THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A STATEWIDE PRINCIPAL MENTORING PROGRAM

Michael Portwood

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THE IMPACT OF SCHOOL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A STATEWIDE PRINCIPAL MENTORING PROGRAM

Michael S. Portwood
Educational Leadership Doctoral

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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National Louis University
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Approved:
Chair, Dissertation Committee
Elizabeth Minor
Member, Dissertation Committee
James Fitzenreick
Dean’s Representative

Director, EDL Doctoral Program
Date Approved
ABSTRACT

The professional demands on today’s school principal are varied and expansive, and as a result, relevant training and preparation is of utmost importance. Because of these rising demands, principal turnover is not uncommon, especially in low-SES schools. Formalized and strategic principal mentoring, however, has been shown to reduce principal attrition, keeping leaders in their roles and contributing to increased student achievement.

This quantitative study examined the responses from school leaders on their experiences in a statewide principal mentoring program and analyzed the connection, in relation to their administrative peers, between their experience as a protégé and their status as a leader in a low-SES system. While no statistical correlation was found between the low-SES status of a leader’s school system and their satisfaction with a statewide mentoring program, leaders did affirm mentoring as a strategy in improving instructional leadership and the value in relational aspects of the program.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This study is focused around the strategy of mentoring leaders, a concept which is of great interest to me professionally, and one that I have greatly benefited from personally.

I would first like to thank the 5 JP’s at home: Janelle, James, Jack, Judson, and Judah. They are a great source of joy for me, each in their own God-designed way, and continue to each be “teachers” for me on a variety of topics: practical, relational, and spiritual. I would also like to thank my father-in-law, Dr. James Bernero, who was my inspiration with regards to my entrance into public education. With this work, I would hope that you “are very pleased.” Thank you, too, to Dr. Don White for his years of sacrificial investment into me as a young leader and for being a model of humility and patience, even in the midst of professional turbulence.

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Lastly, and above all, I would thank Jesus Christ for the peace and purpose that comes in knowing Him, for His continued provision and “stretching of time” when I needed it, for leading through difficult seasons along the way, and for sustaining my family throughout this journey.
To my Blessing, Janelle Marie...

Our family runs, grows, and thrives
out of your tireless sacrifices
of time, energy, and prayer.
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SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

Historically regarded solely as an educational disciplinarian, the role of Principal has evolved as the needs of the American educational system have changed. As this role evolves, the training and support that aims to grow today’s leaders must also keep pace with the growing external factors that further complicate a principal’s ability to catalyze positive change. Such factors may include community demographics, district finances, parental involvement, teacher aptitude, and principal training. Principals who encounter these factors may benefit from context-specific mentoring to support and develop capacity to address challenging issues. This program evaluation asks the question of whether or not there is a connection between socio-economic status of one’s system and the perceived effectiveness of a statewide principal mentoring program as reported by those within the program.

Purpose

Those who have served in the principal role know that it requires a strong work ethic, a stellar sense of organization, and the personal fortitude to operate amidst scrutiny and criticism. Additionally, along with the skills to manage the operational side of a school building, the position requires a sophisticated knowledge of curricular and financial matters as well as an emotional intelligence and interpersonal savvy to be successful. Furthermore, there is a “weightiness” that comes along with the responsibility of being principal because of the inherent connection to the education of children. Not surprising to educators, research tells us that effective principals influence a variety of school outcomes, “including student achievement, through their recruitment and motivation of quality teachers, their ability to identify and articulate school vision and goals, their effective allocation of resources, and their development
of organizational structures to support instruction and learning,” (Horng, et al., 2009, p. 1). For this reason, and because of the important nature of a principal’s work, “scholars recognize the crucial need for mentoring among principals...to help them meet the multiplicity of challenges inherent in contemporary leadership and also reduce the isolation of what can feel like a solitary responsibility” (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgabat, 2013, p.40).

At the center of this study is the formal mentoring program offered through the Illinois Principals Association (IPA). The IPA is the largest professional organization geared specifically towards building-level leadership in the state of Illinois. The IPA was founded in 1971 when the state’s elementary, junior high, and high school principals’ associations came together and desired to collaboratively provide support to the state’s educational leaders. The IPA currently serves over 5400 PK-12 principals, assistant principals and deans from all regions in Illinois. Their services to members vary but include peer-to-peer networking, professional development in the way of seminars, conferences, and training, and a mentoring program for first- and second-year principals and assistant principals. During my tenure as building principal, I was a member of the IPA and was fortunate enough to benefit from conferences and training focused around the responsibilities of instructional leaders. The organization’s mentoring program has the explicit goal of helping leaders thrive in their new positions so they can advance student learning, which, according to Wagner (2014) is “the only goal that matters” (p.128). The IPA’s formal mentoring process has evolved over time, but stated simply, consists of a series of meetings between a trained and experienced mentor and a new building leader. These meetings are centered around discerning, discussing, and operationalizing strategies aimed at building leadership capacity within the mentee. Searby & Tripses (2007) state that “when it comes to mentors, two types are needed: an ally within the organization and a confidant who is
outside the organization” (p. 3). The IPA aims at providing this outside partner within the context of an open and trusting professional relationship.

This study builds on the already identified need of principal mentoring by examining one of the factors most closely connected to the attrition of principals: a student and community’s socio-economic status (Levin & Bradley, 2019, executive summary). Simply defined, socio-economic status (SES) is the social standing or class of an individual or group, and while a true measure of SES is comprised of a complex myriad of variables to be discussed later in this literature review, the impact of SES is far reaching in terms of academic capacity, achievement levels, and an individual’s predictor of lifetime success (Neubourg, et al., 2018). Because one of the IPA’s key desired outcomes is to reduce the number of principals leaving the profession, and because research draws a clear connection between SES and attrition (U.S. Department of Ed, NCES, 2012), this study will investigate any quantitative connection between participating principals’ evaluation of the mentoring program and their school’s SES level for the purpose of developing recommendations for the IPA to differentiate their mentoring approach.

**Rationale**

My interest in principal mentorship is multidimensional; both personal/experiential and research driven. Personally, I can see now that my strengths in the areas of data analysis, conflict resolution, and fostering collaboration are directly connected to the mentoring I received from a previous Superintendent and his intentionality to make himself available to me as a young assistant principal. It is my desire, as I enter the second half of my educational career, to discern the critical attributes of principal mentoring that are most valued by administrators so as to be able to support building leadership similarly. Principal mentoring is often an unspoken and
unrealized foundational need. Bloom, et al. (2003) state plainly that “there is little doubt that an effective principal is a prerequisite to school improvement. There is a shortage of candidates for the principalship, and an increasing trend for individuals with relatively limited experience to move into these positions” (p. 20). The Wallace Foundation has studied educational leadership for more than a decade, and in a contemporary report, stated “a particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement” (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 3). The foundation said about this link:

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have, at most, small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the job of the principal (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 2).

As a result, the educational system must prioritize and excel at mentoring principals entering the profession. Gray, et al. (2007), when asked whose responsibility it is to ensure an effective mentoring process, state that it lies in the hands of “state, university and school district leaders” (p. 29). Because the role of an effective leader is so closely tied to teacher effectiveness and consequently, student achievement, it logically follows that we should be equipping leaders to be as effective as possible. Feeling this responsibility uniquely in my current role and in preparation for the Superintendency, I embarked on this program evaluation in hope of providing feedback to the IPA that might elicit meaningful reform within their mentoring program and ultimately increase academic achievement for all students.

Secondly, reading related research helped to further formalize the rationale for my study. Initially, my intent was to evaluate the principal mentoring efforts within my own district, and as I started reaching out to surrounding districts for insight into their mentoring process, I found
that the large majority utilized the third-party services of the IPA. After further inquiry, I found
that the IPA is the single largest provider of formal principal mentoring in the state. I was
familiar with the IPA and when considering the scope of my dissertation, I’ve always felt that I
wanted to research something that was helpful to the educational society at-large.

The deeper I dove into the research of mentoring, the more research I found about the
importance of effective mentoring efforts and, conversely, the reality of, and contributing factors
to, principal attrition. Research touts that inadequate preparation, professional development, and
a school community’s socio-economic status are the largest contributors to principal turnover
(Jensen, D., 2014; Levin, S. & Bradley, K. 2019). Principal attrition in the United States is
reported to be 18 percent annually (US Department of Education National Center for Education
Statistics, 2012) and growing. “Only three industries that have higher turnover than principals:
Mining and logging, retail trade, and leisure and hospitality. And only leisure and hospitality
workers leave more often than principals of high poverty school,” (Jensen, D., 2014).
Additionally, “the most robust evidence from the studies reviewed indicate that schools with
higher percentages of students from low-income families, students of color, and low-performing
students are more likely to experience principal turnover” (Levin & Bradley, 2019, executive
summary).

One of the IPA’s first action steps with principals is to issue a survey designed to assess
their perceived professional development needs in order to assist the mentoring providers in
determining programming needs for their sessions together. In reading in the IPA’s own
literature stating their program is designed to help principals thrive in their positions yet feeling
the weight of this burden of research describing the growing principal turnover rate, I
contemplated shifting my research focus. Consequently, this study examines the IPA’s approach
to mentoring through the lens of socioeconomics, specifically the needs of leaders serving in low-income systems.

Goals

On the face, and through a broad lens, one goal for this area of study is to gauge the effectiveness of the IPA’s current mentoring efforts in order to assist in their vision of continuous improvement and ultimately increase student achievement within the institutions led by participants of the mentoring program. More specifically, through an analysis of protégé participant data, overlaid with their associated school building and system’s SES, this project is intended to determine whether there is a connection between the IPA’s mentoring program’s effectiveness and, specifically, an evaluation of the program from participants who are leading systems of low-SES students.

Through participant data, I sought out to determine if there are gaps between the articulated goals and objectives from the IPA and what is actualized in the way of increased leadership capacity on the part of participant principals. I investigated whether there is a connection between socio-economic status of the mentee’s system and the degree to which they perceive the effectiveness of the mentoring program. Additionally, through a review of relevant literature surrounding mentoring and the principalship, focus was aimed on the importance of mentoring, determining the core competencies of an effective mentoring program, and the conditions surrounding principal turnover. Ultimately, and maybe most importantly, this body of work was framed to advocate for policy change at the regional/state level with regards to mandated mentoring programs for new principals in impoverished economic areas, and secondarily for a differentiated approach in mentoring principals of low-SES systems. Because
of the connection between family SES and educational outcomes, mixed with the reality of how an effective school system can positively affect this connection, I considered this to be a “mission critical” objective. The results of this study were also viewed as a potential precursor to advocating for a differentiated approach to mentoring at the district/state level based on a socio-economic demographic.

Research Questions

Because public education is a field and a craft involving a multitude of variables connected with efficacy, this research project is careful to clearly identify the applicable components and intent. Primarily, this study sets out to answer the question, “To what extent is a system’s SES connected to the perceived effectiveness of a statewide new principal mentoring program?”

Secondarily, there are several research questions addressed in pursuit of the primary question. They are listed below:

- Why is mentoring school leaders important?
- What are the key elements of an effective mentoring program?
- What are the contributing factors to principal turnover and how can mentoring help?

Conclusion

The idea of becoming an apprentice and then a journeyman before an independent practitioner is common in many professional, skilled-labor trades. Ironically, this is relatively uncommon in the one profession upon which all others are built: education. “Increasing evidence shows that school leaders, throughout all stages of their careers, can benefit from a
mentoring system in which a seasoned leader helps the protege combine theory and practice with experience” (Malone, 2001, p.1).

Two consistent suppositions established by peer-reviewed studies, stand independently of one another in the vast field of educational research: The mentoring of principals (1.) reduces attrition (Jensen, D., 2014), which can be influenced by a school’s collective student socio-economic status (Snodgrass, 2015), and (2.) contributes to an improved sense of self-efficacy with regards to academic gains for students (Helber, 2015). With teacher effectiveness and student achievement ‘on the line’, the stakes are too high to approach principal mentoring with anything other than a scripted process based in educational research. This study was designed to discern if one para-educational organization’s approach to mentoring might be affected and differentiated based on socio-economic status of the school/district in which a principal leads.
SECTION 2 - LITERATURE REVIEW

This section will examine the literature and research surrounding the central question of this study: “To what extent is a system’s SES connected to the perceived effectiveness of a statewide new principal mentoring program as evaluated by those within the program?” This literature review will examine the relationships between socioeconomic status (SES), principal attrition, and principal mentoring. Within each of these themes, the following sub-categorical topics will be explored:

- What is SES, what are the complexities of SES as it relates to schools, and why was it chosen as a select demographic in this study?
- What is the relationship between SES and student achievement?
- What additional stressors or hurdles does SES create as a challenge for educators, particularly principals?
- What is principal mentoring and why is it needed?
- Why is principal mentoring important, especially with regards to student achievement?
- What are the key elements of an effective principal mentoring program?
- What are the known determinants of principal turnover?
- What are the consequences of principal turnover, especially with regards to student achievement?
- What is the relationship between mentoring and principal turnover?
- Is there a connection between the socioeconomic status of a community in which a leader serves and the skillset required to be effective within the system?

Figure 1 is the conceptual model displaying my hypothesis surrounding the relationship between the key themes of this project. Principal attrition (a), with leaders leaving their position or profession, is shown as a linear continuum, left to right. Interrupting that continuum are two strategies, principal mentoring and then SES-specific principal mentoring, where leaders are equipped with strategies on how to support and serve low-SES communities. Label (c) represents the leaders who are moving towards attrition but remain in their position as a result of their participation in principal mentoring. Label (b) represents the leaders that would have
otherwise left the profession, even with principal mentoring as a reality, but remain in the position because of SES-specific mentoring. All leaders contained within the sum of labels (b) and (c) would have been “stopped” from leaving the profession with SES-specific mentoring. It is important to note that the size of the rectangles within the figure are significant. As this study will later discuss, principal mentoring is shown to be effective in reducing principal attrition (Tekleselassie & Villarreal III, 2011). If those mentoring efforts can be expanded to include SES-specific training, the volume of leaders (represented linearly with b and c), as a result, remaining in the profession/their position will be greater than non SES-specific mentoring efforts (c).

![Diagram of Principal Attrition and SES Specific Principal Mentoring](image)

*Figure 1 - Correlative effect of Principal Mentoring & SES Specific Principal Mentoring have on Principal Attrition*

The content of this study is important because of the implicit connection to student performance. Research associates principal turnover negatively with student achievement (Miller, A., 2013), and concentrations of low-SES students have been shown to contribute to principal attrition (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Connectedly, mentoring, or coaching for the purpose of building capacity has been associated with principals staying within their role (Jensen, D., 2014), equipping teachers resulting in increased student achievement (Smith & Smith, 2015).
This study is built on the work of Virginia Snodgrass-Rangel (2018), Gates, Ringel, Santibanez et. al. (2006) and Jensen (2014). All three sets of researchers focus on the dynamics of principal attrition and offer mentoring as a possible solution. Their collective work helps to frame this study and examine the factors leading to, the consequences of, and the practices that contribute to a reduction of principal turnover. This triangular body of work laid by these authors focuses a unique educational reticle on the three areas commented on in this literature review: SES, mentoring, and attrition.

**Theme 1: Socio-Economic Status**

Socioeconomic status is one categorical way to create earmarked distinctions through the world’s population for the purposes of psychological classification and sociological discussion. According to one contemporary study (Children in Poverty, 2017), the percentage of children living 200% below the poverty line in the last decade has been the highest ever in recorded history. Bradley & Corwyn (2002) describe the scope and magnitude of the effects of SES as “wide,” affecting a child’s health and cognition, with effects beginning prior to birth and lasting into adulthood. While it is highly debated among researchers regarding exactly what constitutes SES, its impact on students and education is significant and irrefutable.

As mentioned, there is some debate on what exactly constitutes SES. Milne and Plourde (2006) state that in order to draw any meaningful conclusions about SES, its boundaries and definition must be carefully described and outlined. They go on to say that “just knowing that students come from low-SES homes is not enough. There is first a need to know and understand what constitutes a low-SES household” (p. 194). There is a strong and proven association, but not causation, between SES and a student’s performance in school. Also professionally finding
this to be true and for this reason, I join researchers in advocating for additional study in this regard.

One method utilized by psychologists to capture the essence of SES is to examine capital connected with an individual or family (Milne & Plourde, 2006). This includes considering financial capital (i.e. material resources), human capital, (e.g. non-material resources such as education), and lastly, social capital (i.e. resources achieved through social connections). Merola (2005) also notes that education, occupation, and resources are a more inclusive method of describing SES. Studies have shown that because of the fluctuating nature of a family or individual’s liquid financial assets (e.g., household items, such as those items connected with entertainment, convenience, and technology) one might consider a more stable means of ascribing the defining boundaries of SES.

Historically there have been two major models by which to evaluate an individual’s socioeconomic status. The first described by Blau and Duncan (1967), includes a father’s occupation, education, the individual’s education, first job, and the individual’s job several years later (with each job being rated in correlation with its perceived level of prestige). The second, titled, “The Wisconsin Model,” was proposed by a group of researchers (Sewell, Haller, Portes, 1969) from the University of Wisconsin. Similarly, but with a few distinctions, this model considers occupation, education, level or occupational and educational aspirations, academic performance, and mental ability. Educational records, especially with regards to the purposes of this study, have access to a much more narrow field of information, which are more in line with the National Center of Education Statistics’ (2018) parameters for SES which include education, occupational prestige, and income. As it relates to the body of this research, a student’s family participation in the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) will be used as a proxy for
socioeconomic status. While NSLP participation is not a perfect or encapsulating measure of SES, it is a popular and widely used proxy among researchers because of ease of disaggregated data availability and its use in federal poverty guidelines in determining student eligibility or the description of the free lunch variable as an indicator of economic advantage in the No Child Left Behind legislation (Harwell & LeBeau, 2010). The NSLP is funded by the USDA and offers free and reduced-price meals in order to ensure access to nutritious meals and snacks for families unable to pay the full price. To put this program into educational context, in FY 2019, nearly 30 million students participated in the NSLP, with close to 5 billion lunches served.

One of the sources of impedance in improving one’s SES (or accelerated social mobility) is the cyclical nature of low-SES. Relatedly, Henry, et.al. (2011), suggests that students experiencing poverty are less likely to graduate which may result in less economic and social capital, thus increasing the possibility for similar results and circumstances for future generations. While opportunity structure must be considered when drawing conclusions around social mobility, Lam (2014) speaks to families living in poverty being especially vulnerable with regards to experiencing a “subculture of hopelessness, despair and fatalism” (p.326) and, as a result, can find themselves in situations where it is difficult to believe that they have the power or ability to change their current experience (Liu, et al., 2012). This schema and approach to living increases the sense of cumulative impedance for those with the greatest need to improve their quality of life, and further contributes to the downward mobility across generations (Lam, 2014, Ryabov, 2020). To that end, contributing to the cyclical poverty experience are governmental structures, (such as the medical field, housing market, and criminal justice system) that serve as “labyrinthian organizations,” often perpetuating social and economic inequalities, effectively maintaining the governance of poverty, especially urban poverty (Roesch-Knapp, 2020, p. 839).
Relatedly, with regards to SES, middle-class families are often provided with a greater sense of choice and autonomy than their lower SES counterparts (Stephens, Markus, & Townsend, 2007), most likely because of the connection between opportunity structure and social mobility (Walpole, 2003). This empowering and more optimistic view of their own efficacy tends to lead to greater social mobility and aspirational agency.

One of the most impactful detriments of low-SES is its effect on achievement and academic performance. Even though there is a clear association between a child’s SES and their scholastic achievement (Bradley & Corwin, 2002), socioeconomic status has, comparatively, received much less attention in the way of studying its association with academic achievement than race and gender studies (Berger & Archer, 2018). Furthermore, Reardon (2011) highlights a timely sense of urgency in the need for further consideration and research by noting that “the achievement gap between children from high-income and low-income families is roughly 30 to 40 percent larger among children born in 2001 than among those born 25 years earlier” (p.91). However, it is worth noting that peer reviewed, quantitative studies have confirmed the association between a student’s SES and their academic achievement.

A meta-analysis (Xie & Ma, 2019) examining 499 studies and over 170,000 participants records that SES had a significant impact on student achievement with an overall effect size of 0.57, with Hattie (2009) indicating anything over 0.4 as significant when judging educational outcomes. “Children in families with incomes less than one-half of the poverty line were found to score between 6 and 13 points lower on various standardized tests” (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 1998, p.326). Even with such a large and sophisticated study of research confirming that SES differences reflect variance in an individual’s achievement scores and that
standardized ability tends to be highly correlated with SES, there is still disagreement on the reason as to why (Croizet & Dutrévis, 2004).

Individual students from low-SES backgrounds dropout of school at a higher rate than high SES peers, and school systems with higher concentrations of low-SES students have a substantially higher dropout rate overall (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011). This trend in academic disengagement has been associated with low-SES students as early as pre-kindergarten. Low-SES students can present as less ready to learn, and fall behind higher SES peers in their ability to use functional language and lack of creating problem solving skills (Vail, 2004). Unfortunately, this academic regression can be compounded over time as described by DiPrete and Eirich (2006). They state that “as the advantage of one individual or group grows over time, (e.g., high and low-SES), the inequality of this advantage also grows over time” (p.272). Researchers Haveman & Wolfe (2002) are among a body of researchers who conclude that family income is positively associated with educational success, however, Milne and Plourde (2006) advocate for greater study on specifically which factors of SES contribute to academic failure.

While some say that the association between SES and achievement may be as elementary as the food and nutritional shortages caused by low-SES (Sigman, 1995), Xie and Ma (2019) propose a more holistic rationale for the phenomenon. Their work suggests that the link between SES and academic performance lies in the cultural resources more readily available to high SES families, such as classical literature, books of poetry, and works of art. This idea that SES, as a separate entity, is not the central factor of detriment, but rather the mechanisms between SES and life outcomes is examined elsewhere in research. Social theorist Bourdieu (2011) asserted the idea that the more capital one has, the more influence one is able to exert in social life. This
resulting increased social standing he called *cultural* capital, which he also noted could be transmitted from one generation to the next (conversely also establishing cumulative *inequality* also being transferred over time). Xie and Ma (2019) also note that much like the cyclical nature of low-SES and poor academic performance, there is a similar, but diametrically opposed phenomenon related to high SES families in that, parents from these backgrounds encourage their children to read and “speak favorably of academic pursuits” (Xie & Ma, 2019). Relatedly, researchers Bradley & Corwyn (2002) note that students from impoverished families lack the cultural resources to be able to visit libraries, museums, educational centers, and theatrical events. From a familial point of view, they note that low-SES children are encouraged to sit for longer periods of time and are taught to not interrupt adults who are talking, further contributing to an atmosphere of diminished literacy and linguistic rehearsal. Relatedly, Lareau (2002) found that one distinction between families of differing SES was the tremendous emphasis placed on reasoning in middle- and upper-class families in comparison to lower SES families. This, she found, combined with the tendency for upper class families to draw out their children’s views and develop their opinion on different subjects contributed to language development and a subsequent confidence in engaging in conversations of an academic or debating nature. Sacks, (2009) in considering the impact of cultural resources on a family’s ability to support academics postulates that, “one can make a good guess about a child’s standardized test scores simply by knowing how many degrees their parents have and what kind of car they drive” (p. 93). This theory is uniquely and memorably known as the “Volvo effect.” However, Xie and Ma (2019) suggest that “parents’ occupations and educational levels had greater impacts on academic achievement than did family wealth possession,” (p. 838).
As low-SES families become more and more disconnected from the local school and its educational objectives, the rate by which students disengage from their schoolwork accelerates (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011). Conversely, it has been shown that parental involvement, especially during middle school has a strong relationship to educational outcomes (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011). This is supposed to be because as parents engage with their child’s school, they become more aware of the expectations and inner workings of the classroom and school as a whole. This translates into being better equipped to help their children with their schoolwork and an increased sense of optimism with regards to their beliefs about their own abilities (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011).

SES is also associated with student motivation. Motivation research describes *performance-approach* goals as those whose primary motivation is to gain favorable judgments and highlight their ability in relation to others. Relatedly, a *performance-avoidance* goal is associated with an individual’s need to reframe or avoid situations by which their intellectual ability may be shown to be less than that of their normative peers (Nelson & DeBacker, 2008). This is relevant to socioeconomic status as it has been shown that low-SES students typically perform much better, and even similar to their high SES peers, when their “reputation of intellectual ability” was less relevant (Croizet & Dutrèvis, 2004). These “performance avoidance” behaviors can be indicative of low-SES students in contexts by which they are asked to engage in academic exercises before an audience of peers of whom they value their social judgments. The context for an assessment of ability has an impactful effect on students from low-SES surroundings, and relatedly, situations where students in low-SES circumstances can be seen in a favorable social context have been shown to be more motivating than traditional
attainments of competence (e.g., awards or certificates, as opposed to the attainment of skills or knowledge) (Berger & Archer, 2018).

Additionally, with regards to an individual’s ethnicity, Caldas and Bankston (1997), found associations with specific distinctions surrounding race and achievement. A minoritized race categorization had a strong negative effect on achievement scores, while it was also found that if one was at the poverty level, academic achievement suffered regardless of race. Their research suggests that if a student is from a low-SES background and belongs to a minoritized race, then diversity would be an advantage. However, because of a phenomenon Steele and Aronson (1995) called “stereotype vulnerability,” where a negative stereotype of race or SES affect the whole class because of a teacher’s lack of efficacy for that group, these findings also indicate the same would not be true for a student with a high SES background, meaning socioeconomic diversity does not benefit high SES students. Caldas and Bankston (1997) recommend a cap of socially disadvantaged students in any one school at 30% “to provide an advantageous social environment to those less advantaged, while not weakening the social environment of the more socially advantaged,” (p.276). However, while this research-based proposition may be statistically valid, it is certainly not always practical in public education.

One quantitative study found that there was a high degree of positive correlation between the percentage of minoritized students and the percentage of the student body with a low-SES. In other words, students with low-SES are extremely likely to be concentrated in schools with disproportionately large African American student bodies. Dishearteningly, overlapping both of these findings, it can be stated that “poor students tend to be black, and black students tend to be poor” (Caldas & Bankston, 1997, p. 273). Lastly, and affirming popular intuition among
educators, it was confirmed that standardized test scores do not effectively measure intrinsic ability, regardless of race or SES (Croizet & Dutrévis, 2004).

The educational impact of socioeconomic stress is not a singular straight line pointed at academic achievement, but rather includes a myriad of complicating factors and stressors, both for the individual and the educator. Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno (2016) find that poverty is related to a student’s likelihood of suffering maltreatment, including a chaotic living arrangement, leading to harsher discipline, exposure to substance abuse, and in-home violence. (p.258) Additionally, this chronic stress contributes to diminished cognitive functioning and has significant long-lasting consequences on the individual’s ability to spring back from struggle, persevere through challenges, and maintain feelings of efficacy (Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno, 2016). These factors become more evident in a work or school setting. The chronic stress associated with poverty also contributes to an environment where parents become hyper-focused on their most immediate needs, such as oftentimes disregarding or neglecting their children (Mani, Mullainathan, Shafir, & Zhao, 2013). Because low-SES students are more likely to experience adverse and stressful events, such as economic hardship, marital conflict, and divorce, they are commonly subject to maladaptive functioning and negative coping strategies (Lam, 2014).

Low-SES parents are less likely to be involved with their child’s educational program, as measured by interaction with school personnel, (Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting, 2011), contributing to interference in being able to help when students need it. Henry, Cavanagh, & Oetting (2011) describe a phenomenon where, high SES families, as they are involved with the school system, through a mechanism called social control, build consensus about appropriate behavior with their child’s teacher, agree on priorities and receive “clear and salient messages”
about their child’s academic responsibilities (p.1166). As a result, from the student side, as they perceive that their parents are involved with the school system and expect success, students are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors in the classroom, complete homework, and adhere to performance expectations.

Research suggests that low-SES families can be less likely to be engaged because of competing demands (e.g. multiple employers, inflexible work schedules, lack of child care options, etc), with connections in a student’s attendance, achievement, behavior, and motivation (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011). While further contemporary research is needed in determining whether academic persistence is closely associated with a student’s SES (Dweck, 1975, Browman, et. al 2017), there has been a connection between SES and the motivation to regularly make positively influencing academic decisions (Shah, Mullainathan, & Shafir, 2012). Croizet & Dutrévis (2004) describe a pattern where students from low-SES families are less likely to be engaged in school especially if risking a confirmation of reputation of intellectual inferiority among peers. They (Croizet & Dutrévis, 2004) continue to describe a reality where students from low-SES families are less likely to obtain and secure cultural capital and live in home environments that lack knowledge of the hidden curriculum needed to fully engage in the educational process, further distancing them from school staff and the help they need to succeed. In furthering this behavioral decline in the classroom, it has been demonstrated that low-SES students when given the ability to exercise choice tend to make similar decisions to their low-SES peers (Stephens, Fryberg, & Markus, 2011), often creating an increasingly difficult and unproductive environment for teachers. However, it should be noted that author, Angel Harris, (2011) makes an important distinction between an approach that leads to failure and an intent to fail. He notes that “purposeful school resistance is not the origin of the
racial achievement gap and cannot be responsible for the gap observed among adolescents" (p.142). This is an important distinction with regards to future study as it should serve as a signpost for researchers to investigate the opportunity discrepancy and external factors that lead to school disengagement rather than an internal, psychological focus.

Further contributing to the issue, this cyclical connection between low-SES, poor academic performance, and disciplinary problems often is perpetuated through learned bias on the part of the teacher. In an exercise where teachers were given information about hypothetical students, including their SES, students with low-SES scenarios were rated as having less promising futures by their teachers than did identical students portrayed as having a high-SES background (Auwarter & Aruguete, 2008). Perceptions such as those demonstrated in this study contribute to institutional discrimination on the basis of socioeconomic status (Lam, 2014). Compounding the implicit environmental factors of SES that create a disadvantage for low-SES students, one study reveals that when teachers saw select demographics such as students’ historical ability, family background, or SES as an impediment to their teaching, they were less motivated to investigate ways to reach these students (Diamond, Randolph, & Spillane, 2004). This is an especially disheartening trend considering the limited number of other social avenues that are effective in improving a family’s social mobility. Because education has been shown to be one of the key elements to positively affect the overall well being of the impoverished (Lam, 2014), mixed the connection between strong school leadership and teacher growth and development (Smith & Smith, 2015), this highlights the student-centric need for support for principals. This instructional and motivational area of research is one that needs greater attention because of the long-term effect of SES and the potential education (and strong leadership therein) hold in bringing about change.
Despite histories of poverty, abuse and neglect, in addition to high genetic risks, it is possible for at-risk individuals to bounce back from adversity, display competence in several domains and have productive lives. Interventions and cognitive training programs can be potentially effective in correcting executive deficits related to attention. (Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno, 2016, pg. 263)

SES is shown to have a great impact on the achievement and overall well being of students raised in such an environment. Because of SES’s cyclical nature and myriad of internal and external complications, it is a challenge to overcome its effects on students in the public school system. Research reveals that the detrimental educational and societal effects associated with low-SES can be overcome through targeted intervention and programs (Cedeño, Martínez-Arias, & Bueno, 2016, pg. 263). While I am encouraged as an educator, and now as a researcher investigating this area of student outcomes, to learn that the ill effects of poverty can begin to be educationally reversed, it takes a significant level of targeted support and professional longevity on the part of school leaders.

**Theme 2: Principal Attrition/Turnover**

Nearly 1/4th of the nation’s principals leave their positions each year, which results in adverse effects on students. Shockingly, fifty percent of principals are reported having left the position midyear during their third year of the principalship. Those remaining in the position often leave the most difficult assignments, including high poverty schools, for schools and systems that are not as demanding (Jensen, 2014). Principal turnover in Illinois between the years of 1987 and 2001 was 14%, yet less than 1/5th of those principals’ turnover was a result of them leaving the system altogether. This suggests that as mobility continues to occur,
experienced principals are moving from one position and system to another, repeatedly leaving staff and students to adjust to a string of new leaders. One group of researchers studying the topic of principal attrition state that they have found no study examining the career transitions that a principal takes after leaving the principalship (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino, Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown 2006). Principal attrition (or turnover) is worthy of focus in this study as mentoring is partially, yet explicitly aimed at reducing its effects on student achievement.

Defined at its most basic level, principal attrition occurs when a principal does not return to the same school from one year to the next (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). This definition, however, does not capture any information about the nature of the departure or the existence of succession planning. Based on existing research, the determinants that are most strongly related to turnover are school performance, accountability policy, and professional development. That said, either there are weaknesses within those studies or there was relatively little evidence to support their findings (Snoggrass-Rangel, 2018). One important first step in improving the quality of research on principal attrition is for researchers to gain consensus on how to measure it. I am encouraged to be able to contribute to this needed area of research and recommend additional study.

In order to understand principal turnover, especially if in attempts to counteract its effects, one must understand the determinants of the phenomenon. Dr. Virginia Snodgrass-Rangel from the University of Houston, upon whose work much of my study is built, has assembled a robust body of research on the topic of principal turnover. Her work examined sex, race, age, experience, education, satisfaction, school characteristics, student demographics, leader salary, accountability, district expenditures, teacher characteristics, retirement incentives, and professional development initiatives in relation to principal turnover. Importantly, and as
related to this study, school characteristics did play a significant role in predicting transitions. The racial makeup of the students and families within a school was considered a “significant predictor” in whether or not a principal remained in their position. Schools with no racially minoritized concentrations of students saw a principal turnover rate of 13%, while systems with 100% minoritized students saw a 16% turnover rate. Relatedly, if a principal was the same race as the majority of the student body, the likelihood of leaving the system was 25% lower, and the risk of changing schools was 13% lower (Gates, et al., 2006). Yan (2020) also found that “principals in schools with high concentrations of students of color are about 60% to 70% more likely to move to another school than those in schools in the lowest quartile of percentage of students of color” (p.27). She also noted that systems with improved school disciplinary environments (as measured by disciplinary referral volume and suspensions) are often associated with lower principal turnover rates. This is relevant and points to the disproportional impact principal attrition has on low-SES students because of the interwoven factors low-SES school systems, in-class behaviors (Grolnick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Khajehpour & Ghazvini, 2011) and students of color (Caldas & Bankston, 1997).

Because lower performing schools (e.g., 20% or more of students are found to be not proficient in reading or math for 2 or more years) are most often low-SES schools, Cullen & Mazzeo’s findings (2008) are relevant to my study. They found that principals at academically “Recognized” schools (rated in order, from most to least successful, “(1) exemplary - (2) recognized - (3) acceptable - (4) unacceptable,” from best to worst performing) were 1.6 times more likely to leave than principals at “Exemplary” schools, and those at “Acceptable” and “Unacceptable” schools were 4.2 points and 16.3 points more likely to leave, respectively. Additionally, Goldring & Taie’s work (2018) adds to Cullen & Mazzeo’s in that they determined
schools with 65% or greater of students on free/reduced lunch were significantly more likely to experience principal turnover. Additionally, they found that schools with “widespread disorder in the classroom” were found to experience turnover more frequently than those systems with student behavior more positively characterized.

In examining the characteristics of the building principal, Gates et al., (2006) found that neither a leader’s undergraduate degree attainment nor quality of institution had any effect on the probability of changing schools. However, it was determined that Illinois principals with a master’s degree are less likely than those without a post-graduate to change positions within the state system. Gates et al., (2006) found that gender was found to be a determining factor, as women in Illinois were found to change positions and leave the system more frequently than their male counterparts (2.9% v 2.1% in a given year). However, more recently, Grissom (2019) did not find gender to be a reliable factor associated with turnover. Experience was found to be a significant predictor for all transitions in Illinois, and a pattern arose from the data that suggested the likelihood of a principal leaving decreased at the beginning and end of their careers (Gates et al., 2006, p. 297).

Through a NAESP study (Johnson, 2005), principals were asked after they left their previous position, and in connection with their self-reported inability to make a positive difference for children, what were the obstacles or complications that kept them from doing so. Their answers are listed below:

- Workload and extensive managerial tasks inhibiting more meaningful instructional leadership efforts,
- Extensive personal costs; long hours and a significant toll on their physical and psychological well-being,
• Local and state policies that tie principal hands in making critical decisions such as hiring, firing and funding allocation flexibility,

• Profound isolation on the job.

After immersing myself in this research, in hearing the benefits of mentoring for leaders, and in reading these themes that contribute to principals’ desire to leave their role, I am further convinced that pairing and coaching our school’s leaders is of utmost importance because of the subsequent impact it can have on students.

Principal turnover is concerning because of the pivotal role that principals are expected to play in leading school improvement and because of the time research indicates that improvement can take 5 to 7 years (Fullan, 2007). The revolving door of principals in any one building, but especially low performing schools, makes it difficult to implement and sustain new policies and programs (Miller, 2013). It takes an average of 5 years to implement vision and instructional strategies, and fully implement policies and practices that impact a system’s academic performance. Once interrupted with a leadership change, this cycle starts all over with the new leader. This turnover leads to a dip in core subject achievement scores, and it can take the next principal up to 3 years to regain forward progress for the school. Miller (2013) found that student scores on average fell 0.21 standard deviations below the baseline level during the 4 years leading up to a principal’s departure and continued to decline another 0.025 standard deviations during the first 2 years of the new principal’s tenure before achieving the original baseline level again.

This regular ingress and egress of leadership impedes a school’s ability to bring about school improvement efforts aimed at making academic gains and closing the achievement gap.
There is a cumulative negative effect for students, and this cycle only further magnifies the decline in achievement for underprivileged students (Jensen, 2014, Branch, et al., 2008).

States with the highest percentage of novice principals also have the highest high school dropout rates (Mattern, K. D., & Patterson, B. F., 2011). While turnover leaves less desirable jobs for novices, one study from the state of Texas showed that 12 percent of ineffective leaders were moved from one underperforming school to the next, but rarely moved out of the profession (Branch, et al., 2013). The supply of principals has been so low in some states that districts have had to create new programs or incentives to meet the demand (Paul, 2003).

Conservatively, it costs a district about $6,000 to initially hire a new principal, while some researchers estimate (Jensen, 2014) that it costs districts at least $75,000 to develop, hire, and onboard that same leader. Seeing that average yearly turnover rate for principals is 22%, nationally, this means that low-SES districts spend approximately $36 million just on hiring costs, not considering onboarding, training, or the common practice of signing bonuses for underperforming schools. And because several of the factors contributing to principal turnover are the same factors that are cyclical with regards to declining student achievement (race, academic struggles, low-SES families, etc.), this financial detriment is likely to continue to grow without action.

Mentoring our school’s leaders provides critical assistance and support in dealing with some of these recurrent issues plaguing our nation's schools. Restated from principal attrition researcher Jensen (2014) is the need for “early career support systems such as coaches or mentors” (p.7). According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, principals receiving no professional development during the previous year left their school 1.4x times more often than principal having some sort of on-the-job training (Goldring, & Taie, 2019). Effective
mentoring has been shown to reduce principal turnover given their services reduce principal isolation and build leadership competencies – two underlying causes of early departure from the profession (Jensen, 2014). In advocating for additional research in this area, I quote Dr. Virginia Snodgrass-Rangel as she says,

The broad conclusion is that when we consider all the studies and the significant findings, it is clear that our understanding of principal turnover remains relatively weak. The consequences that appear most closely related to turnover are student achievement and teacher turnover, but in general, there were few studies that examined turnover’s potential consequences. (2018, p.116)

Losing qualified principals to the many stressors of the job has a trickle-down effect, ultimately landing on students and creating even further, deeper disadvantages to minoritized, poverty-stricken families. This revolving door-effect, with one principal after another being placed and then shortly thereafter leaving, contributes to a system in chaos, resulting in a drop in teacher and student performance. Mentoring is one researched approach that has shown to improve the effectiveness of leaders and all they are responsible for (Smith & Smith, 2015, Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgar, 2013, Levin, S. & Bradley, 2019).

Theme 3: Principal Mentoring

At the heart of this study is the question as to whether principal mentoring should be differentiated in relation to the varying needs that present themselves when working with students of lower socioeconomic status in hopes of keeping school leaders within their position and the profession. Before this question can be answered and the data collected is to be
analyzed, a solid and foundational understanding is required of what mentoring is (also referred to as coaching), why it is needed and important, and what the key components are of an effective mentoring program.

Simply stated, mentoring is a partnership, allowing for and centered around a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires and equips the protégé, maximizing their personal and professional potential (Coachfederation.org). This process by which a mentor and protégé interact, exchange ideas, and create an open and trusting platform, where questions are paired with dialogue is of particular importance to principals because they are said to rarely receive systematic feedback regarding the performance. This lack of feedback contributes to a situation where they are described as operating blind (St. Martin, 2010).

Many other professions such as lawyers, doctors, and even teachers, have apprenticeships, ongoing training, and a continuum of learning opportunities for beginners. School districts would be found negligent in the highest degree if they did not provide this kind of support once teachers completed their initial certification, but this is almost exactly the scenario most principals find themselves in once taking on the role (Jensen, 2014). An SES-relevant case for principal mentoring is made in the research that not only confirms the link between effective principals and student achievement, but also in the reality that many new principals find themselves beginning their careers or transferred to ineffective schools with limited knowledge of how to transform the schools with little to no support from the district (Warren & Kelsen, 2013).

Mentoring is one way to help to meet the variety of challenges presented by the principalship and to reduce the feelings of isolation reported by so many in the role (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgar, 2013). Because education is seen as a promising way to
bring about positive change to poverty-stricken families, the long-term effects of improving leadership is also reflected in the social mobility it aids. Jensen (2014) reports that “a 10 percent reduction in principal turnover in high poverty schools (from 27.4 percent to 24.7 percent) while improving principal effectiveness (from ineffective – 25% percentile of all principals to somewhat effective - 50% percentile), has the potential to affect a single child’s earnings by $30,024.07” (p.9). This is a significant factor in the life of a low-SES child and is not to be understated.

The effects of mentoring leaders into greater degrees of effectiveness pays dividends to instructional staff as well. Smith & Smith (2015) note that principals play a key role in supporting and encouraging teacher’s growth. Without effective leadership, resources, time, and structures have almost no hope of emerging to support collaborative work among teachers (Murphy, 2015). Principal mentoring not only contributes to the retention of quality teachers, but also to enhanced teacher performance and student learning by encouraging collegial dialogue (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgar, 2013). A culture of trust and collaboration centered around interdisciplinary student achievement is unlikely without effective leadership, (Murphy, 2015; Jensen, 2014).

Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson (2010) suggest that there is no documented evidence to support that achieving schools can achieve this trusting and cohesive climate aimed at student achievement without an effective leader. In fact, the largest in-depth study and extensive quantitative analysis on educational leadership reinforced the empirical link between school leadership and student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). The quality of a school leader and the extent to which they are able to identify and address problems largely affects teacher and student outcomes (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2003). Branch et al. (2013)
noted that high-capacity leaders were most successful in raising student achievement in schools with the greatest needs, such as low-SES, teacher turnover, and disengagement from school, etc. More specifically, with regards to successful school leadership as judged by student achievement in low-SES systems, Jacobson (2008) found in a study of several elementary school systems across Australia, Europe, and the US, that successful leaders in these systems all had one key characteristic. They brought with them a “genuine concern for the socially equitable and just education of the children and communities they served” (p.13). These leaders were characterized by persistence, optimism, and a determination to overcome resistance to this vision. Even more specifically, Jacobson (2008) found that this determination was often aimed at reforming the thought patterns of staff who did not believe that low-SES students could achieve at the same level as their peers and allowed no external condition to be an excuse for low expectations or poor performance.

So the road to effectiveness is one that must be intentionally identified, developed, and planned for. In order to improve within their complex roles, principals need a valid and reliable system of feedback from which to understand and enhance their leadership (Goldring, Bickman, Cannon, Mavrogordato, Breda, Goff, & Preston, 2010). Because the necessary skillset of an effective principal is diverse and sophisticated, mentoring leaders becomes imperative. To this end, Viviane Robinson (2011), in describing her 5 core benchmarks of leadership, states that “the scope of the work is too great and the expertise required too broad to reasonably expect a single leader to demonstrate high or even moderate levels of competence in all five dimensions” (p.15). Simply from an optics point of view, principals, in order to gain credibility with staff, must be viewed as knowledgeable and a master of a number of complex prerequisite skills (Murphy, 2015), which doesn’t come naturally or intuitively (Smith & Smith, 2015). With this new
emphasis on being an instructional leader, principals are going to need to teach staff/faculty how to work more efficiently and effectively rather than just demanding it (Drago-Severson et al., 2013).

Carer (2000) studied 21 high performing, high-poverty schools and describes a list of characteristics and priorities for principals in these types of systems. These include parental accountability and connectedness, recruiting high quality teachers, an emphasis on basic skills rather than progressive education and “reckless educational theories” (p. 27), and a focus on spending money on two things: instructional materials and instructional support. Relatedly, Leathwood et al. (2004) purport that there are 4 core leadership practices that effective principals use to develop the capacity of their teachers; set direction, develop people, redesign the organization, and manage the instructional program. These characteristics and practices should then serve as a framework for the necessary distinctions in SES-based principal mentoring.

According to Stoll and Bolam (2002), building capacity involves “creating and maintaining the necessary conditions, culture and structures; Facilitating learning and skill-oriented experiences and opportunities; [and] ensuring interrelationships and synergy between all the component parts” (p. 52). Drago-Severson et al., (2013) add that in order to increase teacher capacity leaders also need to increase their cognitive, emotional, interpersonal and intrapersonal capacities. Effective leadership means more than knowing what to do—it is about knowing when, how, and why a certain course of action is taken (Jayapragas, 2016). As it relates to this study, the IPA has three major goals for its formal mentoring program relating to instructional leadership, school improvement planning, and relational/interpersonal support. Today’s modern-day instructional leader is a far cry from the simple complaint manager from schools of
yesteryear and, consequently, requires explicit support in order to build and further develop this required skill set.

In order to advocate for mentoring as a key practice, it is important to understand what research records as the critical elements. Searby & Tripses (2007), in answering the question of who makes an effective mentor states that when it comes to peer mentors, two types are needed; an ally within our organization, and a confidant who is outside our organization. Too often, however, when selecting a mentor, cost-cutting methods, including hiring part-time retirees, reduced hours training, or increased mentor-protege caseloads significantly impair mentors’ ability to build important skills in early principals (Jensen, 2014). Therefore, the mentor-protégé pairing process must be done carefully and strategically. Relatedly, I spoke with the Executive Director of the Illinois Principals Association (IPA), I learned that the IPA employs Field Service Specialists as a supportive role, largely responsible for matching mentors with protégés. There is an extensive application possible protégés are required to complete which aides in the pairing process. Leahy (2019) states that the IPA tries to learn as much as possible about the candidate and describes this process as “useful and strategic.” He went on to say that the application and pairing process considers variables such as minoritized population/concentration, SES, ELL, and other research initiatives when making a match.

The work of Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr (2009) found that mentoring efforts are most effective when the coach focuses specifically on improving instructional leadership and the coach is provided ample training and resources. Frequently, mentoring is provided primarily to new and struggling principals, even though it has been shown to increase leader effectiveness, especially when one-to-one support is provided beyond the principal’s first two years in office (Jensen, 2014). The mentoring process must also be content-rich, being sure
to select topics and discussion points that are relevant to the protégé and their current leadership needs (NAESP, 2013). It is important to clearly define the main focus of the mentoring efforts to ensure that those issues are in fact within the sphere of influence or control of the protégé (Grant, 2014).

Once the mentor-protégé relationship is established and the content to be discussed has been secured, it has been shown that on-the-job support and applications of learning are far more useful to protégés than academic or intellectual exercises (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003). Principals need to engage in authentic conversation and reflection with other principals around the art and practice of leading schools (Jensen, 2014). From my own experience as a principal, I can attest to the value of having a professional confidant with whom to process ideas and collectively problem-solve. Leadership is greatly enhanced if the mentoring process stays focused on helping a principal improve the way they think about the job, how they make decisions, and engage in productive conflict resolution (Daresh, 2004).

Principals play a critical role in schools, both in relation to the development and effectiveness of the teacher and student, therefore their role cannot be overlooked when it comes to support. The required skill profile of an effective principal is complex and requires explicit and intentional development from those who have successfully served in the role. Because so much of a building’s success rests on the placement of a strong leader, failure to develop, nurture, and sustain principals throughout their career can have detrimental effects.

**Conclusion**

The research within this literature review affirms that academic achievement is predicated on clear and effective leadership. However, because principal attrition is associated
with several factors, one of which is the socioeconomic status of students, careful and strategic educational research is needed. Mentoring, when implemented with research-based content and approaches, has been revealed as one possible approach to the problem of principal turnover and should continue to be further examined in order to refine the methods by which it is conducted. This literature review is one attempt to further the knowledge around these important subjects in order to conduct relevant and reliable data analysis for the purpose of improving students’ academic outcomes.

SECTION THREE: METHODOLOGY

Research Design Overview

Educational research is a relatively new field by hundreds of years in comparison to other established categorical scientific areas of study. However, the need for its skillful use today cannot be understated. One subset within the larger arena of research is program evaluation, from which this study operates. Program evaluation is the “systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics, and outcomes of programs to make judgments about the program, improve program effectiveness and/or inform decisions about future programming” (Patton, 2003, p.224). Patton (1997), again, states that “the power of evaluation lies in the ability to affect the spending of billions of dollars on all types of social ills and it is the researcher’s job to conduct studies in a way that will encourage use and action” (p.4). Through careful narrative and strategic data collection tools, this study gathered and quantitatively analyzed data for the purpose of discovering themes of need and ultimately providing for the informed consideration of program reformation.
This study was designed to evaluate the Illinois Principals Association (IPA) mentoring initiative and a connection between socio-economic status and the participants’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the program. This research specifically collected and analyzed responses from IPA mentoring participants and determined if there were themes of reported need from, the building-leaders from low-SES school systems in comparison to the rest of the participating group. Survey questions were administered to participants of the mentoring program and inquired about their experiences within the program based on the effectiveness of the IPA's ability to deliver a “product” in accordance with the precursory program goals and standards set forth by the provider. Ultimately, through study and analysis, it was my aim to utilize this program evaluation to “establish the meaning and meaningfulness of a program” (Patton, 1997, p.301), namely the formal principal mentoring program through the IPA.

Lastly, in accordance with Patton’s (1997) charge to conduct evaluations so that they are “aimed purposefully at instrumental use” (p.79) in making decisions about whether a program should be “continued, enlarged, disseminated, or terminated,” the participants were asked open-ended questions about how the IPA’s mentoring program might further assist with their needs and any sources of possible impedance with regards to their professional work. Alongside the quantitative analysis determining significance of SES, the participants had a two-fold opportunity to share what they consider to be their primary needs as leader, and, secondly, what needs they feel the IPA might be able to assist with during future mentoring endeavors. This secondary qualitative information was collected for the purposes of further thematic analysis and action in the way of differentiating the IPA’s mentoring approach in the event the data revealed SES did indeed have an impact on perceptions of effectiveness.

Participants
The IPA has 5880 members, 4592 of which are active or aspiring principals. Seventy-two administrators from across the state were determined to be eligible to participate in the study because they had been a part of the IPA’s mentoring program within the last 3 years. This “3 year” threshold was arbitrary on my part but felt like a reasonable number by which to vet potential participants. I wanted to “cast the net” as wide as possible yet be sure that the mentoring experience was recent enough for participants to recall appropriate details and the program’s effect on their leadership capacity. Relatedly, I did not limit my scope of participants by any particular demographic because I did not want to limit my pool, knowing that I would be able to analyze data through any particular desired lens on the other end.

All candidates within the three-year window were approached by the Executive Director of the IPA to gauge initial interest. The contacts of those who were interested enough to take the next step were given to me for subsequent follow up. Participants were informed of the nature of the study, their role within, and the fact that their participation was entirely voluntary. Twenty-four of the 72 administrators solicited for the research responded to the survey and served as the respondent pool for data gathered during this study.

**Data Gathering Techniques**

This study required participants to reflect on their own growth and efficacy as a result of the mentoring initiative as a catalyst for change. Their ability to self-reflect and to translate that perception into a rating that can be analyzed involves a complex set of interpersonal skills and an intentionally strategic data collection tool. Patton (1997) clarifies for his readers a boiled-down method for measuring qualitative affect when dealing with human research participants by asking researchers to answer the question, “What would I see in them that would tell me they are
different?” (p. 154). This “delta,” or coefficient of change, was able to be self-reported by participants through the survey tool.

Participants in this study were sent an electronic google form asking them to respond to a series of questions paired with a Likert-scaled response continuum. Response options included “Strongly disagree - Disagree - Agree - Strongly Agree,” based on the recommendation from Lozano, et al. (2008) that “the optimum number of alternatives is between four and seven. With fewer than four alternatives, the reliability and validity decrease, and from seven alternatives onwards, psychometric properties of the scale scarcely increase further” (p. 78). A four point Likert scale was chosen, with no “neutral,” or “undecided” option because “the presence of ‘Neutral’ or ‘Undecided’ may encourage some respondents to take the lazy way out rather than ponder an item” (Patten, 2016, p.35). A Google Form was chosen as the medium to solicit responses and collect data because of its ease of use and management, its widespread acceptance and familiarity among educational personnel, its ability to anonymize responses, and the seamless compilation of data into a shareable Google Sheet.

The IPA has three major goals for its formal mentoring program.

1. The leadership mentor/coach will provide direct mentoring/coaching support to principals by encouraging and advocating a high level of performance to achieve targeted and observable progress towards becoming an effective instructional leader.

2. The mentor/coach and principal will connect leadership development efforts to the improvement needs of the school, resulting in a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning.
3. The relationship between the mentor/coach and the principal will be an integral component for assessing the complex professional learning needs of the principal. The mentor/coach will use multiple mentoring strategies to provide targeted, appropriate, and timely learning and development opportunities to principals.

Each of these goals are connected to ISLLC standards, now known as The Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). Framed around these goal categories, survey questions were assembled within 5 distinct parts - demographics, Goal 1 (Instructional Leadership) questions, Goal 2 (Teaching and Learning) questions, Goal 3 (Principal Development) questions, and an open-ended need assessment follow-up. Apart from demographic and current administrative position inquiries, five survey questions were specifically formulated in connection with these explicit goals from the IPA (with Likert-scale responses), as utilization-focused evaluations have to be focused on the goals of the program (Patton, 1997). These five goal-connected questions were posed with a four-part Likert scale. Questions are listed below:

1. My IPA mentor provided support in the development of a professional growth plan.
2. My IPA mentor provided ongoing structured opportunities for reflective conversation regarding efforts to improve professional practices.
3. With the assistance of my IPA mentor, I was able to analyze trends in student achievement data for the purpose of identifying critical areas that needed to be addressed through strategic improvements in classroom instruction and assessment.
4. My IPA mentor helped to develop my instructional capacity as a leader so the learning needs of students and staff can be identified and addressed.

5. Working with my IPA mentor helped me to ensure the management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

**Ethical Considerations**

In crafting and conducting the research methods that would be utilized in this study, careful attention was paid to the ethical considerations appropriate for this type of research. First, a respect for participants was shown through being sure to communicate and “behave at all times in a way that is respectful” (James, et al., 2008, p. 25) and professional. Additionally, and above all, an intentionality to do no harm through the injury or damage to participants was an overarching precept.

Before initial participation, respondents were asked to read an informed consent page acknowledging understanding of the stated reasons, goals, potential outcomes of this research and their ability to withdraw from the study at any point (see Appendices A and B). Mutual beneficence was articulated through them being able to choose to receive access to the final results, once assembled. In securing permission from the IPA to access their principal contacts and evaluate their mentoring program, it was agreed that they would also receive final results as a way of considering the needs and celebrating the strengths of the program.

Lastly, in following Patton’s (1997) recommendation to be astute and sensitive to the political ramifications that findings may have, a pledge of anonymity was made to participants. It was communicated to respondents that their names would not be made available in connection
with their responses, to neither the IPA nor the educational community at large. This was done so as to protect reputations and avoid hurt feelings of those invested in the program.

Data Analysis Techniques

Patton’s (1997) framework for reviewing data generalizes the approach to this study. These utilized components are description, analysis, interpretation, and judgement.

Description and Analysis

This research is primarily a quantitative study, designed to explore the relationship between participant demographic info (e.g. age, race, gender, years of experience), mentoring program effectiveness and SES, and then determine, through a correlative analysis, to what degree the variables are related. A regression analysis was used to estimate and visualize the connection between variables, namely the dependent (levels of perceived efficiency) and independent variable (SES). SPSS was used as a tool in coding, assembling, and computing required algorithms in order to extract statistical meaning from the data. Demographics (e.g., age, years, in education, years in admin, race and gender) were coded into meaningful ranges in order to evaluate for significance, as shown in Figure 2, below. Code ranges were adjusted and designated in order to gain meaningful conclusions without the range being too large or small in accordance with the breadth of data for that particular demographic.

One demographic category, however, was strategically chosen to align with a piece of foundational data upon which this study was assembled. According to the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012), the percentage of public school principals who stayed in their position from FY 2016 to FY 2017 was higher for principals in low-poverty schools (i.e., schools in which 25.0 percent or less of students were approved for
free or reduced-price lunch) than principals in high-poverty schools (i.e., schools in which more than 75.0 percent of students were approved for free or reduced-price lunch. This tri-tile (e.g., 0-25%-75%-100%) was used as a strategic threshold by which to analyze participant data with regards to levels of satisfaction in the mentoring program in accordance with SES.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Range of Responses</th>
<th>Coded Groupings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Years in Education</td>
<td>9-31</td>
<td>1-14, 15-20, 21+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Admin</td>
<td>2-24</td>
<td>0-3, 4-7, 8-10, 11-15, 16-20, 21-25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td>White, Hispanic or Latino, African American, 2+ races</td>
<td>Each race given a distinct number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male, Female</td>
<td>1 or 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Free/Reduced %age</td>
<td>1.10%-95%</td>
<td>0-25%, &gt;25%-75%, &gt;75%-100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2: Survey Participant Demographics, Ranges, and Code Groupings

For each of the 5 main goal-related questions, each of the Likert-scale responses were given a numerical score (strongly disagree 1, disagree 2, agree 3, strongly agree 4). Respondent data was then analyzed by mean, standard deviation, range limit evaluations (e.g., those respondents who either strongly agreed or disagreed) and an analysis of variance (ANOVA), chosen for its ability to analyze the mean values of three or more independent groups (e.g. mean, standard deviation, variance). In addition to the five Likert-scaled questions, the average score of each respondent’s data was included as a separate data point by which to create another vantage point from which to evaluate the data.

Interpretation and Judgement
As the overseeing researcher, I was responsible for the interpretation of data and discerning significance. Evaluating frequency and mean distribution among my data was informative in arriving at an informed conclusion. Without careful decisions regarding scales of measurement, visual and numerical representations of data are irrelevant. Conditional formatting was used with color scales similar to that of a heat map with different responses represented with distinct colors, to be able to visually see differences and possible themes of relevance within the data (i.e. figure 3, below).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
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<td>2</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3: Sample of Conditional Formatting “Heat Map” to visualize a range of responses*

During the interpretative stage, data collected was compared to anticipated results and used to gain perspective of relational meaning. Additionally, the responses from each individual question were analyzed with regards to each of the respondent’s demographic data, including school free/reduced percentage in order to determine possible statistical significance. Scatter plot graphs displaying numerical responses vs free/reduced percentage were assembled and studied. A trendline and trend slope were calculated in order to determine interdependent relation, as shown in Figure 4 below. For context, question #1 asked respondents to rate their
satisfaction with their mentor providing support in the development of a professional growth plan.

![Graphical representation of participants responses vs. F/R Percentage](image)

Figure 4: Graphical representation of participants responses vs. F/R Percentage. 
Q1: “My mentor provided support in the development of a professional growth plan.”

Establishing final judgements of data involved looking at the big picture conveyed through multiple gathered themes of interpreted data in relation to primary and secondary research questions. The connection between SES (and other relevant demographics) and perceptions of efficacy were analyzed through these methods.

Lastly, each of the open-ended questions (e.g., those allowing for free response rather than a numerical rating scale) were analyzed and responses were grouped by theme. Each of the themes were evaluated with research in the literature review of this study, specifically the critical attributes of principal mentoring, to determine if there was significance or a validation or contradiction of what was stated in the research.

**Conclusion**

This study had the following limitations:
1. Limited Sample Size for Statistical Measurement - This study captured the perceptions of a sample group of principals during one moment in time. There was no strategy in selecting this group of principals from the larger eligible set other than they were available and willing. Some accepted while others refused. The participating principals were asked to be a part of the study and the data collected was from those who volunteered, which may only highlight those who have a predominantly positive or negative view of the program. In light of this limitation, I would recommend expanding the respondent pool by making the evaluation a concluding part of the mentoring process. This way all voices would be captured, and respondent pools from one year to the next could be analyzed. Having this uniformly collected data would assist in evaluating programmatic changes (i.e., a shift from ISLLC to PSEL standards, or differentiated mentor training) and the effectiveness of mentor groups. Recommendations made from the results gathered from this survey would be best applied to this one singular group rather than the entire population at-large.

2. While the analysis was quantitative in nature, it still depended on the self-reflection abilities of principals. Compared to a strictly data-numerical study, at the core, this study utilized the perceptions of principals rather than raw, unemotionally involved information, such as student achievement or changing demographics.

3. Varying amounts of time will have passed between the principals’ ending their mentoring program and the solicitation of this data. With periods of time ranging
from weeks to years since they participated in the mentoring program in question, the reliability of recall answers may vary as well.

Despite the aforementioned limitations and restrictions, this study was designed to expand the body of research available to educational professionals wanting to positively affect student achievement within their boundaries of responsibility. Patton (1997), states that he would “prefer to have soft or rough measures of important goals rather than highly precise measures of goals no one much cares about” (p. 161). My hope is that this journey of inquiry might guide my own practice of mentoring principals as Superintendent, provide recommendations to IPA on how/if they might differentiate their program with regards to socioeconomic status, and advocate for a reinstatement of statewide mentoring initiatives for the academic progress of our students.

**SECTION FOUR: RESULTS**

In the continuous improvement process, proposed reform is “driven by an analysis of student needs, is targeted on specific skills needed by individuals and groups, and is ongoing and integral to the implementation process” (Hawley, 2006, p.168). This process of discerning need in order to target reform, here with the principal playing the role of student, with their needs leading the charge for reform, is precisely the type of continuous improvement cycle intended with this research. Because the principal's positive contributions to the educational system are a “critical component to school success” (Cotton, 2003, p.15), their training and ability to confidently serve effectively in their role is paramount. With research revealing in Section 2 that low-SES communities are connected with a more diverse and often difficult set of issues extending into the school system (Caldas and Bankston, 1997), principals within these
communities need to have a more diverse and expansive set of professional tools to draw from as they seek to raise student achievement (Suber, 2012).

This section analyzes my review of the perceived impact actualized and vocalized by leaders of low-SES school systems, in comparison to their administrator peers, in the context of their participation in the IPA’s principal mentoring program. The findings described in this section are framed within a diagnostic tool coined by Wagner (2012), “As Is-To Be.” Within each of these frames are 4 arenas of change known as the “4C’s” (e.g., context, conditions, competencies, conditions) by which to consider and examine the change process. Wagner et al.'s (2012) book, Change Leadership, was utilized to further frame and develop the data analysis and hopeful change produced through this study. A description of the current landscape surrounding this topic of principal mentoring and SES through the frame of the 4C’s (“AS IS”) is followed by an analysis of the results from my principal survey. Lastly, in adhering to Patton’s (1997) recommendations for a focused evaluation, this study is designed to “change knowledge, attitudes, and behavior,” (p.168) which will be discussed in more detail within Section 6: “Strategies and Action.”

AS-IS ANALYSIS
Figure 5: A graphical representation of the current “AS IS” framework relating to this study
Note: Figure displaying the integrated relationship between the four arenas of change.

Context

Wagner et al. (2012) describes context as the larger organizations systems surrounding our work as educators, and their “demands and expectations, formal and informal” (p. 104). The Illinois Principals Association is the largest organization geared specifically towards building-level leadership in the state of Illinois. The IPA mentoring program was founded in response to a bill passed in the Spring of 2005 in the General Assembly requiring every new principal to have a mentor. The IPA was informally mentoring principals up until this point, but with this new mandate, it became clear that this statewide initiative needed strategic regulation and oversight. While the IPA did not directly provide formal mentoring services, they bid and were
approved to oversee the statewide implementation. This approval afforded the IPA the opportunity to vet and support mentors, even though direct services were provided by regional offices of education across the state. This additional state funding also meant that districts with low-SES communities would have access to dollars to pay for mentoring services, which is sorely needed seeing that a number of principals serving diverse and low-income communities, according to Superville (2019), feel unprepared for the task. This initiative was paid for through 2010, when, unfortunately, as a result of a receding economy, budgets tightened, and state finances dissolved. According to the IPA’s Executive Director, this greatly affected IPA’s ability to provide this service. While research makes the connection between mentoring and reduced principal attrition (Virginia Snodgrass-Rangel (2018), Gates, et. al. (2006), Jensen, (2014)), IPA Director Leahy (2020) is not aware of any body of research or data collected that demonstrates this connection in Illinois through this statewide initiative. Catalyzed by persevering need, in 2015, the IPA reconstituted the mentoring program, taking a more involved role, which is the program we still see active today.

**Conditions**

Wagner (2012) describes the conditions surrounding change as the “external architecture surrounding student learning, the tangible arrangements of time, space, and resources” (p.101). Currently serving 5400 principals, deans, and other educational staff, the IPA’s mentoring program is comprised of a series of meetings between the mentor and mentee. These meetings are aimed at building leadership capacity within the mentee. More specifically, the IPA provides (at least) 40 hours of coaching support, with face-to-face meetings occurring at least 3 times a year. Before these meetings, mentors received a one-day training through the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) or IPA. This training is generally
administered, in that, all candidates receive the same materials and curricular emphases, which is a point of potential reformation and discussion later in the study. The training touches on the research-based rationale for mentoring, its potential benefits, and interpersonal strategies for pairing with and assisting proteges. Additionally, IPA mentors are required to receive ongoing quarterly mentoring support during their first year and bi-annual training in subsequent years from the IPA’s Field Service Specialists. As a supplementary resource available to all mentors and members, an electronic medium called the Ed Leaders Network, the IPA, in partnership with ISBE, created an online, on-demand content source where members can enter into online communities to dialogue in threaded discussions, share content, and blog surrounding professional ideas.

The IPA has been careful to make a distinction between mentoring new principals/administrators versus coaching experienced educational leaders. IPA Executive Director, Jason Leahy, describes the extensive application for mentors. “We’re wanting to learn as much as possible, inquiring about past training and experiences, so the pairing is useful and strategic” (Leahy, 2019) and takes into consideration information regarding minority populations, SES, ELL populations, and different research initiatives. While this is the intent, the IPA also recognizes that as a matter of practicality, because mentors are required to meet with protégés, mentors are most often assigned according to regional proximity rather than shared experience or student/community need.

However, finding quality mentors can be a challenge. IPA Director Leahy states many of his mentors are retired administrators as it is very difficult to get an actively sitting school leader to commit because of their already demanding work schedule. As a financial incentive, the IPA currently pays trained mentors a $2000 stipend for the 40-hour time commitment. One self-
identified “growth area” for the IPA according to Leahy is recruiting and retaining mentors south of Springfield, which he adds, is also where a larger concentration of poorer school districts are located. Currently (as of November 2020), the IPA has a strong presence in Central and Northern Illinois but has a weaker representation in the southern half of the state. See Figure 6 below for a breakdown of existing districts with participating protégé’s and Appendix F for a statewide map of current districts the IPA is serving through the principal mentoring program with the numbers of protégé’s labeled in each district as of November 2020. This information was assembled from an interview with IPA executive director, Dr. Jason Leahy, and from publicly sourced information from ISBE.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protege District</th>
<th># participants</th>
<th>% of Pop. F/R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antioch CCSD 34</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Berwyn North SD 98</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>88.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bloomington SD 87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>58.80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carbondale ESD 95</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cicero SD 99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>94.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Chicago SD 299</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>78.40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Protege District</th>
<th># participants</th>
<th>% of Pop. F/R</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Deerfield SD 109</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joliet PSD 86</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>95.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyden CHSD 212</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Shore SD 112</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>25.10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oregon CUSD 220</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>42.90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rockford SD 205</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>64.10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*as of Nov. '20

Figure 6: Existing IL Districts employing IPA mentoring services for protégés with Free/Reduced %

This is relevant because the IPA draws from its connections with existing leaders and IPA representatives to recruit potential mentor candidates. Through the professional connections of Field Service Specialists, IPA Board members, and regional representatives, they use their own anecdotal experiences and personal professional networks to identify and solicit potential mentor candidates. Recognizing that the professional connections are most likely made with those colleagues in one’s own circle of influence and localized region, this may contribute to the self-perpetuating nature of being under-represented in many low-SES Southern Illinois school
districts.

Culture

In contrast to “conditions” as the visible, tangible arrangements contextualizing change, Wagner describes culture as “invisible but powerful meanings and mindsets that are held individually and collectively throughout the system” (p.102). Detailed in the research review in Section 2, it has been shown that principals play a pivotal role in the educational achievement of students, and mentoring has been acknowledged to be a research-based practice with potential to increase leadership capacity. Because experiential knowledge can be passed on for the purpose of improvement and refinement through a relationship where risk taking and open communication are valued, mentors with a diverse set of professional experiences are sought after by the IPA in order to be paired with protégé’s requesting assistance.

The IPA, in their general “IPA Mentoring and Coaching” informational handout, outline their beliefs relating to the process of principal mentorship. These are relevant to my research and change initiative as they are the pillars that established and support the current mentoring process structure. My research and desired change initiative is most intimately connected to the last “belief” below, which may serve as an in-road for future change. The beliefs are listed below (abridged for relevance):

- Principals play a pivotal leadership role in the continuous improvement of organizational results by enabling students and adults to achieve high performance standards
- Principals need continuous access to quality professional learning experiences
● Mentors model the desired leadership, knowledge, dispositions, and behaviors of a successful principal
● Mentors ensure that principals understand and can access supports available to them to develop their leadership capacity over time
● Mentors always focus on the needs of new principals by offering those successful strategies and practices that increase their ability to act as an instructional leader
● Mentoring requires support, interventions and resources that are both timely and individualized.

While most mentoring relationships are voluntary or initiated by the member-protégé, Executive Director, Jason Leahy, described how, on occasion, the mentoring program is requested by district leadership for struggling protégés. In these cases, the IPA states that they are sure to reinforce for the mentor that they are not serving in an evaluative sense, and while they have found that some principals are unable or unwilling to get out of the old manager-style thinking, the mentors are careful not to communicate these shortcomings back to the Superintendent in order to preserve the mentor-protégé relationship and protect the longevity and fidelity of the program.

**Competencies**

In being intentional to have relevant and standardized goals, the IPA originally aligned its mentoring program goals with the standards set forth by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). Relatedly, the IPA has noted that they desire to update these internal mentoring standards to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) as they are
more up to date than the ISLLC standards. Specifically, four themes emerge when comparing the two standards sets and their elements and functions. These themes include equity, talent development, leadership capacity, and academic systems (Center on Great Teachers & Leaders., 2016). Certainly, leadership capacity and the idea of continuous improvement is connected to this study of mentoring and transference of professional skill set, but even more specifically, the equity theme, dealing with cultural responsiveness, is of great change potential. Khalifa (2020) reminds contemporary leaders that instructional leadership, transformational leadership, curriculum development, and professional development are all important school leadership functions, but leaders cannot continue to ignore the role that cultural responsiveness plays in each of these areas. Because systems with greater minoritized populations experience increased principal turnover (Gates, et al., 2006) and are often associated with low-SES (Caldas & Bankston, 1997), this new set of standards with updated goals surrounding cultural responsiveness may also have implications through the IPA’s mentoring efforts. This change from one set of standards to the next by the IPA is in process but has not yet been finalized.

With regards to evaluating existing skill sets of prospective mentors, the IPA does have specific requirements for mentors before they are admitted to the program. They must have experience in developing or supervising new principals or administrators and must demonstrate their ability to give feedback in positive and constructive ways to push thinking to higher levels in order to create long term plans and results. Additionally, they must also be able to guide others in establishing daily routines and procedures for school operations, management, supervision, and teacher development.

One of the explicit tasks for the mentor is to assist the protégé in discerning the components of their own professional growth plan. The mentor is tasked by the IPA to help the
protégé analyze trends in achievement data in order to identify critical areas needing to be addressed. The IPA-ascribed mentor training is general in the sense that it covers the benefits of mentoring and the basics in what should be fostered within the mentor-protege relationship. The emphasis is placed on helping principals develop the capacity to nurture and sustain a school culture conducive to student learning and the professional growth of staff. And this vision of change is sorely needed in lower-SES communities, where student achievement is traditionally lower than middle- or upper-class communities (Cullen & Mazzeo, 2008). Not only do these communities need access to high-capacity leaders to lead through change for improvement, to not equip leaders also comes at a cost. “Poorly prepared principals lead schools nowhere — and once certified, they remain in the system for many years, obstructing school improvement” (Gray, et al., 2007, p. 10). To avoid the dynamic of ineffective principals leading high-need schools, it is recommended that the IPA consider differentiating their mentor training with regards to the unique challenges found in low-SES school systems. The Southern Regional Education Board’s 13 critical success factors that are related to principals succeeding in at-risk schools should be used as a framework for determining domains of program content. Protégés, upon entrance to the mentoring program, are also surveyed by the IPA to learn more about the candidate, their background, and their needs to assist in the pairing process. This survey asks for basic demographic information including title and previous position, time in current position and educational administration, grade levels responsible for, and contact information. It also asks student demographic questions surrounding % of EL learners, special education population, and Free/Reduced population (the SES proxy for this study). The survey requests additional professional information such as, top three (self-identified) goals, biggest challenges they will face in the upcoming year, and any other information to make the experience meaningful and
productive. This information is then used by the IPA to assist in the pairing process with a suitable mentor. IPA Director Leahy acknowledges this as a potential point of growth stating that the success of the mentor program is largely contingent upon meeting the prioritized needs of protégés. He stated (2020) that the IPA is always wanting to learn and grow, and, if as a result of my study in this area, they can be more effective with a wider set of professionals with diverse needs, or learn new strategies in discerning barriers to success, that information would be welcome. Another barrier, according to Leahy (2020) is that their participant base is largely contingent upon districts-in-need reaching out to them and requesting services for new/struggling administrators. IPA mentor program coordinators are sure to respond to the needs brought to them but recognize that there are still many districts/schools/administrators in need who are not reaching out to employ the services of the IPA.

This dire need for strong leadership in all school systems, but specifically those with low-SES, serves as a “call-to-arms” to the educational community. Several questions arose needing answers as I focused my research on being a catalyst for change. Through what avenues would it be most efficient to petition for new funding for a re-energized mentoring initiative across the state of Illinois? Which district or state officials may need to be contacted, and what common interests could be highlighted in order to convey this sense of urgency? Additionally, what benefits were actualized, if any, through this previous allocation of state dollars to mandate principal mentoring? Has this data been assembled, and has it been disaggregated by community socio-economic standing? And if found to be previously beneficial, who needs to be reminded of the academic dividends it once fostered? Regionally, with regards to the IPA’s mentoring initiative, what does this application process look like, especially with regards to vetting candidates and experiences by low-SES communities? Might I be a part of assisting the IPA in
aligning their mentoring initiatives to the new PSEL standards?

My next steps derived from these questions and that which was learned through an analysis of the 4C’s. This analysis displays principals feeling unprepared for leading low-SES systems, and while the IPA plays a significant statewide role in facilitating mentoring across the state, restored finances are needed to make this training largely available within low-SES communities (Context). In recognizing the value in the relational aspect of mentoring, the IPA requires at least 40 hours of contact time with 3 face-to-face meetings. While this prioritization on regional proximity between the pairings has allowed for the mentor and protégé to meet in-person more frequently, it has inadvertently deemphasized pairings according to other associated demographics, including SES (Conditions). Mentoring is widely believed to elicit positive change in school leaders and is often used as a tool by districts of struggling administrators (Culture). While the IPA does vet participants according to predetermined professional capacities and trains mentors in the use of data for school improvement initiatives, it remains general in its approach, and is consistent with an older set of (ISLLC) professional standards. Moving forward with the plan to update principal mentoring initiatives with the more contemporary PSEL standards will bolster mentors’ efforts in the additional areas of growing leadership capacities and cultural responsiveness, potentially increasing effectiveness in low-SES communities (Competencies).

Findings

This study’s primary research question relates to what extent a system’s SES is related to the effectiveness of a statewide principal mentoring program as evaluated by those participating
in the program. Secondary questions include, “Why is mentoring school leaders important?” “What are the key elements of an effective mentoring program?” and “What are the contributing factors to principal turnover and how can mentoring help?” Five Likert rating-response questions were asked in accordance with the IPA’s formal goal and program objectives. These 5 questions were centered around the development of professional growth plans, structure and opportunities for reflection on professional practices, utilizing student data to reform classroom practices, increasing leadership capacity, and school management (see full questions in Figure 9).

Participants were grouped into 1 of 3 categories in accordance with the SES of their school district. As described previously in this section, the U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012) found that principals were more likely to leave the profession if the number of students participating in the free/reduced lunch program within their system was above 75 percent compared to those principals whose population was 25 percent and lower. In following the grouping pattern of this research, participants in this study were coded into one of three “tri-tiles” with regards to free and reduced lunch status (e.g., 0-25%, 26-75%, 76%+). This initial look was a first step in gaining a preliminary understanding of the relationship between respondent score and SES category. However, no observable theme or significant difference was found among these groups. The number of respondents and average score for each tri-tile for all five questions is shown below in Figure 7.
In continuing to analyze the participant data, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was chosen for its ability to identify statistically significant differences among the means of three or more independent groups. In answering this study’s primary research question, through this analysis, it was shown that the relationship between SES and program satisfaction did not prove to be statistically significant. This was likely due to a lack of variance between participant ratings from one question to the next. Mathematically speaking, a variable is defined as an attribute that describes a person, place, thing, or idea that can "vary" in value from one entity to another. So first, we know that a variable contains different values. For many of the questions posed to participants, people answered much in the same way (or with the same value). Figure 8 shows the generally similar grouping of each rating type per question (with the exception of question 3, which will be discussed later).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FR Tri-tile</th>
<th># of respondents</th>
<th>Q1</th>
<th>Q2</th>
<th>Q3</th>
<th>Q4</th>
<th>Q5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-25%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.666</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.583</td>
<td>3.166</td>
<td>3.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-75%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.333</td>
<td>3.33</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>76%+</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>2.666</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7: Average Score by Participant Free-Reduced Tri-tile
Note: Listed below are the related themes for each survey question:

- Q1 - Development of a professional development plan
- Q2 - Reflective conversation regarding efforts to improve professional practices.
- Q3 - Analyzing trends in student achievement data
- Q4 - Increasing leadership capacity
- Q5 - Management of the organization, operations, and resources
Carroll, S.R. and Carroll, D.J, (2002), discuss using statistics for explaining relationships and describe the statistical reality that if there is not significant variation in the outcome variable then there is nothing to explain. Figure 9 (below) shows the variance (Var(X)) and mean distribution across all 5 questions. We see that question #1 (support in development of a professional growth plan) received the most favorable rating with the highest mean (average) value at 3.417, suggesting that the program uniformly meets this formal goal across this respondent set. Conversely, question three (surrounding the mentors' support in using student data in reforming classroom practices) received the lowest mean value of 2.583. With a rating of “3” as “agree,” and a “2” meaning “disagree,” this mean value of 2.583 suggests that this one question points to a program goal met among this participant pool.
Figure 9: ANOVA analysis incl. mean, st. dev., variance, deg. of variance, and statistical significance.

Connectedly, question #3 also had the largest amount of variance in the responses (see Figure 7) and the most even spread of respondent values across the 4 Likert ratings. This suggests that the participants’ experience with their mentor varied the most with regards to using data meaningfully and is an inroad for further investigation raising the questions, “Why were respondents’ ratings so different in satisfaction? Do these varying ratings reveal a point of need within the program structure or only within the skill sets and capacities of the mentor?” Looking ahead, even though the results to this central research question proved to be statistically
insignificant, an intensive review of the data presented (both quantitative and qualitative responses) revealed 3 predominant themes.

**Theme #1: Variance by Select Demographics**

As an initial part of the survey, each of the 24 respondents were asked for demographic and professional career information including age, race, gender, years in education, and years in administration. This additional demographic information was collected to see if there might be any other vantage points by which the program might be evaluated, similar to that of SES. All respondents who were asked the same 5 Likert-scaled standard-connected questions were also then asked to identify what was helpful, what was lacking, and how additionally they may have desired support in regard to the mentoring program’s efforts. The results from each of the standard-based questions were cross-referenced with each demographic characteristic and analyzed for themes, connections, or trends. For example, participant ratings for each question were analyzed by gender to see if any connected themes of response were present. Patton (1997) describes this kind of cross-referenced evaluation as a perceptual and interpretative approach to establishing meaning and meaningfulness of programs.

With regards to gender, this study consisted of 18 females (71%) and 6 males (29%). In comparison to the state of Illinois, according to the 2019 ISBE Annual report, with regards to active Principals and Assistant Principals, there were 2739 males (44%) and 3464 females (56%) respectively, across the state. So, in comparison to the state at large, this participating research sample was overrepresented by females by about 15%. Focusing on responses by gender, respondents who, on average, submitted responses less than "3-agree" were 55% female, with
females making up 75% of the respondent pool. Interestingly enough, but across the board, when comparing the response averages between males and females, males are consistently lower for all 5 questions asked (about one quarter of a point or 0.2445 points lower on average across all questions). See figure 10 below for a visual representation of this pattern.

![Figure 10: Average respondent score broken down by gender](image)

Participant administrative experience was selected as a second demographic by which to analyze data because of its connection to the core topic and subsequent research question around attrition. Specifically, principal mentoring was shown to be a strategy in fighting against attrition, yet, as shown in the literature review for this study, experience was found to be a significant predictor for all career transitions in Illinois, and a pattern arose from the data that suggested the likelihood of a principal turning over decreased at the beginning and end of their careers. Contrastingly, this pattern is seen in the converse from the data collected from this study. When looking at each respondent’s average score across all 5 questions, the lowest scores received (with varying degrees of dissatisfaction) were submitted from those in the beginning and ends of their careers as shown in the graph below. This raises the question, “If Principals are less likely to leave in the beginning of their career, is the dissatisfaction we see in low scores from novice administrators the beginning of aversion/frustration that could lead to their possible
exodus mid-career?”

It is worth noting that the IPA Principal mentoring program typically assists individuals who are newer to the administrative side of education. Fortunately, this study did have several respondents with 10+ years of administrative experience, which adds a unique perspective from this localized data. Note that the trend line (in red) representing average score among respondents is lowest when administrative years of experience value is at its lowest and highest (e.g. furthest most left and right ends of graph).

![Mean Score vs. # Yrs Admin](Image)

*Figure 11: Graph showing the relationship between the avg respondent score and admin experience*

Lastly, an analysis was done of those respondents who answered with less than a “3” on any given answer against their responses to the question concerning what they thought was lacking within the program. While they did submit recommendations including “creating more specific mentoring goals,” “more frequent contact,” and “mentors with specific fields of expertise,” there were no overarching demographic or contextual themes present for those with less than a "3-agree" in terms of what they wish were different about the program.
Theme #2: Program Content

Instructional leadership

Question three reads, “With the assistance of my IPA mentor, I was able to analyze trends in student achievement data for the purpose of identifying critical areas that needed to be addressed through strategic improvements in classroom instruction and assessment.” In looking at the mean value for each of the 5 questions and correlating responses (see figure 8), question number 3 has a notably lower average than the other 4 questions (2.583 vs 3.42, 3.46, 3.08, and 3.21 respectively). With a sub three-point average (with a score of three representing “agree”) being seen as disagreeable to some extent, this question is important to study a bit closer in hopes of identifying a possible area of reformatory improvement within the IPA mentoring program. This question is connected to IPA’s second goal which connects leadership development efforts to the improvement needs of the school, resulting in a positive impact on the quality of teaching and learning. This point demands attention as Wagner et al. (2012) state the school leader’s ability to use data meaningfully is paramount and should be employed to focus the school community’s attention on the heart of education; the students. This question and goal also speak to the heart of instructional leadership, of which the ability to use data for the purpose of raising student achievement is central (Mendez-Morse, 1991). The work of Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr (2009) found that mentoring efforts are most effective when the coach focuses specifically on improving instructional leadership and the coach is provided ample training and resources. Seeing that instructional leadership is intimately tied to academic achievement, and that mentoring is one key way to develop this capacity in leaders, this confirms the body of research surrounding secondary research question #1 relating to why mentoring school leaders is important.
Substantive/Structured Program Content

When asked how the IPA's mentoring program might be improved, 16 respondents had one or more suggestions, and, notably, 6 of those (37.5%) were all requests for additional structure around relevant topics. Candidates asked for additional structure in “outlining the expectations of the program and what to expect from the process,” and “a clear mentoring structure that gave mentees a choice of topics to cover with detailed information.” Others mention that while the mentor was “very nice,” the sessions “were unstructured” and their “limited knowledge” of the job “made it difficult to gain additional perspective.” Another participant noted that, “it would have been helpful to work out specific goals and objectives” with their mentor, while someone plainly noted that the program “was not structured or individualized enough.” As educators, we recognize this idea of assessing for need and differentiating our approach to learning is useful and effective in the classroom and greatly desired from participants within this learning context. Tomlinson (2014) reminds us that differentiation is one facet of expert teaching and should be paired with students playing a part in choosing learning goals as they relate to their experiences and interests.

Connectedly, mentoring (or coaching) for the purpose of building capacity, has been associated with principals staying within their role (Jensen, D., 2014) and is helpful if provided throughout their career, not just the first few years (School Leader Paradigm, 2018). Research also suggests that high-capacity principals have the greatest impact on student achievement in schools with the greatest needs, such as low-SES, low student attendance, high teacher turnover, etc. (Branch et al. 2013).

When asked to select areas of additional desired support from a list of 11 key areas based
on the IPA’s School Leader Paradigm (2018) and Ross and Cozzens core competencies for educational leadership (2016), the most frequently selected item was "Building Professional Capacity," with 8 of the 24 respondents (33%) stating this was a future desired area of support. This data highlights a desire for growth on the part of principals and partially speaks to secondary research question #2: “What are the key elements of an effective mentoring program?” As we read in Section 2: Literature Review, “the mentoring process must also be content-rich, being sure to select topics and discussion points that are relevant to the protégé and their current leadership needs” (NAESP, 2013). This aligns with data from respondents asking for structure and choice and further supports Farkas', et. al. (2003) stance that on-the-job support and applications of learning are far more useful to protégés than academic or intellectual exercises. This idea of coordinating mentoring pairs according to strategic content connections between the two would fall into the realm of the Field Service Specialists, employed by the IPA as a supportive role. **Theme #3: Relational aspect of program** below answers the remainder of this research question.

**Theme #3: Relational aspect of program**

Lastly, and probably the clearest of the three themes that arose, is the importance and value expressed by participants in the relational aspect of the mentoring program. This study reveals what research confirms; a nurturing and trusting relationship between the mentor and protégé is central to fostering the full maturation of the protégé (Haines, 2003).

When asked to specify the components of the IPA’s mentoring program that were of most help, overwhelmingly, the large majority of participants articulated a relational based aspect of the program. Out of 24 responses, 5 valued having an outsider to talk to, 3 valued the personal
connection with their mentor, 9 appreciated someone to process struggles with, and 1 valued someone to have confidential conversations with. Several participants stated that being able to speak in confidence with someone outside of the organization was of great value, one specifically noting, “It was helpful having the complete confidentiality and support of an unbiased professional to provide perspective and honest feedback on various issues.” Another stated, “I enjoyed having someone to talk to with experience that was not in my building. It was an unbiased conversation that was needed for me.” Phrases and terms like “sounding board,” “ability to problem solve,” and “complete confidentiality with an unbiased professional,” were heard from participants.

Eighteen out of twenty-four participants (75%) had a relational-based answer when asked to identify the most helpful component of the program. This is significant because as we look to revise and adapt the program to meet respondent’s needs, including those connected with a low-SES school system, this relational aspect must be preserved and possibly magnified. Relatedly, Searby, & Tripses (2007), in answering the question of who makes an effective mentor states that when it comes to peer mentors, two types are needed; “an ally within our organization, and a confidant who is outside our organization” (p.3). Seventy-five percent of respondents recorded the interactive dynamic between mentor and protege as one of the most helpful components, and drilling down even deeper, about 25% of them specifically highlighted the value in having an "outsider" to process with.

Again, this finding aligns with research and holds great significance with regards to one of the central motivating tenets of this study in the way of reducing principal attrition. Secondary research question #3 asks, “What are the contributing factors to principal turnover and how can mentoring help?” In one published NAESP study (Johnson, 2005), one of the top four
reasons for principals leaving their profession was profound isolation on the job. While the relational component was clearly one of the largest attributes of the program, research still suggests that Principal-mentor pairings should be intentional and strategic (Leahy, 2019) with colleagues who have had parallel or similar professional experiences. To be discussed later, the idea of facilitating digital mentoring relationships, utilizing tele-optical technology, in order to pair those in similar SES settings does not preclude or eliminate any of the relational attributes that participants found the most value in and bolsters principals within their positions, reducing attrition.

**Strength of Overall Program**

Out of 18 respondents, when asked to identify one area that the program may be lacking and how it might be remedied, 7 participants stated that they had no recommendation on how they felt the program might be improved. Relatedly, with regards to SES, 3 of the 7 were from districts with 0-25% free/reduced (FR) students, 2 were from districts with 26-75% FR students, and 2 were from districts with more than 76% FR students. This is significant, because 7 participants (30% of the overall respondent group) from evenly distributed SES backgrounds, desired no additional change. While 30% of my selective group of respondents is too minimal to make sweeping programmatical judgements of competency, this is encouraging in that, with even representation from all three FR tiers, near one-third of respondents ultimately felt the program met their expectations. The remaining 18 respondents who did offer suggestions for improvement (apart from requesting additional structure which was discussed previously) had a variety of suggestions including attending joint professional development with their mentor (2 respondents), longer sessions and more frequent contact (3 respondents), a focus on current issues, additional support using student achievement data, and the opportunity to connect with
new principals in the area.

Lastly, and relatedly, respondents were asked, aside from their scores and articulated impressions of specific facets of the program, whether or not they would overall recommend the program to someone else. When asked, all 24 respondents (100%) stated that they found value in the program and would recommend it to another admin colleague.

In considering the 4C’s as a backdrop for this study, we uncover several points of entry with regards to opportunities for improvement (to be discussed at greater length in section 5). Not surprisingly, finances play a significant role in the widespread availability of mentoring in the state especially with regards to low-SES districts and communities. While requesting direct allocations of state dollars to a specific initiative is difficult considering the various needs in education and the stretched-thin Illinois budgets, it is my hope that my study and findings will serve as a catalyst in this regard. Secondly, and with regards to further advocacy, we learn (in “Conditions”) that the issue of discerning and meeting the needs of both mentors and protégé’s is an area for growth. Just as we recognize that differentiating instruction for students based on their experiences and capacities is of great value in the classroom, the practice of “one-size-fits-all” mentor training can be improved upon. The IPA may consider a needs assessment for new mentors in determining where to best bolster their understanding of the shared values and commitments required for mentors in relation to program goals and the new PSEL standards. Relatedly, and as acknowledged by the IPA, an opportunity for growth is in the approach to discerning and identifying protégé needs. Currently, proteges are asked to self-identify areas of need, and, as previously stated, new building leaders may not even know the variety of challenges that await them, especially those connected with low-SES systems. Mentors should be trained in themes of common areas of need for leaders of low-SES systems and implemented
as a part of increased program structure, which we learned was also a request from this study’s participants. Lastly, in seeking to preserve (and possibly increase) what was articulated by participants to be one the highlights of the program, adjustments in method to the relational aspect of this program should be considered. Because great value was found and expressed by participants in the frequent meetings between mentor and protégé, yet hearing that the requirement that these meetings be in-person affected the organization's ability to prioritize other protégé characteristics, including SES, the option to use digital meetings should be considered.

**Interpretations, Judgements, and Recommendation**

The analysis and results from my surveys mixed with an analysis of relevant literature has given me insight into the areas of principal turnover, low-SES populations, and principal mentoring. The U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics (2012) found a positive correlation between principal attrition and low-SES (as measured by the National Free School Lunch Program’s “Free/Reduced” status) and served as a catalyst for this study’s research. In answering this study’s primary research question, it was shown that the relationship between SES and program satisfaction did not prove to be statistically significant. In other words, SES was not found to be a distinguishing characteristic in the course of this study when analyzing the results from survey questions. However, it is possible that SES may be too “large” of a category by which to apply mentoring initiatives. It is possible that SES is more of a categorical label associated with several different factors that contribute to attrition, but it is not SES itself, therefore suggesting it may not be a helpful characteristic by which to train mentors/implement strategies. The cross-woven nature of low-SES systems, principal mentoring, and principal attrition is an area of research that needs additional attention.
Through analysis of surrounding data through the lens of the secondary research questions, I was able to glean meaning surrounding the practice of mentoring and the successful leadership of low-SES populations. In answering the secondary questions surrounding the importance of mentoring school leaders, principal turnover, and the key elements of an effective mentoring program, this study was able to provide relevant insight.

Branch et al. (2013) noted that high-capacity leaders were most successful in raising student achievement in schools with the greatest needs, such as low-SES, teacher turnover, and disengagement from school, etc. Connectedly, with regards to this study’s results, when asked to select areas of additional desired support from a list of 11 key areas based on the IPA’s School Leader Paradigm (2018) and Ross and Cozzens’ Core Competencies for Educational Leadership (2016), the most frequently selected item was "Building Professional Capacity," with 8 of the 24 respondents (33%) stating this was a future desired area of support. This confirms the importance of building leadership capacity as one of the core precepts of the mentoring effort and formalized program.

Secondly, principals who are successful in low-SES systems have been found (Jacobsen, 2008) to be determined, above all obstacles and interference, to work towards the equitable and just education of the students in their building. Often this involved working with or pushing through resistance from instructional staff who did not believe low-SES students were able to perform with their grade level peers. This finding has great reformatory power when thinking about differentiating the mentoring efforts of the IPA for participating principals. Principals should be informed of the resistance they might receive from those they work with and be equipped with the tools and examples of success in order to help them persevere for the sake of students in low-SES systems.
Lastly, another significant finding of this study reinforces what is confirmed in existing research. Haines (2003) found that a trusting and nurturing relationship between mentor and protégé is central to the maximal development of the protégé. When the 24 participants of this study were asked what components of the IPA’s mentoring program were most helpful to them, 75% of the respondent pool cited a relational aspect of the program. These respondents cited the interactive relationship between mentor and protege as one of the most helpful components, and drilling down even deeper, about 25% of them specifically highlighted the value in having an "outsider" to process with.

After being enveloped by this body of work and now reflecting on what has been discovered throughout, I would recommend additional research/actionable emphasis on a few key areas. Greater research is needed on the key characteristics that earmark successful leaders in low-SES systems. Because of the body of research previously discussed that confirms the connection between leadership and a climate focused on student achievement (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson, 2010) and the diverse skill set required for principals to be successful (Smith & Smith, 2015), leaders of low-SES systems need additional research to further identify what characteristics define successful leaders in these systems and what, additionally, can be included in the training and development of principals entering into these systems. Relatedly, because the skill set of successful principals is diverse, having several mentors to speak into specific areas or domains of expertise may be helpful rather than assigning a “one size fits all” mentor. Additionally, in seeing that the one survey question with the lowest score (Q: #3) was relating to the mentor’s ability to assist the protégé in taking student achievement data and turn into actionable results, this arena of mentor training may be considered for additional emphasis.
SECTION FIVE: TO-BE FRAMEWORK

Operationally, a clear vision is a critical element in successful change and can be defined simply as the desired, optimal state, however, in using a travel metaphor, knowing your heading and bearing is a small motivator in comparison to knowing “why” your destination has been chosen. To this end, Tony Wagner (2001), asks, “How can teachers be motivated to change if leaders cannot clearly explain why it is important?” (p.381). Section 5 describes our “TO-BE” visionary destination and builds on previous sections of this study which have identified the variables associated with mentoring/attrition/low-SES communities and the “AS-IS”, or the current state of mentoring leaders with diverse needs in the state of Illinois,

TO-BE ANALYSIS

Wagner (2012) describes the “TO-BE” picture as a systemic and dynamic vision of the future to which we aspire (p.119). This required vision has been described using the 4Cs of the “TO-BE” chart (Wagner et al., 2012, Figure 12 below) and through the framework of the four arenas of change (e.g., Context, Conditions, Culture, Competencies).
Figure 12: A graphical representation of the desired “TO-BE” framework relating to this study

Context

In order to effectively elicit change, one must be aware of the surrounding institutional or structural variables that touch the change arena in some way. Heifetz et al. (2009), says that the need to understand how organizational structure operates in multiple systems at the same time is an essential component of identifying and addressing adaptive challenges such as those surrounding the IPA’s mentoring initiatives in a variety of school district contexts. The Illinois Principals Association is one of the largest professional organizations in the state, and partners
with several other para-educational organizations in promoting and executing professional development. It is my hope to bring a renewed context surrounding the goals and scope of mentoring at the local and state level by recommending explicit support and promotion for principal mentoring, with a differentiated approach focused on the critical leadership elements required of principals working in lower socioeconomic districts. Ideally, this would mean an increasing number of trained mentors with experience and demonstrated success in financially challenged settings available throughout the state, and ultimately low-SES districts’ student needs are met as a result of the IPA’s efforts.

Increasing promotion of the mentoring program and sharing successes with other low-SES leaders is hoped to be a self-perpetuating cycle. As principal-proteges in low-SES districts actualize growth goals, they will share these successes and the reputation of the mentoring program will improve within these communities. Long-standing principals, originally a part of the revised program as proteges, will then contribute back into new inexperienced principals with regards to meeting low-SES schools' needs.

As a result of this study and the subsequently renewed effectiveness of the mentoring program, it would be recommended that principal mentoring would be revisited (renewed) as a requirement for new principals, especially those in low-SES systems, and state and district funding and accountability be allocated to the initiative. This state-wide recognition and attention will allow the IPA to remain the largest principal mentoring organization in the state, and as a result of their differentiated low-SES focus, the most successful as well.

**Conditions**

The “TO-BE” or visionary conditions are the ideal arrangements and allocations of
resources. The application process for mentors will be diversified, and purposeful to identify experience with minoritized populations, low-SES concentrations, and ELL students, so that intentional matches can be made with mentees placed within these contexts. This will in-turn give the IPA an overview containing detailed characteristics of mentors’ professional past and skill set and will be a critical part of the pairing process that will most benefit proteges.

Another systematic change to the process involves mentor pairing once the protege’s needs are known. Mentors should be solicited and paired according to the needs of the protege pool, specifically considering SES, rather than matching who is geographically available with who is in need. If no mentor is available matching the SES profile of the requesting protégé, the IPA’s Field Service Specialists will actively scout out veteran administrators who have had or are currently successfully serving in similarly profiled districts.

Another recommended change would be to consider having a multidisciplinary approach by pairing multiple mentors with proteges. In recognizing that no one person is an island or exhaustive storehouse of knowledge, multiple mentors should be made available to the protégé, in accordance with need. This way, as needs arise, the protégé might have the ability to be assisted by a mentor who is considered a specialist in that area in addition to the core or “relational” mentor. Because the respondents in this study found being able to connect relationally with a mentor one of the most helpful facets of the program, I would advocate for this being a core consideration in the mentor/protege relationship. Categorically, I consider this a “conditions” component because ultimately, this visionary “to-be” picture will require additional funding in order to increase the number of mentor’s available, especially if they will be actively recruited from around the state. As revealed in our findings, we saw that the current mentor pool is solicited from existing professional connections, typically in the northern half of
this state. This visionary “TO-BE” requires a new intentionality and refreshed initiative to find candidates where they are needed, and not necessarily drawing from a pool of applicants.

Another one of the most significant conditions that is a part of this “TO-BE” future deals with the central practice of the mentoring program and that is actual time spent together between participants. The mentoring process will still consist of a series of meetings between mentor and protégé, especially since this was one of the most valuable components of the mentoring program according to a large majority of respondents (75%), however, this face-to-face requirement, while well intentioned, may be having a constraining effect with regards to the pairing process. Currently, as a matter of practicality, proteges are almost always paired with a mentor in their general proximal area, as they are required to meet in-person 3 times a year. During the Spring and Fall of 2020, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we certainly have seen school districts’ instructional delivery model shift in-person to utilizing digital platforms. If previous leadership experience in low-SES areas will be prioritized and sought after, it is likely that these mentors may not always be near those protégé’s with similarly characterized needs. It would be more effective for the mentor-protégé pairing to be based solely on the identified strengths of the mentor and needs of the protégé rather than proximity as a delimiter.

Culture

Responses in this study indicate the culture surrounding principal mentoring continues to be positive. One hundred percent of the respondents stated that they would recommend this mentoring program to a colleague, citing on-the-job support as a defining point in their satisfaction. It has been well established in research that job-embedded professional development is seen as a high-yield investment strategy for improving the performance of
educators when the learning experiences are embedded into daily work (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Wilson and Bloom (2019) go on to say that job-embedded support and leadership coaching make up the “heart of intervention.” Darling-Hammond et al. (2009) state that exemplary approaches to this practice wrap highly relevant content around field-based experiences, organized so that participants learn new methods from experts while having real-time opportunities to practice them.

In light of all participants sharing that they would recommend this program to a colleague, it is important to broadcast this message on a district and state level in order to maintain and improve morale surrounding the practice of mentoring. According to the IPA, some districts will assign a mentor to a protégé as a mandatory process of improvement, and it is critical that these positive feelings of value are broadcast and well-known around the educational community so as to improve the sense of efficacy felt by both parties in the cases of involuntary mentorship.

The IPA’s willingness to allow me to survey participants is evidence of a culture of inquiry and continuous improvement. Sustaining this culture through promotion at professional events and through digital networking streams will be critical in order to be effective in the future.

**Competencies**

In order to stay relevant and to be aligned with meaningful contemporary educational competencies, the IPA will need to update their mentoring program goals to a newer, modern-day leadership framework. Currently, program goals are aligned with the ISLLC standards. Executive Director, Dr. Jason Leahy, says that program goals will soon be updated to the PSEL
standards as a part of their larger initiative to bring the mentoring program under the efforts within the School Leadership Paradigm (SLP). The SLP was updated in the Spring of 2019 and speaks to the comprehensive nature of the school leadership, pairing very well with the core objectives for the principal mentoring program. At the center of the SLP is the idea of continuous improvement and believes that principals can “learn while doing” (2019). Expanding on this “learning by doing” model, the SLP states that learning leaders “should always be simultaneously improving their own leadership dispositions, or becoming, while doing the work of moving their learning organizations forward” (p.4, 2019). Furthermore, the SLP explicitly builds upon the understanding predicated by several outside studies indicating that principals have the greatest impact on student achievement in schools with the greatest needs, such as low-SES communities, poor student attendance, and high teacher turnover (Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2013).

Additionally, in considering the leadership needs of low-SES school systems, the Southern Regional Education Board has identified 13 critical success factors that are related to principals succeeding in at-risk schools. These factors include:

- creating a focused mission to improve student achievement and a vision of the elements of school, curriculum and instructional practices that make higher achievement possible.
- setting high expectations for all students to learn high-level content
- recognize and encourage implementation of good instructional practices that motivate and increase student achievement
- create a school organization where faculty and staff
- understand that every student counts and where every student has the support of a
caring adult

- use data to initiate and continue improvement in school and classroom practices and student achievement
- keep everyone informed and focused on student achievement
- make parents partners in their student’s education and create a structure for parent and educator collaboration
- understand the change process and has the leadership and facilitations skills to manage it effectively
- understand how adults learn and knows how to advance meaningful change through quality sustained professional development
- organize and use time in innovative ways to meet the goals and objectives of school improvement
- acquire and use resources wisely
- obtain support from the central office and from community and parent leaders for their school improvement agenda
- continuously learn and seek out colleagues who keep them abreast of new research and proven practices

These factors should be aligned and overlaid with program objectives to ensure that mentors (specifically those leading low-SES systems) are being provided the support they need within a research-based framework designed to meet the needs of their unique student and community needs.

As a result of this study and the associated change efforts, principals will feel well-equipped to lead diverse/low-SES populations. Additionally, through the mentoring program,
Principals will increase the scope of their network of leaders that they are able to access with questions surrounding low-SES populations. Principals will be less likely to leave the profession as a result of this specified training and improved social network by which to give and receive professional support.

As an additional competency, making mentors aware of common issues associated with low-income communities is advantageous as it removes the element of surprise and potential decision stall on the part of the leader. Knowing what to expect, what questions to ask, how to connect with families in poverty, are not skills or strategies that come intuitively. Bryk & Schneider, (2002), describe research-based practices, such as case study analysis and collaborative discussion, and highlight one real life scenario, Holiday Elementary, as an exemplar. This featured leader within this example was a master at gaining the trust of his impoverished community, but also knew where to draw the line between soliciting input and providing local control to administrative tasks. These kinds of real-life, immediately applicable, low-SES strategies are invaluable competencies to incorporate into the mentoring program and add a layer of effectiveness currently not a focus within the program.

**Conclusion**

For over 15 years, principal mentoring across the state of Illinois through the IPA has been a clear, goal-oriented process, built on solid foundational research, and has assisted many new and growing administrators desiring instruction and guidance. Through this inquiry-based study and subsequent evaluation of current best practices, this four-part vision for change focusing on the context, conditions, culture, and competencies relating to leading schools within low-SES communities becomes visible and within reach.
SECTION SIX: STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS

In Section 5, our destination, a clear vision of what could be, was outlined. In Section 6, we unfold the roadmap (to date myself) and begin to plot out our specific route from point “AS-IS” to point “TO-BE.” Our “TO-BE” is framed to articulate the desired outcome from this study, and in conjunction with the Literature Review in Section 3, to establish a sense of urgency in getting there. Kotter (2011) stated, “Establishing a sense of urgency is crucial to gaining needed cooperation” (p. 36). In order to bring about the desired results, strategy must be employed in conjunction with calculated forethought. Because educational leadership is essentially developing strategies so that a myriad of managerial and leadership approaches can be applied and ultimately increase student achievement (Krüger, 1995), this research study focusing on improving leadership capacity and development through mentoring is central to the aim of education. Section 6 outlines the strategies and actions needed in the areas of public relations/marketing, internal organizational procedural reform, and state advocacy in order to actualize the aforementioned desired outcomes.

Strategy 1: Increase Awareness and Statewide Support of Principal Mentoring

In order for a change initiative to build momentum, awareness must be heightened, and interest increased. This first strategy is to increase visibility and confidence in the IPA principal mentoring program through increased public relations and marketing initiatives. This begins with me personally presenting my research results in order to highlight need and catalyze action within two professional organizations of which I am a member (Illinois Association of School Administrators), and board member (Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators). These two organizations are regularly looking for presenters at their annual state-wide
conferences, and if mentors are to be solicited according to protégé needs (and not just availability), this means a larger pool of candidates is needed, especially in low-SES districts in southern Illinois. In part of a culminating project initiative, I will utilize my position as a current board member of the Illinois Association of School Personnel Administrators organization (IASPA) to spread the successes of the IPA’s mentoring program and recruit new potential protégés. IASPA is a statewide para-educational organization aimed at meeting the needs of school human resource personnel, who are often responsible for the mentoring of principals in their districts. IASPA hosts a monthly Twitterchat on a variety of educational topics, and, because of the accessible format, is widely attended by educational professionals from around the state. I have approached my IASPA board member colleague responsible for IASPA Twitterchat creation and coordination, and she is excited to champion this topic as the focus for an upcoming chat. These Twitterchats are growing in popularity and serve as periodic HR professional development sessions for participants. Twitter, in general, is a popular digital medium by which educational professionals are able to connect with colleagues, share ideas, and learn strategies and approaches around topics of professional interest.

Increasing the numbers of mentors, especially those successfully leading high-risk populations, will take increased funding. Before increased revenues can be actualized, public perception, interest, confidence in the initiative will need to be strengthened. This is where utilizing the platform of an annual IASA or IASPA conference will be key. Increased program funding and promotion should include a greater presence at regional and state-wide professional development events and conferences because of their widespread “reach” to numerous administrators at one event. In addition to my own commitment to present my research, in order to build organizational capacity in this way, I would recommend that the IPA have a campaign
presence at popular educator conferences such as the annual IASA conference in Chicago. This is the state’s most popular and widely attended school educator conference, especially by local school district superintendents. Attendees include a high concentration of school superintendents, many of whom may have struggling principals and, in their desire to attend such a conference, are looking to take ideas, strategies, and partner organizations back with them. Headlining speakers from the IPA, especially previous mentors or protégé’s, is a clear way to bring the highlights, research-backing, and successes of the program to a large and already captivated audience.

I also believe in the importance of highlighting the success of effective school leaders within their own districts and regions. As a part of this change initiative, I propose a special IPA award be created and be given to leaders who have shown to be effective leaders in low-SES communities as evidenced by family inclusiveness initiatives, school-business partnerships, and increased student achievement. This award would be to not only encourage the leader, but also to shine a light on positive, professional role models within low-SES communities, highlighting an example of what hard work, determination, and success looks like.

Lastly, the conclusion of this research project will include advocacy to the IPA to professionally pair with low-SES districts in order to create pipelines for specialized professional development, job opportunities, and peer networks for those leaders within those systems. This initiative is in response to two known factors contributing to principal attrition: serving in low-SES school systems (U.S. Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics, 2012) while feeling profound isolation within the job (Johnson, 1995). In order to recruit, retain, equip, and multiply effective leaders in low-SES systems, it takes careful intentionality to provide them with the resources, training, network, and opportunities they need to be successful.
Through these efforts, I will help to maintain and further cultivate the already positive culture and reputation surrounding principal mentoring in the state of Illinois and, through increased public relations and marketing initiatives, shine a light on the need, strategies, and ability to help support our leaders in low-SES school systems.

**Strategy 2: IPA Systemic and Procedural Adjustments - From External to Internal**

With a positive culture and positive reputation established, a comprehensive look at eliciting change will require an inward look to the internal processes and systems that make up the IPA’s principal mentoring program. My focus will be centered around three internal processes that play a significant part in the success of the program overall; the mentor-protégé relationship, required face-to-face meetings, and moving to updated goals.

**Mentor-Protégé Relationship**

At the very heart of principal mentoring is the mentor-protégé relationship. When the 24 respondents in my study were asked which component of the mentoring program was the most helpful to them, 5 valued having an outsider to talk to, 3 valued the personal connection with their mentor, 9 appreciated someone to process struggles with, and 1 valued someone with which to have confidential conversations. All similarly framed responses, 75% of respondents noted that the relationship with the mentor was a highlight of the program, which highlights the need and importance of strategically choosing the right mentor candidate. Recognizing that mentors need to be more than just competent and accomplished (Ganser, 1995), the next advisable step for the IPA is to enhance their mentor and protégé application/training process to include detailed questions about community demographics and subsequent needs connected with low-SES populations within their systems in order to ensure that mentor-protégé pairings are strategic
and effective. Proteges are asked to self-identify their greatest professional needs, and because new principals may not know what they don’t know, additional information should be gathered, such as research-based themes or needs, ISBE free and reduced metrics, and 5Essentials data (in order to review data on teachers, community, and the environment). Once a clear and defined candidate profile is assembled from protégé needs, the IPA will then seek to find an appropriate mentor pairing. Should an existing volunteer mentor not be available, it would also then be next, as a part of this enhanced recommended process, to actively approach and recruit an effective leader serving in a similar system. With the improved reputation and research backing of the IPA aimed and aiding in reducing principal attrition in low-SES school systems, it would be hopeful that these newly identified mentor recruits would be willing (while compensated) to assist their fellow new principal colleagues.

Currently, with regards to mentor training, the IPA’s primary focus is developing mentor’s coaching skills. Through an approach they call ‘micro-credentialing,’ the IPA provides coursework-type professional development in three types of coaching: collaborative, directive, and reflective. Additionally, they provide ongoing support through a network of IPA staff, Field Service Specialists, and regional member colleagues they call a professional learning network. This network of support oversees and supports the mentor after the initial training to make sure they have insight, advice, and strategies in dealing with the myriad of real-world challenges in the field. I would recommend that as part of this cadre of support and readied training materials, the IPA focuses on developing the 13 critical success factors developed by the Southern Regional Education Board in working with their proteges in low-SES systems. Additionally, my body of work, specifically sections 2 (Lit Review) and 4 (results) might be used as a source of training materials in educating mentors in the challenges associated with low-SES systems.
**Face-to-face Meetings**

The IPA requires at least 3 face-to-face meetings between the mentor and protégé. While this self-imposed guideline is meant to further facilitate a closer relationship and personal interaction between the pairing, it also requires travel on the part of one or both of the participants. Practically, this almost always results in pairings where the two are geographically close to one another. This seemingly well intended approach constricts the pairing process, in that, the pool of candidate mentors is significantly reduced in consideration of reasonable travel limits. If one of the proposed enhancements to the process is to prioritize pairings with similar socioeconomic needs, then I recommend we make that one of the more important determining factors in pairings and encourage digital meetings between participants. Throughout this recent COVID-19 season, we have seen an unprecedented and successful shift from analog to digital, and from in-person to virtual meetings. With available and required technology now in the hands of many more professionals, these virtual meetings will remove the barrier of close proximity and allow for more intentional and strategic mentor-protégé pairings.

**Updated Goals**

A finalization to the updated PSEL goals will be beneficial to the program overall, but specifically in catering to the needs of low-SES systems leaders. With these updated standards come new themes of emphasis including equity, talent development, leadership capacity, and academic systems. The equity strand includes competencies surrounding cultural responsiveness (including emphases on respect, regional cultures and contexts, and aligning school systems with a more global community), supporting low-SES communities.

This revised application process along with the active recruitment of effective principals...
in low-SES systems able to meet digitally (and therefore more frequently) will be used in pairing assignments that will build capacity within the protégé and ultimately accelerate student achievement.

**Strategy 3: State Advocacy**

In 2006, the Illinois General Assembly signed into effect Public Act 094-1039, requiring every new principal hired after July 1, 2007 to participate in a new principal mentoring program during their first year of service. These new regulations came with funding and accountability, and the IPA, who had been informally mentoring principals previously, became responsible for the statewide implementation of this initiative. Currently, the IPA supports full funding of the Illinois New Principal Mentoring program in order to support school building leaders and an investment in continued professional development; however, this full funding has not been present in over a decade. In fact, the FY21 ISBE Operations Budget has only a $1,000 line item under *Educator Elevation* for Principal Mentoring….hardly enough to support the initiative across the state.

I will share my research and results in an executive summary with statewide legislators in conjunction with a request to revive funding across the state for new principal mentors (and at the very least a cache of dollars to support new principals in low-SES districts). New and increased funding will be required, districts eligible for Title 1 Funds can allocate a portion towards principal mentoring, to secure the recruitment of effective leader mentors in low-SES districts and dedicated IPA staff to oversee and guide the program within its newly aligned PSEL standards. Along with this funding request will be an assurance of accountability measures in order to measure program growth towards specific goals and student subgroup performance.
These accountability goals and thresholds will include metrics on protégé satisfaction/readiness to lead low-SES systems and subsequent academic growth goals for students within these systems.

Lastly, within Section 3, we read that the skills and capacities needed to serve low-SES educational systems and communities often do not come intuitively or by chance. As a result, my research will be presented along with a request to ISBE to consider new post-secondary standards for graduate educator programs. These additional standards will have a unique focus on the skills, approaches, and strategies required to lead low-SES educational systems, including topics surrounding community engagement, instructional leadership in underperforming schools, and building relational trust. These “soft skills,” heavy on interpersonal prowess, are important because, according to Bryk & Schneider (2002) substantial attention is required in strengthening social relationships among school professionals and parents, and that this relational trust is key in advancing improvement in urban public school communities. See Appendix C (and below) for an at-a-glance view of strategies and actions associated with this study.

**Strategies and Action Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Action</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 1: Increase Awareness and Statewide Support of Principal Mentoring</td>
<td>If mentors will be solicited according to protégé needs, this means a larger pool of candidates will be needed in addition to increased funding. In order to increase awareness/confidence in the IPA principal mentoring program, the points outlined below are action steps. &lt;br&gt;• As well as sharing research results, advocate to the IPA for increased/diversified program promotion.</td>
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</table>
| Strategy 2: Systemic and procedural adjustments of IPA Principal Mentoring program | - More in-depth application process, without being cumbersome, in accordance with new standards.
- Pairing (and if necessary, active recruitment) of effective mentor candidates from low-SES systems to those proteges in need.
- Digital meetings rather than having to make pairing based on proximity...especially as catalyzed through the use of tech during C-19. |
| --- | --- |
| Strategy 3: Statewide policy advocacy | - Advocate for policy change in the way of required (and state funded) mentoring for all beginning principals.
- Accountability measures will be developed to measure program growth towards specific goals and student subgroup performance.
- Through policy advocacy, funding will be acquired to recruit and contract mentors with diverse backgrounds, including those effectively leading in low-SES systems
- Policy for state educational schools require teacher/admin prep for those entering education to learn about research and strategies connected with meeting students’ needs in low-SES districts. |
Conclusion

Wagner et al. (2012) reminds educators that the core business of education is teaching, and the subsequent product is student learning. When principals are trained to be effective leaders, they can be catalysts for great change and increased student achievement (Fink & Resnick, 2001). However, leading low-SES school systems presents a unique set of challenges that must be met with strategic and relational-based training (Harris & Chapman, 2002). These strategies and actions have been created as a complement and capstone to this research project, aimed specifically at bolstering leader capacity and ultimately increasing student achievement.

SECTION SEVEN: POLICY ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

John Maxwell, popular author on topics of leadership, in his book, The 21 Indispensable Qualities of a Leader, claims, “everything rises and falls on leadership,” (2007, p. 267). Researchers Louis, Leithwood, Walhstrom, and Anderson (2010) suggest that the prerequisite conditions required in order to foster student achievement cannot be achieved without strong and effective building leadership. However, educational leadership is too broad in scope with regards to the complexities of the required skill set (Murphy, 2015) to expect anyone to be even moderately competent in all required areas (Robinson, 2011) especially since these skills don’t develop automatically or intuitively (Smith & Smith, 2015). Fortunately, the professional mentoring of principals, and on-the-job support and applications of learning have proven to be far more beneficial in supporting student academic growth than purely scholarly or intellectual exercises (Farkas, Johnson, & Duffett, 2003).
The academic gap for low-SES students is widening (Reardon, 2011), and in order to counteract the effect low-SES systems have on principal attrition (U.S. Department of Ed, NCES, 2012) leaving novice principals in less desirable positions (Branch, et al., 2013), action must be taken to ensure that low-SES school systems are developing and are afforded quality leaders.

Because a principal’s work is so innately tied to teacher growth (Smith & Smith, 2015) and student achievement (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008), they must be able to impact positive change within the system from the start of their tenure as leader. However, scholars recognize the need for mentoring among principals in order to meet the variety of challenges surrounding 21-century educational leadership and to reduce the feelings of isolation on the job (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgabat, 2013).

In 2006, Public Act 94-1039 placed Illinois on the forefront of a national movement that required that every principal be part of a formalized mentoring program and participate in professional development activities aimed at supporting student achievement. Three years later, in 2009, Public Act 96-0373 allowed for a state-funding-dependent second year of mentoring for new principals. The Illinois Principals Association was, and is, the state’s largest provider of formal principal mentoring, but, as with many professional organizations, their services are not without cost. When funding for these two bills were eliminated in 2010, it affected the IPA’s ability to provide this service (Leahy, 2019) especially those leaders in low-SES systems. In order to maximize IPA’s mentoring efforts across the state as they increase their presence in Southern Illinois in low-SES districts, supplementary efforts in the way of securing finances and supporting additional research from the state would be beneficial.
Policy Statement:

Building on this research base and the findings of my own study whereby all participants favorably recommended a formalized mentoring program, this advocacy is a call to action for lawmakers to not only continue to require a mentor for new school principals, but to once again return funding to these previously supported mentoring programs. In the Spring of 2006, the General Assembly required every new principal to have a mentor. Along with this new state requirement came funding to see the initiative through and implement with fidelity. The IPA bid for (and won) the opportunity to oversee the formal mentoring process for the state, which meant they were able to define what quality mentoring looked like and standardize the approach across the state. As previously echoed by IPA Executive Director, Jason Leahy (2019), returning funding for principal mentoring will once again contribute to increased access and improved viability of formal mentoring for all new principals. Statewide funding meant that regardless of a district’s financial status or ability to pay for services, new principals were assured to have a quality mentor assigned through and facilitated by the IPA. This study culminates with an advocacy to revive Public Act 94-1039, in turn, funding and providing a formalized and standardized mentoring program for principals across Illinois.

Analysis of Need

“As not everything can be done, there must be a basis for deciding which things are worth doing… enter evaluation,” (Patton, 1997, p.11). Because the scope of principal mentoring and its implications are so great, especially at a statewide level, it is important to review the implementation of this policy advocacy through several different frames. The
following 5 sub-analyses consider the structures, requirements, implications, and implementation of this proposed policy advocacy.

**Educational Analysis:**

The role of the principal has changed over the years from disciplinarian and simple process manager to instructional leader tasked with improving student achievement. They are seen as pivotal in a teacher’s professional growth (Smith & Smith, 2015), a conductor of collaborative work among staff (Murphy, 2015), contribute to retention of quality employees (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgar, 2013) and essential to the formation of a culture of trust and engagement centered around student achievement (Murphy, 2015; Jensen, 2014). However, the challenge of building and keeping up school improvement efforts leading to improved student achievement for all students requires a lot of knowledge of skills which clearly cannot be taught through traditional preparatory programs which in the past have focused more on developing managerial skills (Yirci & Kocabas, 2010). As contemporary educational leadership leans on building principals to operate in a different capacity than in generations past, research (Wallace, 2013) displays the level of sophistication and intricacy surrounding the variables that contribute to a system successfully supporting teachers and students, and clearly points to principal as the key player with the responsibility and influence to interlace these variables and bring them to critical mass.

Nationally, approximately fifty percent of principals are reported as having left their position by the third year of their principalship and thematically leave more challenging assignments, often high poverty schools, for less “difficult” assignments (Jensen, 2014). Relatedly, Cullen & Mazzeo (2008) found that principals at lower academically rated schools
were up to 16 times more likely to leave than principals at higher performing schools. Because students from families living in poverty score 6 to 14 points lower on standardized achievement tests, (Duncan, Yeung, Brooks-Gunn & Smith, 1998), losing qualified principals to the many stressors of the job has a cumulatively disadvantageous effect on minoritized and poverty-stricken families. However, effective mentoring has been shown to reduce principal turnover (Jensen, 2014), which is especially good news for low-SES communities who need consistent, high-quality leaders in their schools.

Building on this, in viewing this policy advocacy through an educational analysis lens, we, in the educational field, believe in the power of instruction. More specifically, instruction is the central element of education as an art, science, industry, and philosophy. Instruction is the nucleatic essence, in such that, without instruction, there is no education. Educators believe, through the process of teaching/coaching/mentoring, we can facilitate growth and help to move the mindset and skill set of an individual from one point to another. Developing principals as instructional leaders is no different. Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, (2013) remind us of the importance of seeing adults, as well as students, as continually developing learners, rather than finished products. This reminder is in alignment with the core philosophy of mentoring and, as it relates to this study, this particular policy advocacy. Through a meaningful mentoring relationship based in trust and transparency, focused specifically on improving instructional leadership where proteges are provided with relevant training focused around competencies needed for leaders to success in high-risk schools (i.e. SREB’s 13 critical success factors), this facilitation of learning and growth is found to be most effective (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe & Orr, 2009)

Economic Analysis:
Educators are hired as public agents of an elected school board, with which comes fiscal responsibility and oversight. Public education, unlike corporations, generates no revenue from within, so operational dollars are handled with a higher level of obligation and scrutiny, and any initiative funded by taxpayer dollars requires close inspection. According to the Illinois State Board of Education (Historical Budget Information), in FY 2007, PA 94-1039 (new principal mentoring) was allotted $800,000, with an additional $1.1 million proposed the following year. While not a trivial amount of money, within an almost nine-billion-dollar budget, it is a relationally small percentage of the whole. Since mentoring funding was cut in 2010, it certainly has allowed for a reduction in overall spending, but it is important to also count the cost of not mentoring new leaders. Jensen (2014) estimates that it costs a district thousands of dollars to initially hire a new principal, and when considering the cost of developing, training, and onboarding that same leader, the expense is estimated to be at least $75,000. Seeing that nearly ¼ of principals turnover every year (U.S. Dept. of Education, NCES, 2012) this means that low-SES districts spend millions just on hiring costs.

Secondly, with a clear line drawn between principal aptitude and student achievement, how do we calculate the cost of not having proficient and ever-developing leaders? As discussed, in the literature review in section 2, Miller (2013) has shown a clear connection between student achievement scores and principal turnover. Jensen (2014) demonstrated that effective mentoring reduces principal turnover given their services address principal isolation and building leadership capacity, two underlying causes of early departure from the profession. With research in Section 2 supporting the idea that healthy school systems increasing student achievement are contingent upon the quality of the leader, with mentoring as the vehicle to develop said leadership, the study would support the need for ISBE to require and financially
support new principal mentoring, especially for low-SES leaders who are new to the profession, for the consequences are otherwise too great.

**Social Analysis**

With schools shutting down in the United States on or around March 15th, 2020, and great variability being seen in the instructional methods employed during the 20-21 school year, including a myriad of remote learning approaches, this advocacy for principal mentoring funding falls at a unique time in the history of education in our country. Relatedly, Kuhfeld et. al. (2020) shows that missing school for a prolonged period will likely have a major impact on student achievement. Compounding the problem, and relating to the central focus of this study, students from low-SES families already have more absences from school compared with students from middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Whitney & Liu, 2017), adding to the subsequent detrimental educational impact. Kuhfeld et. al. (2020) also highlights the fact that, as a result of an already varied academic skill set among students, this uneven approach to learning in the Fall of 2020 will create even greater disparages among student ability.

Harris & Larson (2019) record that it took nearly 2 full years to make up lost ground for the loss in instructional time due to Hurricane Katrina and recognizing that this unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic season has no real equal by which to compare, one can posit that it may be a similar corresponding academic recovery timeline. Research supports the idea that principals have the ability (Haycock & Jerald, 2002) and responsibility (Duke, 2004) to close the achievement gap, therefore, this advocacy to train and mold leaders into such change agents through quality and intentional mentoring, is of urgent concern and will be required to pull students into post-COVID success.
**Political Analysis: (pros and cons to rollout)**

Our country is not unfamiliar with the effects federal and state legislation can have on the local schoolhouse. While local officials argue that governmental mandates “distort local priorities by encumbering resources for state needs...crowding out the capacity to respond to the unique requirements of local publics,” it is clear that educational mandates do align efforts, even if for a moment in time (Posner, 1998, p.6). Educational reforms such as Common Core, Response to Intervention, the Performance Evaluation Reform Act of 2011, among other reforms, have caused local school leaders to feel a new weight of responsibility relating to academic performance, and have focused and accelerated their efforts to reevaluate their approach to raising student achievement. Currently, the statutory requirement behind PA 94-1039 is still in place, but as an unfunded mandate, even in my own experience as an administrator, is often overlooked or unevenly implemented. With renewed funding for this state requirement, mixed with the acknowledged positive benefits associated with mentoring and having a known third party like the IPA handle mentor procedural formalities, districts are more likely to comply with this initiative, providing for an improved and better equipped principal cadre in Illinois schools. This policy advocacy provides a financial on-ramp accompanying the statutory requirement intended to leverage school systems in preparing leaders for the complications of the principalship.

**Legal Analysis**

In 2006, Public Act 94-1039 required all first-year principals to take part in a formal mentoring and was subject to annual state budgetary provisions. Within the legislation was language outlining the content to be covered by the program, and cited professional and para-
educational organizations eligible to offer mentoring services. The state allocated funding for new principal mentoring from FY 2007 through FY 2012 (Leahy, 2019). In 2009, the Illinois General Assembly passed Public Act 96-0373 allowing for a second year of new principal mentoring. However, the state never allocated funding for a second year, and budget cuts for FY 2013 put statewide principal mentoring in hiatus indefinitely (Leahy, 2019). The promotion and reactivation of this policy provides funding for a legislative statute already in place and would mean a continuation of services once again provided to the continual stream of principals entering the field each year.

**Moral and Ethical Analysis**

Despite the connections found in the research among effective principles of successful schools and student achievement, many principals find themselves beginning their careers at, or being transferred to, ineffective schools with limited knowledge of how to transform the school and little to no support from the district (Warren & Kelsen, 2013). If we were to place individuals into the classroom with students and task them with providing quality instruction with no training or support, there would, understandably, be a great outcry from parents and community members of professional malpractice and irresponsibility. According to Hammer & Rohr in their National Center of Education Statistics publication (1993), 98.7% of principals began their educational careers as classroom teachers. However, the challenges of being a teacher are markedly different than those connected with the scope of responsibility a principal is accountable for (Armstrong, 2009), therefore, so should be the training and preparation.

In my 20+ years in education, I have noticed it is common to see publicly displayed school mission and vision statements with phrases referring to “all students” or “every student.”
Such language might read as, “We believe all students are capable of success,” or “...to provide every student with the tools and experiences they need...” As an administrator and now researcher, I am further burdened by the weight of responsibility associated with this professional charge. Professional Standards for Educational Leaders, or PSEL, (2015), standard 2c surrounding Ethics and Professional Norms. reads, “Place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for each student’s academic success and well-being.” Again, this reminder that “each student” should be our collective responsibility within the educational community is paramount, especially in light of considering the needs and leadership requirements of low-SES schools. In addition to state required coursework and training experiences required to gain an administrative endorsement, it is our responsible, reasonable, and ethical obligation to once again fund mentoring programs for novice principals entering the profession.

Implications for Staff and Community Relationships:

While the level of control a community has over the input and direction of school governance has been debated with regards to teacher morale and student achievement, it is clear that a principal must be able to balance the pressures of demands coming from a variety of stakeholders and play the role of human relator (Bernero, 1973). As students’ parents entrust their children to school staff, they have a distinct set of expectations on principals surrounding topics of professionalism, approachability, inclusivity, and collaboration (Lindle, 1989).

However, parents are not the only stakeholders who place high expectations on school principals. Principal quality has been tied to Superintendent effectiveness and longevity in any given position, and therefore, recruiting and retaining quality principals is possibly one of the most important decisions a superintendent will make (Pijanowski, Hewitt, & Brad, 2009).
Additionally, teachers have expressed their desire for districts to hire principals who are supportive in discipline, collaborative, innovative, respectful, and encourage leadership among staff in making organizational decisions (Hauserman & Stick, 2013).

With high expectations landing on principals from a variety of directions, and because mentoring has been shown to have the potential to increase leadership capacity for principals (Mitgang, 2007), returning funding for new principal mentoring can be seen as an essential step in preparing and providing educational communities the leaders they require.

**Conclusion:**

The role of principal requires a diverse skill set and is closely tied to teacher and student growth. This required skill set does not come intuitively or naturally, and formal mentoring has been shown to improve leadership capacity in these important leadership domains. To this point, the State of Illinois, at one point, believed strongly enough in the practice of mentoring that it required and funded the coordination of the practice statewide. For budgetary reasons, this funding has since been removed. Because having an experienced and trusted mentor with whom a principal could think through dilemmas of practice and important decisions would “help education leaders of all kinds build both confidence and capacity,” (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgabat, 2013, p. 240), this policy advocacy of returning funding to principal mentoring in the State of Illinois is an important piece of punctuation to my collective study.
SECTION 8: CONCLUSION

Introduction

The role of principal has changed greatly over time from one of operational manager and simple disciplinarian to pedagogical visionary and instructional leader. With the addition of these changing and increased responsibilities, approximately one in five principals within the first 5 years leave their position to look for another principalship, while others leave the profession entirely. Research touts that inadequate preparation, professional development, and a school community’s socio-economic status are the largest contributors to principal turnover (Jensen, D., 2014; Levin, S. & Bradley, K. 2019). In understanding that low-SES communities, where students are statistically at risk to underperform on standard measures of achievement, have a change in leadership more often than communities above the poverty line, action and advocacy are warranted. Fortunately, the mentoring of principals has been shown to be one strategy that reduces attrition and can increase the likelihood that principals remain in the role.

The IPA oversees and implements the state’s largest formalized mentoring program. This study examined their mentoring practices and asked program participants a series of questions designed to evaluate their satisfaction with their protégé experience. This study built on the identified need of principal mentoring by examining one of the factors most closely connected to the attrition of principals: a student and community’s socio-economic status (Levin & Bradley, 2019, executive summary). It also answers the question of whether or not there is a connection between socio-economic status of one’s system and the perceived effectiveness of a statewide principal mentoring program as reported by those within the program. Simplified, this study sought to discover the answer to the question, “Might mentoring efforts be enhanced if focused around the specific needs of leaders in low-SES schools?”
Principals influence a variety of school outcomes including student achievement and the development of organizational structures to support instruction and learning. For this reason, and because of the important nature of a principal’s work, researchers have identified mentoring as a crucial need in order for them to aptly meet the variety of challenges inherent in modern-day instructional leadership and to create a culture that is student-centric with regards to academic achievement (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Ashgabat, 2013).

**Discussion:**

The main purpose of this study was to determine if there was an association between the expressed experience from participants in the IPA’s statewide mentoring program and the socioeconomic status of the system in which the participants served. Because one of the IPA’s key desired outcomes is to reduce the number of principals leaving the profession, and because research draws a clear connection between SES and attrition (U.S. Department of Ed, NCES, 2012), this study quantitatively examined the existence of a statistical relationship between IPA principal protege’s experience and their school’s SES level for the purpose of providing feedback to the IPA in the strengths and areas for future development within the mentoring program.

Formalized into program goals, this study was designed to assist in gauging the effectiveness of the IPA’s current mentoring efforts, as measured by participant responses, in order to contribute to their vision of continuous improvement, ultimately increasing leader capacity and student achievement. Through a quantitative analysis of participant data, cross-referenced with select participant demographic information, I sought out to determine if there
were any unique peculiarities associated with the protégé’s mentoring experience that may be connected with their service within a low-SES school system.

In answering this study’s primary research question, it was shown that the relationship between SES and program satisfaction did not prove to be statistically significant. In other words, SES was not found to be a distinguishing correlative factor in the course of this study when analyzing the results from survey questions. However, after reflection and analysis, it is possible that SES may be too broad of a category by which to vet and reform mentoring initiatives. It is possible that SES is more of a categorical label associated with several different factors that contribute to attrition, suggesting it may not be a helpful characteristic by which to reframe and align program pillars and strategies. The interconnected nature of low-SES systems, principal mentoring, and principal attrition is an area of research that needs additional attention.

It should be noted that this study did discover/reaffirm several relevant points surrounding the mentoring initiatives of educational leaders that should also be considered for future research. In analyzing participant responses through the lens of select demographics apart from SES, there was variance in protégé satisfaction with regards to gender and years of administrative experience. Also, a clear theme arose reinforcing the need for a continued structured focus of increasing leadership capacity. Lastly, and most predominantly, participants in this study reaffirmed the value and need for continued emphasis on the relational aspect of mentoring. When asked what component of the mentoring program was of most help to them, three-fourths of respondents identified an interpersonal or relational component of the program.

Building on the literature review and results of this study, the current state of principal mentoring was examined, and recommendations were made in the “TO-BE” analysis based on
Wagner’s (2012) 4C’s--Context, Conditions, Culture and Competencies. Within the revised “conditions” of the change plan, this study casts a vision for renewed effectiveness within formalized principal mentoring with a focus on the critical success factors associated with principals who have succeeded in raising student achievement in schools with traditionally “high risk” demographics. Additionally, this study advocates for principal mentoring to, once again, be made a state-wide requirement for new principals, especially those in low-SES systems, with funding and accountability returning to the initiative.

**Leadership Lessons:**

Setting this study’s topic aside for a moment, throughout this process, I have come to a deeper appreciation for the discipline of research. I have a new sense of value for researching a topic so thoroughly that you are forced to contend with multiple viewpoints, often different from your initial stance or understanding, and the mental marinade that comes with processing many, many author’s findings on a singular topic. High level administrators influence tens, if not hundreds, of educators, who, then, in turn affect hundreds and thousands of students. Feeling the weight of being an informed district office administrator who models processes and systems, I will take this understanding with me as a Superintendent in educating and leading teams through new initiatives and discourses for inquiry.

Secondly, as an educator, I have “new eyes” for families living in poverty. This research has been beneficial in the way of describing the barriers the system of education can provide for low-SES families and in articulating the responsibility the school has to extend itself to families living in poverty. If we as educators believe in our charge to equitably reach all students and student groups within our care, we must understand what may be required on our part in
differentiating our approach and extending our “arm” of intentionality. Just as we charge
teachers to differentiate their instruction and planning for students of all backgrounds and
abilities, we, as administrators, must be willing to think creatively and flexibly if we want to
elicit change in students' lives, considering both short-term academic gains and long-term
generational quality of life changes.

Conclusion:

Looking back on my 20+ years in education, with more than a decade spent as an
administrator, it is evident to me that successes I have had are due, in part, to the time spent
under great leaders who have also been willing to intentionally invest in my growth and
refinement. Skills like data analysis, conflict resolution, and fostering collaboration have all
been modeled and, often, explicitly taught to me by hallmark leaders I have had the pleasure to
work with. However, I also recognize that I have had the great fortune to work with those who
have had the time, skill, and capacity to invest in me as a leader during the season in which these
skills were most beneficial and required. Not all leaders find themselves in such professionally
benevolent systems. School leaders of low-SES systems often find themselves in a troubled and
academically ineffective school environment, with accountability measures pointed in their
direction, surrounded by unhappy and disparaging teaching staff, and families feeling
disconnected from the school system also feeling helpless when it comes to assisting their child
in their studies.

Educational research, professor, and author, Linda Darling-Hammond, said, “Teaching is
the profession on which all other professions depend,” (2018). This quote acknowledges and
underscores the value and importance of instruction. Because research shows that a balanced
and effective school culture begins with a personally invested and high-capacity leader, we must prioritize the training, preparation, and ongoing instruction for school principals as they walk through the first years in their role. Principal mentoring is a strategy that has been shown to improve leadership capacity, reduce attrition, and curtail feelings of isolation which are all too common among new principals. My hope is that through this work of increasing support for principal mentoring, our school leaders will be able to lead boldly and effectively, teachers will have a renewed sense of efficacy as they consider the needs of their class, and students, once having matriculated from their schools, would be able to attribute their success to those educators of their past and be motivated to reinvest into a beginning practitioner in their own field of employment.
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Appendix A: Informed Consent- Survey

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michael Portwood, a doctoral student at National Louis University. This research will explore any possible correlation between the effectiveness of the Illinois Principal Association’s mentoring program and select demographics of the participants’ school systems.

Your participation will involve completing a 22-question survey designed to take between 10 and 20 minutes. These questions are centered around your experiences as an educational leader and your participation in the IPA’s mentoring program. If you agree to participate, the researcher will also collect information about your school and district demographics.

Risks for participating in this study are minimal and this survey process is completely voluntary. You are able to withdraw your name and submission information at any time without negative consequence. The researchers will make every effort to ensure that the information you provide as part of this study remains confidential. Your identifiable information (name, school, and district) will not be published. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications, presentations, or reports resulting from this research study. However, after collected data is anonymized, it may be used in future research studies or used by another researcher.

Information collected will be held securely and access will be limited to myself and select university personnel, including my advisor/chair, Dr. Christine Nelson. Online activities always carry a risk of a data breach, but we will use systems and processes that minimize breach opportunities. This research data will be stored in a restricted-access folder within the Google cloud.
Although you will not directly benefit from this study, it has been designed to learn more about the needs of principals in the state of Illinois. You do have the option to receive a copy of the final results of the study. If interested, please email your request to after June 1, 2020. If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that has not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Christine Nelson, or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth or Dr. Kathleen Cornett.

Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.

Your efforts are very much appreciated and are helpful in the continuous improvement efforts of the IPA in serving Illinois’ leaders! Again, thank you for considering!

Michael Portwood
Asst. Supt. for Human Resources
Homer CCSD 33C

I understand that by checking ‘AGREE' below, I am agreeing to participate in the study, “The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on a Statewide Principal Mentoring Program, have read the above information, and am 18 years or older. *

◯ AGREE
◯ DISAGREE, I do not wish to participate.
Appendix B: Informed Consent- Leahy Interview

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Michael Portwood, a doctoral student at National Louis University. This research will explore any possible correlation between the effectiveness of the Illinois Principal Association’s mentoring program and select demographics of the participants’ school systems.

Your participation will involve answering a series of interview questions focused around the IPA mentoring program. Risks for participating in this study are minimal and this survey process is completely voluntary. You are able to withdraw your name and submission information at any time without negative consequence. However, after collected data is anonymized, it may be used in future research studies or used by another researcher. Information collected will be held securely and access will be limited to myself and select university personnel, including my advisor/chair, Dr. Christine Nelson.

Although you will not directly benefit from this study, it has been designed to learn more about the needs of principals in the state of Illinois. You do have the option to receive a copy of the final results of the study. If interested, please email your request to after June 1, 2020. If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that has not been addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Christine Nelson (cnelson34@nl.edu), or the co-chairs of NLU’s Institutional Research Board: Dr. Shaunti Knauth or Dr. Kathleen Cornett.

Co-chairs are located at National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, IL.
Your efforts are very much appreciated and are helpful in the continuous improvement efforts of the IPA in serving Illinois’ leaders! Again, thank you for considering!

Michael Portwood, Asst. Supt. for Human Resources, Homer CCSD 33C

Consent: I understand that by accepting the invitation to participate in this interview, I am agreeing to participate in the study, “The Impact of Socioeconomic Status on a Statewide Principal Mentoring Program.”
### Appendix C: Strategies and Action Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 1: Increase Awareness and Statewide Support of Principal Mentoring</td>
<td>If mentors will be solicited according to protégé needs, this means a larger pool of candidates will be needed in addition to increased funding. In order to increase awareness/confidence in the IPA principal mentoring program, the points outlined below are action steps.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• As well as sharing research results, advocate to the IPA for increased/diversified program promotion.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Offer to share the results of my study and present the value in low-SES specific principal mentoring at professional conferences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Host an IASPA twitterchat focused solely on the benefits and needs of the IPA principal mentoring program.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Serve as a program liaison in helping to recruit ex-protégé’s back into the program as mentors.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote successful low-SES educational leaders within low-SES communities in order encourage interest in educational leadership.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pair with low-SES districts to create pipelines for professional development, leadership training, job opportunities, and peer networks for those in low-SES districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strategy 2: Systemic and procedural adjustments of IPA Principal Mentoring program</td>
<td>• More in-depth application process, without being cumbersome, in accordance with new standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Pairing (and if necessary, active recruitment) of effective mentor candidates from low-SES systems to those proteges in need.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Digital meetings rather than having to make pairing based on proximity...especially as catalyzed through the use of tech during C-19.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategy 3: Statewide policy advocacy</td>
<td>• Advocate for policy change in the way of required (and state-funded) mentoring for all beginning principals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Accountability measures will be developed to measure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
program growth towards specific goals and student subgroup performance.

- Through policy advocacy, funding will be acquired to recruit and contract mentors with diverse backgrounds, including those effectively leading in low-SES systems
- Policy for state educational schools require teacher/admin prep for those entering education to learn about research and strategies connected with meeting students’ needs in low-SES districts.
Appendix D: Participant Survey

Demographic Information and Survey Questions

- Name (First, Last)
- Age
- Number of years in education
- Federal EEOC race category (1 white, 2 Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, 3 American Indian or Native Alaskan, 4 Asian, 5 Hispanic or Latino, 6 Black or African American, 7 Two or More Races)
- Gender
- School years during which you were mentored through the Illinois Principals Association (check all that apply)
- Current School and District Name
- Are you currently serving in the same school and district that you were while participating in the IPA mentoring program?
- Please record the school and district name you were a part of while participating in the IPA mentoring program.
- Current Position Title
- Are you currently in the same position as you were during the IPA mentoring program?
- Please record the position title held while participating in the IPA mentoring program.

Please carefully read the questions below and respond using the 4-point scale provided. Space has also been provided on select questions for additional comments (which are always helpful).

Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Agree (3) Strongly Agree (4)

Q1 - My IPA mentor provided support in the development of a professional growth plan.

Q2 - My IPA mentor provided ongoing structured opportunities for reflective conversation regarding efforts to improve professional practices.
Q3 - With the assistance of my IPA mentor, I was able to analyze trends in student achievement data for the purpose of identifying critical areas that needed to be addressed through strategic improvements in classroom instruction and assessment.

Q4 - My IPA mentor helped to develop my instructional capacity as a leader so learning needs of students and staff can be identified and addressed.

Q5- Working with my IPA mentor helped me to ensure the management of the organization, operations, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.

Please specify the components of the IPA’s mentoring program that were most helpful to you.

The IPA’s desire is to continuously improve their efforts in meeting the needs of all Illinois’ principals. Please specify one area in which you feel the program was lacking or how it might be improved.

What other areas, if any, connected with your professional responsibilities would like support in?

I am likely to recommend this mentoring to a new principal friend or colleague. (Y or N)
Appendix E: Leahy Interview Questions

1. In your experience, what do you see as the greatest areas of support for new principals, and do you feel that differs by SES of the corresponding district?

2. How does the IPA currently support principals in low-SES districts? (documents or resources available?)

3. How are mentors recruited and then selected?

4. What does training for new mentors look like, and is it differentiated at all by need? What role does SES play?

5. What do you feel are the strengths and areas for growth with regards to mentor pairings currently?

6. What considerations are made when pairing mentors and protégés? What role, if any does SES play in this pairing?

7. What percentage of proteges come from low-SES districts? Mentors?

8. When mentoring was reimplemented statewide, do you know if it had any affect on attrition?

9. Consider the quote following...“Only three industries that have higher turnover than principals: Mining and logging, retail trade, and leisure and hospitality. And only leisure and hospitality workers leave more often than principals of high poverty school,” (Jensen, D., 2014). Seeing that low-SES contributes to school systems losing leaders at a higher rate, where do you feel the IPA Principal Mentoring Program fits into this equation, and how might SES be considered additionally within the coordination of mentors and protégés?

10. What is the status of the mentoring program during this pandemic, and how has COVID affected the program overall?

11. What do you envision for the principal mentoring program in the future?
Appendix F: IPA Mentoring Map