CARYN M. WELLS
BARBARA A. KLOCKO

Can Teacher Leadership Reduce Principal Stress?

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study was to determine what stressors face practicing school principals, with an interest in determining whether they perceived that teacher leaders could relieve some of their stress. This descriptive study used quantitative and qualitative measures that revealed differences in the stressors identified by principals. Principals from all schools reported that they encounter significant levels of stress in their position, with little connection between the roles that teacher leaders currently play and the principals' associated workload stress. Differences in gender responses to stress and rural, suburban, and urban schools principals' perceptions are also reflected in the findings. This article is one of a series written to analyze the complexities of principal workload and the potential role of teacher leaders in alleviating workload stress. The conceptual framework for this study is distributed leadership, chosen for its relevance and alignment with the tenets of teacher leadership in the schools.

The role of the school leader has grown more complex as the nature of the work has shifted focus to meet the challenge of guaranteeing higher levels of learning for all students. Principals are expected to exercise a style of leadership that creates a culture that promotes the necessary changes to improve student achievement, all within increasingly complex school environments and the watchful eye of school accountability (Kafka, 2009; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Louis et al., 2010; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008).

Moller and Pankake (2006) referred to the three options that principals face: "Do everything themselves or with a few chosen teachers, sit back and let leadership occur in a chaotic manner, or intentionally plan and facilitate the process of collaborative leadership" (p. 8). The intentional focus of the principal is central to this study, seeking to understand the world of leadership as experienced by the practitioners who are busy leading their schools

and employed in what has been described as a "job too big for one" (Grubb & Flessa, 2006, p. 518). The stressors faced by principals may present challenges in the staffing of schools. Reports of principal shortages are commonplace, with concerns for the reduced numbers of viable replacements for administrative openings (Gross, 2009).

Hall, Berg, and Barnett (2003) clearly summarized the underpinnings of this study:

> If there is one overall conclusion we would offer based on the past two decades of study of beginning principals in America, it would be that the job has become increasingly complex, more difficult, and with intense and unreasonable pressures to solve a broad menu of education, social, and personal problems. At this time, the demands for accountability, maintaining a safe environment, and serving all the needs of children (and many needs of their parents) means that in reality no one person can do it all. . . . We also are very concerned about how long they can survive in the pressure cooker that the principalship has become. (pp. 2–3)

Principals interact in the living environment of the school system and are expected to provide leadership for all teachers. While the expectation for leadership has rested primarily on the shoulders of building principals, teachers also engage in leadership roles, largely stemming from their classroom teaching (Lieberman & Miller, 2005). York-Barr and Duke (2004) concluded from their review of two decades of teacher leadership research,

> After reflecting on the literature as a whole, we suggest that teacher leadership is the process by which teachers, individually or collectively, influence their colleagues, principals, and other members of school communities to improve teaching and learning practices with the aim of increased student learning and achievement. (pp. 287–288)

Our study is framed by this definition of teacher leadership particularly as it emphasizes the power of teacher influence to create the capacities for change that result in improved student achievement.

While administrative stress is widely reported, there is a dearth of understanding regarding the specifics of how to reduce stress for administrators. In this article, we extrapolate information from the literature on workplace stress and integrate it with findings that emerged from the results of this study—namely, that principals reported traditional and expanded roles for teachers as possibilities that might relieve principal workload stress. We were interested in these questions: If given a choice to help relieve stress, would principals prefer that teachers perform traditional roles, or is there is a description of expanded roles and duties for teachers, including those

for whom teachers have not been trained? Likewise, is it possible that distributed leadership, as a conceptual model, provides a view of practice that correlates with an emerging view of teacher leadership?

WORKPLACE STRESSORS OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Principals, under increased scrutiny for student achievement in their schools, are working with teachers to elevate teaching practice to improve student learning (Catano & Stronge, 2006; Kafka, 2009; Louis et al., 2010; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). Along with the expectation for instructional leadership are the important managerial issues that confront administrators, including school safety, scheduling, budget allocation, parental contact, and the day-to-day functions of the school that demand a logical and smooth response to immediate concerns of all stakeholders (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Pounder & Merrill, 2001). Unfortunately, school leaders are vulnerable to the myriad stressful factors that are embodied in the demands for effectiveness and efficiency (Cooley & Shen, 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2006; Grubb & Flessa, 2006; Kafka, 2009; Lashaway, 2003; Schoen & Fusarelli, 2008). According to Lashaway (2003), principals face numerous pressures on the job that include the complexity of the range of expectations, a sense of alienation and loneliness on the job, the contextual expectations of the job, and the increased and competing demands for roles or resources.

Reports of accountability for increased school improvement, diminished revenues, heightened parental expectations, changing demographics, and stress and burnout among school administrators are replete in the literature (Kowalski, 2005; Lieberman & Miller, 2005; Sorenson, 2007). As administrators respond to these difficult realities, they are vulnerable to the same effects of stress that are reported in the literature about workplace stress, whether it be increased blood pressure, anxiety, depression, anger, heart attacks, or resentment (Sorenson, 2007). Principals reporting to their schools on a daily basis face the pressures, expectations, and realities of the workplace. The literature describing these stressors did not include information of the leadership roles that teachers may perform in the work environment, a key interest as we explored the relationship between teacher leaders and principal stress in the writing of this article. When principals develop priorities for their schools, they assign roles that may or may not include a vision for teachers as leaders.

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Teachers functioning as leaders in a school is not a new concept, with analysts pointing to three phases of teacher leadership—the first being that of union leader or department head, the second as curriculum leader or mentor, and the third as that of instructional improvement leader in which teachers become the creators of school culture (Silva, Gimbert, & Nolan, 2000; York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Schools may represent all phases of teacher leadership, as they reflect roles from each of the three phases. The phases represent a continuum where new roles and responsibilities have been added to the teachers' opportunities to serve. Silva and colleagues (2000) and York-Barr and Duke (2004) proffered that teachers function as leaders when they influence their peers, work collaboratively with principals, and change the culture of the school to be more responsive to improved student achievement.

Teacher leaders often report that their primary role is to assist or support their colleagues in their building, which may result in tension with fellow teachers or administrators (Smylie & Denny, 1990). The teaching profession is one of egalitarianism, in which school cultures and teacher predispositions concerning work roles are strongly entrenched (Rogus, 1988). The transition from teacher to teacher leader is challenging in such an environment. Likewise, the historical role of administrator does not include that of shared leadership; administrators have traditionally been responsible for providing the leadership for the school. Teachers and administrators offer unique perspectives to the field of instruction. Teachers possess operational knowledge about instruction and student achievement, and principals view instruction from an organizational perspective, offering insights and understanding (Smylie & Brownlee-Conyers, 1992). It is especially important to merge the teacher's operational knowledge with the principal's organizational perspectives to create effective, seamless curricular initiatives.

Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers (1992) reported that there are considerable ambiguities in the working relationships of teacher leaders and their principals, which range on a continuum from support and guidance to conflict and tension. Ultimately, the development of teachers as leaders is exemplified by expertise, collaboration, reflection, and empowerment. Teachers become leaders as they develop these skills (Snell & Swanson, 2000). The development of relationship skills, competence, and credibility are hallmarks of the effectiveness of teacher leaders (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Teacher leaders are, first and foremost, effective classroom teachers and therefore able to influence others by their credibility and instructional strength.

A broadened concept of teacher leadership is inherent in the various realms of influence that teachers may affect, which ultimately may change the culture of the school to be one of continued school improvement. The school culture and context are essential elements for leaders to consider; leaders must incorporate adequate time for reflection and capacity building of all teachers (Katzenmeyer & Moller, 2001). Fullan (2003) added that there must be recognition of the limit to learning in a context of superficial interaction. Fullan suggested that collaboration that is paired with deep reflection is necessary to make significant school improvement. When principals intentionally work to place importance on teacher autonomy and tap their problem-solving skills, a form of distributed leadership emerges in which the school's social dynamics are addressed and effective teams are built.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Principals are the primary source of leadership in attempting to transform the culture of the school to improve student achievement. In essence, the skills required of leaders who work to change the culture of the school combine a model of instructional leadership and transformational leadership—conceptual models dominant in the literature about educational leadership (Hallinger, 1992). Principals who are primarily instructional leaders place an emphasis on instructional effectiveness of teachers (Lashaway, 2003). In contrast, leaders who focus on transformational leadership collaborate with teachers to improve student achievement via analysis of student learning with the expressed goal of educational change (Hallinger, 1992). Transformational leaders provide opportunities for teachers to engage in activities and dialogue about school improvement; therefore, these principals enact key leadership practices. They focus on bringing teachers together to work collaboratively and develop teacher teams for the purpose of improving student achievement. Consequently, transformational leaders alter the structure and culture of the school to include a network of interrelationships (Scribner, Sawyer, Watson, & Myers, 2007). The interactions that are created through team activities, such as collaboration, dialogue, and enhanced communication, result in a form of distributed leadership in which leadership opportunities are available to many members (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001). According to Scribner and colleagues (2007), distributed leadership must be cultivated because it alters school culture to include shared power and responsibility between principal and teachers.

The concept of distributed leadership provides the context and conceptual underpinning for teacher leadership. Mujis and Harris (2003) reported,

> Distributed leadership theory is helpful in providing great conceptual clarity around the terrain of teacher leadership for three reasons: 1. It incorporates the activities and multiple groups of individuals in a school who work at guiding and mobilizing staff in the instructional process; 2. Implies a social distribution of leadership where the leadership function is stretched over the work of a number of individuals and where the leadership task is accomplished through the interaction of multiple leaders; 3. Implies interdependency rather than dependency. (p. 440)

Distributed leadership is aligned with the foundations of teacher leadership, since it recognizes that collective energy surpasses that of individual efforts. Crawford (2005) reported, "From a theoretical position, distributed leadership overlaps considerably with 'teacher leadership' and 'learning-centered leadership'" (p. 213). Extending beyond leadership roles that are traditionally defined and dependent on a hierarchy, distributed leadership includes others, as experts, when necessary (Copland, 2003). Thus, there are avenues in place for leaders to emerge in response to specific needs and opportunities. The fundamental emphasis is on the interactions of the people. Distributed leadership practice focuses on the webbed interactions of leaders and followers, as opposed to a definition of the roles or functions of the leaders (Spillane, 2005). Principals are in key positions to successfully lead distributed leadership efforts in their schools (Murphy, Smylie, Mayrowetz, & Louis, 2009). A foundation of the distributed leadership model is the interaction, or interdependency, of the various individuals; in schools, it is the interaction among principals and teachers. Harris (2003) concluded, "Whatever specific definition of teacher leadership one chooses to adopt, it is clear that its emphasis upon collective action, empowerment and shared agency is reflected in distributed leadership theory" (p. 317). We propose that distributed leadership enables principals to share the leadership challenges with teachers as partners and that this can be a source of stress reduction in an increasingly complex governance environment.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This article is second in a series written from the original study about teacher leadership, principal stress, and possible relief from stress as indicated by the principals. An earlier work described the aggregate data (Wells, Maxfield, & Klocko, 2011); in this article, we disaggregated data

by gender and rural, suburban, and urban schools. We were interested in learning if there were differences among the perceptions of principals from rural, urban, and suburban school districts and between the responses of male and female principals. The work of teacher leaders was examined in terms of their contributions to increased student achievement and in terms of how, through distributed leadership, teacher leaders may provide a new sense of balance to the work of the principal.

We were interested in learning if principals describe their schools and organizations with predictable teacher roles and functions or if an alternative view might emerge, one with new forms of principal–teacher interactions. While distributed leadership does not equate with leadership roles and functions (Spillane, 2005), we posit that new frames of interaction and interdependency between principals and teachers may be possible and could result in a school culture that reduces the workload stress for principals. As teachers develop expertise in teaching, work in collaboration with their colleagues, and expand traditional roles, they are building capacity. Teacher teams that engage in reflection and self-management learn through their interactions with one another (Scribner et al., 2007). Structures alone will not suffice in creating distributive learning school environments. Principals are key players in establishing a culture that expands and shares the various work roles to include others in the work of change (Copland, 2003).

Reports of principal stress have been recorded for more than three decades, with indications of the numerous health concerns and problems with time management, relationships, conflict, and compliance with state and federal mandates (Armenta & Reno, 1997; Bailey, Fillos, & Kelly, 1987; Cale, 1993; Gmelch, 1978; Kafka, 2009; Lyons, 1990; Ripley, 1997; Williamson & Campbell, 1987). Although the stress levels continue to be a function of the principal role, what may be different are the increased pressures to accomplish much with diminished support and to be the source of solving societal issues (Kafka, 2009). Principals are now responding to expectations for increased student achievement, which may be tied to their evaluation, the Common Core State Standards, and the expectation for preparing every student for work or college readiness. We were intrigued with teacher leadership for the possibilities that it could bring to the stress-filled world of the principal. We were also interested in learning if principals conceptualized the benefits of teachers as leaders, including the human agency inherent in teacher leadership. In this study, we sought a greater understanding of the principals' perceptions of workload stressors and their descriptions of how teachers might provide relief from that stress.

METHOD

This study used quantitative and qualitative methodology to systematically examine the beliefs of K–12 principals regarding their workload expectations and stressors. Additionally, we sought to examine principals' beliefs regarding teacher involvement in minimizing principal workload as measured by a modified Likert-type inventory consisting of questions that asked the respondents about the stressors that principals encounter, the roles that teachers assume in their buildings, and principals' preferences regarding which responsibilities teachers could assume to alleviate the stress of the principalship.

PARTICIPANTS

All principals working in K–12 school districts in a Midwestern state (n = 3,084) were invited to participate in this study. Principals assigned to preschools, charter schools, and alternative education programs were not included in this study.

Principals representing elementary (n = 505), middle (n = 226), and high school (n = 269) levels responded to the original questionnaire. This total (n = 1,000) differs from the participant total (n = 907) in that some principals oversee combinations of grade levels within their buildings.

The principals were closely distributed by gender as indicated in Table 1. Additionally, suburban school principals accounted for nearly half the

Table 1.   Demographics of Survey Respondents (n = 907)

	Response	
	%	n
Gender		
Male	51	444
Female	49	455
Principal experience, years		
>20	10	90
15–19	11	96
10–14	23	213
5–9	30	269
<5	26	241
District type		
Rural	40	357
Urban	15	135
Suburban	45	410

respondents in this purposeful sampling. Principals were widely distributed by size of school district and years of experience as a principal. In sum, the participants in this study ($n = 907$) were representative of a larger population of principals in this Midwestern state.

DATA COLLECTION

The data from the survey focused on the responses of practicing principals ($n = 907$) who volunteered to complete the online questionnaire administered through Survey Monkey (see the appendix). The sample size supports a 99% confidence level with an error level of 3.6%, as ascertained by the high rate of response (29%) to this survey. The use of an electronic query may represent a limitation to this study, as some principals ($n = 33$) who received an invitation to participate in this study opted out. This may or may not represent a universal opt-out to all Survey Monkey surveys and therefore cannot be directly attributed to the nature of this study. This limitation is minimal when considering the expediency and high response rate attributed to this study.

While the data in this study might appear to be ordinal, we have treated the data as nominal data to facilitate analysis. Principals were asked about their backgrounds in education and demographic information about their school and district. Respondents rated the frequency that teachers perform certain task-associated roles in their schools (4 = *almost daily*, 1 = *almost never*). Principals were asked their perceptions regarding their workload, rating the incidence of stress associated with 26 identified stressors (4 = *almost daily*, 1 = *almost never*). Moreover, respondents had the option of indicating *does not apply* to all questions in this survey. Last, principals identified the stressors that would be reduced if teachers performed certain task-associated roles (4 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*).

Three open-ended questions provided rich qualitative responses to support these findings: "What do you see as the most realistic solution to the workload pressures you face?" "How can teachers provide support to you as principal?" and "What changes would be required in schools to allow teachers to provide support to you as principal?"

DATA ANALYSIS

We explored frequencies and means to identify the nature of participant attitude, stressors, and capacity for collaborative leadership. For the second stage of the analysis, we used an analysis of variance to determine whether there were significant differences in responses by prin-

cipals by gender and district type (rural, urban, or suburban). Through this analysis, we examined the differences among means between groups and within groups to determine whether at least one group differed significantly from the other. Differences were considered significant at the standard alpha level of .05.

DATA INVENTORY AND CODE DEVELOPMENT

To further explore how and to what extent principals view their workload and the role of teacher leaders within their buildings, we organized data from three open-ended response questions in the survey. In this stage of the analysis, we analyzed the findings provided by the questionnaire to look for systematic patterns regarding the workload and stressors associated with the principalship. We drew on established methods of qualitative inquiry as a guide, employing coding and categorizing processes that made use of inductive and deductive approaches to establish emergent themes from the data and to make assertions about the case (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Miles, Huberman, & Sandana, 2013). The analysis of these data was an ongoing and recursive process (Creswell, 2013). We entered data into the NVIVO 7 software to facilitate organized analysis and reviewed the data numerous times during the assignment of codes.

VALIDITY

We designed the questionnaire to measure principals' perceptions of their workload and their attitude about teacher leaders providing assistance. We subsequently pilot-tested the instrument to a group of seven principals. The respondents indicated general satisfaction with the survey, expressing that the questions were clearly written and easily understood. Content validity was established from the participants in the pilot sample. Lawshe (1975) proposed that each subject matter expert rater respond to the following question for each item: "Is the skill or knowledge measured by this item *essential*, *useful*, but not essential, or *not necessary* in order to define the construct?" According to Lawshe, if more than half the panelists indicate that an item is essential, that item has at least some content validity. We therefore established content validity based on the polling of the researchers and participants in the pilot sample.

We established construct validity of the survey by aligning the variables in the survey with the research base of instructional and transformational leadership, the stress of the workload of principals as defined in the literature, and the descriptors based on the experiences that we had as

researchers and former building principals. To determine the reliability or the internal consistency of the instrument, Cronbach's standardized item alpha of .953 was obtained, indicating that all scale items are measuring the same construct; thus, the fundamental requirements of construct validity were met with a high degree of reliability. These constructs were defined largely by the knowledge base regarding the principalship and informed by the factor analyses previously performed (Wells et al., 2011).

In the data analysis of the qualitative responses, we grouped patterns and clustered data into major categories and subcategories. We then employed pattern matching to strengthen the coding system. The results of the quantitative and qualitative data were integrated through the concurrent triangulation strategy thus promoting a means to cross-validate or corroborate the findings.

RESULTS

The final reporting of these data is presented as a descriptive narrative. While generalizable findings may appear, this research is not seeking universals that exist free of context. In this article, we present the findings of the workplace stress of principals, the relief they reported as it relates to teacher roles, and the differences by area (rural, suburban, urban school principals) and by gender. The results of this study are grouped here by primary category.

AGGREGATE

Stress Factors

1. Work typically associated with teacher leaders did not affect the stressors that principals identified as highly stressful.
2. Principals perceive financial constraints as the primary work-associated stress, with personal management stressors dominating the list.

Relief From Stress

1. Principals view teacher relief of stress primarily for leading instructional as opposed to day-to-day managerial requirements associated with the principalship.
2. Principals also included concepts such as work with struggling and resistant teachers as help for stress relief.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

1. Women principals reported greater concerns for the volume of paperwork and insufficient time to get the job done.
2. Teachers in schools performed leadership roles more frequently with female principals. These roles were generally associated with instructional leadership.

RURAL, SUBURBAN, URBAN STRESS DIFFERENCES

1. Urban principals reported the greatest amount of stress in six categories: insufficient time to get the job done, volume of paperwork, constant interruptions, loss of personal time, increased expectations from central office, and feeling overwhelmed with the job.
2. Rural and urban principals reported similar levels of stress. They reported that more stressors affect their performance than did their suburban counterparts. Rural and urban districts are often faced with similar student populations and decreasing enrollments.

It is clear from the perceptions of the principals in this study that the stress associated with the workload of the principal is both common and complex. It is this stress on the job that limits the job satisfaction of the principal (Sorenson, 2007).

WORK-ASSOCIATED STRESSORS

We contend that teacher leaders could be part of a formula that provides a primary effect in school improvement and a secondary effect of improving the quality of work life as experienced by principal. We present four distinct categories for consideration relative to a successful implementation of teachers as leaders.

Role Identification

What roles will teacher leaders perform when the school is being asked to undergo significant, transformational change?

Structural Identification

To what extent do systems and structures have to change to redefine the role of teachers to become leaders that are empowered to work with instructional issues, such as creating vision for school improvement, using

data to improve instruction, as well as responding to the tougher issues involving ineffective or struggling teachers?

Interactions and Relationship Identification

Besides roles and structure, what are the interactions and relationship changes that need to occur to create cultures that more effectively balance the leadership in schools that include teachers as partners? How is interdependency created among these individuals?

Systems Identification

How do superintendents foster and model interdependent leadership in the school system?

The stressors identified in this study fall clearly into the structural identification realm of responsibility, typically not an area in which teacher leaders actively support the principal. Thus, in one sense, the work of teachers as leaders might not provide relief for the areas that concern principals most. As principals identified the frequency of these stressors, five stressors exhibited the highest means in the overall comparison, regardless of gender of the principal or the type of school under consideration. As principals experienced stress, these stressors were consistently identified between *often* (3) and *almost daily* (4): diminished revenues, insufficient time to get the job done, volume of paperwork, constant interruptions, and keeping up with e-mail correspondence.

Table 2 shows the mean scores (>3.0) and significant differences of stressors for dominant stressors when gender is considered. Statistically

Table 2. Principals' Perceptions of Work-Associated Stressors Identified by Gender

	Total (n = 849)		Male (n = 419)		Female (n = 430)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Diminished revenues	3.32	0.84	3.34	0.83	3.33	0.86
Insufficient time to get the job done[a]	3.30	0.85	3.23	0.88	3.37	0.81
Volume of paperwork[a]	3.22	0.86	3.12	0.89	3.31	0.83
Constant interruptions	3.19	0.96	3.14	0.96	3.23	0.96
Keeping up with e-mail correspondence	3.04	1.02	3.05	1.03	3.04	1.02
Work–life balance	3.03	0.97	3.04	0.97	3.03	0.95
Loss of personal time	3.02	0.96	3.01	0.98	3.04	0.94

Note. "As a building principal, how often do you feel stress regarding the following issues?" 4 = *almost daily*, 1 = *rarely*.
[a]Statistically significant mean difference (analysis of variance with level set at .05).

significant means were revealed for female principals, who indicated a higher degree of stress for insufficient time to get the job done and the volume of paperwork that was associated with the job. Kochan, Spencer, and Matthews (2000) reported similar findings, with female principals reporting more concern about increased paperwork on the job; they also expressed more concern for balancing work and family responsibilities.

Rural and suburban principals identified diminished revenues (3.41, 3.26) as their highest stressor, while urban principals expressed insufficient time to get the job done (3.39) as their highest concern, as shown in Table 3. As an aggregate, principals experienced stress between *often* (3) and *almost daily* (4) in the following areas: diminished revenues (3.32), insufficient time to get the job done (3.30), volume of paperwork (3.22), constant interruptions (3.19), keeping up with e-mail communications (3.04), work–life balance (3.03), and loss of personal time (3.02).

When these stressors were analyzed by type of district, 15 responses were expressed as statistically significant: loss of personal time, feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands, volume of paperwork, reports to state and district, board of education presentations, dealing with changing

Table 3. Principals' Perceptions of Work-Associated Stressors Identified by District Type

	Total (n = 851)		Rural (n = 347)		Urban (n = 129)		Suburban (n = 375)	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Diminished revenues	3.32	0.84	3.41	0.82	3.35	0.84	3.26	0.87
Insufficient time to get the job done[a]	3.30	0.85	3.37	0.80	3.39	0.76	3.19	0.91
Volume of paperwork[a]	3.22	0.86	3.26	0.83	3.32	0.85	3.13	0.89
Constant interruptions[a]	3.19	0.96	3.24	0.95	3.31	0.93	3.10	0.97
Keeping up with e-mail correspondence	3.04	1.02	3.03	1.02	3.12	1.02	3.05	1.01
Work–life balance	3.03	0.97	3.10	0.93	3.06	0.97		
Loss of personal time[a]	3.02	0.96	3.07	0.96	3.21	0.93		
Job expectations of the principalship			3.05	0.93	3.03	1.01		
Increased performance expectations from central office[a]					3.02	0.96		
Feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands[a]					3.00	1.03		

Note. "As a building principal, how often do you feel stress regarding the following issues?" 4 = *almost daily*, 1 = *rarely*. Blank cell = not considered a stressor, mean score < 3.0.
[a]Statistically significant mean difference (analysis of variance with level set at .05).

demographics, general loss of joy in doing this work, increased performance expectations from central office, insufficient time to "get the job done," student discipline, responding to the new demands of the curriculum, responding to student test score results, providing a vision for school improvement, constant interruptions, lunchroom and building supervision.

The disparity between and among groups of principals representing rural, urban, and suburban school districts suggested that there is not a simple one-size-fits-all solution to alleviating principal stress; the context of the stress is involved. Furthermore, this disparity underscores the need for additional study regarding the stressors endured by principals in urban school districts.

Woodruff and Kowalski (2010) claimed that school characteristics, such as size, enrollment, geographic location, and type, could be associated with the problems encountered by principals. This finding was substantiated in this study as indicated in Table 3. The American Institute of Stress (1999, as cited in Sorenson, 2007) reported that the 10 most stressful jobs in the modern workplace include that of inner-city teacher and administrator. In this study, there were stressors identified by urban principals that did not rise to the level of stress for either the rural or suburban counterparts, suggesting that the job expectations and stresses of the urban principal are substantially different from those of the rural and suburban districts. Not only did urban principals identify twice the number of stressors of their suburban counterparts, but the responses from the urban principals accounted for the disparity—thus, the significant differences between the responses from these groups of principals.

Similarly, the rural and urban principals' mean scores for the following responses were close in number, suggesting that it is possible that principals of both locations have diminished resources for assistance to perform these tasks: insufficient time to get the job done, volume of paperwork, and dealing with constant interruptions.

In examining the roles that teachers perform in schools, we found that for the aggregate, there are no roles that currently rise to the level of *often* (3), as the highest mean score reported was for work with other teachers to develop curriculum (2.97). Upon further examination of the roles performed by teachers in schools, we found that teachers in schools with a female principal currently analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning (3.07) and assign consequences for student misbehavior (3.01) with more frequency. Principals in urban schools also have teachers who analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning (3.12) more frequently than *often* (3). Suburban female principals also empower teachers to analyze and apply test score data to improve

Table 4.   Roles Frequently Performed by Teachers in Schools (>3.0) Considered by Principal Gender and District Type

Principal Group	Role	M
Urban male (n = 39)	Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning	3.05
Female (n = 455)	Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning	3.07
	Assign consequences for student misbehavior	3.01
Rural female (n = 150)	Work with other teachers to develop curriculum	3.08
	Assign consequences for student misbehavior	3.01
Urban female (n = 72)	Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning	3.14
Suburban female (n = 200)	Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning	3.11
	Assign consequences for student misbehavior	3.07
	Work with other teachers to develop curriculum	3.03

Note. 4 = almost daily, 1 = rarely. Groups not relevant to table: male principal (n = 444), rural males principal (n = 198), suburban male principal (n = 185).

teaching and learning (3.04) and work with other teachers to develop curriculum (3.01). Table 4 describes how often teachers take on leadership specific roles, considering the principal's gender and whether the building is situated in a rural, urban, or suburban district.

None of the roles identified were identified as stressors; female principals appear to collaborate and share leadership responsibility with their faculty more than their male colleagues; and all roles were clearly instructional in nature, or an extension of the traditional role of the classroom teacher. As one principal commented, "teachers already do many of the supportive things and it doesn't relieve the stress."

There is a growing body of research to support the notion that the job of the principal is indeed too exhaustive for one person, given the demands of the position. It is interesting to note that many authors cite paperwork and time management as stressors, which were identified as recurring stressors in this study as well (Bloom, Barrett, & Strong, 2003; Crow, 2006; Hall et al., 2003; Whitaker, 1998). One principal from this study noted,

> Teachers need to be more comfortable taking leadership roles when it comes to instructional practices and analyzing data to drive instruction. They tend to keep ideas within their own grade level. In addition, they need to take more authority/leadership to handle most situations with their students, whether in the classroom, playground, etc.

This attitude prevailed, as principals indicated that they would feel less stress as a principal if teachers resolved problems at the classroom level (3.39), as shown in Table 5. One principal noted, "They need to spend their time on instruction, not supporting me."

Table 5. Principals' Perceptions of Roles That Teachers Could Assume to Alleviate the Stress of the Principal

	n	*M*	*SD*
Resolving problems at the classroom level	773	3.39	.721
Analyzing test score data to improve instructional practice	767	3.34	.683
Working with teachers who are resistant to change	784	3.27	.717
Influencing building-wide instructional practices	772	3.24	.657
Working with teacher teams to develop curriculum	753	3.21	.702
Providing professional development training for teachers in this school	770	3.16	.648
Chairing school committees	756	3.16	.687
Mentoring new teachers	734	3.11	.730
Providing instructional leadership for the staff	774	3.11	.711
Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in this school	758	3.05	.706
Creating a vision for school improvement	756	3.05	.733
Working with ineffective, struggling teachers	779	3.05	.794
Resolving parent complaints and concerns	771	2.98	.801
Conducting peer teaching evaluations	779	2.96	.787
Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in our district	744	2.94	.738
Supervising evening and weekend events.	738	2.90	.846
Serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or band boosters	734	2.88	.746
Assigning consequences for student misbehavior	771	2.80	.870
Developing plans of action for changing demographics	727	2.76	.766
Completing reports for the district, state	772	2.72	.851
Participating in a formal process to resolve staff disputes	731	2.68	.834
Presenting to the board of education	722	2.54	.813
Participating in budget and purchasing decision-making	752	2.43	.780
Handling issues regarding building security other than classroom discipline	746	2.33	.872
Handling communications with media	698	1.82	.791

Note. "I would feel less stress as a principal if teachers performed these functions." 4 = *strongly agree*, 1 = *strongly disagree*.

While the majority of the teacher roles receiving a 3.0 mean or above that were described by principals for relieving their stress were instructional, we also note that others could be described as managerial. Noninstructional areas that principals reported included working with teachers who are resistant to change and working with struggling or ineffective teachers—areas that often result in tension and conflict.

FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS

The results of this study indicated that principals are seeking traditional solutions to solve current problems. An emergent theme from principals was a requisition for more funding, more support, or additional staff. However, one principal provided an alternative view:

More resources is not realistic. I think more strategizing with teachers to solve the day- to- day problems of discipline and reasonable consequences. I think the role of a principal is not, realistically, that of an instructional leader, more of a facilitator or team builder. The job cannot be done well currently.

This survey also indicated that principals want more support and involvement from teacher leaders but feel that they are constrained by the demands of the job, which, according to one principal, "has grown exponentially since the early '90s." One principal expressed, "The realities of the pendulum swing to hyper-accountability and hyper-transparency at the state and federal levels compounded with the state budget crisis spells years of stress and unhappiness as the workload builds with less support." Another theme that was expressed resoundingly was to eliminate or reduce state and federal interference with local school operations. These mandates create volumes of paperwork and stress. Another respondent added,

> The workload pressures are caused by constant change in curriculum and performance that keep the school in constant flux. Unrealistic and duplication data collection create volumes of work for administrators cutting into valuable time that could be used to work with teachers and observe classrooms.

Most principals acknowledged that current financial prospects have hindered their success in accomplishing academic goals with their students and teachers. One principal pleaded,

> I need help with distributing the work. Minimally, districts who are faced with budget cutting need to better understand the value of building administration in terms of a principal working with the necessary complement of assistant principals to get the job done. Cutting assistant principals is not keeping cuts away from students and does great damage to principals who are true practicing instructional leaders.

In addition to the demands of the job, many principals do not feel optimistic about teacher leadership because of contractual constraints. One principal explained, "Expecting the principal to provide all building management is unrealistic. Teachers need to be able to support building management as a requirement spelled out in the teacher contract." A resounding cry from principals was made to eliminate teacher protections as well as union influence over teachers. The foundation of this plea rests on a "change in mindset, awareness, shift away from blame to ownership," as articulated by one respondent.

TEACHER LEADERS

Principals viewed effective instruction as the job of teachers. Principals were resolute in their conviction that the primary responsibility of teachers

must be to be effective teachers in their classroom: "Teachers should take a leadership role in supporting each other with modeling quality teaching."

By developing a cadre of classroom teacher leaders, through attention to the relationships and interactions within the school, a form of distributed leadership may surface (Harris, 2003; Spillane, 2005). Another principal offered recommendations that emerge from a culture of interdependency and responsibility:

> A huge paradigm shift would have to come about in that teachers would have to believe in their own expertise and be willing to share it with others. They need training in how to mentor appropriately, how to conduct informal observations of one another to help one another become better instructionally, and in classroom management procedures. Teachers also would need training in how to understand and utilize assessment data to improve their instruction and make recommendations for appropriate programming.

Additionally, the results of this study raise the issue of teacher leadership training as a mechanism for promoting teacher leadership, understanding that the culture of a school district is difficult to change (Fullan, 2001). One principal advocated for "development of strong connections with teachers to empower them to lead." The principal continued, "The mindset in this district is still labor versus management. Change is consistently met with resistance."

LIMITATIONS

There are several limitations to the generalizability of this study. The principals were not asked to explain or verify their answers to ascertain if the level of response they gave was aligned with the actual roles that teachers were performing in their respective districts. Instead, it was a onetime assessment of what was happening; hence, the means reported from principals indicate a correlation—that is, no causal interpretations can be made from these data. Additionally, principals who participated in this study represented union and nonunion work environments. This study was not designed to draw conclusions regarding the differences between the union and nonunion states.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study suggest that the context of school is important in understanding the workload stress of principals, with urban principals reporting greater levels of stressors than those of principals in rural or suburban settings. Principals of rural schools reported similar mean scores

to some of the stressors, possibility reflecting the broad base of activities that rural principals may be expected to cover, given the absence of a larger administrative staff. Likewise, female principals reported greater levels of stress in two of the variables that were part of this survey: How do school superintendents support female principals as they experience concerns over work–life balance with demands of the job? Additionally, while the design of this study was not intended to review the stress reduction techniques of principals, it seems logical that research in these areas may assist principals to learn how best to balance this *job too big for one* while learning self-care measures.

As conceptions for teacher leaders continue to evolve, a spotlight is on principals who have the capacity to empower others, as opposed to initiating a system of delegation or assigning roles and duties (Harris, 2003). Ayers and Sommers (2009) noted, "it is leadership that an organization must have, not a single leader. In the most robust and resilient organizations, anyone can step forward to provide leadership when that individual is best positioned and best equipped" (p. xxi). Unfortunately, definitions of leadership are often explained by roles and tasks, resulting in superficial and unsustainable results in the schools (Lambert, 2003).

The results of this study illustrate the perceptions of building principals relative to creating educational environments that effectively utilize teachers as leaders. It is clear that the principals in this survey were in favor of teachers performing primarily instructional and some managerial roles within their buildings, while questioning the viability of teachers to assume leadership roles in what is often a labor-versus-management environment.

We are left with a question to understand with greater clarity: What is it that principals want? Were they merely suggesting that teachers do what they often do—namely, traditional teacher roles of teaching and working with instruction, only more of it or more effectively? Do some principals want teachers to work independently on instructional issues or with them as full partners? We are not able to answer these questions, and we feel that they are worthy of further investigation.

These findings are consistent with the research on teacher leadership conducted by Smylie and Denny (1990), who reported,

> The literature on leadership suggests that leadership development is an organizational phenomenon. It is influenced not only by organizational structure but also by the interactions and negotiations among leaders and other organizational participants that take place in a political and normative framework. (p. 256)

Lambert (2003) suggested that a high leadership capacity school is one that is a learning community: "Since leadership is defined as reciprocal,

purposeful learning in a community, such 'work' embraces a shared vision, inquiry, dialogue, reflection and a focus on learning" (p. 426). The interactions of the stakeholders are of intense importance, with all players able to contribute to the forward motion in the school. Structural changes, while important, do not guarantee a level of dialogue that is implied in Lambert's definition; instead, teachers, as experts, are able to create and sustain a community of inquiry.

Harris (2003) agreed, advocating for meeting time, effective professional development, and capacity building to develop the confidence and voice of teachers as leaders: all areas that principals can promote. The principals in this study provided insights and feedback about their workload and the stress, indicating that teachers may play a part in alleviating that stress. In this study, principals reported that they were most interested in teachers engaging in effective instructional practices, along with help for struggling or resistant teachers, despite the fact that evaluative feedback has not been part of teachers' training. In the most school settings, teacher leaders are authorized to lead in areas that have seen little change over several decades (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). Will the dialogue about teacher leaders witness a change to rely less on the roles and behaviors of teachers or principals and more on the interactions, or the *how* and *process* by which change occurs?

Additional research is needed to learn more about the principals who are successful in the development of teacher leaders and the creation of synergistic relationships in their organizations. Future studies can inform practitioners who are working to develop leadership capacity in their schools using distributed leadership models; they can also provide information for professors who are training aspiring and practicing school leaders. Frost (2008) viewed the concept of teacher leadership as one that allows teachers to "lead innovation and improvement" (p. 340), opportunities that administrative leaders may promote.

Likewise, principals play the most significant part in shaping the efforts that build capacity for teacher leadership. Teacher leadership opportunities are not linear; they often result from a multitude of directions, such as teacher to teacher or principal to teacher. It may well be that a new iteration of teacher leadership emerges, perhaps as a result of the intention to build interactions among individuals in a school that fosters interdependence and instructional growth. Harris (2003) offered advocacy for teachers who could have the agency to lead the change of the school, as examined through the lens of distributed leadership:

> Quite simply, we cannot continue to ignore, dismiss, or devalue the notion of teacher leadership as a form of distributed leadership- to do so is to know-

ingly invest in forms of leadership theory and practice that make little, if any difference, to the achievement of young people. (p. 322)

While it is obvious that teachers cannot alleviate all stress that principals face, it seems reasonable to suggest that as teachers function more as partners in a flattened hierarchy, they may help mediate the effects of stress. In this view, we are not suggesting a mere listing of delegated tasks and roles but a view of interactions among the stakeholders in the school who build a culture of inquiry, reflection, and professionalism together. The first wave of teacher leadership was characterized by traditional roles, such as department heads or union representatives; the second wave, as curriculum leader or mentor; and the third wave, as instructional improvement and continuous learning (York-Barr & Duke, 2004). As the literature base for teacher leadership continues to expand, perhaps a distributed leadership model will ground an approach of practice where the emphasis is on relationships, interactions, and building community. Principals are able to provide the leadership and opportunity for extended interactions and for multiple leaders within their schools, practices that may interrupt and moderate their cycles of stress while promoting a culture of improved attention to student achievement.

APPENDIX: A STUDY OF PRINCIPAL PERCEPTIONS OF WORKLOAD ISSUES

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

We are asking you to participate in a research study regarding the workload of principals. The purpose of this study is two-fold. First is the interest in the perceptions of principals concerning the various roles they play, and the related stressors they experience. Second are the roles teachers play in the building and how they are utilized with regard to supporting their principals. Your participation in this research study is limited to responding to this online survey that should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. The benefit of this research is to add to the knowledge base about the stressors of the workload and possible relief as reported by principals. Currently, little is known as to how principals view teachers with regard to problem resolution and leadership within the schools.

There is minimal possible harm foreseen in participating in this research. This survey is voluntary and you may discontinue participation at any time. Choosing not to participate or to discontinue par-

ticipation will not affect your relationship with your school district, Oakland University, or The Galileo Institute for Teacher Leadership. Your privacy will be protected and your identity will not be used in any sort of report that is published. We will not name individuals nor schools participating and the collection of IP addresses through this Survey Monkey survey will be disabled. Please do not provide your name or personal information within your survey responses. Your survey information will be kept strictly confidential and only viewed by the researchers involved in this study. After publication of this study, all survey information will be destroyed.

1. If you are willing to participate in this study, please indicate below:
   ☐ YES. I agree to participate.
   ☐ NO. I do not wish to participate.

LEADERSHIP PROFILE

2. What is your gender?
   ☐ Male
   ☐ Female
3. How many years have you served as a principal? **[Q2]**
   ☐ More than 20 years
   ☐ 15–19 years
   ☐ 10–14 years
   ☐ 5–9 years
   ☐ Fewer than 5 years
4. What level best describes the students in your building? (Check all that apply)
   ☐ Elementary
   ☐ Middle School
   ☐ High School
   ☐ Describe your school district:
   ☐ Rural
   ☐ Urban
   ☐ Suburban
5. What is the approximate size of your school district?
   ☐ More than 20,000 students
   ☐ 8,000 to 19,999 students
   ☐ 4,000 to 7,999 students
   ☐ 1,000 to 3,999 students
   ☐ Fewer than 1000 students

ROLES OF TEACHERS

6. At our school teachers:

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Handle building security issues.					
Assist with master scheduling.					
Make presentations to the Board of Education.					
Participate in budget and purchasing decision-making.					
Work with other teachers to develop curriculum.					
Handle communications with media.					
Provide peer feedback for teacher evaluations.					
Mentor new teachers.					
Supervise evening and weekend events.					
Develop action plans for changing demographics.					
Engage in formal processes to resolve teacher disputes.					
Assign consequences for student misbehavior.					
Create a vision for school improvement.					
Provide instructional leadership for the staff.					
Resolve disputes within the staff.					
Analyze and apply test score data to improve teaching and learning.					
Coach other teachers					
Influence grading and instructional practices.					

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Resolve parent complaints.					
Chair school improvement committees.					
Serve as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters.					
Hold formal leadership positions in this school.					
Hold formal leadership positions in our district.					
Plan and present professional development.					
Observe teaching and give feedback to other teachers.					

WORKLOAD OF THE PRINCIPAL

7. As a building principal, how often do you feel stress regarding the following issues:

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
My own ability to manage time efficiently					
Evening and weekend responsibilities					
Constant interruptions					
Sharing leadership with teachers					
Work–life balance					
Being called away from the building for meetings					
Working with parent groups such as PTA, Band Boosters, etc.					
Diminished revenues					

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Concerns regarding personal health and fitness					
Providing instructional leadership faculty					
Providing a vision for school improvement					
General loss of joy in doing this work					
Job expectations of the principalship					
Planning quality professional development activities					
Teachers' resistance to change					
Knowing how to prioritize tasks					
Board of education presentations					
Conflict within the staff					
Feelings of being overwhelmed with job demands					
Student discipline					
Loss of personal time					
Issues with unions					
Insufficient time to "get the job done"					
Working with ineffective or struggling teachers					
Volume of paperwork					
Dealing with parent complaints					
Lunchroom and building supervision					
Responding to student test score results					
Reports to district, state					
Responding to new demands of the curriculum					

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Personal goals and expectations to excel in this job					
Dealing with changing demographics					
Keeping up with email communications					
Dealing with staff disputes					
Increased performance expectations from central office					
Conducting teacher evaluations					

8. What do you see as the most realistic solution to the workload pressures you face?

TEACHER PARTICIPATION

9. I would feel less stress as a principal if teachers performed these functions:

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Assigning consequences for student misbehavior					
Working with teacher teams to develop curriculum					
Working with teachers who are resistant to change					
Chairing school committees					
Handling issues regarding building security other than classroom discipline					
Serving as liaisons to stakeholder groups such as PTA or Band Boosters, etc.					

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in this school					
Conducting peer teaching evaluations					
Completing reports for the district, state					
Handling communications with media					
Providing instructional leadership for the staff					
Influencing building-wide instructional practices					
Supervising evening and weekend events					
Developing plans of action for changing demographics					
Mentoring new teachers					
Presenting to the Board of Education					
Providing professional development training for teachers in this school					
Holding formal or assigned leadership positions in our district					
Analyzing test score data to improve instructional practice					
Resolving parent complaints and concerns					
Resolving problems at the classroom level					
Participating in budget and purchasing decision-making					
Participating in a formal process to resolve staff disputes					

	Almost Daily (4)	Often (3)	Sometimes (2)	Rarely (1)	N/A
Creating a vision for school improvement					
Working with ineffective, struggling teachers					

10. How can teachers provide support to you as principal?
11. What changes would be required in schools to allow teachers to provide support to you as principal?

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Caryn M. Wells is an associate professor for the Department of Educational Leadership at Oakland University, Rochester, Michigan. Her research agenda includes the leadership of teachers, superintendents, and principals; the stress level of change efforts; mindfulness; and professional learning community implementation. She is a former high school principal, counselor, and teacher.

Barbara A. Klocko is an associate professor for the Department of Educational Leadership at Central Michigan University, Mount Pleasant, Michigan. She serves as program director for the master of arts in teacher leadership. Her research interests include resiliency of the educational leader and teacher leadership. She is a former public school administrator and classroom teacher.