MONKEYING IN THE MIDDLE:
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR

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DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to my grandfather and role model, Allan “Buddy” Bellin, whose unflinching belief in me has led me to be the person—and Doctor!—I am today. Among his most important teachings were to recognize the value of asking questions and to appreciate the perspectives and experiences of others, which were essential skills in conducting my dissertation research. My grandfather made a tremendous impact on countless students during his career as a math teacher and guidance counselor, and I hope to someday do the same through my work in education.
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ABSTRACT

MONKEYING IN THE MIDDLE:
THE ROLE OF THE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR

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In large school districts, principal supervisors oversee groups of principals. Principal supervisors commonly have titles such as Area or Regional Superintendents, Leadership Directors or Network Leaders. They are situated in the organizational hierarchy between top district leaders (Chief-level positions) and principals, and serve as the link between these two groups. To reflect recent changes in the responsibilities of principals from a focus on school management to a focus on instruction, many school districts have re-conceptualized the role of principal supervisors based on the premise that having principal supervisors provide support to principals about issues that directly relate to teaching and learning is necessary in order to raise school performance. Using qualitative methods, this research study analyzed the role of principal supervisors as middle managers who are expected to develop the instructional capacity of the principals they supervise by examining how the organizational conditions of school districts and the practices of top district leaders and principals influence principal supervisors’ work. Since there is minimal scholarship in the field of education, the conceptual framework of the study draws on theoretical perspectives about middle managers and strategy implementation from the fields of business and organizational behavior—Argyris & Schon’s (1974) theories of action and Guth & MacMillan’s (1986) middle management expectancy theory.
Through written questionnaires and interviews with top district leaders, principal supervisors and principals in a large, urban school district, this research found that principal supervisors do not spend the majority of their time focusing on developing the instructional capacity of the principals they supervise. Rather, as a result of principal supervisors’ positioning in the district’s organizational hierarchy, the organizational conditions and practices of top district leaders and principals, and principal supervisors’ views about their intended job functions, principal supervisors often serve as “brokers”—intermediaries between central office staff members and principals. Honig & Copland (2008) set forth the conceptualization of principal supervisors as “brokers,” and the findings from this study confirm their findings. However, the results of this study extend their research by offering numerous additional ways in which principal supervisors’ brokering serves central office staff members and principals. As a contribution to the existing scholarship about principal supervisors, I further distill Honig & Copland’s (2008) denotation of principal supervisors as brokers by dividing principal supervisors’ broader brokering functions into three more refined categories of buffering, bolstering and bridging, and providing evidence to support these distinctions. I contend that most of these brokering activities are consistent with the district goal of having principal supervisors support principals’ instructional leadership.

The findings from this study have a variety of implications for school districts, including the need for districts to either further refine the role of principal supervisors based on the realities of principal supervisors’ daily work, or to address district organizational conditions and practices in a way that allows principal supervisors to serve their intended instructional role.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION………………………………………………………………………….ii  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS…………………………………………………………………iii  
ABSTRACT……………………………………………………………………………………iv  
LIST OF TABLES……………………………………………………………………………ix  
LIST OF FIGURES…………………………………………………………………………..x

Chapter 1 – Introduction.......................................................................................1  
  Problem Statement...............................................................................................2  
  Study Purpose.......................................................................................................4  
  Research Questions...............................................................................................5  
  Methodological Overview....................................................................................6  
  Organization of this Dissertation........................................................................7

Chapter 2 – Literature Review...........................................................................9  
  Instructional Leadership........................................................................................10  
    Principal Supervisors..........................................................................................14  
        Function and Purpose......................................................................................14  
        Impact as Instructional Leaders.................................................................16  
    Central Office Administrators...........................................................................19  
        Function and Purpose......................................................................................19  
    Principal Supervisors as Middle Managers.....................................................32  
    Middle Managers and Organizational Strategy..............................................35  
  Conceptual Framework.......................................................................................38  
    Theories of Action..............................................................................................39  
    Middle Management Expectancy Theory.......................................................41  
    Definition of Key Terms...................................................................................46  
        The Objective of Principal Support............................................................46  
        Conceptualization of Instructional Leadership............................................47

Chapter 3 – Research Methodology...................................................................49  
  Site Selection and Context of Study...................................................................50  
  Participant Selection............................................................................................53  
  Methods and Research Design............................................................................54  
  Data Collection.....................................................................................................55  
        Document Review...........................................................................................55  
        Questionnaires...............................................................................................56  
        Interviews.......................................................................................................57  
        Memos............................................................................................................62  
        Research Journal.............................................................................................63  
        Sequencing.....................................................................................................64  
        vi
Data Analysis.................................................................................................................65
  Questionnaires .........................................................................................................66
  Interviews ..................................................................................................................67
Data Management........................................................................................................70
Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity ............................................................................70
Researcher Roles and Positionality ............................................................................70
Addressing Threats to Validity ....................................................................................72

Chapter 4 – Results......................................................................................................75
  Principal Supervisors’ Positioning (Research Question #1) .....................................80
    District Organizational Hierarchy ............................................................................80
    Principal Supervisors as Central Office Leaders ....................................................87
    Principal Supervisors as Principal Overseers .......................................................89
  Principal Supervisors as Brokers (Research Question #2) .....................................92
    Buffering .................................................................................................................97
      Buffering Central Office Staff from Principals ....................................................98
      Prioritizers ..........................................................................................................98
      Buffering Principals From Central Office Staff ...............................................100
      Prioritizers ........................................................................................................100
      Time Protectors .................................................................................................101
      Central Office Support Managers ..................................................................104
  Bolstering .................................................................................................................105
    Bolstering for Central Office Staff .................................................................106
    Enforcers .............................................................................................................106
  Messengers ...............................................................................................................107
    Bolstering for Principals .......................................................................................109
      Connectors ..........................................................................................................109
      Rubber Stampers ..............................................................................................110
      Advocates .........................................................................................................111
  Bridging Between Central Office Staff and Principals .........................................113
    Aligners .................................................................................................................113
    Clarifiers ..............................................................................................................115
    Communication Facilitators ..............................................................................116
  The Decision to Broker ..........................................................................................117
  Allocation of Brokering Activities ........................................................................120
  Principal Supervisors and Instructional Leadership (Research Question #3) ....125
    Principal Supervisors as Instructional Leaders ...................................................125
    Principal Supervisors as Strategic Brokers .........................................................130
  Other Findings ........................................................................................................132
    Unintended Consequences of Spending More Time in Schools ......................132
    Role Revision Process .........................................................................................135
    Assessing Principal Supervisors’ Job Performance ...........................................136

vii
Chapter 5 – Discussion and Recommendations.................................................................139
   A Focus on Principal Support Through Brokering......................................................139
   Principal Supervisors’ Views About Being Instructional Leaders............................145
   Understanding and Addressing Principal Supervisors’ Perspectives.......................152
   Non-instructional, Instructional Leaders.....................................................................156
   Central Office Staff Support......................................................................................156
   Screening, Professional Development and Evaluation of
   Principal Supervisors.................................................................................................169
   Limitations of This Study..........................................................................................172
   Directions for Future Research................................................................................174
   Concluding Thoughts.................................................................................................176

Appendix A – Informed Consent Form........................................................................180
Appendix B – Principal Questionnaire.........................................................................182
Appendix C – Principal Supervisor Questionnaire........................................................184
Appendix D – Top District Leader Questionnaire..........................................................186
Appendix E – Principal Interview One Guide.................................................................187
Appendix F – Principal Supervisor Interview One Guide..............................................188
Appendix G – Top District Leader Interview One Guide...............................................189
Appendix H – Principal Interview Two Guide.................................................................190
Appendix I – Principal Supervisor Interview Two Guide..............................................191
Appendix J – Top District Leader Interview Two Guide................................................193

BIBLIOGRAPHY.............................................................................................................195
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Information Obtained from Written Questionnaires…………………………57
Table 2 – Information Obtained from Interviews.......................................................61
Table 3 – Overview of Brokering Findings..............................................................77
Table 4 – Principal Supervisors’ Brokering Responses...........................................121
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework, Argyris & Schon’s Theory of Action.................................................................45

Figure 2 – Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework, Guth & Macmillian’s Middle Management Expectancy Theory.................................46

Figure 3 – District’s Organizational Chart...............................................................82

Figure 4 – Purpose of Network Support Teams.....................................................85

Figure 5 – Expanded Conceptualization of Principal Supervisors as Brokers..........95

Figure 6 – Relationship Between District’s Design Theory, Participants’ Espoused Theories and Theories-in-Use............................................157
Chapter 1
INTRODUCTION

Our society highly values leadership. The media is flooded with stories about both effective and ineffective leaders in government, business and other fields. National bestselling book lists include books that examine facets of leadership by well-respected authors such as Jim Collins, Jack Welsh and Peter Drucker. Outstanding leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr., Margaret Thatcher and Mahatma Gandhi are celebrated and immortalized. Thus, it is not surprising that education leadership has received a great deal of attention.

Largely in response to mounting pressure to improve students’ academic outcomes and the subsequent increase in school-based accountability, the role of the school principal is different today than it was two decades ago. Historically, principals served as operations managers, but during the last twenty years or so, many scholars in the field of education and leaders in school districts around the country have redefined the principal position to emphasize instruction, based on the premise that principals who focus on the quality of instruction in their schools will raise their school’s performance (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Elmore, 2004; Fink & Resnick, 2001). The Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Denver Public Schools, Milwaukee Public Schools, New York City Department of Education, and Tulsa Public Schools are examples of large school districts that have increased principals’ focus on teaching and learning (Syed, 2014).

As many researchers have documented, school district central offices have traditionally served mainly as fiscal or administrative pass-throughs for federal and state
initiatives and have supported school operations, including busing, facilities, purchasing and employee contracts and pay (e.g. Hightower, Knapp, Marsh, & McLaughlin, 2002). In recent years, however, the education community has called for school districts to shift the work practices of central office staff members from these managerial functions to teaching and learning-related functions. Given this trend and the emphasis on the importance of principal leadership, some school districts are beginning to pay closer attention to the role of principal supervisors—individuals who have traditionally been charged with overseeing, supporting and evaluating school leaders. To mirror the changed role of principals, a growing number of school districts have moved principal supervisors’ focus from one of operational management to one of instructional support for principals. The Broward County Public Schools, Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Des Moines Public Schools, Long Beach Unified School District, and Minneapolis Public Schools are some of the school districts across the country that are committed to changing the historical role of principal supervisors (Syed, 2014).

Problem Statement

According to assessment data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which publishes annually The Nation’s Report Card, students who attend our nation’s urban schools perform below grade-level in core academic subjects. As will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2, research has shown that principals are one of the most influential in-school factors in increasing student achievement, and their influence is even greater in low-achieving, high-poverty schools. Moreover, the
chronically low performance of students in urban schools has been attributed partially to high principal turnover, as the departure of a principal can instigate an exodus of teachers, disrupt school culture, and cause parent involvement to waver (Macmillian, 2000; Fink & Brayman, 2006). Nearly 30% of principals in such schools resign every year, and by their third year in the position nearly half of all such principals leave their jobs (Tyre, 2015). Moreover, there is concern about an uptick in this figure in recent years, as job satisfaction among principals is diminishing. Between 2008 and 2012, job satisfaction of principals decreased by 9%, from 68% to 59% (Markow, Macia, & Lee, 2013).

In our nation’s most troubled schools, where strong and consistent principal leadership is most urgently needed, providing support to principals so that they can be more effective and satisfied leaders is essential to improving student outcomes. Principal supervisors are often the centerpiece of a district’s support system for its principals. In most large school districts, principal supervisors serve as the only intermediaries between the district’s central office and individual schools. Therefore, in order to understand how large school districts support principals, we must understand the role of the principal supervisor. This understanding may offer insights about how to better support principals by enhancing their effectiveness as school leaders and thereby raising the academic outcomes of their students.
Study Purpose

Current scholarship stresses the importance of having principals in large, urban school districts operate as instructional leaders and of having central office staff members, including principal supervisors, provide job-embedded supports to principals in serving as instructional leaders (Augustine, Gonzalez, Ikemoto, Russell, Zellman, Constant, Armstrong, & Dembosky, 2009; Donaldson, 2008; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Gallucci & Swanson, 2006; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). The limited literature specific to principal supervisors explains that they are often challenged to simultaneously respond to the differing requests and expectations of top district leaders to whom they report and to the principals they oversee (Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall & Simon, 2013; Honig & Copland, 2008). However, there is little existing scholarship about how principal supervisors’ positioning in the district’s bureaucratic structure influences their implementation of organizational strategy, and specifically the organizational strategy of instructional leadership that is prevalent in school districts today. The existing literature and its limitations will be discussed in more detail in chapter 2. Because of the minimal research in the field of education, I turned to literature about middle management and theoretical perspectives about middle managers and strategy implementation from the fields of business and organizational behavior (Beatty & Lee, 1992; Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Nonaka, 1991; Dutton, Asford, O’Neil, & Lawrence, 2001; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1999; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Huy, 2001, 2002; Kodama, 2005; Ling, Floyd, & Baldridge, 2005; Louis, 1998; Mantere, 2007; Rouleau, 2005).
My work in this study builds on these burgeoning research developments about principal supervisors which have informed district reform efforts that target principal supervisors. My research is rooted in the premise that district central office administrators can support teaching and learning in ways that will result in students’ increased academic achievement if appropriate organizational structures are in place to support the intended outcomes.

The primary goal of this study was to delve deeply into the role of the principal supervisor, in order both to contribute to the scholarship about principal supervisors and to offer recommendations for how school districts can better support principals. Given the proliferating number of districts across the country that are redefining the role of principal supervisors, my work in this area is both valuable and timely.

**Research Questions**

The focus of exploration in this study was whether a district reform initiative that seeks to shift principal supervisors’ support of principals from one of operational management to one of instructional support was implemented in accordance with district intentions to increase principals’ focus on instructional issues. I also examined whether principals, principal supervisors and other district leaders are aligned in their perceptions of the role of principal supervisors in supporting the instructional focus of principals’ work and if the practices of these stakeholders match the intended role of principal supervisors. The research questions investigated in this study were:
1) In what ways do the positioning of principal supervisors in large school district organizational hierarchies impact their ability to serve as instructional leaders?

2) What requests from, and expectations by, top district leaders and principals help and/or hinder principal supervisors’ work in supporting principals’ instructional leadership?

3) How do principal supervisors understand, manage and negotiate their roles as middle managers between principals and top district leaders?

As I overview in the section that follows and detail in chapter 3, after my review of the literature in chapter 2, these research questions guided the development of the conceptual framework and the research methodology, including site and participant selection, research design, data collection and data analysis.

**Methodological Overview**

This research is a qualitative case study that considers the role of principal supervisors as middle managers who are situated between top district leaders (e.g. Chief-level positions) and school-based leaders, and examines how their positioning as middle managers in the organizational hierarchy influences their ability to serve as instructional leaders who are expected to develop principals’ instructional capacities. Since qualitative inquiry focuses on meaning-making in context, qualitative methodology provided the most appropriate means for me to address the research questions.
The various components of the study are dynamically and logically connected to answer the research questions through use of what Ravitch & Carl (2016) refer to as the “horizontals of qualitative research”—criticality, reflexivity, collaboration and rigor. As I will detail in my description of the research methodology in chapter 3, the research methods involved administering written questionnaires, conducting interviews and reviewing relevant documents. The data collection methods were situated in relation to each other in terms of sequencing, the nature of the data sought and the ways in which the data collection methods support the development of both each other and the larger set of data. Participants included principals, principal supervisors and Chief-level district leaders. I used an iterative, ongoing and systematic process for data analysis that included a descriptive coding approach. In addition, I planned for validity and trustworthiness in and through the research design of this study by considering researcher positionality, descriptive validity, interpretative validity, methodological triangulation and perspectival triangulation.

**Organization of this Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduced the study by presenting the rationale for, and significance of, the research, followed by the research questions investigated, and a brief explanation of the research methodology and design used. Chapter 2 presents a review of scholarship about the role of principals, central office administrators and principal supervisors, as well as research about the instructional impact and influence on students’ academic outcomes of each of these roles. I also make
an argument for considering principal supervisors as middle managers, followed by an overview of research about the effect of middle managers on the implementation of organizational strategy, drawing from literature in the fields of business and organizational theory. I then provide narrative and visual representations of the conceptual framework that underpins the study. Chapter 3 describes the research design and methodology of the study and its logic, including the site of study, participant selection, selection criteria, data collection and analysis process. I also discuss my positionality as a researcher and issues of validity. Chapter 4 provides the results from the study that relate to the research questions as well as additional findings from the research. Chapter 5 concludes the dissertation by discussing the implications of the study and suggestions for future research. The appendix includes the written questionnaire that was administered to each participant group and the interview protocols for each of the participant interviews.
Chapter 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Since most districts purport to be using an instructional leadership framework as the basis of their reform efforts to redefine expectations for both principals and principal supervisors, I first survey the literature about instructional leadership. To illuminate the relational dynamics between principal supervisors and their superiors and subordinates, which is required in an examination of principal supervisors’ positioning in school district organizational hierarchies, I then review scholarship about the role of principals and the function of central office leaders in supporting issues related to teaching and learning before turning to the limited existing literature about the role of principal supervisors. Since the increased instructional responsibilities of principals and principal supervisors are based on the notion that a focus on instructional issues will result in improved instruction and increased student achievement, I also review studies that examine the extent to which this notion is supported by research. I then consider the positioning of principal supervisors as middle managers who are expected to serve as instructional leaders as part of their school district’s strategy to improve student outcomes by surveying research about middle management and organizational strategy implementation. Lastly, I present the conceptual framework I used as the basis of this study, which draws on the scholarship discussed earlier in the chapter.
Instructional Leadership

During the past century, educational leadership has been studied from many different angles and perspectives, leading to the emergence of a wide range of practical and theoretical approaches. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the emerging performance standards movement led to a heightened interest in instructional leadership as a leadership construct. As previously described, instructional leadership calls for a laser-like focus on issues that directly concern teaching and learning. The premise of instructional leadership developed from research about high-performing schools which underscored the notion that principals in effective schools were focused on issues that directly related to teaching and learning (Edmonds, 1979). Even though critics identified inherent gaps in this line of reasoning (e.g., Barth, 1986), as well as limitations of the research (e.g., Bossert, Dwyer, Rowan, & Lee, 1982; Cuban, 1984), instructional leadership became accepted as a normatively desirable function of school leadership. The tenets of instructional leadership are evident in education policy, research and practice today, and such leadership is the basis of the design of most current education leadership preparation and development programs. As part of school improvement efforts, many school districts around the country have used an instructional leadership framework to define district-wide expectations around teaching and learning.

Researchers have documented several specific ways in which principals engage in instructional leadership activities (Blase & Blase, 1999; Bolman & Deal, 1992; Bossert et al., 1982; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Heck, 1992; Heck & Hallinger, 2005; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marsh,
Kerr, Schuyler-Ikemoto, Darilek, Suttorp, & Zimmer (2005; Reynolds, Teddlie, Hopkins, & Stringfield, 2000; Walters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). These researchers examined principals’ instructional leadership through different approaches and therefore came to varying—but not incompatible—views about what constitutes effective instructional leadership practices. For example, Blase & Blase (1999) detailed how principals contributed to improvements in the quality of teaching in their schools by observing classroom activities and giving teachers feedback and praise, modeling instruction, and using inquiry-based approaches that fostered teachers’ reflections on their practice. The researchers examined teachers’ perspectives about the impact of principals’ instructional leadership activities on their teaching. Hallinger (2003) outlined ten practices of a principal who is an instructional leader: framing the school’s goals; communicating the school’s goals; coordinating the curriculum; supervising and evaluating instruction; monitoring student progress; protecting instructional time; providing incentives for teachers; providing incentives for learning; promoting professional development; and maintaining high visibility. Hallinger concluded that the ultimate effectiveness of principals’ use of an instructional leadership model is linked both to factors in the local context of a school and to the school’s external environment. According to Lemoine, McCormack, & Richardson’s (2014) synthesis of studies about principals’ instructional leadership practices, a principal who exercises instructional leadership presents focused and ongoing professional development; encourages instructional innovations; invites teachers to become part of the school leadership team; establishes a safe, orderly, and positive school environment and culture; manages time wisely; has a presence throughout
the school; and frequently monitors and evaluates teachers and student learning. While researchers highlighted different instructional leadership activities in terms of their relative importance, the scholarship generally supports the conclusion that school leadership contributes to improved student learning through use of structural and sociocultural processes.

Critics of early notions of instructional leadership believed that such notions did not value school culture sufficiently, and they questioned whether a “heroic” model of school leadership fit the needs of schools (e.g., Barth, 1986; Bossert et al., 1982; Cuban, 1984). Partly in response to these criticisms, the concept of instructional leadership has evolved during the past few decades. The scholarship from the 1970s and 1980s conceived instructional leadership as a directive, top-down approach that is carried out by the principal (Bossert et al., 1982; Dwyer 1986; Edmonds, 1979; Glasman, 1984; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985a; Leithwood & Montgomery, 1982). Relatively little reference was made to teachers, department heads or assistant principals as instructional leaders. Moreover, there was little discussion of instructional leadership as a distributed characteristic or a function to be shared. Some contemporary scholars emphasize the distributed and joint attributes of instructional leadership with school- and district-based staff members in their conceptualization of instructional leadership (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2001; Jackson, 2000; Lambert, 2002; Marks & Printy, 2003; Southworth, 2002).

In adopting an instructional leadership construct for a variety of leadership roles, some school districts are strategically aligning expectations of instructional leadership
across different leadership levels and positions. For example, in their review of how school districts are defining instructional leadership as part of reform initiatives and how they are taking steps to implement instructional leadership practices, Honig & Rainey (2015) found that Aspire Public Schools began defining instructional leadership at the teacher level. Aspire Public Schools initially defined what high-quality teaching entailed, and then defined the instructional leadership responsibilities of principals and principal supervisors based on their conceptualization of excellent teaching. In another example, Honig and Rainey found that Green Dot Public Schools provided professional development about the same instructional topics for teachers, principals and principal supervisors, but the content of the professional development was differentiated based on job functions. For example, teachers may receive professional development that deepened their knowledge of science instructional strategies, while principals may receive guidance on how to observe the use of these instructional strategies during classroom walkthroughs, and principal supervisors may learn how to coach principals in providing feedback to teachers who are struggling with using the recommended science instructional strategies.

Research conducted about why some large, urban school districts experience academic gains more quickly than other similarly-sized districts with comparable demographics suggests that management and organizational structures may be an important, but not the determining, factors in improving district performance (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Honig & Copland, 2008; Honig, 2013; Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). Rather, research by Corcoran et al. (2013) indicated
that it is the extent to which these management and organizational structures support and enhance instructional quality that determines their impact on student achievement. They studied how principal supervisors in a handful of school districts nationwide are assigned to schools to lead (ex. by geographic location, school theme/focus or grade-levels), who principal supervisors report to and the support they receive from other central office personnel. Based on their findings, Corcoran et al. concluded that principal supervisors are in a position to drive instructional quality at the school-level. In order to understand the role of principal supervisors in supporting and developing principals’ instructional capacities, we must first understand the relational dynamics of principal supervisors in the school district organizational context. For this reason, I will provide an overview of literature about principals and then review scholarship about district central office leaders.

**Principals**

**Function and purpose.**

The responsibilities of school principals have evolved over time. In the nineteenth century, principals spent the majority of their workdays in classrooms as teachers who had administrative responsibilities in addition to teaching responsibilities. Influenced by the economic changes of the era, educational reformers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century believed that an improved administrative structure and attention to school management would lead to improved education practice. Drawing an analogy to factory work, they contended that principals should become
administrative bureaucrats of a school “plant”. These reforms distanced the principal from the classrooms and student learning, and created an administrative culture of authority and discipline. The pendulum swung in the 1970s after a series of research studies about effective schools concluded that strong principals supported instruction, as will be detailed in the last section of this chapter. According to this research, principals should be “hands-on in classrooms, hip-deep in curriculum and instruction” (Cuban, 1984, p. 5), and work directly with teachers on their teaching practices (Bossert et al., 1982; Cuban, 1984; Dwyer, 1986; Edmonds, 1979; Hallinger & Heck, 1996a, 1996b; Hallinger & Murphy, 1986; Heck, Larsen, & Marcoulides, 1990; Leithwood, Begley & Cousins, 1990). This research largely relied on cross-sectional surveys of principal effectiveness and case studies of school improvement, but the actionable nature of the findings of these studies was encouraging to policymakers and practitioners.

As previously explained, increased pressure on principals to improve teaching in order to elevate student achievement has continued to mount in recent years as a result of school accountability policies. Principals are now expected to serve as instructional leaders who spend the majority of their time on issues that directly concern teaching and learning, including establishing clear academic goals for their school, motivating staff and students to work towards those goals, monitoring progress made towards attaining those goals, aligning teaching and learning activities with those goals and coaching teachers in a range of instructional areas (Bolman & Deal, 1992; Bossert et al., 1982; Copland & Knapp, 2006; Elmore, 2004; Fink & Resnick, 2001). Portin, Schneider, DeArmond & Gundlach (2003) explained that principals should “attack teacher isolation” by encouraging staff to work collaboratively and by being attentive to how time is
allocated for collaborative teacher planning (p. 11). Seashore Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom, & Anderson (2010) described the role of principals in encouraging teachers’ professional learning by emphasizing research-based instructional strategies and initiating discussions about instructional approaches, both in teams and with individual teachers.

Some scholars have noted that in addition to these instructional responsibilities, principals continue to have non-instructional responsibilities, especially in districts that have site-based autonomies. Bartoletti & Connelly (2014) wrote:

Principals are in the hot seat to improve teaching and learning. They need to be educational visionaries; instructional and curriculum leaders; but also assessment experts; disciplinarians; community builders; public relations experts; budget analysts; facility managers; special program administrators; and expert overseers of legal, contractual, and policy mandates and initiatives (p. 2).

Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr & Cohen (2007) stated that in order to be successful in prioritizing instructional responsibilities, principals must be “skillful at delegating some of their management duties to make time for instructional tasks” (p. 22). Since the basis of the shift in the responsibilities ascribed to principals and principal supervisors rests on the premise that principals who focus on instructional issues will be able to lead their schools to dramatic increases in student achievement by increasing the quality of instruction, I will now scrutinize scholarship about the effects principals have on teaching and learning to understand how this notion is supported by research.

**Impact as instructional leaders.**

Accountability pressures have spurred increasingly more sophisticated and large-scale research on the conditions that support improved student achievement, and some
research has attempted to establish empirical effects of school leadership on student learning as well as key aspects of leadership that produce improved outcomes (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Robinson, Lloyd, & Row, 2008). This research has sought to inform district reform initiatives that pertain to instructional leadership. A great deal of scholarship supports the presumption that student outcomes will improve if principals focus on issues directly related to teaching and learning. Many scholars have studied whether and how principal leadership improves instruction and students’ academic achievement (Blase & Blase, 2004; Bredeson & Kose, 2005; City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009; Firestone & Riehl, 2005; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003; Riehl, 2000). Several researchers have affirmed a strong connection between school leadership and student outcomes (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Donaldson, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2012; Hitt, Tucker & Young, 2012; Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) synthesized seventy research studies relating principal leadership to student achievement that were conducted from the early 1970s through the early 2000s. Across these disparate studies, they found a statistically significant positive correlation of .25 between principal instructional practices and student learning, leading them to claim that “A highly effective school leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall academic achievement of students” (p. 10). After examining the empirical literature on the relationship between the principal’s role and school effectiveness in the late twentieth century, Leithwood et al. (2004) concluded that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact on student learning. As part of the same study, Leithwood et al. noted that “There are virtually no documented instances of troubled schools being turned around
without intervention by a powerful leader. Many other factors may contribute to such turnarounds, but leadership is the catalyst” (p. 5).

Other researchers have identified a less direct, but still significant, connection between principal practices and academic outcomes. Based on their synthesis of forty-three studies conducted between 1980 and 1995 that investigated evidence of the relationship between principal leadership and student achievement, Hallinger & Heck (1998) concluded that principals have a measurable, but indirect, effect on school effectiveness and student achievement. Supovitz, Sirinides, & May (2010) studied the relationship between student learning, principal leadership, peer teacher influence and changes in teachers’ instructional practice, and concluded that principals’ indirect influence stems from their efforts to foster collaboration and communication among teachers around instruction. Seashore Louis et al. (2010) conducted the largest investigation of the topic to date—collecting data from respondents in forty-three school districts in nine states—and found that principals’ impact on instructional quality increases to the extent that principals strengthen the sense of professional community and teachers’ engagement in this community.

Although research linking principals’ instructional leadership to higher student achievement has led to a general consensus about the importance of principals engaging in instructional leadership activities, Wimpelberg (1987) warned that it is foolish to expect that principals can serve as effective instructional leaders if they do not receive support from their central office. In a similar vein, Elmore (2000) critiqued the current, pervasive pressure on principals to be instructional leaders who lead school improvement,
cautioning that “Relying on leaders to solve the problem of systemic reform in schools is, to put it bluntly, asking people to do something they don’t know how to do and have had no occasion to learn in the course of their careers” (p. 2). Casserly, Lewis, Simon, Uzzell, & Palacios (2013) also shared this line of thought, contending that:

Effective school leadership depends on support from district officials. Except for those who are the most entrepreneurial, principals are unlikely to proceed with a leadership style focused on learning if the district and state are unsupportive, disinterested or pursuing other agendas (p. 16).

My review of scholarship about the role of principals and their impact on the quality of instruction in this section provides a foundation for understanding how principal supervisors are intended to improve principals’ instructional capacities. In order to develop a deeper understanding of the relational dynamics between principal supervisors and the district leaders with whom they work, I must also study how central office administrators support teaching and learning. Therefore, I will now turn to scholarship about the activities of central office personnel.

Central Office Administrators

Function and purpose.

Public anti-central office rhetoric abounds with stories of mismanagement, waste and corruption in large school district bureaucracies. This rhetoric has contributed to, and has been perpetuated by, the school choice and site-based autonomy movements. In addition, as Honig (2012) wrote, “School district central offices were originally established and have historically operated to carry out a limited range of largely regulatory and basic business functions, not to support teaching and learning
improvement, let alone support principals’ instructional leadership” (p. 735). There are an increasing number of scholars, however, who contend that a district’s central office can have an important role in supporting teaching and learning (e.g., Iver & Farley-Ripple, 2008). Much of their scholarship necessarily is focused on large, urban school districts which have sizable central offices, since more than half of the school districts in the United States have only a handful of central office employees (e.g., a superintendent and a business director) (Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000).

As with research about instructional leadership, the earliest scholarship highlighting that school district central offices should play a role in improving student achievement was built on the foundation of research about effective schools (e.g., Brookover, Beady, Flood, Schweitzer, & Wisenbaker, 1979; Brookover & Schneider, 1975; Edmonds, 1979; Lezotte, Edmonds, & Ratner, 1974; Lezotte, Hathway, Miller, Passalacqua, & Brookover, 1980). Interest in the topic was spurred by researchers such as Wimpelberg (1987), who pointed out that most teachers and principals do not innately exhibit the characteristics of teachers and principals in “effective schools” and thus there is a need for district leaders to help school-based staff members develop such characteristics. The majority of studies conducted before the 1990s found that district central offices gave little attention to curriculum and instruction issues or to equipping principals with skills and tools required to lead effectively in this area (e.g., Crowson & Morris, 1985; Floden, Porter, Alford, Freeman, Irwin, Schmidt, & Schwille, 1988; Hannaway & Sproull, 1978; Rowan, 1982). Elmore (1993) summarized this literature, stating that there was a tendency for “key decisions on curriculum and teaching [to be]
passed from states to districts, from districts to principals, and from principals to teachers, with little effective focus or guidance” (p. 116). In a later analysis, Elmore (2000) situated the lack of attention by most central office administrators to the instructional “core” within the theory of loose coupling (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Weick, 1976). Elmore (2000) wrote:

The administrative superstructure of the organization—principals, board members, and administrators—exists to “buffer” the weak technical core of teaching from outside inspection, interference, or disruption. Administration in education, then, has come to mean not the management of instruction but the management of the structures and processes around instruction (p. 6).

There is considerable agreement in recent literature about the importance of the central office in supporting and servicing the schools, as well as about the role of a district’s central office in establishing a district-wide culture that emphasizes student achievement as being the primary responsibility of every staff member in the district (e.g., Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Quellmalz, Shields, & Knapp, 1995); providing professional development offerings about instructional issues, such as interpreting data to make instructional decisions (e.g., Fitzgerald, 1993; Shipengrover & Conway, 1996); aligning curriculum and assessment to instructional practice (e.g., Bullard & Taylor, 1993; Cawelti & Protheroe, 2001; Honig & Copland, 2008); recruiting principals and teachers who are strong instructional leaders (e.g. Quellmalz, Shields, & Knapp, 1995); and providing needed administrative support and resources so that good instruction can occur (e.g., Ragland, Asera, & Johnson, 1999; Skrla, Scheurich, & Johnson, 2000). In their meta-analysis of studies of high-performing or significantly improving districts, Iver & Farley-Ripple (2008) outlined common practices of central offices which support
students’ academic outcomes: providing curriculum and instruction services to schools, including selecting externally developed instructional models; offering professional development for teachers and principals; and facilitating and evaluating the implementation of specific reforms (either externally or internally developed) to improve instruction and student achievement.

Some researchers have noted the effects of a lack of support by central office administrators. For example, McLaughlin & Talbert’s (2001) study of teacher professional learning communities and Berends, Bodilly & Kirby’s (2002) study of comprehensive school reform designs revealed how instructionally-focused reform efforts plateaued, lumbered or outright failed absent central office administrators’ support for implementation. Similarly, there are a handful of studies which concluded that central office administrators should provide additional support for principal learning (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Rorrer, Skrla, & Scheurich, 2008; Togneri & Anderson, 2003). While these researchers underscored the importance of a central office in improving teaching and learning, they pointed to what district leaders should not do to support this work rather than what they should do to support this work.

There is a growing body of research about the specific role that the central office plays in developing principals’ instructional leadership (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Elmore, 2007; Honig, 2012; Honig & Copland, 2008; Hubbard, Mehan & Stein, 2006). A central tenet of this research is that groups of principals should be convened on a regular basis to discuss issues related to instruction. However, this literature is largely conceptual in nature and does not detail specific practices. In a case study of central office
administrators in San Diego, Hubbard et al. (2006) found that district leaders struggled to help principals improve their instructional leadership because they were not successful in their attempts to focus on instructional issues rather than on operational issues. This resulted from long-standing institutional patterns of practice and an overall lack of capacity for district leaders’ new instructional support roles. Similarly, Honig (2006) found that central office personnel who tried to alter their practices and their relationships with principals tended to fall back on traditional central office practices and relationships. Doing so impeded their ability to focus on instruction.

As Honig (2012) noted, there are shortcomings in the literature about how central office administrators support teaching and learning. These shortcomings stem in part from methodological limitations of the research. Many of the studies about central offices rely on single interviews with a small handful of central office administrators or on school principals’ reports about central office support and do not reveal the daily practices of central office administrators. Honig (2012) wrote:

Central office administrators and their work practices have been so invisible in (education) research that it is not uncommon for district studies—even studies purportedly focused on the district role in instructional improvement—to refer to “the district” or “the central office” as a monolithic actor in such reforms (p. 3).

Because these studies overlook the day-to-day practices of central office staff members, they do not assist in an understanding what such administrators are doing daily to foster or frustrate high-quality instruction and do not serve as guides for how central office administrators can effectively participate in improvement efforts.
In previous sections, I surveyed the landscape of major studies and perspectives about the role of principals, the impact of principals on teaching and learning, and the function of district central office personnel. This survey has helped to situate principal supervisors in a relational context. Having reviewed scholarship about leaders at the school-level and leaders at the district-level who are supported by, and support, principal supervisors, respectively, I will now examine the role of principal supervisors, who are expected to be the conduit between these two levels of leaders.

**Principal Supervisors**

**Function and purpose.**

Principal supervisors are the centerpieces of most large districts’ support systems for their principals. As central office staff members who support, monitor and assess principal performance, principal supervisors are the link between high-level district leaders and school leaders. Large school systems hire individuals who are exclusively devoted to principal supervision, but in smaller school systems (e.g., those with fewer than 10,000 students), superintendents and directors of teaching and learning often function as principal supervisors in addition to having other responsibilities (Corcoran et al., 2013). Since the principal supervisor position only exists in sizable school districts, the discussion of principal supervisors in this paper will be limited to school districts of this scale.

Perhaps because the dedicated position of principal supervisor only exists in select school districts, there is a dearth of academic research literature that directly

24
addresses the topic of the role of the principal supervisor. Most of the literature that exists about the role of the principal supervisor reflects expert opinions and some descriptive case studies (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Condon & Clifford, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill, 2013; Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Honig, 2012, 2013; Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009; Syed, 2014).

The size and composition of the groups of principals that principal supervisors oversee varies across school systems. Research about best practices for a manageable caseload of principals for one principal supervisor indicates that a caseload of between eight to twelve principals is ideal (Honig and Rainey, 2014). However, it is not uncommon in large, urban districts that are under-resourced for principal supervisors to oversee a larger number of principals—sometimes more than two or three times the best practice caseload. The Council of the Great City Schools reported that the average supervisor-to-principal ratio is 1:24 (Corcoran, et al., 2013). Some school districts group principals by school-level or geographic location, while other school districts group principals by school programming offerings (e.g. S.T.E.M. or career and technical education). Many school districts cluster chronically low-performing, “turnaround” schools under a specific principal supervisor. A number of school districts attempt to assign schools to principal supervisors based on a match between a principal supervisor’s background and the needs of the schools, although principal supervisors sometimes lack the background and expertise to effectively and equitably support all of the schools they supervise. For example, schools with large populations of students who are English language learners may be grouped under a principal supervisor who has expertise in English as a second language instruction, but a principal supervisor who has experience
at the high school level may be responsible for overseeing some elementary school principals (Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009).

As explained earlier, a focus on school-based accountability has led many school districts to consider more closely the purpose of the principalship in instructional improvement. In some districts, the changed role of principals from a focus on compliance and management to a focus on issues that directly relate to teaching and learning has led to a similar shift in the conceptualization of the role of principal supervisors, based on the notion that providing strong support to principals in instructional areas will lead both to the school reaching its academic goals and to the district reaching its academic goals. Many of these districts have changed principal supervisors’ job titles to highlight their role in principal development. For example, in the Hillsborough County Public Schools, principal supervisors used to be called “Area Directors,” and their new title is “Leadership Directors” (Corcoran et al., 2013).

The most comprehensive research on the role of the principal supervisor was commissioned by the Council of the Great City Schools as a two-part study conducted in the fall of 2012 and in the spring of 2013. The study compared common themes across a coalition of 67 of the nation’s largest urban public school districts that were members of the Council of Great City Schools in the ways in which principal supervisors are selected, supported and evaluated. As part of the study, Casserly et al. (2013) surveyed principal supervisors in 41 districts about their job functions. The top five instructional tasks that principal supervisors reported that they were expected to perform to support principals included: conversing with principals about student performance data, visiting classrooms
with principals, evaluating principals, coaching principals individually on instructional issues and conducting professional development with principals in groups. Most districts surveyed vested their principal supervisors with both principal support and principal evaluation responsibilities.

Despite the intended role of principal supervisors as being primarily focused on instructional issues, a number of scholars have documented that principal supervisors often lack the training, time and tools required to evaluate principals’ instructional needs and to provide principals with high-quality, job-embedded professional development (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Condon & Clifford, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill, 2013; Goldring et al., 2009; Honig, 2012, 2013; Honig et al., 2010; Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009; Syed, 2014). Corcoran et al. (2013) found that in practice, principal supervisors often serve multiple non-instructional roles and need to juggle competing demands for their time. Corcoran et al.’s study found that principal supervisors struggle with how to respond to mixed messages and conflicting mandates they receive from top district leaders. They elaborate, “While many districts envision a strong and growing instructional leadership role for principal supervisors, in practice these supervisors often still handle extensive administrative oversight responsibilities as vestiges of past structures or roles—and with diminished central office resources” (p. 39). Principal supervisors in many districts reported that they continue to be in charge of duties that are not directly related to teaching and learning, such as overseeing school inventories and budgets, approving field trips, and responding to day-to-day parent requests and issues. For example, in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Public Schools, principal supervisors are
responsible for providing direct technical assistance to principals with issues involving planning family/community events and maintaining school facilities, in addition to providing instructional support.

Some districts seek to ease principal supervisors’ non-instructional management responsibilities by arranging staffing structures to provide an extended network of support staff to assist principals with operational and some instructional needs. For example, the New York City Department of Education provides each network of schools, which is led by a principal supervisor, with a staff of approximately fifteen staff members who are specialists in various instructional and operational areas. These staff members include content specialists, special education and English as a Second Language specialists, human resources specialists and budget specialists (Corcoran et al., 2013).

Regardless of whether principal supervisors are responsible for providing direct technical assistance to principals about non-instructional issues or whether they have staff members who assist principals with such issues, Honig (2012) found that principal supervisors in all of the districts she surveyed served as “brokers” for other central office staff members and principals, as well as between principals and external personnel and resources. She contended that this is because principal supervisors often have district-level responsibilities in addition to school-level responsibilities. Their district-level responsibilities include attending meetings related to district-level planning and policy, handling substantial oversight responsibilities related to school administration and operations, and presiding over employee and student dismissal proceedings. For example, in the Denver Public Schools, principal supervisors serve alongside top district
leaders on “priority committees”—cross-functional committees of four to six people tasked with addressing critical district goals, such as Common Core implementation and teacher evaluation (Corcoran et al., 2013).

As described in this section, the existing scholarship about the role of the principal supervisor outlines a number of instructional and non-instructional functions that principal supervisors are expected to perform. An earlier section of this paper established that principals who function as instructional leaders can improve the quality of instruction in their schools. Therefore, the critical question at this juncture is whether support from principal supervisors matters when it comes to improving principals’ instructional capacities to determine whether re-envisioning the role of principal supervisors is a worthwhile endeavor. I will now turn to scholarship in this area.

**Impact as instructional leaders.**

Although the underlying assumption of the movement to shift the role of principal supervisors is that principal supervisors who focus their work with principals on instructional leadership will have a greater positive impact on student achievement than principal supervisors who do not do so, there is not any research that shows a direct connection between student outcomes and a specific principal supervisory model or approach. However, a handful of scholars have documented how the work of principal supervisors can be fundamental in helping principals build their capacity for instructional leadership (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Honig et al., 2010; Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). Honig (2013) asserted that principal supervisor support is most effective when it
is differentiated for individual principals based on district leaders’ ongoing assessments of principals’ capacity. In a later study, Honig and Rainey (2014) found that principal supervisors who were most effective in developing the instructional capacity of the principals they oversaw strove to devote one hundred percent of their time to doing so. Donaldson (2008) found that higher quality instructional practices resulted from having principal supervisors who were able to equip principals to support teachers’ professional development.

While their research was not specific to principal supervisors, Augustine et al. (2009) found that the quality of principals’ job-embedded professional development had a statistically significant relationship with the amount of time that principals spent on instructional leadership tasks, such as observing classroom instruction and engaging with teachers outside the classroom to improve instruction. Research by Gallucci and Swanson (2006) also indicated that arrangements such as having on-site coaches and other forms of professional development that take place in schools as part of principals’ regular work day is essential to principals’ growth in instructional leadership practices. Many scholars who point to the potential of principal supervisors for improving principals’ practice draw on research about principal mentoring and coaching, which, like the research on the role of the principal supervisor, is largely descriptive and theoretical in nature. While the impact of principal mentoring and coaching on principals’ growth as instructional leaders is not well understood in the literature, evidence from sectors outside of education indicates that leadership coaching leads to improved leader performance (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; De Meuse, Guangrong, & Lee, 2009; Goff,
Extrapolating from these findings suggests that principal mentoring and coaching by principal supervisors can help to support principals’ development as instructional leaders.

Honig and Rainey (2014) concluded that principal supervisors who successfully encouraged principals’ growth as instructional leaders used a teaching stance in their work. Honig and Rainey wrote, “Like excellent classroom teachers, they made intentional moves to help principals think and act in ways that built their capacity for instructional leadership” (p. 21). They expanded on this observation by explaining that these moves included the “joint work” of modeling practices, developing and using tools and brokering external resources to strengthen principals’ instructional leadership practices. Instead of operating as directors, evaluators or more traditional supervisors, principal supervisors who functioned as instructional leaders took a teaching stance both in their one-on-one work with principals as well as when they led principal network meetings and communities of practice.

As I have detailed in this chapter, research on educational leadership underscores the importance of having principals operate as instructional leaders and the necessity of having intensive job-embedded supports for them to engage in this work. While the education literature about principal supervisors supports the notion that they can improve principals’ instructional leadership and, by in turn, students’ academic outcomes, the existing scholarship about the role of the principal supervisor also suggests that principal supervisors commonly face challenges in supporting principals as instructional leaders. One of the most difficult challenges they face is how to be responsive to both the needs
of the top district leaders to whom they report as well as to the principals they oversee. However, there is scant research that details in depth how principal supervisors’ positioning in the district’s organizational structure impacts their ability to support principals as instructional leaders. While there is limited related research in the field of education, there is abundant research in the business literature. For this reason, I will make the case that principal supervisors can be considered middle managers in the district’s organizational structure and then explore the implications of this positioning by reviewing scholarship about middle management and strategy implementation that is based in theoretical perspectives from organizational theory literature. Such an exploration will allow me to consider whether the positioning of principal supervisors can influence their use of an instructional leadership approach to supporting principals.

**Principal Supervisors as Middle Managers**

While there are many ways in which the term *middle management* is used and understood in the literature, a broad conceptualization of the term refers to managers located below top-level managers and above lower-level managers in the hierarchy (e.g., Dutton & Ashford, 1993; Uytterhoven, 1972). Woodridge, Schmid and Floyd (2008) contended that the distinguishing feature of individuals in middle management is not only their location in the organizational chart, but also their access to individuals in top management, coupled with their detailed knowledge of operational-level work. It is this combination, the authors asserted, which enables middle managers to function as intermediaries between those who develop the organization’s high-level strategy work
and those who engage in the day-to-day activities of the organization. Middle managers serve as synthesizers by interpreting information from their subordinates and channeling it upward to top management. This may also involve their championing of information by seeking to shape the perspectives of top management. In addition, middle managers influence the activities of the organizational players below and around them.

Given their positioning in the organizational hierarchy and the reporting structure in the district, principal supervisors fit Woodridge et al.’s (2008) conceptualization of middle management. Honig et al. (2010) described how principal supervisors are typically considered to be director-level leaders who report to cabinet-level leaders. The cabinet-level leaders, in turn, directly report to the superintendent. Corcoran et al. (2013) cited a number of reporting structures for principal supervisors in the school districts they studied. Corcoran et al. found that in many school systems, such as in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, the cabinet-level leaders to whom principal supervisors report is the Chief Academic Officer. In other school systems, supervisors report to cabinet-level leaders who oversee operational units. For example, in the Denver Public Schools, principal supervisors report to either the Assistant Superintendent for Elementary Education or to the Assistant Superintendent for Post-Secondary Readiness, both of whom report to the superintendent. In the Hillsborough County Public Schools, principal supervisors report to the Assistant Superintendent for School Operations and Administration, who reports to the superintendent. Although Corcoran et al. found that principal supervisors are one administrative level away from the Superintendent in most school districts, two administrative layers separate the principal supervisor and the
superintendent in a few of the largest school districts, such as the New York City Department of Education, where principal supervisors report to Network Leaders, who report to the Chief Academic Officer, who then reports to the superintendent.

Principal supervisors’ positioning in the organizational hierarchy and to whom principal supervisors report is often a strategic decision by districts. In the school systems that Honig et al. (2010) surveyed, district leaders explained that part of the rationale for having principal supervisors report to cabinet-level leaders rather than directly to the superintendent was that the superintendent did not want to be inundated with direct reports. In addition, this positioning of principal supervisors leverages high-level authority and resources for supporting principals. It also increases the availability of information about schools to those at the executive level (Honig et al., 2010).

Honig and Rainey (2014) found that most school systems involve their principal supervisors in weekly district policy meetings in order to tap the valuable information principal supervisors obtain by working closely with principals and their schools. For example, in the Green Dot Public Schools, the principal supervisors are the only director-level staff members who participate in the weekly executive management meetings. According to one Green Dot cabinet-level leader:

The rationale is that they have such a large scope of impact in the work. Our work is schools, and they are supervising our schools, and everything that we discuss at the management team level—whether its growth, or financial, or marketing, is about those schools. It doesn’t make sense for them not to be a part of the conversation (p. 13).

The Tulsa Public Schools have a similar outlook on the position of principal supervisors, intentionally designing the principal supervisor role to ensure that information about
schools is transferred from principals to higher-level district leaders. One district leader remarked:

Our principal supervisors meet with the executives every Monday. They are part of the team that consistently has a voice at the level...the principal supervisors carry messages from the field about what they see and what principals or teachers need and what children and communities need. They inform some of the executive staff about policies and procedures (p. 14).

I have established that principal supervisors function as middle managers in large school districts because they have been positioned to facilitate information-sharing between principals and school system decision-makers. In the next section, I will survey literature about middle managers and organizational strategy before considering principal supervisors’ implementation of instructional leadership as an organizational strategy.

**Middle managers and organizational strategy.**

Since districts rely on principal supervisors to apply principles of instructional leadership as an organizational strategy, it would be useful to explore research about the role of middle managers in organizational strategy processes. Several researchers have analyzed organizational behavior from the perspective of power and political processes (e.g., Allison, 1971; Ansoff, 1979; Tushman, 1977; Bacharach and Lawler, 1980a; Pfeffer and Salancik, 1978; Kanter, 1977). These authors suggested that power and political dynamics among individuals in organizations often affect the decisions that top managers make and how effective their decisions are in practice. Prior to the 1970s, conceptualizations of management in general, and strategy in particular, assumed a top-down analytical process that separated decision-making from action, with the primary
role of middle managers being to implement strategy (see Pettigrew, 1992 for review). A great deal of research has since been conducted about strategy formulation and strategic implementation (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Guth, 1976; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Huy, 2002; Tichy, 1983; Yavitz & Newman, 1982). Much of this scholarship emphasizes either processes used in continuous improvement efforts (e.g., Louis, 1998) or necessary components of organizational change (e.g., Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). A key insight gleaned from this research has been that organizations consist of multiple agents who engage with and influence one another in ways related to organizational strategy through their social interactions, and specifically that middle managers influence organizational strategy in important ways (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Burgelman, 1983; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Woolridge, 1992, 2000; Woolridge & Floyd, 1990).

Although scholarship about middle managers and scholarship about organizational strategy share the premise that middle managers are central to explaining organizational outcomes, the scholarship is diverse in terms of the focal constructs and the relationships studied. Some scholars have analyzed the role of middle managers as important mediators between otherwise disconnected actors and domains, notably top-level and operating-level managers (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1999; Nonaka, 1991). Other scholars have focused on middle managers as sources of resistance (e.g., Guth & MacMillan, 1986), while some scholars have highlighted middle managers as being potential agents of change (e.g., Huy, 2002). A substantial amount of research has examined the concept of “issue selling”—how middle
managers shape the strategic agenda of an organization by influencing which issues come
to the attention of top management (e.g., Dutton, Asford, O’Neil, & Lawrence, 2001;
Ling, Floyd, & Baldrige, 2005). Whereas the literature on “issue selling” concerns the
upward influence of middle managers, other work focuses on how middle managers
promote strategic change downward (e.g., Beatty & Lee, 1992; Huy, 2001, 2002). A
handful of studies also have investigated how middle managers build and sustain
relationships across an organization (Kodama, 2005; Rouleau, 2005). Huy (2002)
described how middle managers help subordinates make sense of, and cope with, change.
In sum, the literature about the role of middle managers and their influence on
organizational strategy has identified a variety of ways in which middle managers
contribute to strategy formulation and implementation, with particular attention given to
identifying specific techniques that middle managers use to influence strategy and how
organizational context affects middle managers’ enactment of specific roles.

Numerous conceptual theories about how middle managers implement
organizational strategies can offer insights about how principal supervisors’ positioning
as middle managers affects how they perceive and execute instructional leadership with
the principals they lead. As previously described, the scope of strategy process research
has expanded since early research on the topic began in the 1970s because of the
realization that the behaviors and activities of individuals below those of top managers
have important consequences for how organizational strategy is formed and
implemented. Many of these theories emphasized processes used in continuous
improvement efforts (e.g., Louis, 1998) or highlighted necessary components of
organizational change (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999). In doing so, these theories mainly focused their analysis at the organizational level. There is also some research which indicated that middle managers’ own empowerment is important to organizational change processes. Fenton-O’Creevy (2006) contended that “middle managers need to be the first targets of empowerment and involvement practices rather than just the implementers of involvement for their subordinates” (p. 37). In accordance with my belief that individuals’ behaviors and actions result from their feelings of motivation and agency, I designed a study that used theoretical perspectives to focus analysis at the individual level. By doing so, I draw attention to aspects of organizational context that have not been examined by previous research which has focused analysis mainly at the organizational level. After describing the conceptual framework that is the theoretical underpinning for the study in the section that follows, I detail the research methodology in the next chapter.

**Conceptual Framework**

As described in the previous section, research which has been conducted about organizational strategy formulation and implementation identified techniques that middle managers use to influence the implementation of organizational strategy and described how organizational context affects middle managers’ enactment of specific roles (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Burgelman, 1983; Floyd & Lane, 2000; Floyd & Woolridge, 1992, 2000; Guth, 1976; Guth & MacMillan, 1986; Huy, 2002; Tichy, 1983; Woolridge & Floyd, 1990; Yavitz & Newman, 1982). While most theories in the existing scholarship have attempted to understand middle managers’ actions at the
organizational level, this research study applied theories about decision-making processes at the individual level and analyzed how such processes are influenced by organizational factors. These theoretical perspectives were used to explore how and why principal supervisors execute the organizational strategy of instructional leadership with the principals they lead.

The conceptual framework for the research study was based on Chris Argyris & Donald Schon’s (1974) theories of action and on William Guth & Ian MacMillan’s (1986) middle management expectancy theory. Both theories take a micro-sociological orientation by focusing on individual actions, but also acknowledged that such actions are embedded within social systems that comprise organizational structures. By using theories that emphasize both individuals’ conscious and subconscious activities, this study draws attention to aspects of organizational context that have not been examined in the existing research about school district leaders.

**Theories of action.**

According to Argyris & Schon’s (1974) theories of action, individuals have mental maps about how to act in situations. These mental maps shape the way they plan, implement and review their actions. Argyris & Schon contended that these maps, rather than the theories individuals articulate, steer individuals’ actions. However, individuals are often unaware of the mental maps they use. Thus, sometimes there is a divergence between what individuals actually do and what individuals describe they do when they talk to others about their actions. For this reason, Argyris & Schon contended that these phenomena represent discrete theories of action. Argyris and Schon referred to
individuals’ observable activities as *theories-in-use* and what individuals convey they do as *espoused theories*.

Argyris & Schon described that *governing variables* serve as the organizational guidelines for individual actions. The governing variables dictate the kind of activities that are acceptable in a given situation. *Action strategies* are individuals’ planned activities which are based on their assessment of how to keep the governing variables within an acceptable range. An action’s result(s) are its *consequences*, and include both intended and unintended outcomes.

Argyris & Schon elaborated on the significance of the consequence(s) of individuals’ future behavior in the context of organizational learning. When the consequence(s) of an action match the individual’s intention, then the theory-in-use is confirmed both for the individual and for the organization at large. When the consequence(s) of an action do not match the individual’s intention, there are two possible responses the individual might have regarding the detection and correction of the error. The first response, *single-loop learning*, occurs when an individual’s action strategies are ineffective and the individual reasons that other action strategies that adhere to the governing variables would be more effective. The root cause of the mismatch is assumed to be operational; the organization’s norms, policies and objectives that influence the individual’s action ultimately remain unchanged. The second response, *double-loop learning*, involves questioning the basic assumptions of the goals of the action and the action strategies employed to achieve such goals. Double-loop learning ultimately leads to a modification of an organization’s norms, policies and objectives.
According to Argyris & Schon, the reasoning processes of individuals in organizations inhibit the exchange of relevant information in ways that make double-loop learning difficult, but contend that double-loop learning is necessary for organizational change, especially for change in bureaucratic organizations that are implementing a new organizational strategy.

**Middle management expectancy theory.**

Middle management expectancy theory examines how top leadership secures middle management’s commitment to a new organizational strategy to predict the extent to which middle managers will be motivated to implement the strategy when their self-interest is at stake. The premise of this theory is that middle managers are motivated more by their perceived self-interests than by organizational interests. The view that rational individuals will be motivated by self-interest rather than organizational interest is consistent with the assumptions underlying the theory of a capitalist economy.

According to Guth & MacMillan (1986), differences between the goal structures of top managers and the goal structures of middle managers can lead to differences in their perceptions of the desirability of a strategy being implemented. The authors outlined different conditions that will lead to varying levels of personal commitment by middle-level managers to a proposed strategy. If a middle manager’s perception of self and collective goal alignment is low, the manager’s commitment to the strategy will be low, and thus the amount of effort he or she would be willing to put forth to implement the strategy would also be low. Conversely, if a middle manager’s perception of self and collective goal alignment is high, the manager’s commitment to the strategy will be high,
and thus the amount of effort he or she would be willing to put forth to implement the strategy would also be high.

The authors contended that there are three fundamentally different sources of this commitment that influence whether strategy implementation will be effective. These factors relate to the individual’s perception of his or her and the organization’s potential to successfully execute the strategy and the individual’s perception of the likelihood that successfully executing the strategy will lead to an outcome that the individual believes is desirable. Thus, a middle manager may decide to put little effort into the implementation of a particular strategy if one or more of the following is true:

1) The individual believes that he/she has a low probability of successfully implementing the strategy;
2) The individual believes that even if he/she is able to perform successfully in an individual capacity, his/her successful performance has a low probability of achieving the organizationally desired outcome; or
3) The organizationally desired outcome does not satisfy his/her individual goals.

In addition, Guth & MacMillan (1986) asserted that the only organizational conditions in which middle managers’ self-interests would not impact strategy implementation are when the goal structure of middle managers is completely congruent with the goal structure of top management and when the perception of the middle manager about the goal-related cause/effect relationships are also highly congruent to the perception of top management.
Middle managers’ low commitment to a strategy leads them to de-prioritize activities related to implementation of the strategy. Their low commitment can lead either to passive intervention or to active intervention, both of which can compromise the quality of the implementation and/or postpone the implementation beyond the time when it would be effective. Passive intervention involves intentionally causing unnecessary delays and “foot-dragging” (p. 313). Active intervention can take several different forms, including arguing persuasively against the strategy (e.g. during in-person meetings or through written email); forming coalitions with other members of the organization who oppose the strategy; deliberately taking ineffective action or creating ‘roadblocks’ to implementation; or sabotaging the strategy to prove that it was not a good strategy in the first place (p. 314). When middle managers pursue passive intervention or active intervention, their commitment to organizational strategies affects the ability of top managers to realize organizational goals.

Although theories of action and middle management expectancy theory are based upon different theoretical traditions, they are complementary to each other. Theories of action is rooted in theories of organizational learning, which describe the processes of creating, retaining and transferring knowledge between individuals within an organization. Middle management expectancy theory is grounded in theories of motivation, which underscore the desire or willingness of an individual to take certain actions. Theories of action and middle management expectancy theory look at separate but related aspects of the impetus for an individual to act in certain ways. Approaching this impetus from different angles, each of the theories considers the micro activities of
individuals who implement organizational strategy by scrutinizing the practices which guide and fuel those activities. Examining the principal supervisor as a middle manager from perspectives that are rooted in different bodies of literature provided rich insights because each theory offered a different window for understanding the impact that the role of the principal supervisor as a middle manager has on a principal supervisor’s daily activities.

A visual representation of the conceptual framework is shown in figures 1 and 2. Figure 1 applies Argyris & Schon’s (1974) theories of action to the role of principal supervisors in the district under study. The district’s design theories are listed in the boxes on the left side of the page, and the intended outcomes of those design theories are set forth in the boxes on the right side of the page. The espoused theories and theories-in-use were discovered through the various components of my research study, and therefore are depicted as black boxes. The black boxes for theories-in-use are influenced by the motivational forces described in Guth & MacMillan’s (1986) middle management expectancy theory, which is represented in figure 2. These motivational forces impact principal supervisors’ decisions about their work which, in turn, impacts how they execute the organizational strategy of serving as instructional leaders. Having described the theoretical basis upon which my conceptual framework is built, I will now turn to an explanation of the embedded assumptions of my conceptual framework and will define key phrases as I have used them.
**Figure 1. Visual Representation of Conceptual Framework, Argyis & Schon’s Theories of Action**

**Design Theories**
- PS engage in the following instructional activities:
  - Setting performance goals with principals
  - Evaluating principals’ performance and addressing underperformance
  - Facilitating learning communities among principals in their network
  - Conducting collaborative school/classroom walkthroughs
  - Coaching principals

**Espoused Theories**

**Theories-in-Use**

**Effects**
- Improve principals’ instructional leadership capacities
- Improve teachers’ instructional practices
- Increase students’ academic outcomes

**PS provide job-embedded, professional learning opportunities to principals about instructional issues through:**
- Individual support
- Network meetings
- PD offered by external partners

**PS focus the bulk of their time on issues that directly relate to teaching and learning while other central office staff members support non-instructional issues**

**PS are held accountable for:**
- Principal performance
- Addressing specific school needs
- The academic performance of students in schools in their network
Definition of key terms.

The objective of principal support.

An underlying assumption of the conceptual framework of this study relates to a premise upon which many school district reforms rest—that is, the more that principal supervisors who support principals are focused on working with principals to improve the principals’ instructional leadership capacities, the greater the positive impact will be on student achievement. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there is not any research that shows a direct link between any specific principal supervisory model or approach and student achievement. However, the underlying theory of these district reform efforts is buttressed by a large body of literature that establishes a connection between strong...
school-based leadership and student outcomes (City, Elmore, Fiarman & Teitel, 2009; Copland & Knapp, 2006; Donaldson, 2008; Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Hit, Tucker & Young, 2012; Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Gordon Donaldson’s (2008) research indicated that increasing support for principals allows them to be better equipped to support teachers’ learning, which in turn supports students’ learning. Progressive school district leaders tend to accept the notion that if central offices provide school leaders with appropriate on-the-job support, principals will be able to lead their schools to attain gains in student achievement, and this belief is reflected in such districts’ organizational strategy design and policy. While this study sought to understand the role of the principal supervisor as it relates to instructional leadership practices, it does not attempt to make direct correlational or causal links between principal supervisors’ work in supporting principals’ instructional leadership and students’ academic achievement. Since I use the term “instructional leadership” frequently throughout the study, it is important that I define it clearly as part of the conceptual framework.

**Conceptualization of instructional leadership.**

“Instructional leadership” is a phrase that is used in education research and practice in numerous contexts and has differing meanings depending on the context in which it is used. Since its inception in the 1970s, instructional leadership has emerged as one of the most preeminent models of leadership in education. Literature about instructional leadership is primarily focused on principals, although in recent years the concept has been applied to other roles, namely district leadership positions. A review of school leadership scholarship by Hallinger and Heck (1996a, 1996b) found that
instructional leadership was the most frequently studied model of school leadership during the past twenty-five years.

While definitions of instructional leadership vary, scholars generally agree that principals who execute instructional leadership align all school activities and strategies with the school’s academic mission and work closely with teachers to examine and improve the quality of their teaching (Blase & Blase, 2004; Bolman & Deal, 1992; Bossert et al., 1982; Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005; Heck, 1992; Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marsh, Kerr, Schuyler-Ikemoto, Darilek, Suttorp, & Zimmer 2005; Walters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). According to an instructional leadership framework, an effective principal establishes clear academic goals, motivates staff and students to work towards those goals and monitors progress made towards attaining those goals. Instructional leadership assumes that students’ academic achievement will improve if principals serve as instructional leaders who focus on the teachers’ instruction, while the teachers in turn, focus on helping students learn. In order to focus on issues that directly concern teaching and learning, however, principals must overcome the pressures that steer them away from engaging in this work. To exercise instructional leadership, principals must also possess significant expertise in instructional issues.

The definition of instructional leadership that serves as a core construct in this research study is intentionally broad. I define instructional leadership as any and all actions that directly relate to promoting teaching and learning in the leader’s school.
Chapter 3
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is a qualitative case study that considers the role of principal supervisors as middle managers who are situated between top district leaders and school-based leaders. The study examined how their positioning as middle managers in the organizational hierarchy influences their ability to serve as instructional leaders who are expected to develop principals’ instructional capacities. A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study because qualitative research seeks to describe, illustrate, explore and explain a phenomenon, and the objectives of my investigation are to describe, illustrate, explore and explain the phenomenon of principal supervisors functioning as middle managers between principals and top district leaders (Yin, 2013). In addition, qualitative research seeks to understand the perspectives and experiences of people, and understanding the perspectives and experiences of principals, principal supervisors and top district leaders was critical to answering my research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). A qualitative approach also allows for narrative, phenomenological data collection and analysis that give priority to the subjective intentions, perceptions and experiences of participants, which is a critical aspect of my research questions (Creswell, 2014). In this chapter, I discuss the research methodology used for this study, including the site and context of the study, my rationale for methods selection, data collection procedures and approach to data analysis, as well as how I sought to address concerns about the validity of the study.
Site Selection and Context of Study

As previously explained, large school systems across the country hire individuals whose sole job responsibility is to supervise principals. These principal supervisory structures and dynamics are nearly identical across large, urban school districts and, as described earlier, in recent years many such school districts have re-conceptualized the role of principal supervisors to focus on instructional issues rather than on operational issues. The significant challenges faced by large, urban school districts—namely having a large number of students from persistently disadvantaged households and chronically low academic performance by students—also are comparable across such districts. For this reason, I chose to use a case study approach to examine how one school district’s expressed priority of having principal supervisors focus on teaching and learning is carried out in daily practice and how the district’s organizational conditions and structures support or impede this goal. My selection of a school district research site to serve as a case study of a typical large, urban school district therefore represents strategic and purposive selection. In addition, as a former employee of the district who worked closely with one of the top district leaders, I was able to gain access fairly easily to participants and I knew the appropriate channels to use to obtain information that was pertinent to my study (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 32). Since the school district I studied can be considered representative of other large, urban school districts, my research findings have implications for other school districts as they put into practice their desired responsibilities of principal supervisors.
To maintain the anonymity of the district and the study participants, I will refer to the school district as “Mann School District (MSD)”. In 2017, all of the roughly 40,000 students served by MSD were deemed to be “economically disadvantaged” by the state and qualified for a free or reduced-price lunch. According to the state department of education where the MSD is located, approximately 65% of the students self-identified as Black, 16% self-identified as Hispanic, and 15% self-identified as White. The district’s chronic absenteeism rate was approximately 30%. In addition, roughly 20% of students in the district had disabilities and about 10% were labeled as Limited English Proficiency. Less than 35% of MSD third graders were proficient in reading on the state assessment, and only approximately 65% of MSD students graduated from high school.

The MSD community, district leaders, families and local politicians felt a sense of urgency to raise student achievement levels and to increase standards for students across the district. In response to such sentiments, these stakeholders collectively developed an ambitious strategic plan to transfer significant authority from district leaders to principals and to offer considerable resources from the district office to schools. These changes were predicated on the premise that principals, who are closer to, and more knowledgeable about, their students’ and communities’ needs than district leaders, should set the strategic vision they have for their schools rather than carrying out a vision set by district leaders. The shift in authority and resources from district central offices to schools has been a common trend in school district reform for the past few decades (Briggs & Wohlstetter, 2003; David, 1989; Leithwood & Menzies, 1998; Murphy & Beck; 1995).
As a result of the district’s strategic plan, school leaders in the MSD were given a great deal of autonomy in areas such as curriculum, staffing and budgetary spending. The district’s strategic plan also shifted the role of principal supervisors to support principals’ growth with instructional issues. In order to have principals be the decision-makers in the areas listed above, but also to have them maintain their primary focus on serving as instructional leaders, the district’s strategic plan also called for the reconfiguration of many central office departments and for a change in the job functions of several central office personnel. At the center of this reconfiguration was the development of a new network structure. Each “network” consists of 10-15 schools that are supported by a “Network Support Team” of representatives from the human resources, special education, finance, curriculum and instruction and facilities departments. Figure 4 (page 88) is a visual representation of how Network Support Team members from different district departments are supposed to rally around the principals in their network. Designating personnel from different district departments to each network was meant to improve the provision of services by the central office to the schools by providing principals and principal supervisors with a direct point of contact and by having Network Support Team members focus on a subset of schools rather than on all of the schools in the district. The network structure established in the MSD closely resembles the staffing arrangements of central offices in other districts (Corcoran et al., 2013).
Participant Selection

In order to understand the work of principal supervisors in the MSD, I sought to examine the perspectives of individuals who directly support and give instruction to, and who are directly supported by and take instruction from, principal supervisors, as well as to examine the perspectives of principal supervisors themselves. The MSD has eight principal supervisors, each of whom oversees a network of between 10-15 schools. Rather than sampling principal supervisors, the population of the district’s principal supervisors participated in the study so that I was able to capture the breadth and diversity of their experiences. To understand the viewpoints of individuals whose roles are superior to the role of principal supervisors in the district’s organizational hierarchy, all of the individuals who hold Chief-level positions in the district—the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Talent Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Operations Officer, and the Chief Information Technology Officer—also participated in the study. I refer to these individuals throughout my study as “top district leaders.”

To gain the perspectives of those individuals whom the principal supervisors are intended to serve, I sampled two principals from each network of schools to be part of the study. I limited the sampling frame to include only principals who had been with the same principal supervisor for the 2015-2016 and the 2016-2017 school years to reduce the effects of personality or leadership-style differences between principal supervisors on principals’ perspectives. To select the principal participants, I used the district’s list of principals by network and a random number generator and randomly selected two principals per network. I sought to have a diverse mix of principal participants who possessed the following characteristics:
1. Principals from both K-8 and high schools (6-8 from each level);

2. Principals from schools with a range of student achievement gains during the previous academic school year, as measured by Performance Index scores calculated by the state department of education (6-8 with gains and without gains in Performance Index scores).

Since I did not initially achieve this mix of principals, I re-drew principals using the same process explained above until I achieved the desired mix of principal participants.

The selection criteria for the principal participants was important to ensure that a variety of perspectives were represented in the study. As Maxwell (2013) highlights, random sampling without some purposeful selection is likely to achieve this diversity only with a large sample size. For this reason, deliberately selecting principals from diverse backgrounds made the goal of having a range of variation more achievable than it would have been had I selected a sample of the same size using random or accidental variation (p. 98). Furthermore, deliberately searching for principals from heterogeneous school contexts increases confidence in my conclusions (Miles, Huberman & Saldana, 2014, p. 32).

Methods and Research Design

My research methods involved reviewing relevant documents, administering written questionnaires and conducting interviews. I also collected data in the form of analytic memos and in a research journal, which I developed on an ongoing basis throughout the duration of my study. I methodologically triangulated the data I collected.
by employing multiple data collection methods, strategically sequencing the data collection methods, and having repeated samples for each data collection method (e.g., multiple interviews with members of each participant group). In this section, I will describe my approach to collecting data from each of these data sources, followed by a discussion of how I analyzed and managed the data collected.

**Data collection.**

*Document review.*

I began my research by reviewing the following official documents from the MSD: principal supervisor job descriptions, weekly principal supervisor meeting agendas and notes, emails to principal supervisors from top district leaders, emails to principals from principal supervisors and emails to principal supervisors from principals. I asked the principal supervisors to remove the name of the principal from all documents to eliminate privacy concerns. These documents served as a source of context and history of the role of the principal supervisor in the MSD. They also helped me learn what has formally been stated about the responsibilities of principal supervisors and indicate what topics are prioritized during meetings. The former provided information about the MSD’s design theories, while the latter offered insight about district leaders’ and principal supervisors’ theories-in-use. I reviewed multiple drafts of these documents—versions from both prior to and after the implementation of the district’s strategic plan—so that I could assess the stated changes in the responsibilities of, and actions taken by, the principal supervisor.
**Questionnaires.**

Study participants answered a short, three-to-ten question written questionnaire in the summer of 2017. Sixty-six percent of principals, one hundred percent of principal supervisors and one hundred percent of Chief-level top district leaders completed the questionnaire. The questionnaires asked principals and principal supervisors about their interactions with each other, including the frequency of their interactions, who initiates contact, and the nature of their interactions. The questionnaires also aimed to uncover what participants view as being the responsibilities of principal supervisors in supporting principals—their espoused theories. The questionnaires for all of the groups asked participants to indicate the areas in which principal supervisors support principals, and to indicate the types of instructional and non-instructional issues for which principal supervisors support principals—their theories-in-use. The responses to these questions helped me gain a general sense of participants’ perspectives about principal supervisory practices in the MSD for further exploration as part of the interviews. The information obtained from the questionnaires for each participant group is in table 1 below. Appendix B is the written questionnaire that was given to principals, appendix C is the written questionnaire that was given to principal supervisors, and appendix D is the written questionnaire that was given to top district leaders.
Table 1. Information Obtained from Written Questionnaires

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Principals        | Frequency of contact between principals and principal supervisors  
|                   | Nature of interactions between principals and principal supervisors  
|                   | Areas in which principals believe that they are most and least supported by principal supervisors  
|                   | Ways in which principals believe that they are supported by principal supervisors with instructional issues  
|                   | Ways in which principals believe that they are supported by principal supervisors with non-instructional issues  |
| Principal Supervisors | Frequency of contact between principals and principal supervisors  
|                     | Nature of interactions between principals and principal supervisors  
|                     | Areas in which principal supervisors believe that they provide the most and least support to principals  
|                     | Ways in which principal supervisors believe that they support principals with instructional issues  
|                     | Ways in which principal supervisors believe that they support principals with non-instructional issues  |
| Top District Leaders | Areas in which top district leaders believe that principal supervisors most and least frequently support principals  
|                      | Ways in which top district leaders believe that principal supervisors support principals with instructional issues  
|                      | Ways in which top district leaders believe that principal supervisors support principals with non-instructional issues  |

Interviews.

Since responding to written questions may have caused some participants to give cursory answers, I supplemented the questionnaires with lengthier, in-person interviews in which I drew out more reflective and detailed responses to the questions posed. I relied heavily on interviews to collect data because interviews provide the opportunity to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of principal supervisors and the meaning they and those who they directly support or who are supported by them make of their experiences (Seidman, 2006). In the fall of 2017 and winter of 2017/2018, I conducted two one-hour interviews with each principal supervisor, two one-hour interviews with the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Operations Officer, the
Chief Talent Officer, and the Chief Information Technology Officer, and two one-hour interviews with each of the sixteen principals selected for my study. I conducted the initial interviews first with principals, followed by the initial interviews with principal supervisors, and lastly by the initial interviews with top district leaders. I used the same sequence for the follow-up interviews—interviewing principals first, then interviewing principal supervisors and finally interviewing top district leaders. In total, I conducted 58 hours of interviews. I digitally recorded each interview to complement my interview notes and for validity purposes, which I detailed in the “Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity” section.

In order to compare responses across individuals, the interviews were structured. As I explain in the “Addressing Threats to Validity” section below, given my positionality as a researcher in a familiar context, using planned interview questions that had been vetted prior to the interviews helped to ensure that I did not ask questions based on any pre-existing biases I may have had, which would have made the data generated invalid and unreliable. I did not develop the protocol for the second set of interviews until I analyzed the data from the first set of interviews so that I could incorporate my emerging theories in the follow-up questions I posed. During all of the interviews, I probed participants by asking them about specific events and actions, in addition to asking them general questions, in order to gain insight about how participants make sense of, and construct reality about, the role of principal supervisors in relation to my research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 148).
The interview questions were aligned across participant groups to allow me to understand the perspectives of each participant group. By asking similar questions of principals, principal supervisors and top district leaders that related to their positioning in the district organizational hierarchy, I was able to compare and contrast their responses to shed light on their perspectives of, and experiences with, principal supervision and support. During the first set of interviews with all participant groups, I delved into each component of the theories of action perspective. I first asked participants to describe the design theory of the role of principal supervisors. I then inquired whether they believe there is a difference between the intended responsibilities of principal supervisors and the actual responsibilities of principal supervisors—their theories-in-use. I also asked members of each participant group whether they agreed with principal supervisors’ intended role responsibilities—the design theory—to capture participants’ espoused theories. Furthermore, as the intended beneficiaries of principal supervisors’ daily work, I asked principals to provide examples of principal supervisors’ theories-in-use. I also sought examples from principals and top district leaders of their interactions with principal supervisors to provide additional insight about the theories-in-use they described. Appendix E is the first interview guide for principals, appendix F is the first interview guide for principal supervisors, and appendix G is the first interview guide for top district leaders.

During the second set of interviews with principals and top district leaders, I asked them to detail the requests they make of principal supervisors and how they see principal supervisors serving as brokers, based on principal supervisors’ responses from
the first set of interviews. I asked top district leaders about topics that would allow me to consider principal supervisors’ motivation to engage in instructional leadership activities through the lens of middle management expectancy theory by uncovering the directives and expectations of top district leaders to principal supervisors. My second interviews with principal supervisors focused on the requests that principals and top district leaders make of them, their goals in serving as a principal supervisor and their decision-making processes about serving different brokering functions. In addition, I asked principal supervisors questions that relate to the sources of their commitment that might influence whether strategy implementation will be effective according to Guth & MacMillan’s middle management expectancy theory. I questioned whether each principal supervisor believes that he/she will be successful in acting as an instructional leader, the extent to which he/she believes that the MSD will successfully position school leaders to serve as instructional leaders, whether he/she believes that principals should serve as the instructional leaders of their schools and whether he/she believes that principal supervisors should serve instructional leadership functions. I asked parallel questions to principal supervisors and to top district leaders regarding the organizational goals of having principals and principal supervisors serve as instructional leaders so that I could assess the alignment between their views. Moreover, triangulation of the interview data I collected from multiple participant groups allowed me to ascertain information about principal supervisors’ theories-in-use despite the fact that observations were not part of my methodology. Appendices H, I and J are the second interview guides for principals, principal supervisors, top district leaders, respectively.
Table 2. Information Obtained from Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Group</th>
<th>Focus Areas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Interview #1**  | - What they believe are the stated responsibilities of principal supervisors  
|                   | - Whether they believe there is a difference between principal supervisors’ stated responsibilities and principal supervisors’ actual responsibilities  
|                   | - What they believe are principal supervisors’ actual responsibilities  
|                   | - Their interactions with principal supervisors regarding instructional issues  
|                   | - Their interactions with principal supervisors regarding non-instructional issues  
| **Interview #2**  | - The requests they make of principal supervisors  
|                   | - The challenges they experience in obtaining support from their principal supervisors  
|                   | - How they see principal supervisors’ brokering playing out  
|                   | - Ways in which the role of principal supervisors could be changed so that principal supervisors better supporting them with instructional issues  
| **Interview #1**  | - What they believe are their stated responsibilities  
|                   | - The extent to which they agree with their stated responsibilities  
|                   | - Whether they believe there is a difference between their stated responsibilities and their actual responsibilities  
|                   | - Their actual responsibilities on a daily basis  
|                   | - Their interactions with principals regarding instructional issues  
|                   | - Their interactions with principals regarding non-instructional issues  
|                   | - The challenges they face in their role  
| **Interview #2**  | - How they serve as members of the district leadership team  
|                   | - The requests principals and top district leaders make of them  
|                   | - Their beliefs about whether having principals and principal supervisors serve as instructional leaders will lead to improved student outcomes  
|                   | - Their beliefs about whether having principals and principal supervisors serve as instructional leaders is possible given district organizational conditions  
|                   | - Their interactions with top district leaders  
|                   | - What they believe being an effective principal supervisor entails  
|                   | - Whether they believe they have been effective in their role  
|                   | - Their decision-making processes about serving different brokering functions  
| **Interview #1**  | - What they believe are the stated responsibilities of principal supervisors  
|                   | - Whether they believe there is a difference between principal supervisors’ stated responsibilities and principal supervisors’ actual responsibilities  
|                   | - What they believe are principal supervisors’ actual responsibilities  
|                   | - Their interactions with principal supervisors  
|                   | - The challenges they believe that principal supervisors face in their role  
| **Interview #2**  | - How principal supervisors serve as members of the district leadership team  
|                   | - The requests they make of principal supervisors  
|                   | - How they see principal supervisors’ brokering playing out  
|                   | - Their beliefs about whether having principals and principal supervisors serve as instructional leaders will lead to improved student outcomes  
|                   | - Their beliefs about whether having principals and principal supervisors serve as instructional leaders is possible given district organizational conditions  

An overview of the information obtained from the interviews for each participant group is in table 2 above. The interview protocols for principals are in appendices E and H, the interview protocols for principal supervisors are in appendices F and I and the interview protocols for top district leaders are in appendices G and J.

**Memos.**

I wrote reflective, analytic memos about my research experience each week. Writing memos not only captured my analytic thinking about the data I collected, but also facilitated such thinking and stimulated analytic insights. Writing memos also provided me the opportunity to reflect on my goals for the study, my prior experiences in the MSD and my relationships with study participants, as described in the “Researcher Roles and Positionality” section. In addition, writing memos helped me formulate ideas for my future actions and changes to my research design. Such writings also assisted me with developing questions or thoughts for discussion with my inquiry group members. I referenced my memos in the later stages of data analysis. I organized the memos on my computer carefully, and recorded the date on the top of each memo so that I could trace my evolving ideas and emerging theories over time (Creswell, 2014).

Prior to beginning my research, I identified specific memos I would write to ensure that I reflected on important issues at key points during my research. The ordering of the memo topics was strategic because it interspersed the focus of my structured reflections throughout the research process. Given my closeness to the site of the study as a former employee of the MSD, many of my memos considered my social location and the impact of my positionality. The topics for the memos are listed below:
• Researcher identity memo
• Fieldwork and data collection memo
• Research design memo
• Conceptual framework memo
• Formative data analysis memo

Research journal.

Since “the data in a qualitative study can include virtually anything (you) see, hear, or that is otherwise communicated to you while conducting the study, and there is no such thing as ‘inadmissible evidence’,” I kept a research journal to capture data that I did not capture elsewhere (Maxwell, 2013, p. 87). In addition, after the conclusion of each interview/observation, I wrote my initial impressions informally in my research journal (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). In these reflections, I highlighted possible themes and connections to my research questions, and also highlighted issues that merited further analytic attention. My research journal also served as a source for my field-based analysis as I began to make sense of the data. In addition, I referenced the notes from my research journal when writing my weekly analytic memos.

A section of my research journal contained a research log where I captured changes and revisions to my planned research methods and design in a central location. The format of my research log was bullet points. I noted dates and the reasons for any changes or revisions. This documentation was useful as I sought to make sense of how I arrived at my findings.
**Sequencing.**

The sequencing of my data collection methods was strategic. First, I reviewed documents related to principal supervision, and then I administered written questionnaires to study participants. I subsequently conducted two sets of interviews with each of the participants—an initial interview and a follow-up interview. Sequencing my data methods so that my interviews followed my document review and my administration of written questionnaires allowed me to have an initial understanding of the expressed role of principal supervisors and positioned me to be able to ask informed questions and to obtain clarification as needed during the second interviews.

Each of these data collection methods offered valuable insight about my research questions. Through my document review, I learned what has been stated formally in district policy regarding the role of principal supervisors. This allowed me to gain an understanding of MSD’s design theory that is intended to guide principal supervisors’ practices. Through written questionnaires and interviews with the principal supervisors and other district leaders, I explored the stated perspectives of participants and their plans for supporting principals—their espoused theories according to the theories of action perspective. Through written questionnaires and interviews with principals, I gleaned an understanding of how principals are supported in daily practice—principal supervisors’ theories-in-use as described by Argyris and Schon. Administering written questionnaires and conducting interviews with district leaders also afforded me the opportunity to uncover the goal structures of top managers, while the written questionnaires and interviews with principal supervisors allowed me to understand the goal structures of
middle managers. I then compared these goal structures with each other to explore the extent to which they were aligned in order to determine whether existing differences may lead to reduced personal commitment by principal supervisors to the organizational strategy. Further, by writing analytic memos and keeping a research journal, I captured my evolving understanding of the themes I explored by my research questions. I detailed each of these data collections methods in the sub-sections that follow. By triangulating my data collection methods, I was able to check the data collected from each method against each another to reduce the risk of arriving at conclusions that did not accurately represent participants’ perceptions or lived experiences. Using all three methods allowed me to be more secure in my findings than I would have been had I used only one of these methods.

**Data analysis.**

I used an iterative, ongoing and systematic process for data analysis throughout the course of my study that involved immersive engagement with the data collected through multiple readings, coding, concurrent condensing and displaying of data, connecting strategies and generating themes/categories and drawing/verifying conclusions (Miles et al., 2014). By doing so, I approached data analysis critically (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 217). In reviewing the annotated documents, survey results, interview transcripts, memos and research journal, I used open, descriptive coding. As I read, I assigned codes and themes to what seemed to be important and recurring ideas. I also noted strong language and concepts that participants seemed to avoid. In addition, I
wrote notes in the margins with tentative ideas, highlighting quotes that stood out to me as being particularly noteworthy. Since I generated a substantial amount of data and a wide variety of data forms through the data collection methods, descriptive coding was appropriate for the purposes of my study because it provided a means for me to index and categorize my data inventory (Maxwell, 2013).

Throughout the data analysis process, I subjected my formative analyses to scrutiny and looked for alternate explanations through a variety of validity strategies. I also actively sought the opinions of others to challenge my assumptions through dialogic engagement. Furthermore, as previously mentioned, I wrote memos and in my research journal throughout the research process to systematically interpret and make sense of the data.

**Questionnaires.**

Since the purpose of the written questionnaires was to gain a general sense of participants’ perspectives about principal supervisory practices in the MSD for further exploration as part of the interviews, I was primarily concerned with identifying high-frequency responses within participant groups, and in participants’ answers to variations of questions that were asked of more than one participant group. I was interested in similarities and differences in the responses given by each group. For this reason, I created pie charts based on the multiple-choice responses from each close-ended question specific to each participant group. The visual simplicity of the pie chart format allowed me to readily note the relative proportion of participants that provided each response within a participant group. For the question that asked participants to provide a ranking
of the responses provided, I created a stacked bar chart grouped by rank. I assigned a different color to each response option. Using a stacked bar graph assisted me in making sense of the data because it displayed participants groups’ responses in relation to one another. Through these straightforward, unadorned data displays, I was able to identify common themes in participants’ responses as well as issues which I wanted to explore further during the in-person interviews.

**Interviews.**

I transcribed the digital recordings from my interviews verbatim within 2-3 days following each interview. I double-checked interview transcriptions while listening to the recordings for accuracy. I was committed to both transcribing and analyzing the data soon after the interviews so that too much time did not elapse between the interview/observation and my analysis. For this reason, I scheduled the interviews with this timeframe in mind.

Since the study relied heavily on interview data, I used a series of readings to glean different interpretations of the transcripts and to generate additional insights. Because there is limited existing research about principal supervisors, my first reading was an unstructured reading, uninterrupted by coding, so that I could familiarize myself with the corpus of data as a whole. Following this reading, I did an open, inductive reading of the data, whereby I underlined key words or phrases and terminology that seemed notable. My third reading focused on the core constructs embedded in my research questions: middle management positioning, compliance/operational issues and instructional leadership (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Creswell, 2014). I also did thematic
readings of my data to consider the data in light of Argyris & Schon’s theories of action and Guth & MacMillan’s middle management expectancy theory. In my thematic reading that considered the data in light of Argyris & Schon’s theoretical perspective, I used the following codes: design theories, espoused theories, theories-in-use, governing variables, action strategies and consequences. In my thematic reading that considered the data in light of Guth & MacMillan’s theoretical perspective, I used the following codes: individual goal, organizational goal, goal structure alignment and intervention. Following each reading, I wrote my impressions in my research journal. By scrutinizing the data I collected in this manner, I analyzed the data from different perspectives and deepened my understanding of how my research questions could be answered.

After analyzing the first sets of interviews using the series of readings mentioned above, I created a list of follow-up questions to which I sought answers in subsequent interviews. The patterns and processes that were illuminated through my readings of the data informed my inquiries in the additional interviews. I used the same process to analyze the subsequent sets of interviews.

Following these readings, I sifted through the coded materials to identify similar and different phrases, relationships, patterns, themes, and categories (Miles et al., 2014). After isolating these patterns, commonalities and differences, I clustered similar ideas into categories based on themes and patterns that arose during my review and which related to my research questions.

My data analysis involved a process of data condensation with a series of associated actions. Miles et al. (2014) stated, “Through the course of our work, we have
become convinced that good data displays are a major avenue to robust data analysis” (p. 13). To organize my vast inventory of data and to encourage my thinking, I crafted short narrative summaries and profiles (Seidman, 2006; Miles & Huberman, 1998). I also built thematic matrices and concept maps that were based on the elements of my conceptual framework, which helped me uncover connections among salient themes and compare similarities and differences across individuals and within participant groups. Developing matrices allowed me to assemble information into an accessible, compact form to analyze and justify the data (Maxwell, 2013). For example, I used a combination checklist/role-ordered matrix with distilled components of the role of principal supervisors in order to easily compare principals’, principal supervisors’ and top district leaders’ espoused theories about principal supervisors’ practices. My continued coding of data and drawing of preliminary conclusions helped me develop additional matrices to test my preliminary conclusions. The matrices also facilitated opportunities for dialogic engagement about emerging themes and surface possible disconfirming evidence. Every few weeks, I reviewed my weekly analytic memos to monitor the evolution of my ideas and theories.

Gradually, I established a set of assertions, propositions and generalizations that covered the consistencies I discerned in my collected data. Thus, my data condensation continued in a cyclic pattern as I sharpened, sorted, discarded and organized data before drawing conclusions about my research questions (Miles et al., 2014). I used ATLAS.ti software to support many of my research needs, including coding, organizing and storing my data, providing ready search and retrieval capabilities, connecting relevant data segments, forming networks of information, displaying data and supporting my theory building.
Data management.

I carefully managed all confidential data, including its collection, entry, analysis, and ongoing security, and maintained its confidentiality. Raw survey data was stored in a password-protected SurveyMonkey account. Audio recordings of interviews were stored in a password-protected electronic Dropbox file; transcripts of recordings were generated by a transcription service that guaranteed confidentiality and were stored in a password-protected Dropbox file. As previously mentioned, data analysis was conducted using the program ATLAS.ti, which was also password-protected.

All individuals who participated in the study were assigned a unique pseudonym to maintain both anonymity and confidentiality. If any names were mentioned during the course of an interview, transcripts were scrubbed of such names. The list of identifiers and the institutions or individuals to which they correspond was kept in a separate password-protected Dropbox file.

Researcher Roles/Issues of Validity

Researcher roles and positionality.

Since the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis in qualitative research, it is impossible to eliminate the influence of the researcher and his/her personal values, attitudes and beliefs (Miles et al., 2014). Therefore, before I began my research I considered how I would influence my research, especially because there were advantages and disadvantages to my being a researcher in a context that was familiar to me. My experience working in the MSD helped me delve more deeply into detailed contextual
information, but potentially it could also have been a source of bias. I had positive, professional relationships with many MSD staff members and therefore it was likely that they felt comfortable talking with me during interviews and might have been more forthcoming and honest about their feelings with me than they would have been with a stranger. District personnel sometimes approach non-district employees with a “you-don’t-know-what-it’s-like-in-urban-schools” attitude during interactions. Had I not been an insider at one point, these negative sentiments would likely have been compounded by the fact that I am a young, privileged, white woman from academia. My background in working for the district might have made me more credible. MSD personnel might also have appreciated that I had an understanding of any contextual references they made during interviews. However, I was cautious that these relationships did not impede my ability to make data-driven conclusions.

During the time I was employed by the district, I worked closely with the second highest ranked leader in the district—the Chief Academic Officer. Given my proximity to the Chief Academic Officer, staff often tried to impress me with their work, with the hope that I would convey positive information about them to the Chief Academic Officer. This perception could have caused research participants to embellish their responses to my inquiries in order to make themselves look better. Another obstacle I anticipated facing is that I had previously used my influence with the Chief Academic Officer to successfully advocate for issues which benefited some district employees. For this reason, employees may have believed that I was in a position to further their interests, and may have considered this when crafting their answers to my questions. I explain how I worked to address these threats to validity in the next section.
Addressing threats to validity.

Miles et al. (2014) cautioned that researcher effects, especially during an observation, can result in participants’ social behavior to be different than it would ordinarily have been. The authors contended that participants may act differently than they otherwise would act if they do not know who the researcher is, why the researcher is there and what the researcher is planning to do with the data collected (p. 296). While I was a familiar face to the participants in my study, I was transparent about the intentions of my study so that participants knew what I was studying, why I was studying it, how I was collecting information and what I planned to do with the information collected in order to minimize false impressions or rumors. In light of my existing relationships with the participants and my perceived hierarchical rank, I ensured that employees understood that the purpose of my research was solely academic and that it was not commissioned by the district for evaluative purposes.

I also considered descriptive validity, which is a threat to validity that involves capturing inaccuracies or incompleteness in describing what participants said. I addressed this threat to validity by digitally recording all interviews and transcribing them verbatim. Furthermore, I listened to each recording and double-checked the transcripts to ensure accuracy and completeness. By doing so, I was confident that I had “rich data” as detailed grounding for, and testing of, my conclusions (Maxwell, 2013, p. 126).

In addition, I addressed threats to interpretative validity, whereby the researcher imposes his or her own meaning on participants’ words and actions rather than
understanding the perspective of the participants themselves. Maxwell (2013) recommended that “researchers seriously and systematically attempt to learn how the participants are making sense of what’s going on, rather than pigeon-holing their words and actions into your own framework” (p. 90). My decisions during the data condensation process—such as which chunks of data to code and which ones to pull out, which category labels best summarized chunks of data and which evolving story to tell—were all analytic choices I made as part of the data analysis process. To hold myself accountable for bracketing my own preconceptions and to reduce misrepresentation of participants’ words and actions, I shared the reflections on themes, causal relationships and interpretative conclusions I deduced from the first interview during my second interview with each participant. I solicited their feedback about my interpretations of their comments, tone and body language to minimize the misrepresentation of their words and actions. I did not share specific statements/quotes as part of these “member checks” because I did not want participants to be self-conscious about their wording during the second interviews nor did I want them to be significantly influenced by their responses from the first interviews. To further attend to interpretive validity, I also shared parts of my annotated transcripts with other doctoral students and faculty to talk about my interpretations and engaged in coding with them in an effort to develop “intersubjective consensus” through dialogic engagement (Miles et al., 2014, p. 13).

Maxwell (2013) explained that trying to reduce a researcher’s influence is not a meaningful goal in qualitative research, and that it is more important for a researcher to understand how he or she is influencing what a participant says during an interview and
how this will affect the validity of inferences drawn from the interview. Writing weekly memos about my assumptions, experiences and reactions to participants forced me to be reflective about my influence as a researcher, and I asked other doctoral students and faculty members to read these memos and to critically challenge my thinking about my presence and my interpretation of the data.

Furthermore, as described in the “Methods and Research Design” section, I used methodological triangulation by employing multiple data collection methods and strategically sequencing them. Having different data collection methods and several repeated samples for each data collection method (e.g., several interviews) allowed me to examine varied interpretations in ways that are generative. Perspectival triangulation that considers a range of participant perspectives was also built into the research design, as I engaged participants with three different jobs (top district leaders, principal supervisors and principals). Conducting numerous interviews among participant groups and asking parallel questions across participants gave me the opportunity to rule out spurious associations and premature theories and to develop and test alternate hypotheses during the course of the research process. The concurrent use of these validity strategies throughout the research process helped me ensure that I had the quality and depth of information to confidently answer my research questions with the most authentic and stable interpretations possible (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 195). The findings from my study are detailed in the following chapter.
Chapter 4
RESULTS

A few minutes into my conversation with principal supervisor Rhonda Thomas¹, her cell phone rang. I could hear the frustration in Principal Derek Conley’s voice over the phone.

“One of my fifth grade teachers is out on short-term disability leave, and her class hasn’t had a substitute teacher in more than two weeks. I’ve been dividing the class among the other fifth grade classes, but it’s been chaos up there as a result. I reached out to Susan in HR but haven’t heard back from her…”

Beeeeeeeeep! The loud tone from the phone is audible from my seat across Rhonda’s desk. “Hang on a second,” Rhonda tells Principal Conley. “I’m getting another call.” She clicks over to the other line. It’s Sam from the finance team. Sam is assigned to work with the network of principals that Rhonda leads.

“Rhonda!” Sam begins, “Just checking in to see whether you reviewed the Excel doc I sent with your principals’ discretionary spending to date. Some of their purchases seemed questionable to me, so I want to make sure that they’re okay with you.”

“I’m on the other line, Sam.” Rhonda explains. “I’ll call you back shortly.” An hour and a half later, Rhonda has resolved the issues raised by Principal Conley and by Sam. Rhonda had designated this time on her calendar to do school walkthroughs in the schools in her network that have principals who are in their first year on the job. With the afternoon nearly over, she hopes to get to these walkthroughs tomorrow, but predicts that “more likely than not, something else that requires my attention will surface.”

¹ This, and all subsequent names, are pseudonyms.
Interactions like the ones portrayed above are daily occurrences for principal supervisors. With one foot in the district central office and another foot in schools, principal supervisors must navigate both settings and the players who are part of them. Principal supervisors have divergent responsibilities as a result of these dual roles. In this chapter, I report on the findings of each of my research questions as they pertain to these dual roles that principal supervisors serve. I organize sub-sections throughout the chapter by the separate functions that principal supervisors play in support of central office staff members and in support of principals. While I allude to how each of my findings connects to the theoretical perspectives that underpin the conceptual framework in this chapter, I discuss these connections in more detail in chapter 5.

In the first section, I describe the ways in which the positioning of principal supervisors in large school district organizational hierarchies impacts their ability to serve as instructional leaders. I explain the structure of the district organizational hierarchy and how principal supervisors function as district central office team members as well as principal overseers. In the second section, I explain the ways in which the requests from, and expectations by, top district leaders and principals influence principal supervisors’ work in supporting principals’ instructional leadership capacity. In the third section, I describe how principal supervisors understand, manage and negotiate their intended roles as instructional leaders. In the last section, I share other findings that are either unrelated or tangentially related to my research questions before moving into a discussion of findings and my recommendations based on my findings in the final chapter.
As my findings in this chapter evidence, as a result of principal supervisors’ positioning in the district’s organizational hierarchy, organizational conditions and the practices of top district leaders and principals, and principal supervisors’ views about their intended job functions, principal supervisors often serve as “brokers”—intermediaries between central office staff members and principals. In doing so, principal supervisors act as instructional leaders because many of these brokering activities serve an instructional purpose. Table 3 provides a brief description of each brokering activity undertaken by principal supervisors, an example of what the brokering activity looks like in practice and whether principal supervisors believed that the brokering activity supports teaching and learning. I offer an extended discussion about the implications of principal supervisors’ brokering in chapter 5.

Table 3. Overview of Brokering Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brokering Category</th>
<th>Brokering Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Serve an Instructional Purpose?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buffering</td>
<td>PRIORITIZERS</td>
<td>Buffering central office staff members from principals Highlight important issues to which central office staff members should be attentive, and, in doing so, signal to them which issues are less important</td>
<td>Requests from principals for classroom trailers to alleviate overcrowding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRIORITIZERS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Buffering principals from central office staff members</td>
<td>Translate requests made of principals so that principals experience them in a form that they can manage quickly</td>
<td>Curates announcements and action items from departmental leaders into a single weekly summary email; creates monthly calendar of essential to-dos</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Excuse principals from certain activities which the principal supervisors deem to be unimportant</td>
<td>Told principals that it was unnecessary to attend spirit competition</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TIME PROTECTORS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Buffering principals from central office staff members</td>
<td>Guard principals’ time so that the majority of principals’ time and energy can be spent focusing on instructional issues</td>
<td>Responded to food services departments’ request for school start and end times</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Address compliance issues on behalf of principals</td>
<td>Strategically allocating time on monthly network meeting agenda</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORT MANAGERS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Buffering principals from central office staff members</td>
<td>Flag performance issues for departmental team leaders</td>
<td>Raised a Network Support Team member’s non-responsiveness to the Chief Talent Officer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>ENFORCERS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Bolstering for central office staff members</td>
<td>Follow up with principals about meeting deadlines or fulfilling requests made of principals by central office staff members</td>
<td>Reminded staff members to upload teachers’ evaluative ratings to the state evaluation system website by the deadline</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MESSENGERS</strong>&lt;br&gt;Bolstering for central office staff members</td>
<td>Deliver messages to principals for a wide range of purposes</td>
<td>Including a “FYI” for principals in a weekly network summary email or forwarding the original email</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONNECTORS</td>
<td>Direct principals to both internal and external resources and personnel which or who can be helpful to them</td>
<td>Connected a principal to district public relations employee when a team from a local news station showed up at the school unannounced</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RUBBER STAMPERS</td>
<td>Grant Network Support Team members permission to take action on principals’ requests for which they do not have authority</td>
<td>Approved use of funds that were allocated to hire a School Climate Manager to hire a Reading Specialist instead</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADVOCATES</td>
<td>Follow up with central office staff members on principals’ behalf</td>
<td>Asked the Office of School Safety for an additional school police officer in a school with an increased number of fights</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ALIGNERS</td>
<td>Ensure that members of the two groups are driving towards the same goal and taking actions that complement, rather than conflict with, each other’s work. Communicate district priorities and initiatives to principals and assist them in putting the priorities and initiatives into practice. Provide information about schools to central office staff members to inform their decision-making and work</td>
<td>Ask principals to establish goals for their schools based on the district-wide goals that top district leaders set. Explained that new school bus routes should consider rival gangs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principal Supervisors’ Positioning *(Research Question #1)*

**District organizational hierarchy.**

The organizational hierarchy in the MSD is typical of the hierarchy in most large school districts. The Board of Education presides over the Chief Executive Officer, who in turn oversees the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Talent Officer, the Chief Financial Officer, the Chief Operations Officer, and the Chief Information Technology Officer. Each of these Chief-level individuals has a handful of Deputy Chiefs who report to them, and each of the Deputy Chiefs lead a department. For example, the Chief Information Technology Officer oversees the Deputy Chiefs of the Information Systems, Technology Services and Education Technology departments. The principal supervisors are on the same organizational level as the Deputy Chiefs and they lead “departments” of networks of schools. Each principal supervisor leads a network of 10-15 schools and is the direct supervisor of all of the principals in his or her network.
The principal supervisors report directly to the Chief Academic Officer. The Chief Academic Officer leads the district’s curriculum, assessment, special education, professional development and content-specific (ex. mathematics, science and early childhood) work. The Chief Academic Officer’s oversight of the principal supervisors was a strategic decision made by the district a few years ago and coincided with the district’s attempt to shift the responsibilities of principals and principal supervisors to emphasize instructional issues. Previously, principal supervisors reported to the now-eliminated position of Chief of Schools, and subsequently they reported to the Chief of Staff to the Superintendent. Both the Chief of Schools and the Chief of Staff to the Superintendent led the principal supervisors’ focus on school management issues. Because of her leadership in instructional areas, the Chief Academic Officer was viewed as someone who would be better positioned to focus principal supervisors’ work on the district’s stated priorities for their role. In addition, a top district leader explained that this positioning of principal supervisors elevates principal support to an executive-level function, which signals the district’s emphasis on the importance of the role of principals. See figure 3 on the following page for a graphical representation of the MSD organizational chart.
Figure 3. District Organizational Chart
Considering findings from the theories of action perspective, while the district’s design theory about the importance and positioning of principals and principal supervisors mirrors top district leaders’ and principal supervisors’ espoused theory, the design theory and espoused theory do not always match their theories-in-use. In public-facing and internal communication about its strategic plan, the district touts that since principals are the individuals who are most closely connected to both their school staff and the community, principals are the district’s most influential leaders. The job description for principals states:

The principal has primary responsibility and accountability for establishing his or her school as a high-quality, high-expectations academic center with a focus on personalized instruction, professional support for teachers, and school-wide practices that lead to measurable results.

Since the district’s design theory is predicated on the belief that principals have the greatest ability to impact student outcomes, district supports for principals should be at the forefront of the organizational design. Principals report directly to principal supervisors, and therefore organizational supports should also center around principal supervisors. When district leaders changed the responsibilities of the principal supervisor position, they also changed principal supervisors’ job titles from “Area Superintendents” to “Network Support Leaders” to highlight their role in principal support. One top district leader discussed the district’s beliefs about principals by drawing analogies. He explained:

Before the rollout of the (district’s strategic plan), support for principals from Downtown was like a conveyor belt. Every principal received the same ‘package’ of supports. But the (district’s strategic plan) has us think about support for principals like they do in medicine, where a medical
team serves an individual patient’s needs. A team of folks from Downtown are supposed to rally around a principal and provide support to the principal based on what the principal identifies as needs of the school community.

This top district leader’s analogy seemed to resonate with the other top district leaders, all of whom stated that the realization of principals’ visions for their schools should be central to the work of departmental teams.

The principal-centric view of the district hierarchy that top district leaders trumpeted is the basis of the network support structure that positions principals as decision-makers with autonomy in a number of operational areas and surrounds them with support from key central office departments to assist them with the implementation of their decisions so that they can focus on academic issues. Each “network” consists of 10-15 schools that are supported by a “Network Support Team” of representatives from the human resources, special education, finance, curriculum and instruction and facilities departments. The network structure was discussed in detail in chapter 3. In order to foster the adaptive change necessary among members of the Network Support Team to realize the goals of the network support structure, the district holds quarterly Network Support Team convenings. The convenings focus on deepening Network Support Team members’ understanding of both their role-specific and collective Network Support Team responsibilities for supporting principals. To reinforce the message that central office staff members should assist principals from a service orientation that prioritizes principals’ needs and decisions, the same few slides are presented at the beginning of all Network Support Team convenings. Figure 4 below is the image that is shown in one of these slides.
When asked who they primarily serve in their role, all principal supervisors quickly responded that their top priority was to serve principals and they explained how the network structure was meant to support this goal. A few principal supervisors noted that while they were supposed to serve principals because doing so was the district’s strategic vision, they cited examples of times when principals in their network hoped to start an initiative or adopt a program in their schools that they felt responded to the local needs of their school communities, but that district leaders declined principals’ appeals in favor of uniform decisions that district leaders made for all schools in the district. Principals offered several similar examples. One principal stated that she had identified a
school-wide behavior management system that she wanted to implement but was told by central office personnel that she could not do so because she had to adopt Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).

In describing the organizational hierarchy, principals did not identify themselves as being at the center of the organizational structure as depicted in figure 4. Instead, they described the organizational hierarchy from the top-down perspective that is portrayed in figure 3. They explained that directly under the Superintendent are the Chiefs, and directly under the Chiefs are the Deputy Chiefs and principal supervisors. Principals then fall below the principal supervisors, with teachers falling below principals “at the bottom of the food chain,” stated one principal. When probed about the purpose of the network structure, several principals explained that although central office staff members tout that they are principal-focused in their work, the support the principals receive from central office personnel often does not feel principal-focused to them. Another principal noted the incongruity between the responsibility and accountability of principals and the deference to district leaders that is expected of them:

If, for example, I plan to hold a meeting with my staff after school…but receive a call from someone Downtown that requires my immediate attention, I have to reschedule the staff meeting. Not attending to Downtown isn’t really an option.

Principal supervisors voiced similar frustrations, explaining that in practice, requests they receive from central office personnel trumps most requests they receive from principals.

Thus, despite the district’s intent per the design theory to restructure the organizational hierarchy from a linear model with the Superintendent and Chief-level positions at the top followed by layers of personnel to a circular model with principals in
the middle and personnel surrounding them with support, the linear model represented in figure 3 is regarded as a kind of pecking order that guides principal supervisors’ decision-making about how to prioritize requests made of them as their theories-in-use, which will be discussed in more detail in the section titled “The Decision to Broker.” I will now turn to principal supervisors’ role as central office leaders and then to their role as principal overseers, followed by findings about how they balance the disparate responsibilities of these dual roles.

**Principal supervisors as central office leaders.**

The position description for principal supervisors defines principal supervisors’ sole responsibility as being to oversee the instructional work of principals; it does not mention any district-level responsibilities as being part of the role. The lack of district-level responsibilities is a glaring omission in the position description, since principal supervisors’ participation in numerous district-level activities is mandatory. They are required to attend weekly, three-hour Senior Leadership Team meetings where the Superintendent and different departmental leaders share with the larger district leadership team the work that their department is doing in pursuit of organizational goals. In addition, principal supervisors attend two-hour weekly meetings with the Chief Academic Officer to discuss and troubleshoot school management and operations issues. They are also expected to attend bi-monthly Executive Team meetings with all of the Chiefs that are focused on high-level district strategic activities, and are asked to reserve a half-day block on their calendars every other Wednesday afternoon for teacher disciplinary hearings.
Top district leaders also frequently ask principal supervisors to participate on district-level committees, such as the charter schools’ authorization committee and the school budget process revision committee, as well as to attend ad hoc meetings related to district-level planning and policy matters, such as meetings about the five-year capital programs plan and meetings about changes to district-wide grading policies. While principal supervisors report that these standing meetings and responsibilities, on average, take approximately 20% of their time during a typical week, they report that the “one off” meetings and requests are also time-intensive and frequent, comprising, on average, approximately 20% of their time during a typical week. According to one top district leader, they ask principal supervisors to participate in such meetings because:

Our work is schools, and we discuss schools at just about every meeting we have. Since they are supervising schools, it doesn’t make sense for them not to be part of the conversations.

In addition to serving on a variety of district-level committees and attending a number of district-level meetings, principal supervisors are expected to lead Network Support Teams. This leadership role involves facilitating weekly team meetings with Network Support Team members to align their work to the needs of the schools in the network and to be in frequent communication with Network Support Team members. A principal supervisor lamented that “more often than not, these meetings turn into extinguishing sessions for the fire of the moment.” Principal supervisors reported that topics of conversation during these meetings often include facilities and maintenance issues and discussions about schools that are not in compliance with district, state and federal guidelines. It is worth noting that although principal supervisors lead the
Network Support Teams, they do not serve as the supervisors for Network Support Team members. Rather, Network Support Team members report to the Deputy Chiefs or Executive Directors who oversee their departments. Principal supervisors’ engagement with the Network Support Team members relates to their brokering between central office staff members and principals, which I describe in the section titled “Central Office Support Managers.” Before turning to my findings about the brokering functions of the principal supervisor role in practice, I will review the results of my research regarding the ways in which principal supervisors serve the principal oversight functions.

**Principal supervisors as principal overseers.**

At the same time that principal supervisors are expected to play an important role within the central office, they are also expected to focus the majority of their time and energy overseeing the principals in their networks, according to both the district’s design theory and the espoused theory of top district leaders. The position description for principal supervisors establishes the following key responsibilities:

- Leading strategic change that continuously elevates the performance of schools;
- Using evidence of principals’ effectiveness and student performance data to determine necessary improvements in principals’ instructional practices;
- Coaching and supporting individual principals with instructional issues using effective professional learning strategies;
• Conducting monthly professional development with assigned network of principals; and

• Evaluating principals using the formal district principal evaluation process in ways that help them grow as instructional leaders.

These responsibilities are consistent with the Council of Chief State School Officers’ 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards and Casserly et al.’s (2012) findings of principal supervisors’ reports from 41 districts nationwide about the responsibilities they were expected to perform to support principals.

It is significant to highlight that in addition to supporting principals, principal supervisors are expected to evaluate principals’ job performance. As part of the formal statewide evaluation process, they evaluate principals five times during the course of the school year. These five evaluations include announced and unannounced observations of the principal during the school year as the principal performs assigned duties. Principal supervisors observe principals conducting school walkthroughs, leading staff meetings, facilitating professional development sessions, and holding conferences with teachers or staff members. State mandates require that principal supervisors have discussions with principals following each observation, and that the announced observations also include a pre-observation discussion between the principal supervisors and the principals. The evaluation ratings that principals receive from principal supervisors become part of the principals’ permanent career personnel file. It also comes with what some principals consider to be a perk of not being evaluated for the next three years.
A few principal supervisors said that they found the evaluation and support functions of the principal supervisor role as being in conflict with one another. They believed that principals would be more likely to open up about their leadership challenges and ask for assistance of their principal supervisor if their principal supervisor’s only role is to support them. However, all of these principal supervisors believed that they were generally able to overcome the tension between these two functions. One principal supervisor explained how he attempts to do so:

A lot of it comes down to rapport. I try to build strong relationships with my principals so that they can trust me and be open with me about their areas for improvement and when they are struggling. I try to get them to see the evaluations not as punitive, but as real opportunities to grow. I also strive to be as honest, fair and evidence-based in my evaluations as possible.

Interestingly, one principal supervisor stated that “a lot of our authority as (principal supervisors) rides on our role as their evaluators. We need this because some principals have very strong personalities.” This suggests that the principal supervisor believes that principals may feel that principal supervisors do not have much power in their roles. Principal supervisors echoed this sense of disempowerment in sharing that they are given directives by some central office staff members, which I detail in a later section of this chapter titled “The Decision to Broker”. These are interesting power dynamics given principal supervisors’ attendance at executive-level meetings, the fact that they report directly to a Chief-level position, and are at the same level in the organizational hierarchy as respected Deputy Chiefs. I discuss additional findings that pertain to principal supervisors’ beliefs about their roles in the section titled “Principal Supervisors and Instructional Leadership”.

91
Having described how the positioning of principal supervisors in the district organizational hierarchy leads to “de facto” responsibilities as central office personnel and as principal overseers, I will now explain how these responsibilities result in principal supervisors’ focusing on issues other than instruction in their daily work.

**Principal Supervisors as Brokers (Research Question #2)**

As explained in the previous section, while principal supervisors are expected to support the principals they oversee, they are also expected to play an important role within the central office. Principal supervisors are expected to be in schools regularly to provide instructional leadership support to principals, and to be intimately aware of, and responsive to, the needs of principals, as well as to the needs of central office leaders, as they arise in real-time. Thus, the daily work of principal supervisors is different from the role outlined in the position description. Principals and principal supervisors reported in the written questionnaires that principal supervisors do engage in the instructional leadership-related activities listed in the position description, but that these activities are not their sole focus, since they also engage in other activities which the district’s design theory does not include. In other words, some of their theories-in-use reflect the district’s design theory, while others do not reflect the district’s design theory.

The revised principal supervisor position description does not contain non-instructional responsibilities or responsibilities that do not pertain to providing support to principals. However, members of all participant groups reported that principal supervisors continue to have duties that are not directly related to teaching and learning.
and that do not involve supporting principals’ growth as instructional leaders. These responsibilities include approving school budgets, facilitating teacher disciplinary hearings, and responding to escalated parent concerns. Forty-two percent of principals reported that the most common issues for which their principal supervisor provides support to them are legal issues, followed by nineteen percent of principals who reported that the most common issues for which their principal supervisor provides support to them are school operations issues. Moreover, it is significant to note that members of all participant groups also reported that principal supervisors should serve many of these non-instructional functions. While some of the participants’ espoused theories reflect the district’s design theory, others do not. Their espoused theories and theories-in-use, however, mirror one another.

Principal, principal supervisor and top district leader interviewees described many of these functions in ways that relate to Honig & Copland’s (2008) notion of principal supervisors being “brokers” for top district leaders and their teams and principals. Honig & Copland describe such brokering as “figuring out how to act as efficient and effective resource brokers between the central office and schools, in a way that supports diverse school needs and interests, while staying true to the district’s overarching vision for improving teaching and learning” (p. 4). It is significant to note that these brokering functions were part of principals’, principal supervisors’ and top district leaders’ espoused theories of the role that principal supervisors should serve. Thus, although the brokering functions of principal supervisors are ignored in the position description—the design theory—such brokering functions are readily apparent in participants’ espoused
theory and theory-in-use—the planned actions and observable activities of principal supervisors. It is because of these “de facto” brokering functions that principal supervisors do not perform their intended role of focusing only on supporting principals’ instructional leadership development and instead support both principals and central office staff members.

The theme of principal supervisors serving as “brokers” between principals and central office personnel was salient across participant groups, and there were a variety of brokering functions that principal supervisors served. In addition, central office staff members and principals viewed principal supervisors’ brokering as serving different purposes. Each of these purposes benefitted central office personnel and principals in disparate ways. For these reasons, Honig’s broad conceptualization of brokering does not detail sufficiently principal supervisors’ brokering functions. Thus, as a result of my findings, I extend Honig’s conception of brokering by developing a framework that subdivides brokering into three disparate functions—buffering to shield the noncritical requests central office staff members and principals make of each other, bolstering to facilitate the work of central office staff members that relies on principals and vice versa, and bridging to serve as an intermediary between central office staff members and principals. I then identify specific brokering activities within each of these function areas. Figure 5 is a visual illustration of my expanded conceptualization of Honig’s notion of principal supervisors as brokers.
Figure 5. Expanded Conceptualization of Principal Supervisors as Brokers
Figure 5 depicts the historic hierarchy of top district leaders being ranked above principal supervisors and principal supervisors overseeing principals. The bi-directional arrows represent the flow of information. The arrows pointing from top district leaders and principals to principal supervisors indicate the requests that each group makes of principal supervisors and the expectations that each group has of them. The arrows pointing from principal supervisors to top district leaders and principals portray the brokering in which principal supervisors engage between each group. The trapezoid image shows a filter of the primary types of brokering that principal supervisors direct. As will be explained in more detail later in this chapter, principal supervisors make a decision about the kind of brokering to use in a particular situation based on the expectations of them and the requests made of them, as well as their own perspectives and beliefs about their role.

These findings emerged from my concurrent and converging data collection and analysis processes. I identified specific brokering activities based on the examples that participants shared following my multiple readings and coding of the data. I then named individual brokering activities, grouped the brokering activities into thematic categories and generated a title for each thematic category. Clustering the brokering activities and sorting the brokering activities into larger categories was an iterative process. I revised the categories and activities that I initially identified as I looked for both disconfirming and confirming evidence to verify my conclusions. For example, I had originally categorized one of the brokering activities—serving as central office support managers—under “bridging”, but later moved it to “buffering” based on the similarities of the
activity to other brokering activities in the “buffering” category. In another example, I removed a brokering activity—sense-making—whereby principal supervisors explain the “why” of various efforts to principals and central office leaders because only one principal supervisor had alluded to the brokering activity during both sets of interviews.

I will now delineate the specific ways in which principal supervisors serve each of the three main brokering functions—buffering, bolstering and bridging. I will also explain the purposes that top district leaders and principals ascribe to each of the principal supervisors’ brokering functions.

**Buffering.**

In acting as buffers for both central office staff members and principals, principal supervisors provide a filter for the requests that members of each group receive from members of the other group. Principal supervisors benefit principals and central office staff members by buffering between the two groups, which reflects participants’ espoused theory that principal supervisors should, and their theory-in-use that principal supervisors do, serve both principals and central office personnel. As I elaborate in the sections that follow, while some of the buffering functions that principal supervisors serve for principals and central office staff members are similar, the buffering functions benefit each of the groups in different ways.
Principal supervisors serve as buffers for central office staff members, particularly those who serve on Network Support Teams, by helping to prioritize issues that require central office staff members’ attention. Principal supervisors highlight important issues to which central office staff members should be attentive, and, in doing so, signal to them which issues are less important. Top district leaders expressed how their departmental staff members are “inundated” with requests from principals to respond to principals’ concerns about issues such as budget accounting, maintenance, and staff absences. Top district leaders acknowledged that their departmental staff members are not able to immediately address all of the principals’ appeals. “With limited time, resources and capacity, we can’t do it all,” remarked one top district leader. Being intimately aware of school needs, principal supervisors occasionally step in to buffer principals’ requests to central office staff members in order to help central office staff members “prioritize among the priorities,” according to a top district leader.

One top district leader told about the time that he had received phone calls from two principals who were flustered about the overcrowding in their schools and requested classroom trailers. With limited funds for expenses that were not planned for in the department’s annual budget, the top district leader wanted to know how pressing of an issue the space constraints really were at the schools. “Principals are strong advocates for their schools, and these principals in particular really knew how to tug at the heart strings,” he laughed. He reached out to the principal supervisors of the networks of
which these schools were a part for more information. One of the principal supervisors confirmed emphatically that the congested school in his network was deteriorating the quality of teaching and learning. The other principal supervisor said that she thought the crammed feeling of the school in her network could be alleviated by making some nonintrusive changes to the school’s master schedule. Having received buffering support in the form of guidance from the principal supervisors, the top district leader fulfilled one of the principal’s requests but denied the other principal’s request. In this example, the top district leader appreciated receiving guidance from the principal supervisors about the use of the district’s limited resources. (As was the case in this example, this buffering for central office staff members also benefits principals when principal supervisors believe that the principals’ issues should be given high priority. In other words, such buffering expedites the time in which central office staff members address some principals’ issues. This buffering activity will be further explained in the “Bolstering” function as part of the “Advocates” sub-section.)

Another top district leader remarked, “I guess it’s kind of an unwritten rule that if [the issue] is something we really need to respond to, the principal supervisor will let us know.” As further evidence of principal supervisors’ buffering for principals, principals conveyed annoyance that their emails and calls to top district leaders and departmental team members are sometimes ignored and only responded to when their principal supervisor gets involved. Thus, by bringing the most critical issues from principals to the attention of central office staff members, principal supervisors operate as buffers for them.
Buffering principals from central office staff.

Prioritizers.

Similar to how principal supervisors serve as a buffer for central office staff members, one way that principal supervisors serve as a buffer for principals is by emphasizing important action items for them to address. Principal supervisors serve this buffering activity for principals in two ways. The first way is by translating requests made of principals so that principals experience them in a form that they can manage quickly. All principal supervisors who participated in this study alluded to having served this buffering function for the principals in their networks. A principal supervisor explained that she curates announcements and action items from departmental leaders and puts them into a single summary email that she sends to principals at the beginning of each week. The other principal supervisors also follow this, or a similar, practice. The principal supervisor elaborated:

I take mandates and other important information from all of the departments and put them in one email that can be a ‘one-stop-shop’ for principals. In doing so, I try to re-frame them in such a way that they are relevant and manageable for principals.

Relatedly, a principal stated that one of the most helpful things her principal supervisor does is create a monthly calendar of essential “to-dos” that the principal uses as a checklist to make sure that she has met all required deadlines.

Another way in which principal supervisors shield principals from demands that interfere with the time they can spend on instruction is by excusing principals from certain activities mandated by district leaders which the principal supervisors deem to be unimportant. One principal supervisor offered as an example the time when he
“exempted” principals of schools in his network from being judges for a district-wide school spirit competition. He stated:

Their participation was going to mean that they would be out of their buildings for a fifth time this month. And their mid-year teachers’ evaluations are due at the end of next week. It wouldn’t have been a good use of a day.

By excusing principals from being part of the competition, the principal supervisor provided the principals with more time to engage in activities that supported an instructional purpose. Both of these prioritizing functions save principals time and relate to another function of principal supervisors in serving as buffers for the principals in their network, which I describe below.

*Time protectors.*

In serving as a buffer for principals, principal supervisors also guard principals’ time so that the majority of principals’ time and energy can be spent focusing on instructional issues. Prioritizing buffering activities for principals, as I detailed in the previous section, is intimately related to the time protecting buffering activities. In addition to supporting principals’ abilities to quickly manage requests made of them and excusing them from non-essential diversions, another time-saving measure which principal supervisors engage in is assuming non-instructional tasks that have been asked of principals by central office staff members. One principal supervisor stated, “Principals have enough to do…if I can take something off of their list, I will.” The kinds of tasks that principal supervisors shield principals from by working on issues on their behalf are typically related to compliance and/or the collection of information from schools.
Participants shared many examples of times when central office personnel sought information from all schools in the district and principal supervisors were either asked or volunteered to compile information about schools in their networks and provide it to the departments. As a result, central office team members did not trouble principals directly for such information. For example, when the food services department needed to figure out how to divide their staffing resources based on when to serve breakfasts and lunches, all of the principal supervisors put together lists of start and end times of the school days for the schools in their networks. “It was one less email the principals had in their flooded inboxes,” joked one principal supervisor.

Principal supervisors also described that they allowed principals in their networks to focus on higher-priority, instructional issues by addressing “low-hanging fruit” on principals’ behalf. For example, one principal supervisor said that he met with a member of the human resources office about a school that he believed the human resources office should prioritize sending substitute teachers to when the district was short on substitute teachers. He explained that his meeting with the member on the principal’s behalf reduced the principal’s to-do list by one action item, thereby increasing the amount of time that the principal could spend on the teacher observations that she had planned for the day. In doing so, the principal supervisor served as a buffer for the principal.

An additional way in which principal supervisors protect principals’ time is by the choices principal supervisors make about what items to include on their monthly network meeting agendas. Principal supervisors reported that they are constantly being asked by central office personnel for “time on the agenda” to share information with principals. One principal supervisor explained:
There seems to be a pattern when departments send information to principals. They’ll send an initial email, then a reminder email, then appeal to us for time on our network agendas for them to talk to principals.

Another principal supervisor added to that thought, stating:

But this is not the point of network meetings. Network meetings are not supposed to be a string of infomercials. I have to intervene and tell [central office staff members] “no” unless I deem whatever they’re asking to present to be important for them to get in front of principals.

When asked how he makes decisions about what is and is not important and what should and should not be shared with principals during network meetings, the principal supervisor reflected:

If it’s something that can be—or was—sent in an email, then I’ll encourage them to do that or tell them that it’s already on principals’ radar. I’ll often tell them that I’ll put their information in my weekly bulletin for principals. If it’s something that’s a high priority for the district—like information about state testing—then I’ll give them the time.

A third principal supervisor said that her decisions about whether central office staff members are provided the opportunity to share information with principals during network meetings depends on who is doing the asking. If the ask is from a top district leader, she will unequivocally agree to let them present. If the ask is from anyone other than a top district leader, she considers factors such as how important it is to principals and whether or not the information can be communicated using a different medium. Therefore, principal supervisors serve as buffers for principals by working on tasks for principals and by guarding principals’ monthly meeting and professional learning time to reduce the amount of time that principals spend on operational and compliance issues at the expense of instructional issues.
Central office support managers.

In addition to prioritizing requests that central office staff members make of principals and protecting principals’ time, principal supervisors also manage central office staff members who are on the Network Support Team assigned to their networks. Such management primarily involves principal supervisors’ flagging performance issues. Principal supervisors do not serve in a supervisory capacity to Network Support Team members, but sometimes address issues related to their management. However, a handful of principal supervisors interviewed reported that there have been times either when they noticed a pattern of underperformance by Network Support Team members or when principals told principal supervisors about negative performance issues they experienced with Network Support Team members. In these instances, principal supervisors raised their concerns with departmental leaders or with Chiefs. For example, one principal supervisor shared that she talked to the Chief Talent Officer about a Network Support Team member’s non-responsiveness to calls and emails from her and from the principals who report to her, explaining that she and the principals in her network had not been able to make contact with the Network Support Team member in several weeks. By intervening on behalf of principals, principal supervisors eliminate the need for principals to deal with the hassle of reporting performance issues that arise with Network Support Team members. Principals generally confirmed these reports. As one principal noted, “When I need a response from someone Downtown, I call my [principal supervisor]. She’ll help me deal with it.”
Some principal supervisors believe that Network Support Team members do not make their responsibilities as a Network Support Team member a top priority among their other departmental responsibilities and deduced that this was because principal supervisors do not evaluate them. A few principal supervisors conjectured that it would be easier to hold Network Support Team members accountable if they were evaluated by principal supervisors. Their desire to be Network Support Team members’ evaluators reflects their objective to buffer principals from the non-responsiveness of central office staff members. While not all districts have structures that are analogous to the Network Support Team structure in the MSD, many districts have structures that are similar to the Network Support Team structure in that there are central office personnel who are assigned to support subsets of principals in the district but who do not report to principal supervisors. Therefore, this brokering function is a function that many principal supervisors serve.

**Bolstering.**

In addition to running interference for central office staff members and principals by protecting them from engaging in non-essential activities, principal supervisors also bolster the requests that central office staff members and principals make of each other in an effort to support them. Bolstering refers to principal supervisors’ facilitation of the work and priorities of central office staff members and principals. Bolstering frequently takes the form of sharing and reinforcing information between the two groups, as detailed in the sections below.
Bolstering for central office staff.

Enforcers.

One way in which principal supervisors bolster central office staff members’ work is by underscoring the importance of such work to principals and helping to move it forward. All of the principal supervisors I interviewed described how they were frequently asked by central office personnel to be more forceful in following up with principals about meeting deadlines or fulfilling requests made of principals by central office staff members regarding issues that were unrelated to teaching and learning. Examples include being asked to follow up when a principal failed to submit hiring paperwork for paraprofessional staff members or when a principal did not upload teachers’ evaluative ratings to the state evaluation system website by the deadline. All principal supervisors lamented serving as what some referred to as “compliance officers” for demands that they did not necessarily agree with and which frustrated their principals. Principal supervisors also said that they are asked to monitor principals’ submission of materials and other information on a regular basis. Their estimates of how often they are asked to do so range from twice a week to every day. As one principal supervisor remarked, “I’m a policeman without the uniform. One of my principals misses a deadline, and I’m asked to lay down the weight of the law. I’m the bad guy.”

Top district leaders reported that the compliance deadlines that they and their departmental staff members ask principal supervisors for help enforcing are frequently federal and state compliance deadlines for which there could be “serious legal, financial and other consequences for the district” if such deadlines are not met. One top district
leader provided the example of not receiving funds for students with special needs if the district is at a certain rate of non-compliance with up-to-date Individualized Education Plans (IEPs). When probed about why they turn to principal supervisors rather than reaching out to principals to remind the principals about the consequences of non-compliance, one top district leader explained that “[Principal supervisors] are in more regular communication with principals than anyone at [the district office].” Thus, principal supervisors strengthen central office staff members’ objectives by holding non-abiding principals accountable.

*Messengers.*

Similar to how central office staff members frequently ask principal supervisors to nudge principals about meeting compliance deadlines, central office staff members also often ask principal supervisors to deliver messages to principals. All of the principal supervisors I spoke with reported that they are asked to deliver messages for a wide range of purposes, including action items for principals to complete, invitations for principals to attend events or trainings and messages that are simply “FYIs” for principals. Seventy-five percent of principal supervisors interviewed said that the majority of requests they received to message information to principals contained action items for principals to take, followed by requests to share general information to keep principals “in the know about upcoming district-wide activities and initiatives,” as one principal supervisor explained. Principal supervisors reported that they included the most important action items and general information for principals to be aware of in the weekly communication they send to principals in their networks, as described in the earlier “prioritizers” section.
However, a number of principal supervisors also mentioned forwarding emails to the principals in their network, instead of or in addition to including the information from the emails in their summary emails. When asked how they determine whether to forward emails or to include the information in a more comprehensive email to the principals in their network, principal supervisors explained that it depended on the timing of when they received an email with information for them to message relative to the deadline of the task or dates pertaining to the information and also the urgency of the information contained in the email. One principal supervisor also shared that sometimes the central office staff member who sends an email “has framing [about an issue] that I don’t want to lose, and so I forward it to my principals.”

A top district leader explained that he relies on principal supervisors to be couriers of messages because principal supervisors contact principals on a daily basis. Other top district leaders explained that many central office employees perceive that the information they want to message to principals will be viewed as being a higher priority—or at least read—by principals if it is communicated to them by their principal supervisor. “They [principals] take it more seriously if it comes from the person who will be writing their performance evaluation,” remarked one top district leader. As described in the “prioritizers” section, principals’ reports concur with these statements, as principals rely on their principal supervisors to bring the most important information to their attention.
Bolstering for principals.

Connectors.

In serving as connectors for principals, principal supervisors direct principals to both internal and external resources and personnel which or who can be helpful to them. As one principal supervisor remarked, “I’ll seek out just about anyone if I think they can help one of my principals.” Some principals described how their principal supervisor put them in touch with central office employees in departments, such as the grants or communications departments, that do not have departmental team representatives on the Network Support Teams. For example, one principal discussed the time when a crew from a local news station showed up unannounced at her school with the hope of interviewing her, students in her school and their families about their perspectives on a new charter school that was opening in the area. Not having been in a similar situation before, the principal was unsure about what to do and she called her principal supervisor for guidance. Her principal supervisor connected her to a woman in the district’s communications department who managed public relations, and who was able to provide guidance to the principal. Stated one principal supervisor, “Some principals, especially new principals, don’t know who outside of Network Support Teams to contact for support, so I’ll make an introduction for them”.

Principals also rely on their principal supervisors to connect them to other principals in the district from whom they can learn “best practices.” One principal shared that he asked his principal supervisor to introduce him to a principal in another network who had restructured her school’s advisory period. The principal was considering doing
a similar restructuring in his school and wanted to learn about what factors the other principal had considered in making decisions about the restructuring.

In addition, principals depend upon their principal supervisors to connect them to external personnel. One principal supervisor reported that he had connected principals to external professional development providers who could offer professional learning in areas in which several elementary school principals in his network felt that they needed to grow. These areas included early literacy instruction and assessing students’ understanding of math standards by using formative assessments. As a former high school principal, the principal supervisor explained that he lacked the deep content knowledge of the elementary school subjects that the principals sought to learn. Therefore, by connecting principals to resources both inside and outside the school district, principal supervisors are able to extend the support they offer to principals beyond what the principal supervisors are able to provide.

Rubber stampers.

As previously described, district leaders designated personnel from various district departments to serve on Network Support Teams and to be the direct points of contact in their functional areas for both principal supervisors and principals. However, principal supervisors and principals shared their annoyance that such central office staff members lack the authority to act on many requests from principals. In order for these central office staff members to take action on a request for which they do not have authority, they must be granted permission to do so by either the head of their department or by the principal supervisor of the network. For example, a Network Support Team
member on the budgets team received a call from a principal who wanted to use funds that were allocated to hire a School Climate Manager to hire a Reading Specialist instead. The Network Support Team member had to get written permission either from the principal supervisor or from the budgets department lead in order to reallocate the funds. As one principal supervisor explained, “Central office network representatives must always be given sign off. They can’t do much without me or their boss giving them the nod.” Several principal supervisors described how it seemed as though Network Support Team members reach out to them more often than they reach out to their own departmental supervisors. One principal supervisor surmised, “It is often easier and less of a hassle to get in touch with us [principal supervisors] than to connect with their boss [the department head].” When this outreach is magnified by the nine members who serve on each Network Support Team, however, it results in a barrage of requests for approval being made to principal supervisors. According to one principal supervisor, “My phone is always buzzing. My email is always dinging.” By routinely approving central office support staff members’ proposed actions so that they can act on principals’ requests, principal supervisors are serving as intermediaries between principals and central office staff members.

Advocates.

Principals also ask principal supervisors to follow up with central office staff members on their behalf if their attempts to contact a central office staff member are fruitless or if they anticipate that “outreach will not be well-received,” as one principal explained. The principal provided the example of when she did not want the teachers in
her school to use a social-emotional learning curriculum that the social-emotional learning department was piloting. To increase the likelihood that her request would be approved, she asked her principal supervisor to make the ask of the social-emotional learning department. In another example, a principal supervisor told about the time she had to reach out to the Office of School Safety to ask for an additional school police officer to be put in her school because of the increased number of fights that had occurred there recently. The principal was worried that the local news channel would obtain and air footage of a fight. While the principal did not receive a response to the multiple calls and emails she made to the department, “when [the principal supervisor] called, they knew the issue was urgent and it was addressed immediately.” In an additional example, a principal carbon copied her principal supervisor on an email she sent to the Executive Director of the Family and Community Engagement Office about a question she had regarding an upcoming family event for which she planned to use Title I funds. When the Executive Director did not respond to the email in a timely fashion, the principal supervisor sent a follow-up email. “I didn’t even have to ask her to do it,” said the principal. “She knew that if I was carbon copying her on something, I would want her to step in if I didn’t get the information that I needed.” This brokering function of principal supervisors relates to the function of principal supervisors as “prioritizers” for central office staff members described above, whereby central office staff members rely on principal supervisors to indicate which communications from principals are most critical for them to address. In the contexts described in this section, however, such follow-up is primarily for the benefit of the principals.
**Bridging between central office staff and principals.**

While the other two brokering functions, buffering and bolstering, involve principal supervisors acting primarily on behalf of one group or the other, bridging involves principal supervisors’ brokering in a manner that assists both groups more equally. Principal supervisors serve a bridging function by helping to align the work of principals and central office staff members, to clarify information for members of each group and to facilitate communication between them. I explain how principal supervisors serve this bridging function in the following sections.

**Aligners.**

Principal supervisors align principals’ work and central office staff members’ work and by ensuring that they are driving towards the same goal and taking actions that complement, rather than conflict with, each other’s work. This alignment involves communicating district priorities and initiatives to principals and assisting them in putting the priorities and initiatives into practice. For example, several principal supervisors reported that they ask principals to establish goals for their schools based on the district-wide goals that top district leaders set. In another example, a principal supervisor reported working with a principal to make sure that his school walkthrough tool included monitoring district attendance procedures and the use of district-mandated social-emotional learning strategies.

Principal supervisors also align the work of the two groups by providing information about schools and sharing their experiences working with principals and in schools with central office staff members to inform their decision-making and work.
Most of this aligning occurs during meetings that principal supervisors and top district leaders attend. One top district leader described how having principal supervisors attend certain district-level meetings is helpful because the principal supervisors can share information they have about schools that is relevant to the topics being discussed in the meetings. For example, a top district leader shared that during a meeting about creating new and more efficient bus routes, a principal supervisor raised the fact that many students in two high schools that were in close proximity to each other were members of rival gangs, and recommended that to avoid conflict these schools did not share buses. In another example, a principal supervisor told a story about what happened when district leaders were discussing plans to merge two schools that had low student enrollment into one school building. The principal whose school building would be abandoned had plans to develop an impressive family resource center in one part of the building. The principal supervisor shared this information with district leaders, who, based on this information, decided to move the merged schools into that principal’s building rather than into the other building, as they had originally intended to do.

As explained earlier in this chapter, top district leaders also frequently ask principal supervisors to participate on various district-level committees. When asked why principal supervisors are asked to attend district-level meetings and to serve on district-level committees, a top district leader responded, “To help consider the impact of policies and operating procedures at the school-level.” Since principal supervisors are intimately aware of all facets of the schools in their network, they can anticipate and offer insight about challenges resulting from the adoption of district-imposed changes. Another
top district leader explained that “Getting ahead of implementation issues before they hit schools will allow us to steer clear of major issues requiring major time in the future.” Thus, by being knowledgeable about the work of both principals and central office staff members and because they have frequent interactions with members of each group, principal supervisors are situated to align principals’ work and district leaders’ work.

Clarifiers.

Principal supervisors serve as go-betweens among central office staff members and principals on a regular basis. When members of each group have a question or seek clarity about an issue, rather than going directly to members of the other group, they often go to principal supervisors. One top district leader remarked, “There have been many, many times when I’ve gone to a [principal supervisor] about an ask from a principal and said, ‘So what’s going on with this? What’s this about?’” Another top district leader provided the example of a time when she questioned a principal’s decision not to hire an individual who the top district leader believed was a strong candidate for an assistant principal position. Rather than going directly to the principal to inquire about the basis for her decision, the top district leader reached out to the principal supervisor. “A good amount of the time, I don’t know the answer, and have to follow up with either the principal or someone Downtown to find the answer,” said one principal supervisor. When asked why central office staff members ask principal supervisors instead of principals for clarification, a top district leader stated that “[principal supervisors] are in more regular communication with principals than anyone at [the district office].” Another top district leader explained that it is often easier to get in touch with principal
supervisors because “they tend to not be running around schools like principals are always doing.” Interestingly, principals shared similar reasons for why they ask their principal supervisor rather than a central office staff member when they need clarification about an issue. As one principal said, “[Unlike a central office staff member] I know that my principal supervisor will answer her phone!” Thus, principal supervisors act as intermediaries who elucidate matters for central office staff members and principals when asked to do so.

*Communication facilitators.*

Principal supervisors also facilitate communication between central office staff members and principals as needed. In one example a principal supervisor shared, she approached the budgets representative assigned to her network of schools about funding a part-time enrichment position which a principal felt was necessary to add to her staff roster. During their conversation, the budgets representative had a question that needed to be answered by the principal, and said that he would email the principal to obtain the needed information. Instead, the principal supervisor called the principal on her cell phone and handed the cell phone to the budgets representative. “I knew she’d answer right away if she saw that I was calling,” said the principal supervisor. The principal supervisor stated that she chose to streamline communication between the principal and the budgets representative because she knew it would result in the budgets representative obtaining the information he needed more quickly than he would have without the principal supervisor’s intervention. The principal supervisor felt that it was in the best interest of both the budgets representative and the principal to resolve the issue quickly.
However, a few principal supervisors commented that they are often asked questions which could be answered by other central office personnel or are included on emails on which they do not believe they should be included. For example, a principal supervisor said that a member of the grants department told her that a Councilperson wanted to donate a photocopy machine to a school in her network and asked the principal supervisor whether the principal of the school would be interested in receiving it. “[The grants department team member] should have gone directly to the principal. There was no reason for me to be involved,” she remarked. When asked why she believed that the central office staff member reached out to her rather than reaching out directly to the principal, she explained, “It was probably more efficient for him to get in touch with me than it would have been to try to get in touch with the principal.” Another principal supervisor explained that:

Some [central office] folks believe that principal supervisors have to be in the loop about everything [related to principals], but we don’t. Sometimes I read an email and want to say to them, “Why are you contacting me about this? Handle it yourself.”

While principal supervisors believe that they are sometimes taken advantage of in serving as a direct link for central office staff members and principals to communicate with each other, this bridging function is nonetheless an important brokering function that they undertake.

The decision to broker.

This chapter has detailed the specific activities in which principal supervisors engage within each of the three main brokering functions. I probed principal supervisors
about their decisions to broker to better understand the reasons why they serve as brokers. Principal supervisors reported that although they were never explicitly instructed to act as brokers in many situations, both principals and top district leaders assumed that the principal supervisors would perform such functions. Since they did not have a formal onboarding process for the position, new principal supervisors observed their colleagues and received informal coaching from them in order to learn the expectations of principals and top district leaders. A few principal supervisors also mentioned that they went on “listening tours” with the principals in their networks to get to know their needs and the needs of their schools. As detailed in the earlier sections of this chapter, principal supervisors serve different brokering functions on behalf of central office staff members, on behalf of principals, and between central office staff members and principals. According to principal supervisors, much of this brokering occurs on a frequent, but as-needed, basis. When asked about how they decide whether to broker, principal supervisors explained that in many cases, they were approached by top district leaders or by principals with the expectation that they would serve as brokers, such as when central office staff members email principal supervisors information to pass along to the principals in their networks or when principals ask principal supervisors for clarification about the rationale for district leaders’ decisions. As one principal supervisor noted, many of these brokering requests are not framed in a way that allows the principal supervisor to decline to play a brokering function. She explained:

We often receive emails [from a central office staff member] that say something to the effect of, “To share with your principals,” rather than something like, “Can you please share this with your principals?” Of course I would share it either way, but the first is an assumption and the second is an ask.
Other times, principal supervisors reported, it was their decision to serve a brokering function. Principal supervisors choose to be brokers by engaging in activities such as flagging important information that principals should be aware of, following up with central office staff members about issues that are time-sensitive and important to principals, and aligning district- and school-level work. Said one principal supervisor, “I’ll step in when I have to…especially to advocate to central office for my principals.” Another principal supervisor jokingly admitted that some principals are such tireless advocates for their schools that if the principal isn’t getting what he or she requested from central office personnel and has involved the principal supervisor in the communication, “I’ll intervene just to get them off my case!” Principal supervisors reported that they always serve as brokers in developing their network meeting agendas because they receive so many requests from central office personnel to “get on the agenda”. One principal supervisor explained that he has a conversation with the person making the appeal to him about what they want to share, tries to see if the information can be distributed to principals through a different medium, and if not, works with the person to condense the information so as to take as little time at the meeting as possible. However, he prioritizes timely information at different points throughout the school year. For example, in the early spring when principals are developing their school budgets, he will give priority to central office staff members who ask to share information which is relevant to school budgets. If a top district leader asks to have time with principals, “the answer is always ‘yes!’” he laughed. Thus, some brokering functions are unwritten, understood expectations of principal supervisors by principals and top district leaders and
principal supervisors passively accept such responsibilities, while other brokering actions are based on active decisions made by principal supervisors.

**Allocation of brokering activities.**

In earlier sections of this chapter, I provided a detailed description of the brokering activities undertaken by principal supervisors. However, principal supervisors did not report engaging in all of the brokering activities equally. Rather, they reported that they assigned different levels of importance and spent different amounts of time on each of the brokering activities. Table 4 is a checklist matrix that displays all of the brokering activities and indicates the number of principal supervisors who mentioned each brokering activity when responding to questions they were asked during their interviews. While there were some clearly identifiable trends in the allocations of importance and time across all of the principal supervisors in my study, there were also individual differences among them. Although my study is focused at the organizational level rather than at the individual level, presenting this information provides insight about the magnitude of principals supervisors’ engagement in each of the individual brokering activities, as well as the relative significance of each activity.
Table 4. Principal Supervisors’ Brokering Responses

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**CENTRAL OFFICE SUPPORT MANAGERS**
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Several things emerged from this organization of the data. All principal supervisors stated that a significant portion of their brokering work was related to three of the brokering activities: serving as prioritizers, enforcers and messengers for principals.

Seven of the eight principal supervisors described protecting principals’ time, prioritizing for central office staff members and advocating for the principals/schools in their network. Principal supervisors estimated that they spent the most amount of their brokering time prioritizing for principals, which they estimated took up an average of 26.25% of their time, followed closely by serving as enforcers (21.25%) and messengers (20.625%). The fact that principal supervisors spend so much time prioritizing for principals indicates that they are concerned about the information overload principals receive from central office staff members. As a result, they feel that it is important for them to focus principals’ attention. Moreover, since enforcing and messengering are brokering activities that are directives from central office staff members to principal supervisors, a significant portion of principal supervisors’ brokering is instructed by central office staff members. Conversely, only three principal supervisors reported engaging in the brokering activities of managing central office support, facilitating communication between central office staff members and principals, and clarifying information for central office staff members and principals. Therefore, these brokering activities are the brokering activities least frequently undertaken by principal supervisors.
Principal Supervisors and Instructional Leadership (Research Question #3)

Principal supervisors as instructional leaders.

My findings indicate that it is not only their brokering responsibilities that impede principal supervisors’ ability to fulfill the instructional leadership functions as they were conceptualized in the revised principal supervisor role. As explained in chapter 4, principal supervisors only spend 40% of their time in schools during a typical week engaging in such instructional leadership activities. There is evidence to suggest that the fact that principal supervisors spend a relatively small percentage of their time in schools each week is at least partially because principal supervisors do not agree with their role as instructional leaders as it is outlined in the position description. Principal supervisors’ disagreement about the conceptualization of their role stems from multiple concerns.

First, my findings suggest that principal supervisors have doubts about their instructional leadership capabilities, resulting from inadequate pre-service training they received prior to assuming the position, insufficient onboarding they had when beginning the role, and limited ongoing professional learning opportunities they obtain while serving in the position. Principal supervisors in the MSD are not selected on the basis of explicit results achieved in, and measurable student achievement gains made during, their previous positions or on their demonstrated instructional knowledge. Rather, a main criterion for selecting principal supervisors in the MSD is whether or not they were “strong” principals. This is based on a broad assessment of the leadership skills that district leaders believe are important to the principal supervisor role, such as their ability to build relationships and to collaborate effectively with their principal supervisor.
colleagues and central office staff members, their focus on results, and their belief in students’ potential. One top district leader explained that in selecting principal supervisors, the district was “looking for folks who can build relationships and ask questions,” in addition to being “highly respected by their peers [principals] to give them credibility to do evaluations.” The interview question protocol for principal supervisors in the district consists of behavioral questions about their past experiences working as school leaders, including their problem-solving orientation to addressing issues, their commitment to stakeholder engagement, and their resiliency. The interview also includes a role play activity whereby applicants are asked to lead a difficult conversation with a teacher about the teacher’s classroom management. Therefore, without an emphasis on instructional knowledge, the selection process for principal supervisors in the MSD may lead to the hiring of principal supervisors who have limited instructional expertise and who may not be able to be effective instructional leaders of principals.

Relatedly, principal supervisors in the MSD receive the same onboarding around district-wide operational procedures as do all district employees, but there is no formal onboarding which is specific to the principal supervisor role. Remarked one principal supervisor about her experience as a new principal supervisor, “I was kind of just thrown into the fire…I learned what to do by watching my fellow [principal supervisors].” When asked if they felt prepared to assume the role of principal supervisor when they first started in the role, 88% of principal supervisors responded that they did not feel prepared. In particular, principal supervisors explained that they would have appreciated receiving more training in creative school design and school staffing to match specific school needs.
and priorities and having a better understanding of district leaders’ perspectives and priorities.

Principal supervisors’ continued professional learning opportunities in the MSD are also limited. All principal supervisors reported that they received minimal professional development in the following areas to improve principal effectiveness and student achievement: analyzing student performance data, understanding the state’s new academic standards, conducting principal evaluations and observing classrooms with a focus on student learning and student work. Although all of these topics relate to principal supervisors’ intended role as instructional leaders, principal supervisors reported that such professional development is ad hoc in nature. It is not part of a systematic, sustained curriculum of professional learning. As one principal supervisor remarked, “It’s a little bit of this and a little bit of that.” Most of the professional development is provided by external providers, and a few principal supervisors complained that it is less effective than it would be if district leaders were actively involved in the planning to ensure that the programming aligns with district needs and improvement strategies. Furthermore, there is little evidence that such professional learning is regularly and rigorously evaluated for its effectiveness in supporting principal supervisors’ efforts to advance teaching and learning in their networks. Although principal supervisors reported that they had the autonomy to find various professional development opportunities on their own to further their professional development, it was a challenge to attend many such opportunities because of their limited network budgets. Thus, there are a plethora of reasons why principal supervisors in the MSD may not believe that they are effective instructional leaders.
Second, a number of principal supervisors also questioned the adoption of an instructional leadership framework because they did not believe that the district would be able to implement instructional leadership practices district-wide. Having served as principals in the district from between two and eighteen years, principal supervisors shared that they had seen a string of district leaders throughout their career, each of whom pursued the latest hot trends for transforming education and made decisions that were politically expedient. One principal supervisor provided the example of the district’s shift to small schools in the early 2000s, which satisfied local members of City Council because it resulted in every neighborhood in the city having a neighborhood school, and this had become a contentious community issue a decade prior when many district schools had to be closed as a result of district-wide budget cuts. Other principal supervisors cited the dysfunction of the internal operations of the district, which made it difficult, if not impossible, to successfully implement any systemic changes. Reflected one principal supervisor:

What we’ve ended up with as a result of these many efforts throughout the years has been a slew of unrelated initiatives that collectively consume an exorbitant amount of resources but that do nothing to help kids.

Joked another principal supervisor:

I’ve experienced countless reforms in the decade that I’ve been a principal supervisor. If I had a dollar for every one of these trends, I’d be a millionaire and could have retired a long time ago.

Principal supervisors expressed discouragement about the numerous failed district reform efforts over the years. Their belief that the district’s emphasis on the adoption of an instructional leadership framework is a fleeting trend suggests that they did not believe
that their work to develop principals’ instructional capacities would lead to improved student outcomes that could be maintained over time.

In addition, some principal supervisors commented on the lack of financial and other resources provided to support their work, which they believe restricts their ability to advance principals’ instructional growth. Principal supervisors are given $5,000 each year to spend at their discretion for the purpose of supporting principals. One principal supervisor explained that this money doesn’t stretch very far because it is to cover all expenses related to network activities. For example, if a principal supervisor would like a principal or a few principals to attend an out-of-state professional development session, all travel, hotel, registration and food costs are taken from this budget. Principal supervisors noted that additional resources should be allocated that would allow them to successfully implement the district’s instructional leadership strategy.

Third, some principal supervisors did not believe that carrying out the activities set forth in an instructional leadership framework—as intended by the district’s strategic plan—would lead to improved school leadership. These principal supervisors questioned the adoption of an instructional leadership framework because they were not convinced that instructional issues are the most important issues for principals to deal with in schools with problems such as having a significant number of students who have serious behavioral challenges, persistent student violence, high staff turnover, and low family engagement. One principal supervisor challenged the premise of instructional leadership, explaining:

Good instruction cannot occur in a poor school climate. Student behaviors in our schools have to be in check. A principal must be an instructional leader, sure, but only after being a strict disciplinarian.
Another principal supervisor shared her view that school leaders have many pressing priorities that outweigh instructional priorities:

(School options are) a competitive marketplace. With so many school options in the district today, principals must first and foremost be able to market their school…if they are not successful in retaining students, their staff and budget will be cut, and ultimately they won’t have a school to lead!

Echoing a similar sentiment, a principal supervisor stated:

School leaders must be able to connect to families and relate to the community in order to attract families to attend the school and to build a school community…it’s critically important to school leadership.

Thus, principal supervisors in the MSD may conclude that using an instructional leadership approach will not lead to desirable results, and therefore they may not be invested in instructional leadership as an organizational strategy.

Given that principal supervisors hold many beliefs that could result in their having a low commitment to the instructional leadership strategic focus of the district’s reform efforts, it is conceivable that principal supervisors in the MSD may have decided to put little effort into the implementation of instructional leadership as an organizational strategy. The implications of these findings are elaborated upon in chapter 5.

**Principal supervisors as strategic brokers.**

Although the position description does not include any responsibilities or competencies that do not relate to the design theory’s instructional focus of the role, all participants were explicit about principal supervisors’ brokering functions and viewed these functions as being critical to principal supervisors’ work. Top district leaders
expressed that they appreciated having a reliable, single point of contact to individual school sites. Similarly, principals reported that they were grateful that principal supervisors serve brokering functions because it gives principals a dependable touch point who “brings order to the chaos” of district operations, as one principal stated. Principal supervisors also believed that most of their brokering functions were valuable. With the exception of being asked to enforce compliance tasks and deadlines and being carbon copied on emails for which they believe they did not need to be included, and which they viewed as a relinquishment of responsibilities that central office staff members should undertake, principal supervisors called their brokering “important” and “essential.” Moreover, they believed that their brokering functions served an instructional purpose. They rationalized that if they navigated the organizational bureaucracy on behalf of the principals they support, and helped central office staff members support principals, then principals would not have to spend as much time on compliance and operational tasks. This would maximize the amount of time that principals would have to spend on instructional tasks. By explaining the contributions of their brokering to principals’ enhanced instructional capacities, principal supervisors asserted that their brokering served a strategic purpose. However, it is important to note that this definition of instructional capacity differs from the definition of instructional capacity as set forth in the district’s design theory.
Other Findings

In this final section I discuss additional findings from this study that are important, but that do not relate directly to the research questions. First, I present some unintended consequences of having principal supervisors spend more time in schools. Second, I discuss the perspectives of principal supervisors about the role revision process. Lastly, I raise the issue of how principal supervisors’ job performance is assessed.

Unintended consequences of spending more time in schools.

Until recently, it was rare for district leaders such as principal supervisors to spend time in schools and in classrooms; they spent most of their time at the district office. However, the new responsibilities for principal supervisors call for an increase in the amount of time that they are in schools working with principals. Prior to the revision of the principal supervisors’ position during the 2015-2016 school year, the Chief Academic Officer reported that principal supervisors spent approximately 20% of their time in schools and 80% of their time in the district office during a typical week. With the introduction of principal supervisors’ new responsibilities and the network support structure, the Chief Academic Officer set a goal at the start of the 2017-2018 school year for principal supervisors to spend 40% of their time in schools each week, which would double the amount of time they were in schools each week compared to the 2015-2016 school year. During the 2017-2018 school year, principal supervisors reported that they met the target goal of how much time they spent in schools versus in the district office—spending approximately 40% of their time in schools and 60% of their time in the district office during a typical week. Despite spending an increased percentage of their time in
schools, however, principal supervisors still spend less than half of their time in schools, and this allocation of their time does not reflect the district’s design theory that principal supervisors’ primary focus should be on supporting principals in building their instructional leadership skills.

Moreover, simply because principal supervisors are spending more time in schools than they did in the past does not mean that they are working with principals on instructional issues when they are in schools. (Conversely, when principal supervisors are at the district office they are not engaged solely in non-instructional issues. I will expound on this thought in chapter 5.) As a result of principal supervisors spending more time in schools, however, they have become better informed about the challenges that principals confront. One objective of the revised role of principal supervisors was to increase principal supervisors’ awareness of the areas in which principals needed improvement related to teaching and learning, but principal supervisors’ increased awareness about the challenges principals face has extended beyond instructional issues to include non-instructional issues as well. All of the principal supervisors had stories to tell about times when they went to schools with the intention of supporting principals with issues related to instruction and instead wound up supporting principals with issues related to school operations or management. One principal supervisor offered an example of the time when he planned to do classroom walkthroughs with one of his principals who was struggling with providing evidence for her teacher evaluations, but five minutes into their first classroom observation the principal received a call that there was a massive leak in the ceiling of the cafeteria. The principal and principal supervisor
then spent the next hour on the phone with various members of the facilities department attempting to get someone to come to the building to do emergency repair work. The cafeteria ceiling was fixed a few days later, but the massive leak had brought the poor physical condition of the school to the attention of the principal supervisor, and so the principal supervisor sought to become involved with the district’s capital programs plan in an attempt to add the school’s roof to the district’s list of planned school renovations. The principal supervisor estimates that he spent an additional ten to twelve hours in meetings and conversations with district leaders and others about capital programs.

Another principal supervisor described a time when he visited a school to observe a principal leading a Professional Learning Community (PLC), but when the principal supervisor arrived at the school he learned that the electricity had gone out. The emergency generator was on and provided electricity to some parts of the school, but since many classrooms and hallways were dark, the principal was scrambling to develop a contingency plan that would allow instruction to continue in a controlled manner. District leaders were perturbed that there weren’t any written plans for principals to follow when there was an electricity outage, and they asked the principal supervisor to be part of the team that drafted a district-wide written plan. To do so, the principal supervisor attended another dozen or so meetings with various central office personnel.

As explained above, principal supervisors reported that their physical presence in schools as part of their responsibility to support principals with instructional issues also resulted in their undertaking additional non-instructional-related responsibilities. One principal supervisor who has been in the position for five years estimates that he has 20%
more tasks to complete each day following the change in the principal supervisor role. He remarked, “The instructional tasks we’re expected to do feel more like a layering on of tasks rather than a change in tasks.” Although responsibilities included in the revised role for principal supervisors were intended to replace their previous responsibilities, findings suggest that in practice it has become a hybrid role, including both instructional and non-instructional responsibilities.

**Role revision process.**

District leaders outlined the new role for principal supervisors in the district’s strategic plan as part of a description of how principals would be supported with the new autonomies they were granted in several functional areas. District leaders based their decision about the revised role on national trends about principal supervisors’ work and on research about “best practices” for principal supervisors from organizations such as the Council of the Great City Schools, the Council of Chief State School Officers and The Wallace Foundation. However, principal supervisors who had been in the role at that time did not participate in the re-conceptualization of their responsibilities. One principal supervisor who had been in the principal supervisor position for several years shared that she was disappointed by the lack of involvement of principal supervisors in the process of re-defining their role. “I would have liked to be part of the conversations about how our new role would look. It would have been nice to at least have been consulted.” Another principal supervisor stated, “I wish that [decision-makers] had conducted some sort of audit of our work before giving us new responsibilities.” These statements by principal supervisors evidence their being disheartened that their thoughts were not considered in
the role revision process, and their belief that had they been involved in the process, their new role responsibilities may have been different.

**Assessing principal supervisors’ job performance.**

The evaluation tools used to assess principal supervisors’ job performance do not reflect either their intended job responsibilities or their daily work. The evaluation process for central office staff members has five components, listed in chronological order throughout the school year: a self-assessment completed prior to the start of the school year; a reflective conversation with their supervisor in September/October; completion of a goal-setting form in September/October; a mid-year reflection with their supervisor in February; and an end-of-year assessment in May. The same performance evaluation tools, including forms and rubric, are used for all central office staff members regardless of their focus area. Since principal supervisors are her direct reports, the Chief Academic Officer evaluates principal supervisors. There are four overarching evaluation criteria areas—effective leadership, system-wide improvement, collaborative relationships and professional responsibilities. Each of these evaluation criteria has a set of indicators that are intended to assess a central office staff member’s knowledge or skills in the area. Ratings are given on a four-point scale, with 4 being “excellent,” 3 being “proficient,” 2 being “progressing,” and 1 being “not meeting standard”.

The “effective leadership” criterion includes the following indicators: articulates and models a shared vision for continuous improvement and lifelong learning with department, district and within schools; models behaviors that are consistent with district vision, beliefs and values; engages in courageous and challenging conversations about
decisions; and promotes high expectations for student achievement in department and district communications. The “system-wide improvement” criterion includes: analyzes building and district data to communicate, inform, and assist others in meeting achievement goals; encourages reflective, data-driven conversations focused on increasing student achievement; develops, interprets and implements policies and procedures with a focus on learning; and develops procedures and processes that ensure efficiency and alignment to the district mission. The “collaborative relationships” criterion includes: establishes professional relationships marked by genuine collaborative work; supports and models cultural competency; contributes to a culture of mutual respect and trust recognizing and valuing the diversity of all stakeholders; encourages honesty, integrity, and candor among colleagues, and embraces new ideas and uses conflict resolution strategies to reach solutions. Lastly, the “professional responsibilities” criterion includes: thinks strategically and displays sound judgment; is adaptable to changing situations; provides timely support to all schools and departments; allocates and manages resources to meet the needs of district mission and strategic directions; and uses effective practices as well as rules and regulations relates to staff supervision, coaching and evaluation, if applicable. A top district leader explained that all of these indicators are intentionally broad to be able to be used across central office staff members regardless of their functional area. However, since principal supervisors’ evaluations do not seek to gauge whether they provide principals with the skills, tools and support they need to improve teaching and learning in their schools or whether they effectively broker for and between principals and central office staff members, principal supervisors are not provided meaningful, actionable feedback about their performance in their roles.
In this chapter, I shared my findings related to my research questions as well as other findings from my study. I described the district’s organizational hierarchy and how principal supervisors’ positioning leads to differences between their written responsibilities and their responsibilities in practice. I detailed the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve for and between central office personnel and principals and then explained on what grounds principal supervisors decide whether to broker. In the next chapter, I will discuss my findings as they relate to the theoretical perspectives and offer some suggestions for district leaders to consider.
Chapter 5
DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A Focus on Principal Support Through Brokering

The findings from my research indicate that principal supervisors do not support principals exclusively with instructional issues as described in the district’s design theory. Rather, when asked about principal supervisors’ responsibilities, all participants in my study described principal supervisors’ brokering responsibilities. At the same time that they raised principal supervisors’ brokering responsibilities, however, all participants also discussed principal supervisors’ instructional leadership responsibilities. Thus, both principal supervisors’ brokering and their support of principals as instructional leaders are espoused theories. These findings confirm Corcoran et al.’s (2013) conclusions that principal supervisors need to juggle competing demands for their time.

The brokering functions that principal supervisors play results largely from the fact that they are the only individuals in the district who are accountable to top district leaders but who are expected to serve principals directly. I discussed the specific brokering functions that principal supervisors serve for and between top district leaders and principals in chapter 4. Upon close examination of these activities, it is evident that principals are the main beneficiaries of principal supervisors’ buffering and bolstering functions. Principal supervisors’ bridging activities mutually benefit both principals and central office personnel since bridging is a form of brokering between principals and central office staff members.

Participants’ responses indicated that principal supervisors engage in six brokering activities which benefit principals, although there is some overlap in the
purposes of a few of these brokering activities. Principal supervisors serve as *prioritizers* for principals by emphasizing important action items for them to address, by translating requests made of them so that principals are able to quickly manage them and by excusing them from activities that the principal supervisors do not deem to be important. They are *time protectors* for principals by assuming non-instructional tasks for them and by being selective about what topics they allow central office personnel to address during network meetings. Principal supervisors function as *central office support managers* by addressing performance issues of central office staff members who are assigned to support a network of principals so that they can more effectively service principals and their schools. They serve as *connectors* for principals to both internal and external resources and personnel which or who can be helpful to them, and as *rubber stampers* for central office personnel who lack the authority to support principals’ requests without permission to do so from principal supervisors or top district leaders. Principal supervisors are also *advocates* on behalf of principals to central office staff members by encouraging and reminding the staff members to act on principals’ requests.

While principal supervisors engage in six brokering activities which benefit principals, participants’ responses indicated that principal supervisors broker in only three ways which benefit central office staff members. Principal supervisors serve as *prioritizers* for central office staff members by highlighting important issues to which central office staff members should be attentive. (It is important to note that serving this brokering function is actually the *reverse* of the district’s design theory, which states that central office staff members should cater to the requests and needs of principals.) Central
office staff members ask principal supervisors to be *enforcers* for them to ensure that principals meet deadlines or fulfill requests made by central office staff members. Relatedly, central office personnel ask principal supervisors to be *messengers* for them and to share information with principals.

Principal supervisors not only focus more of their brokering on principals, but also one of the brokering functions principal supervisors serve for central office personnel—being *prioritizers*—equally benefits principals. When principal supervisors act as *prioritizers* for central office staff members, they bring high-priority school issues to the attention of central office staff members. However, these are high-priority issues for principals to address as well, and principal supervisors usually act on these issues because of principals’ requests that they do so.

Moreover, principal supervisors do not take it upon themselves to engage in the other two brokering functions that benefit central office staff personnel—being *enforcers* and *messengers*. Rather, principal supervisors only serve these two brokering functions when central office staff members ask them to do so. Principal supervisors only act as *enforcers* when central office personnel ask them to follow up with the principals in their networks about deadlines, and they only act as *messengers* when central office personnel ask them to share information with principals. In addition, principal supervisors also expressed their discontent when they described engaging in some of these brokering responsibilities. For the brokering functions that benefit principals, however, principal supervisors explained how they regularly voluntarily and willingly engaged in such activities. For example, principal supervisors serve as *prioritizers* for principals by
drafting weekly bulletins that underscore key information. Principals do not ask principal supervisors to compile this information. Principal supervisors serve as time protectors by filtering central office staff members’ requests to address principals during network meetings. Principals do not ask principal supervisors to be strategic in deciding the number and kinds of issues to include in network meetings. Principal supervisors serve as connectors for principals by directing them to helpful resources, and often suggest resources to principals without principals asking for direction. Thus, many of the brokering functions that benefit principals are either undertaken without principals’ requests that principal supervisors do so and sometimes even without principals’ knowledge.

Furthermore, the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve for principals are generally more time-intensive than are the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve for central office staff members. For example, bringing important issues to the attention of central office staff members often only involves sending an email or making a phone call, as does being couriers of messages. However, a principal supervisor may have to follow up several times or with several different people in order to come to a resolution about an issue on a principal’s behalf, and curating information for a “one-stop-shop” email of important information can take several hours.

Therefore, although principal supervisors serve brokering functions that are in service of both central office staff members and principals, my findings do not suggest that their allegiance is equally divided between the two groups. The fact that principal
supervisors engage in brokering for principals more frequently, in ways that are more time-consuming and more from their own initiative than they do when engaging in brokering for central office staff members suggests that principal supervisors want to support principals in their work and view principal support as being their most important responsibility. In addition, my interviews with principal supervisors suggested that they felt more dedicated to supporting principals than they did to supporting central office staff members. They seemed to feel almost a kinship with the principals in their networks—consistently referring to such principals as “my principals” when discussing their dealings with principals. The language that people use often reflects their values, beliefs and experiences, and the language that principal supervisors used when talking about the principals in their networks indicated that they viewed themselves as advocates for principals. In describing how he follows up with central office staff members on behalf of principals, a principal supervisor stated, “My principals will CC me on emails so that I’m in the loop if they need me to step in and follow up if they aren’t getting a response.”

Similarly, top district leaders often used the words “their principals.” For example, when discussing how principal supervisors function as messengers from top district leaders to principals, a top district leader remarked, “When someone on my team sends something, maybe it will be opened by a handful of them [principals]. When a [principal supervisor] sends something to their principals, you know it will be opened.” Principal supervisors’ and top district leaders’ use of these possessive pronouns in my interviews with them was the norm rather than the exception. It suggests not only that
principal supervisors believe that they have “ownership” of principals, but also that top district leaders believe that principals are not their responsibility. Rather, they believe that they are the responsibility of principal supervisors. Use of this language is also further evidence of the belief by both principal supervisors and top district leaders that principal supervisors not only do serve these brokering functions, but that principal supervisors should serve such functions. By prioritizing support for principals, principal supervisors are, in fact, upholding a key element of the district’s design theory.

However, most of principal supervisors’ support of principals involves supporting them by brokering for them rather than supporting them by supporting them through growing their instructional leadership skills, as called for in the district’s design theory. There are several reasons why principal supervisors focus on their brokering functions in their support of principals. It may be that principal supervisors wish to support principals but do not believe that supporting them with instructional issues is something that they are capable of doing, will lead to school improvement or is a priority given the many other issues that principals confront. These ideas are discussed in detail in the next section. Alternatively, or in addition, principal supervisors may recall the challenges they faced when they were principals in interacting with central office staff members, and would like to help the principals they oversee deal with similar challenges. Moreover, they may have appreciated a principal supervisor who advocated for them when they were a principal and seek to emulate that individual, or they may feel that there was a lack of support for them in other areas when they were a principal and seek to fill that void for the principals in their networks.
In this section, I explained that my findings suggest that principal supervisors want to support principals and that they function as brokers in ways which are consistent with their intended focus on supporting principals. In the next section, I will discuss why I believe that they do not focus their support of principals on instructional issues.

**Principal Supervisors’ Views About Being Instructional Leaders**

My findings have suggested a number of reasons why principal supervisors’ daily practices do not conform to the practices intended by the district’s design theory. One of the most salient of these reasons is because principal supervisors spend a significant amount of time serving brokering functions and attending district-level meetings, which principal supervisors do because they are requested and expected to do so by top district leaders and principals. However, as discussed in chapter 4, principal supervisors reported that they spend approximately 40% of their time—16 hours—in schools during a typical week. While principal supervisors shared that most of their time at schools is spent developing the instructional leadership skills of principals, some of this time is spent on non-instructional issues that arise after they arrive at the school. By examining these findings using the lens of middle management expectancy theory, it seems likely that principal supervisors’ diverted focus from instructional issues stems from more than just the multiple brokering functions they serve and the requests by, and expectations of, central office personnel and principals of them. Principal supervisors’ espoused theories and theories-in-use may be partially explained by the tenets of Guth and Macmillan’s middle management expectancy theory.
Principal supervisors’ orientations to their work—how they understand the fundamental nature of their role and the connection between their role and the district’s goals—effects how they engage in their work. The premise of middle management expectancy theory is that a relationship exists between middle managers’ willingness to exert high levels of effort in pursuit of the organizational goals and goal attainment. As described in the Conceptual Framework section of chapter 1, according to middle management expectancy theory, there are different sources of middle managers’ commitment that influence whether they will be motivated to implement an organizational strategy. These factors relate to the individual’s perception of both his or her potential and the organization’s potential to successfully execute the strategy, as well as the individual’s perception of the likelihood that successfully executing the strategy will lead to an outcome that the individual believes is desirable. Considering the role of principal supervisors from a middle management expectancy theory perspective emphasizes that principal supervisors’ commitment to focusing on teaching and learning in their roles is rooted in their drive to realize the district’s strategic vision of positioning principal supervisors as the instructional leaders of the principals in their networks.

According to middle management expectancy theory, the first condition that could result in a principal supervisor having a low level of commitment to taking an instructional leadership approach to his or role is that the principal supervisor believes that he or she will not be an effective instructional leader because of his or her perceived lack of instructional leadership skills. Evidence from the study suggests that there are several reasons why principal supervisors in the MSD may believe that they have significant deficiencies in their instructional leadership skills. The MSD does not screen
candidates for the principal supervisor position for their instructional expertise. Rather, the MSD puts a premium on principal supervisors’ track record as principals. Scholarship affirms that this is a common practice in many large school districts nationwide. Instead of selecting principal supervisor candidates based on their instructional knowledge, such districts hire individuals who have been successful principals to become principal supervisors (Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009). However, this selection criteria is a flawed basis upon which to identify principal supervisors who would be strong instructional leaders—the fact that someone was a good principal does not necessarily mean that the person is equipped to lead principals with instructional issues because coaching is a skill set that must be learned. Moreover, seven of the eight principal supervisors in the MSD were in principalship positions in the district prior to their selection as principal supervisors, but they served as principals prior to the intended responsibilities of both principals and principal supervisors changing from a focus on school management to a focus on instruction. As a result of being principals during a time when the role of principals and principal supervisors was primarily non-instructional, these principal supervisors may have difficulty relating to the principals they oversee who are now expected to serve instructional functions. In addition, they may model their behaviors and activities on the behaviors and activities of the principal supervisors to whom they reported when they were principals.

The MSD does not provide training to newly appointed principal supervisors and offers limited ongoing professional learning opportunities for standing principal supervisors about how to grow principals’ instructional leadership capacities. As detailed in chapter 4, there is not a formal onboarding process which is specific to the principal
supervisor role. Moreover, the professional development provided to principal supervisors is ad hoc and is provided by external vendors who do not align their programming with district needs and goals. This is typical of many school districts, as a number of scholars have documented that principal supervisors in districts nationwide often lack the training, time and tools required to evaluate principals’ instructional needs and to provide principals with high-quality, job-embedded professional development (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Condon & Clifford, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill, 2013; Goldring et al., 2009; Honig, 2012, 2013; Honig et al., 2010; Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009; Syed, 2014).

Since the instructional knowledge of principal supervisor candidates is not given much weight in the hiring process, and principal supervisors are not offered many professional learning opportunities after assuming the position, principal supervisors hired for the position may have limited instructional expertise and may have doubts about their abilities to be effective instructional leaders of principals. This, in turn, could result in a principal supervisor having a low level of commitment to taking an instructional leadership approach to his or role, according to middle management expectancy theory.

Middle management expectancy theory asserts that the second condition which could result in a principal supervisor having a low level of commitment to instructional leadership is that the individual believes that even if he or she is able to perform successfully as an instructional leader in an individual capacity, his or her effectiveness as an instructional leader has a low probability of achieving the organizationally desired outcome of helping principals develop as instructional leaders. One reason why principal
supervisors may believe that the district will not be successful in realizing the goal of having principal supervisors and principals district-wide adopt an instructional leadership stance is because they may perceive that top district leaders are not genuinely committed to the strategy. Their questioning of top district leaders’ commitment to instructional leadership may stem from the fact that principal supervisors do not feel that they have been given the on-the-job resources necessary to support principals successfully with instructional issues. They may believe that since the district’s allocation of resources is not aligned with its stated strategic objective, top district leaders are not fully dedicated to the organizational strategy. For example, the fact that top district leaders expect principal supervisors to attend regular, lengthy meetings at the district office about non-instructional issues, which limits the amount of time that they are available to visit schools to work with principals on instructional issues, may lead principal supervisors to conclude that many top district leaders do not feel that spending time in schools is a high priority, despite their espoused directives that principal supervisors should focus their time on instructional issues. Similarly, since there is minimal funding available for professional development or instructional materials for principal supervisors, they may surmise that top district leaders feel that other district reforms, to which they direct more resources, are more important than efforts to improve principals’ and principal supervisors’ instructional leadership capacities. As a result of observing a mismatch between the fact that the district champions an instructional leadership framework but does not designate resources to back its adoption, principal supervisors may feel that their commitment to taking an instructional leadership stance to their work would be fruitless.
In addition, the responses of several of the principal supervisors suggest that they believe that other parts of the organization, over which they do not have any control, are too dysfunctional to allow them to fully support principals as instructional leaders. They cited the inefficiencies of internal district operations and the challenges of implementing any initiative district-wide with full fidelity, which has resulted in chronic underperformance of the school district and numerous failed district reform efforts over the years. Furthermore, many of the principal supervisors appeared to be disheartened by the district’s constantly changing reform efforts and viewed the adoption of an instructional leadership framework as a passing fad. Thus, it is likely that principal supervisors in the MSD conclude that using an instructional leadership approach will not lead to desirable results, and therefore they may not be invested in instructional leadership as an organizational strategy.

The third condition that could result in a principal supervisor having a low level of commitment to serving as an instructional leader is if the principal supervisor perceives that his or her support of principals in the areas of teaching and learning will not lead to satisfaction of the principal supervisor’s individual goals. Most employees strive to be viewed favorably by their superiors, and this need to be recognized in a positive light may be heightened in the MSD because of its long-standing organizational culture of favoritism. For example, one principal supervisor described how every quarter the Chief Operations Officer sends a report to all principal supervisors and cabinet-level leaders that gives accolades to principal supervisors whose networks of principals have the highest safety plan submission rates, and therefore she takes measures to ensure that
safety plans are completed, even if it limits the time she spends engaging in instructional leadership activities. Another principal supervisor explained, “it’s not what you know, it’s whether you’re liked by (top district leaders).” She continued, “Being liked will get you promoted, invited to present (at district trainings) and participate on certain (exclusive) committees.” These perceptions suggest that even if principal supervisors believe in their abilities as instructional leaders, they may feel that the larger organizational structure will not highlight their talents as instructional leaders. Therefore, since their efforts will not be appreciated by their superiors, it would not be worthwhile for them to undertake such efforts. Moreover, since spending more time in schools and thus out of eyesight of their superiors reduces the time that principal supervisors have to make a positive impression on their superiors, principal supervisors may feel that assuming an instructional leadership stance will not lead to them being viewed favorably by the individuals to whom they report. Thus, they may seek to engage in activities that are more visible to top district leaders, with the hope that doing so will lead to their superiors having a more favorable impression of them.

Thus, principal supervisors understand, manage and negotiate their roles as middle managers by balancing the expectations of principals and top district leaders, the requests they receive from both groups, and their own beliefs about being instructional leaders. Principal supervisors in the MSD may not believe that they have the requisite skills to support principals with issues related to teaching and learning effectively, may not be convinced that the district will be able to fully adopt an instructional leadership framework even if they are able to serve as instructional leaders for the principals in their
networks, and may not believe that supporting principals with instructional issues will result in commendatory perceptions of them. These beliefs could lead to principal supervisors having a low commitment to acting as instructional leaders. As previously discussed, according to middle management expectancy theory, when middle managers have a low commitment to an organizational strategy, they can redirect the strategy, delay its implementation, reduce the quality of its implementation and even totally sabotage the strategy. It is therefore conceivable that principal supervisors in the MSD may be avoiding engaging, or avoiding engaging fully, in instructional leadership activities. The next section will detail the importance of understanding and addressing principal supervisors’ perspectives if top district leaders hope to reverse such beliefs of principal supervisors.

**Understanding and Addressing Principal Supervisors’ Perspectives**

As explained in chapter 4, principal supervisors were not involved in the deliberations about changing their positions to emphasize instruction. This lack of involvement by central office personnel who are not top district leaders is common when policies and procedures are developed and executed in large, bureaucratic school districts (Ferlie, Ashburner, Fitzgerald & Pettigrew, 1996). There is a significant body of research, however, which indicates that organizations consist of multiple agents who engage with and influence one another in ways related to organizational strategy through their social interactions, and specifically that middle managers influence organizational strategy in important ways (e.g., Balogun & Johnson, 2004, 2005; Burgelman, 1983; Floyd & Lane,
Middle management expectancy theory stems from this scholarship.

The lack of involvement by principal supervisors in the decision-making process about their new responsibilities may have had negative implications for principal supervisors’ commitment to serving as instructional leaders. As explained in the last section, middle management expectancy theory maintains that a divergence between principal supervisors’ individual goals and the district goals can adversely influence principal supervisors’ motivation to implement the strategic actions necessary to achieve the district goals. By not making the effort to understand the values and goals of principal supervisors, district leaders may have unnecessarily created a chasm between principal supervisors’ goals and the district goals that resulted in principal supervisors’ reduced commitment to adopting an instructional leadership framework. This rift could have been avoided had principal supervisors’ goals been incorporated in the development of the position description.

Although district leaders adopted an instructional leadership framework without consulting principal supervisors in order to understand their views and respond to their concerns, district leaders can still attempt to address the causes that underlie principal supervisors’ lack of commitment to serving as instructional leaders. Drawing on conditions that could lead to middle managers’ low personal commitment to an organizational strategy, middle management expectancy theory offers suggestions for how top district leaders can work to improve principal supervisors’ commitment to, and therefore the efficacy of, the organizational strategy of having principal supervisors serve
as instructional leaders. As explained in chapter 4 and in the previous section of this chapter, principal supervisors may perceive that their instructional skills are inadequate to support principals with instructional issues. Top district leaders can increase the self-confidence of, and belief by, principal supervisors that they can be successful in their roles by providing them with additional training and development opportunities in these areas, or by providing them with additional support (ex. consultants) to supplement their existing expertise. Top district leaders can also ensure that principal supervisors receive the resources they need to successfully support principals as instructional leaders, such as providing principal supervisors with larger network budgets so that they can purchase learning materials for their network meetings. To understand what supports and resources would be helpful to principal supervisors, top district leaders should conduct an audit of the supports and resources principal supervisors currently receive and desire and respond accordingly. They might find, for example, that principal supervisors believe that they would benefit from opportunities to collaborate formally with each other, and top district leaders could then build in time for them to do so as part of the weekly meetings. Providing principal supervisors with supports and resources that are in line with the organizational strategy would also demonstrate to principal supervisors that top district leaders are committed to realizing the strategy.

Since there is evidence that principal supervisors may assume that adopting an instructional leadership framework as an organizational strategy is doomed because of the numerous other prior organizational strategies that were unsuccessful as a result of district dysfunction, district leaders must work to address omnipresent operational
inefficiencies. District leaders should coordinate the work of departmental teams in a strategic way so that principal supervisors and employees in individual departments operate in concert with each other and towards the goal of improved teaching and learning. For example, professional development about math topics that a principal supervisor holds for the principals in his or her network would be futile if the curriculum and instruction team offers professional development about the same math topics but suggest different instructional strategies. District leaders are already engaging in such work. The Network Support Teams have the potential to build bridges among historic organizational silos, which may lead to better working relationships between principals and central office staff members and among members of different central office teams.

Given the deep roots of the problems that the central office has related to resources, data and systems, I do not mean to suggest that district issues can be easily or quickly addressed. However, district leaders should broadcast their efforts and share how the instructional leadership strategy connects to, and will be supported by, other district reform efforts that seek to make school district operations more efficient. For example, the MSD is currently in the process of adopting a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform to integrate business functions, including tracking the completion of maintenance requests, purchasing inventory and hiring and other human resource functions. These operational improvements may help convince principal supervisors that they will be less diverted from focusing on instructional issues.

To address the concern that some principal supervisors may not think that serving as instructional leaders will showcase their individual work, top district leaders should
provide positive reinforcement when principal supervisors engage in instructional leadership activities—even (and maybe especially) if top district leaders do not physically see them doing so.

By soliciting principal supervisors’ thoughts about their serving as instructional leaders, top district leaders can determine the best way to increase principal supervisors’ commitment to the organizational strategy. However, in doing so, top district leaders may recognize the value of having principal supervisors serve functions that are different than the instructional functions intended by the organizational strategy and may decide to shift principal supervisors’ responsibilities accordingly. I will discuss this idea in more detail in the next section.

**Non-instructional, Instructional Leaders**

Applying Argyris & Schon’s (1974) theories of action perspective, the district’s design theory as articulated in the position description and in the district’s strategic plan is reflected in *some* of the principals’, principal supervisors’ and top district leaders’ espoused theories—they *all* emphasized the importance of having principal supervisors support principals as instructional leaders. However, participants *also* maintained espoused theories that did *not* reflect the district’s design theory—these espoused theories related to their discussion of the criticality of having principal supervisors serve as brokers. As explained in chapter 4, the practices of principal supervisors, and of principals and top district leaders in engaging with principal supervisors as brokers—their theories-in-use—mirror participants’ beliefs about what principal supervisors *should* do per their espoused theories regarding brokering. Therefore, participants’ theories-in-
use are misaligned with the design theory, and only *some* of their ideas about what principal supervisors should do and what principal supervisors actually do are aligned.

Figure 6 below is a visual representation of the relationship between the district’s design theory and stakeholders’ espoused theories and theories-in-use.

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 6. Relationship Between District’s Design Theory and Participants’ Espoused Theories and Theories-in-Use*

In the previous chapter, I noted how principal supervisors spend much of their time acting as an intermediary between central office staff members and principals. My findings indicate that principal supervisors’ daily work is informed by organizational systems, routines and structures; the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve are necessary given the dysfunction of district operations. For example, principals reported being overwhelmed by receiving dozens of emails from central office staff members each day, particularly because many of these emails are reminders about
deadlines and other important dates. As a result of their email inboxes being filled with repetitive emails, principals sometimes disregard their emails, and, in turn, miss deadlines. Central office staff members, who then become frustrated by principals’ noncompliance to these deadlines, ask principal supervisors to follow up with the principals in their networks. To mitigate the occurrences of such incidences of missed deadlines, principal supervisors highlight important communication from central office staff members to principals. In a more efficient organization, there would be a clearly defined, streamlined way for principals to receive communications from central office staff members that would not require principal supervisors to broker. However, until such a system is developed, such brokering by principal supervisors is necessary.

As discussed in chapter 4, top district leaders and principals reported that they appreciated having a reliable, single point of contact who helps bring order to the organization’s functioning and who reduces principals’ focus on issues that do not directly relate to teaching and learning. Principal supervisors explained that if they navigated the organizational bureaucracy on behalf of the principals they support, and assisted central office staff members in supporting principals, they reduced the amount of time that principals spend on compliance and operational tasks, which then allowed principals to spend more time on instructional issues. Although principal supervisors believe that many brokering activities that were not directly connected to instruction expanded principals’ instructional capacities, the district’s design theory contends that the only way in which principal supervisors can improve principals’ instructional leadership capacities is by supporting their professional know-how regarding instructional issues. In
addition, some of the brokering activities of principal supervisors, such as *connecting*, directly supported principal instructional leadership by increasing principals’ engagement with resources and personnel that or who relate to teaching and learning.

It is important to note, however, that not all brokering functions improve principals’ instructional leadership capacities using this conceptualization of how principal supervisors can support principals’ instructional bandwidth. For example, principal supervisors were irritated about serving the brokering functions of *enforcing* and *messaging*, asserting that central office staff members should assume such functions in many cases. Principal supervisors shared several examples of times when they “picked up the slack” for non-responsive central office staff members. In one example, a principal supervisor said that a principal in her network requested assistance from the network family and community engagement (F.A.C.E.) coordinator in planning a literacy event for families. When the F.A.C.E. coordinator did not provide assistance, the principal supervisor stepped in to do so. Not only did assuming the F.A.C.E. coordinator’s responsibilities mean that the principal supervisor had less time to do her own job—working with principals on instructional issues—but it also could have had the effect of shielding the F.A.C.E. staff member from the consequences of his low quality of service to the school. This, in turn, could have the effect of encouraging such behavior in the future and prolonging the office’s dysfunction. In addition, serving as the main conduit of information between central office personnel and principals sometimes put principal supervisors in a position where they passed along information that did not help to advance the instructional focus of principals. However, principal supervisors
described the importance of demands and information from central office personnel going through them rather than going directly to principals to give principal supervisors the opportunity to frame or otherwise translate the information in ways that kept principals focused on teaching and learning. While many brokering functions that principal supervisors serve are in line with supporting principals’ instructional leadership capacities, principal supervisors should not be liaisons between central office staff members and principals for all purposes.

Since many of the brokering activities of principal supervisors are necessary given district inefficiencies, and because principals, principal supervisors and top district leaders agree that principal supervisors’ brokering is helpful in enabling principals to serve as instructional leaders, why aren’t these responsibilities viewed as a form of instructional leadership? By serving brokering functions, principal supervisors increase principals’ abilities to focus on instructional issues, thereby improving principals’ instructional leadership capacities. Although the brokering functions they serve are not directly related to instruction, many such brokering functions have a strategic purpose related to facilitating instructional leadership, and therefore can be viewed as supporting instruction. Thus, I contend that principal supervisors should be viewed as operating as instructional leaders when they engage in brokering functions.

The conception of principal supervisors’ brokering functions as a form of instructional leadership aligns with the logic underlying district reform efforts, which is that the more time and energy district leaders spend working to improve principals’ instructional leadership capacities, the greater the positive impact will be on student
achievement. Thus, viewing principal supervisors’ brokering as a form of instructional leadership is in line with the logic of district reform efforts.

The brokering responsibilities of principal supervisors do not fit within the constructs of instructional leadership as it is conceived in the existing literature. However, since brokering functions that are not directly related to instruction serve a necessary, strategic role in facilitating instructional leadership, they should be added to current perspectives in the field of what instructional leadership entails. The existing conception of what it looks like for principal supervisors to serve as instructional leaders should be expanded to include such brokering functions.

Although current scholarship about instructional leadership does not conceptualize instructional leadership in a way that is compatible with principal supervisors serving as brokers, some literature exists which supports the premise. As explained in chapter 2, Honig & Rainey (2014) found that principal supervisors who were most effective in developing the instructional capacity of the principals they oversaw strove to devote one hundred percent of their time to doing so. However, it is important to note that the principal supervisors Honig & Rainey studied did not spend all of their time in schools. Rather, they prioritized activities based on the extent to which they felt that engaging in activities would help them support principals with instructional issues. Many of the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve assist them in supporting principals with instructional issues. For example, by attending central office meetings about the academic department’s new proposed grading policy, principal supervisors are able to ensure that the new policy would align with grading practices that schools could
reasonably adopt. As is also discussed in chapter 2, there is not any research that shows a direct link between any specific principal supervisory model or approach and improved student outcomes. Therefore, formally accepting the role of principal supervisors as brokers could be an impactful principal supervisory model or approach. Additional research is necessary to explore this line of thinking.

Focusing on having principal supervisors reduce and strategically streamline non-instructional tasks for principals is also consistent with the findings of researchers who studied why some large urban school districts experience academic gains more quickly than other similarly-sized districts with comparable demographics. Such research found that it is not the management and organizational structures themselves that are determinative in improving district performance, but rather the extent to which the management and organizational structures support and enhance instructional quality which determines their impact on student achievement (Copland & Knapp, 2006; Council of the Great City Schools, 2013; Honig, 2008, 2013; Knapp, Copland & Talbert, 2003; Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi, 2010). Similarly, the Council of Great City Schools (2013) concluded that “strong” features of district supervisory systems are those that are likely to have a significant impact on principal supervisors’ capacity to drive instructional quality at the school-level (p. 53). For the reasons described earlier in this section, principal supervisors’ brokering may be a “strong” feature that drives improved instructional quality.

My findings indicate that principal supervisors cannot effectively serve both brokering functions and the instructional responsibilities stated in the district’s design
theory because when they engage in brokering, they limit the time they have available to work with principals on the instructional leadership responsibilities outlined in the position description. However, as described above, they serve a type of instructional leadership when they act as brokers because their brokering has the effect of increasing principals’ focus on instructional issues. Given the critical importance of having principal supervisors intercede in the operations of the district as they exist currently, however, the brokering functions in which principal supervisors engage should be intentionally designed components of the role. The design theory and the principal supervisor position description should highlight brokering functions as being responsibilities of principal supervisors.

One caveat to the conclusion that principal supervisors’ brokering serves an instructional purpose by reducing the time that principals need to spend on non-instructional tasks is the embedded assumption that principals know how to be effective instructional leaders if given the opportunity. This may not be true for some principals. If principals do not know how to be instructional leaders and their instructional leadership support is given primarily in the form of principal supervisors’ reducing their non-instructional responsibilities, such principals may only be supported as instructional leaders through the targeted professional development that principal supervisors offer to principals (ex. monthly network meetings, school walkthroughs and coaching conversations).

If district leaders do not want to revise the design theory and the position description for principal supervisors, an alternative option is to take steps to enable
principal supervisors to focus their support of principals’ growth as instructional leaders, as intended by the district’s design theory. This would involve revising the selection and onboarding of principal supervisors, as well as providing principal supervisors with quality professional development experiences, resources and other support that mirror the instructional focus of the position. Developing systems to streamline the work of central office personnel and principals and to improve how Network Support Teams currently function to be more in line with their intended purpose would also reduce the need for principal supervisors to serve brokering functions, as would ensuring that other work of departmental teams is strong, coordinated and in sync with each other. However, given the slow pace of change in bureaucracies, making these systemic improvements would not likely occur quickly and thus may not be a prudent course of action.

Although I contend that the brokering functions that principal supervisors serve are necessary components of their work given current district operational inefficiencies, some scholars would argue that having principal supervisors deliberately attend to brokering functions would not result in improvements to student learning. Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel (2009) developed the framework of the “instructional core,” which presupposes that there are only three ways to improve student learning at scale: 1) by raising the level of the content that students are taught; 2) by increasing the skill and knowledge that teachers bring to the teaching of that content; and 3) by increasing the level of students’ active learning of the content. Everything that is not part of the instructional core can only affect student learning and performance by influencing what goes on inside the core. According to the ideology of the instructional core framework,
administrators’ influence on the quality and effectiveness of classroom instruction is not determined by the leadership practices they manifest, but by the way in which those practices influence the knowledge and skill of teachers and the level of content taught to, and actively learned by, students. While the effort to redefine the role of the principal supervisor seeks to create conditions that influence what occurs inside the instructional core, it does not directly reach the instructional core. Elmore et al. asserted that school improvement efforts will only be successful in markedly improving student outcomes at scale if they directly focus on improving the complex and demanding work of teaching and learning (p. 37). Accepting principal supervisors’ brokering as an important part of the principal supervisors’ role would fall short of influencing the instructional core. The district’s design theory would come slightly closer to this end insofar as principal supervisors’ work in supporting principals’ growth as instructional leaders could increase teachers’ skill and knowledge. Therefore, Elmore et al. would contend that the district’s current design theory should not be modified. Rather, the district should take steps to implement the design theory as it is intended.

To build upon the logic of Elmore et al. (2009), an additional option for districts to consider is to add a position, and to have the person filling the position work closely with the principal supervisor to handle the brokering responsibilities so that the principal supervisor can focus on supporting principals with instructional issues. Alternatively, the person filling the position can serve an instructional purpose and continue to have principal supervisors’ serve brokering functions. If resources permit, individuals who exclusively serve an instructional purpose can be school-based personnel who are located
closer to the instructional core. As discussed in chapter 2, there is a need for principals to be supported in their instructional growth in addition to being supported by brokering activities undertaken on their behalf. Gallucci & Swanson (2006) found that arrangements such as having on-site coaches and other forms of professional development that take place in schools as part of principals’ regular work day is essential to principals’ improvement in their use of instructional leadership practices, and Augustine et al. (2009) found that the quality of principals’ job-embedded professional development had a statistically significant relationship with the amount of time that principals spent on instructional leadership tasks. Additional proposed changes to central office support are discussed in the section below.

Central Office Staff Support

Developing a structure of network support based on the re-envisioned role of principal supervisors was a lofty undertaking for the district. The job responsibilities of many Network Support Team members changed as a result of the introduction of the network structure, which involved a culture shift in central office staff members’ approach to supporting schools. Although the members of various central office departments who served on Network Support Teams were supposed to streamline the non-instructional responsibilities of principals and principal supervisors in order to allow them to focus their time and energy on teaching and learning, principal supervisors report that because they have to serve the brokering functions of rubber stamping to authorize Network Support Team members to act and managing Network Support Teams when
there are performance issues, the introduction of Network Support Teams added to principal supervisors’ non-instructional responsibilities. To eliminate the need for principal supervisors to be *rubber stampers*, the district could consider shifting this responsibility to other district personnel or have Network Support Team members seek approval from a principal supervisor or from their departmental leader only for requests from principals that require a significant investment of resources.

In addition, principals’ and principal supervisors’ descriptions of their interactions with Network Support Team members suggest that Network Support Team members themselves do not understand what their responsibilities are as part of Network Support Teams because such responsibilities have not been explicitly outlined. As a result of the lack of clarity about the new expectations of them, Network Support Team members have made modest changes to their work from since the change in the structure of network support. While examination of this issue is beyond the scope of this study, it might help address the performance issues of Network Support Team members if top district leaders define for them more clearly what the role of each member of the Network Support Team is in supporting principals and principal supervisors, based on his or her functional area. District leaders should help Network Support Team members understand how their work, singularly and in conjunction with the work of Network Support Team members from other departmental teams, contributes meaningfully to the district’s design theory. By clarifying the responsibilities of members of their departmental teams, top district leaders may realize they can eliminate tasks and systems that are outdated or unnecessary and redirect the resources to tasks that are more essential to the improvement of teaching and
learning. This would support the effort to make district operations run more smoothly, as explained in the section titled “understanding and addressing principal supervisors’ perspectives”, and would be an extra benefit of taking such action.

Once Network Support Team members understand their responsibilities, they should receive function-specific training. Since Network Support Team members’ jobs have changed as a result of the network structure, the district should offer professional learning opportunities for them in order to equip them with the skills and tools they need to do their new jobs efficiently. For example, a human resources representative whose exclusive responsibility prior to being assigned to be part of a Network Support Team was to conduct paraprofessional and related service provider selection should be trained in screening processes and desired competencies for teacher and principal candidates, since under the network support structure that representative is now responsible for all human resources matters for the schools in his or her network.

From conversations with Network Support Team members on their network teams, principal supervisors have learned that some Network Support Team members feel disempowered in their roles. As previously explained, Network Support Team members do not believe that their attempts to share deadlines directly with principals will be taken seriously by principals and therefore they ask principal supervisors to serve as the conduit between them and principals. Principal supervisors expressed frustration about having central office personnel ask them to enforce the submission of materials by principals to meet deadlines established by central office staff members. Top district leaders explained that principal supervisors serve in this compliance capacity because Network Support
Team members lack the authority to hold principals accountable for non-compliance. However, since having principal supervisors serve as *enforcers* can be easily eliminated in order to increase principal supervisors’ available time, and because having principal supervisors be *enforcers* does not promote expanding the instructional capacity of principals, it would behoove district leaders to strengthen Network Support Team members’ authority. One suggestion is to give Network Support Team members the opportunity to participate in principals’ evaluations as part of a 360 degree evaluation model. (Principals could also be asked to evaluate Network Support Team members’ work to develop mutual accountability.) With respect to accountability, principal supervisors could reduce their need to engage in the brokering function of managing Network Support Team members when there are performance issues by evaluating Network Support Teams members’ work directly as part of the district’s formal evaluation process. If principal supervisors are Network Support Team members’ evaluators, then Network Support Team members might be incentivized to perform at a higher level. Just as overhauling the trainings for, and evaluations of, Network Support Team members is necessary to realize the intended objective of the network structure, significant changes to processes pertaining to the role of the principal supervisor are also necessary. This will be discussed in the next section.

**Screening, Professional Development and Evaluation of Principal Supervisors**

Shedding light on principal supervisory practices in the district has illuminated the fact that changes are needed in the selection, training and evaluation of principal
supervisors. The mismatch between the district design theory’s stance about principal supervisors’ work, stakeholders’ espoused theories about what principal supervisors should do in practice and principal supervisors’ theories-in-use has led to screening processes, professional development opportunities and evaluation tools for the position that do not mirror what principal supervisors actually do in practice and also do not reflect the district’s intended role of principal supervisors. This is problematic for the individual as well as for the organization, as described in the first section of this chapter. By screening prospective principal supervisor candidates based on skills that will not be used frequently in their daily work, principal supervisors who are hired for the position are unprepared to assume the role. Moreover, the district’s ad hoc approach to professional development for principal supervisors does not provide principal supervisors with a deep understanding of how to support high-quality instruction. Furthermore, because principal supervisors are only offered professional development that aligns to the intended role of principal supervisors but not their actual role, principal supervisors do not receive job-embedded support in their work. As discussed in chapter 2, there is a body of scholarship that underscores the importance of job-embedded training for principal supervisors (Canole & Richardson, 2014; Condon & Clifford, 2012; Corcoran et al., 2013; Gill, 2013; Goldring et al., 2009; Honig, 2012, 2013; Honig et al., 2010; Kimball, Milanowski, & McKinney, 2009; Syed, 2014). Since principal supervisors’ brokering functions are critical components of their role, but many principal supervisors assume the position directly from the principalship and thus do not have experience with brokering between principals and central office personnel, the MSD should ensure that
training opportunities for principal supervisors increase principal supervisors’ understanding of, and ability to undertake, brokering functions. Furthermore, it is unfair to principal supervisors to evaluate them on metrics that do not take into account the frequent overt and subtle expectations of them and requests made of them that go beyond their instruction-related functions. If the district is genuine in its stated focus to grow leaders at all levels of the organization and the district’s performance evaluations are supposed to serve as a basis for individual growth plans, then the current evaluation tools are largely meaningless for principal supervisors.

In addition to evaluating principal supervisors for work that does not reflect their actual practices, the fact that the district uses the same general evaluation tool for principal supervisors as they use for other central office staff members also ignores principal supervisors’ unique middle management positioning between district leaders and principals. As the only central office staff members who are expected to spend a majority of their time in schools, principal supervisors are quasi-school staff members and quasi-central office staff members. The evaluation tool is different for school-based personnel and for central office personnel. Given their positioning, the principal supervisors’ evaluator should not use the evaluation tool that is designed for central office personnel.

If principal supervisors’ theories-in-use reflected the design theories for the role, then it would be reasonable for principal supervisors’ instructional capabilities to be used as the primary criteria for candidate selection, as the basis for their professional learning opportunities and to assess their effectiveness in the position. Since this study established
that principal supervisors’ theories-in-use do not mirror the design theory for the role, district decision-makers should re-think the screening, professional development and evaluation of principal supervisors. In order to both hire and gauge the effectiveness of principal supervisors to ensure that the best individuals are in this important position and that aspiring principal supervisors understand the responsibilities they will be expected to handle, the screening, professional development and evaluation of principal supervisors should reflect the work they will actually perform. Before such changes could be made, however, the brokering functions of principal supervisors would have to be openly acknowledged and accepted as part of principal supervisors’ theories-in-use.

Limitations of this study.

While my approach to designing this study was deliberate, like all studies, it has several limitations. First, while this study was located in a large, urban district whose principal supervisory structures closely resemble those of other large school districts, one must be careful when generalizing from this study and applying its findings to other types of school districts. In smaller school districts, for example, principal supervisors often serve a dual role as Chief Academic Officer or as Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction, in addition to their role as principal supervisor. The findings in my study are not likely to be applicable in such contexts.

Moreover, while top district leaders (Chief-level positions) were interviewed as part of this study, other central office staff members were not interviewed. This is a shortcoming of the study because findings suggest that when engaging in many of the
brokering functions, principal supervisors serve as a conduit between these central office staff members and principals.

Another limitation of this study is that the methodology did not include observations. Conducting observations would have further triangulated my data collection methods and would have allowed me to see principal supervisors’ theories-in-use in practice. While I sought to gain an understanding of principal supervisors’ practices by interviewing principals, principal supervisors and top district leaders about them, seeing their practices in person would have supported participants’ reports. I cannot know what such observations would have revealed. Although I do not think that my data is incorrect, more robust data collection methods may have provided additional insights that could have been relevant to my findings.

An additional potential shortcoming of this study is that I conducted this study in a district in which I used to work and in which I am invested. I have relationships with many of the participants and I have some positional authority in the district. As I explained in chapter 3, I believe that these factors are more of a benefit than a hindrance because participants may have been more open and honest with me as a result of my contextual knowledge of the district and my personal connection with them. Despite my efforts to be aware of my biases and to take steps to mitigate them during my data analysis, the subconscious mind is very powerful.

Lastly, while my findings from this study offer suggestions for further refining the role of principal supervisors based on the perspectives of top district leaders, principal supervisors and principals, the study was not intended to provide evidence that such role
refinement would necessarily lead to better teaching and learning that would result in improved student performance. Suggestions for addressing the limitations of this study in future research are discussed in the next section.

**Directions for future research.**

As this dissertation has uncovered, through both an examination of literature in the field and practice in a case study of a large, urban school district, there are many areas of further research which would continue to fill the significant void in the literature about the role of the principal supervisor. My review of existing scholarship in chapter 2 recounts the widely held belief that principals who function as instructional leaders can improve the quality of instruction in their schools. However, since there is not any existing research that shows a direct link between student achievement and any one principal supervisory model or approach, a critical question to consider is what kind of support from principal supervisors would be most beneficial in improving principals’ instructional capacities. I have suggested that in serving strategic brokering functions, principal supervisors are instructional leaders who do not directly engage in instruction. Future research should consider whether having principal supervisors serve as strategic brokers between principals and top district leaders is an effective principal supervisory structure or whether other forms of support for principals by principal supervisors would be more effective. Consideration should also be given to whether forms of support for principals by individuals other than principal supervisors would be more desirable. (Subsequent research may conclude, for example, that having principal supervisors serve in any capacity is not as valuable as having other central office support configurations.)
It may be worth noting that it is somewhat counterintuitive for school districts to emphasize the importance of, and attempt to improve the quality of, instruction by introducing reform efforts that focus on personnel who are distant from the classroom in the organizational hierarchy. It seems more logical to focus reform efforts on personnel who are close to the classroom, such as teacher-leaders. Examining principal supervisors’ work in a district that uses a teacher-leadership model could be an area for further research.

In addition, since my findings suggest that principal supervisors also broker between central office staff members who are not top district leaders and principals, future studies can build on the findings of this study by including the perspectives of staff members throughout the central office who work with principals and principal supervisors. Questions to explore include: To what extent do such central office staff members understand and believe in the connection between their work and supporting principals as instructional leaders? What organizational conditions both help and hinder their work in supporting principals and principal supervisors?

Furthermore, researchers who wish to build on this study might examine how factors such as principal supervisors’ span of control—the number of schools which they are assigned to oversee—and the way in which principal supervisors are assigned to schools (ex. schools in a network are grouped by neighborhood or by school theme such as project-based learning, for which a principal supervisor has particular expertise) influence principal supervisors’ brokering. In addition, future research could explore whether the amount of time which principal supervisors’ brokering saves for principals
will be significant enough to permit the additional time that principals have to greatly improve their instructional capacities. It is also possible that principals will use their additional available time to focus on other operational and management tasks rather than on instructional issues because there are so many non-instructional issues for them to address. If this occurs, researchers should seek to understand the nature of these issues and how to address them in a way that requires minimal principal involvement.

Lastly, subsequent research should also explore the issues scrutinized in this study using in-depth observations of how principal supervisors handle their daily work and how they engage with principals and central office staff members. The data methods employed in this study merely scratch the surface of such work practices. Engaging in intensive observations would offer additional perspectives and a different kind of empirical support that, in conjunction with my research and other existing scholarship, would provide researchers, practitioners and others in the field with a broader, more-encompassing understanding of the work of principal supervisors.

**Concluding thoughts.**

This research has provided an important contribution to literature in the field of education leadership because there is scant existing scholarship about how principal supervisors’ positioning in a large school district’s bureaucratic structure influences their implementation of organizational strategy, and specifically the organizational strategy of instructional leadership that is currently prevalent in school districts. Because of the minimal scholarship in the field of education, I turned to literature about middle
management and theoretical perspectives about middle managers and strategy implementation from the fields of business and organizational behavior to scrutinize the role of principal supervisors in supporting principals’ instructional leadership. The theoretical perspectives I used—theories of action and middle management expectancy theory—provide insight about why the new responsibilities of principal supervisors are not being reflected in their practice. Considering my findings in light of theories of action revealed that principals’, principal supervisors’ and top district leaders’ espoused theories and theories-in-use have a dual focus—one focus that is aligned to the district’s design theory and another focus that is not aligned to the district’s design theory. Examining my findings through the lens of middle management expectancy theory uncovered that the misalignment between the district’s design theory, and one of principal supervisors’ espoused theories and one of their theories-in-use stems from the principal supervisors’ personal goals and beliefs about their own abilities and how to raise student achievement.

Previous scholarship about principal supervisors’ functioning as middle managers has given little weight to principal supervisors’ agency. My findings show that principal supervisors can be the “backseat” drivers of organizational strategy, and therefore they cannot be viewed merely as being unthinking implementers of strategy. As the link between the central office and the schools, principal supervisors have the potential to significantly impact principals’ leadership, and thus play a key role in the realization of district goals. On the one hand, principal supervisors’ motivation and agency can move strategy implementation forward if they choose to propel implementation efforts. On the
other hand, principal supervisors’ motivation and agency can hinder strategy implementation if they choose to slow down or sabotage implementation efforts.

In addition to establishing that principal supervisors are critically important to district strategic reform efforts, exploring the role of principal supervisors as middle managers in the district organizational hierarchy from different theoretical perspectives also shed light on how principal supervisors’ positioning, perspectives and feelings about their ability to be instructional leaders, as well as the explicit and implicit requests and directives of top district leaders and principals, can influence principal supervisors’ motivation and ability to serve their intended role as instructional leaders. Barry Oshry (1932) writes about how individuals in large organizations suffer from “system blindness,” an unawareness of underlying organizational influences based on an incomplete view of the entire organizational system. As a result of being blind to such underlying influences, Oshry asserts that individuals participate in, and perpetuate, patterns of behavior that consistently produce undesirable outcomes. My hope is that by conducting this study, I have helped to bring “sight” to some of these hidden organizational influences. These conditions can only be fully addressed if they are brought to light, and this study seeks to accomplish this.

Despite the fact that principal supervisors in the MSD currently do not act solely in accordance with their job descriptions, they serve as important intermediaries between principals and district leaders in the broader school system. They influence the design of district goals, policies and initiatives based on their knowledge about how these elements will play out at the school-level. Once district goals, policies and initiatives have been
established, they ensure alignment between the work of central office personnel and the goals and work of individual principals. They serve as interceders who negotiate resources and support from across the central office system to meet the specific needs of individual schools and leaders, and feed information and priorities from principals to central office personnel and from central office personnel to principals. Given the current inefficiencies in district operations, without such brokering, principals would spend a great deal more time and energy on non-instructional issues. Thus, by serving as brokers, principal supervisors support principals’ expanded instructional capacities.

As school district leaders throughout the country consider how to restructure and redesign their central offices and how to deploy financial and human resources to provide more impactful district-level services to principals and their schools, district leaders must do more than simply shift organizational charts and stated priorities. They must consider organizational conditions to ensure that the actual practices of individuals who support principals’ work reflect organizational goals. This dissertation suggests that in addition to attending to principal supervisors’ positioning, taking into account the district ecosystem in which they operate is critical to enhance system-wide strategic work and to the success of district reform efforts, and ultimately, to improved student achievement.
Appendix A
Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study
University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education
3700 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, PA 19104

Researcher: Jenny Janovitz, Doctoral Student
Title of project: The Role of the Principal Supervisor
IRB Study Number: 827092

Background:
The purpose of this study is to understand how principals, principal supervisors and other district leaders understand the role of principal supervisors in supporting the principals they oversee.

If you participate, you will be asked to:
- Discuss your interactions with district leaders, principal supervisors and principals.
- Participate in a written questionnaire and two in-person interviews that are each approximately 60 minutes in length. The first interview will occur in fall 2017 and the second interview will take place in winter 2017/2018. The interviews will occur at a date, time and location of your choosing.

Potential risks of study:
The design of this study accounts for maintaining confidentiality, as discussed in the section below. As with all research, there is a chance that confidentiality of the information collected from you could be breached. Please know that I will take steps to minimize this risk. Your participation in the questionnaire and interviews will also result in a loss of time. You do not have to answer any questions you do not want to, and you can stop the interview at any time.

How confidentiality will be maintained:
Data and documents from the study will be stored securely. All recordings, transcripts, and summaries will be given codes and stored separately from your identity. In the research report, all identifying characteristics, such as name and school/network will be changed and replaced with a pseudonym. Pseudonyms will also be used if your remarks from interviews/observations are quoted. During the review and verification of data, I will ask if there are specific pieces of data that you prefer to have altered.

Benefits:
You are not likely to have any direct benefit from being in this research study. This study may provide you an opportunity to reflect on your practice. In addition, the result of this study will be used to provide feedback to district leaders around principal supervision, which may improve principal supervision in the future. You will not receive any payment for your participation.
If you have any questions about this study, feel free to contact:
Researcher: Jenny Janovitz
Phone: (216) 337-1069
Email: JenJan@gse.upenn.edu

**Independent contact:** If you have any concerns, complaints, or questions about your rights as a study participant, or if you become dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may speak to someone who is not involved with this research team by contacting the University of Pennsylvania Institutional Review Board at (215) 898-2614 or online at http://www.upenn.edu/regulatoryaffairs/.

**Voluntary participation:**
Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide not to participate, there will not be any negative consequences. If you decide to participate, you may stop participating at any time and you may decide not to answer any specific question.

By signing this form I am attesting that I have read and understand the information above and I freely give my consent to participate.

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**Informed Consent Agreement**

Participant’s printed name: ___________________________________________

Participant’s signature: ___________________________________________

Date reviewed and signed: ________________________________

Do you give consent to be audio taped during this research study?
*(Please initial one of the options below.)*

_______ Yes
_______ No

*You will receive a signed copy of this informed consent form.*
Appendix B
Written Questionnaire for Principals

1) In a typical week, approximately how many times do you interact with your principal supervisor (either via email, phone or in-person contact)?
   o None
   o 1-2 times
   o 3-4 times
   o More often than 4 times
   o Daily

2) In a typical week, what is the nature of your interaction with your principal supervisor?
   o Mostly via email
   o Mostly via phone
   o Mostly via email and phone
   o A mix of email, phone and in-person contact

3) Who initiates contact between you and your principal supervisor?
   o I usually initiate contact with my principal supervisor
   o My principal supervisor usually initiates contact with me
   o We both initiate contact

4) In which areas does your principal supervisor provide support to you? Please rank all of the areas below from the most amount of support (#1) to the least amount of support (#8).
   o Curriculum & instruction
   o Talent acquisition/selection
   o Teacher/staff member professional development
   o Building operations
   o Budget/finance
   o Student discipline
   o Family/community engagement
   o Legal

5) Please rate your level of agreement with the following statement: My principal supervisor knows the instructional challenges I face as a school leader.
   o Strongly agree
   o Agree
   o Disagree
   o Strongly disagree
6) In what ways does your principal supervisor provide support to you with instructional issues? Check all that apply.
   o School/classroom walkthroughs
   o Individual coaching conversations
   o Feedback provided as part of principal evaluation process
   o Conversations about student/teacher performance data
   o Professional learning with other principals (ex. Network meetings)
   o N/A – My principal supervisor does not support me with instructional issues
   o Other (Please explain): ________________________

7) In what ways does your principal supervisor provide support to you with operational/compliance issues? Check all that apply.
   o Sending me a list of operational/compliance items and their deadlines from central office departments
   o Following up with me about an upcoming or missed compliance deadline from a central office department
   o Handling an operational/compliance issue from a central office department himself or herself on my behalf
   o Connecting me with a central office staff member who can assist me
   o N/A – My principal supervisor does not support me with operational/compliance issues
   o Other (Please explain): ________________________
Appendix C
Written Questionnaire for Principal Supervisors

1) In a typical week, approximately how many times do you interact with a given principal in your network (either via email, phone or in-person contact)?
   - None
   - 1-2 times
   - 3-4 times
   - More often than 4 times
   - Daily

2) In a typical week, what is the nature of your interaction with a given principal in your network?
   - Mostly via email
   - Mostly via phone
   - Mostly via email and phone
   - A mix of email, phone and in-person contact

3) Who initiates contact between you and the principals in your network?
   - The principals in my network usually initiate contact with me
   - I usually initiate contact with the principals in my network
   - We both initiate contact

4) In which areas do you provide support to principals in your network? Please rank all of the areas below from the most amount of support (#1) to the least amount of support (#8).
   - Curriculum & instruction
   - Talent acquisition/selection
   - Teacher/staff member professional development
   - Building operations
   - Budget/finance
   - Student discipline
   - Family/community engagement
   - Legal
5) In what ways do you provide support to the principals in your network with instructional issues? Check all that apply.
   o Conducting school/classroom walkthroughs
   o Holding individual coaching conversations
   o Providing feedback as part of the principal evaluation process
   o Holding conversations about student/teacher performance data
   o Offering professional learning opportunities with other principals (ex. Network meetings)
   o N/A – I do not support principals with instructional issues
   o Other (Please explain): ________________________

6) In what ways do you provide support to the principals in your network with operational/compliance issues? Check all that apply.
   o Sending a list of operational/compliance items and their deadlines for completion from central office departments
   o Following up with principals about upcoming or missed compliance deadlines from central office departments
   o Handling operational/compliance issues from central office departments on their behalf
   o Connecting principals with other central office staff members who can assist them
   o N/A – I do not support principals with operational/compliance issues
   o Other (Please explain): ________________________
Appendix D
Written Questionnaire for Top District Leaders

1) In which areas do principal supervisors support principals? Please rank the following areas in order of their importance from the area in which principal supervisors most frequently support principals (#1) to the least important area in which principal supervisors least frequently support principals (#8).
   - Curriculum & instruction
   - Talent acquisition/selection
   - Teacher/staff member professional development
   - Building operations
   - Budget/finance
   - Student discipline
   - Family/community engagement
   - Legal

2) What is the role of principal supervisors in supporting principals with instructional issues? Check all that apply.
   - Conducting school/classroom walkthroughs
   - Holding individual coaching conversations
   - Providing feedback as part of the principal evaluation process
   - Holding conversations about student/teacher performance data
   - Offering professional learning opportunities with other principals (ex. Network meetings)
   - N/A – Principal supervisors should not support principals with instructional issues
   - Other (Please explain): ________________________

3) What is the role of principal supervisors in supporting principals with operational/compliance issues? Check all that apply.
   - Sending a list of operational/compliance items and their deadlines for completion from central office departments
   - Following up with principals about upcoming or missed compliance deadlines from central office departments
   - Handling operational/compliance issues from central office departments on behalf of principals
   - Connecting principals with other central office staff members who can assist them
   - N/A – Principal supervisors should not support principals with operational/compliance issues
   - Other (Please explain): ________________________
Appendix E
Interview Protocol #1 for Principals

1) What are the three most time consuming areas of responsibility for you as a principal?

2) Where/from whom do you seek support when you need assistance with a challenge you confront in your work?

3) Describe the role of a principal supervisor. What are the responsibilities of a principal supervisor?

4) Do you believe that the responsibilities you just described the “right” responsibilities for principal supervisors? Is this the work that you believe they should be doing? Please explain.

5) In any organization, there are policies and job descriptions on the one hand and day-to-day practice on the other hand. Do you believe that there is a difference between what the job description for principal supervisors outlines and what principal supervisors do in daily practice? Please explain.

6) Describe your relationship with your principal supervisor.
   6a) Describe a recent interaction that you had with him or her that is typical of the kind of interactions you have with him or her.

7) Are your interactions with your principal supervisor helpful to you? If so, how? If not, why not?
   7a) What actions have your principal supervisor taken that have been most helpful to you? Provide an example.

8) Describe your interactions with your principal supervisor regarding instructional issues.
   8a) Provide an example of a typical interaction between you and your principal supervisor regarding an instructional issue.

9) Describe your interactions with your principal supervisor regarding operational/compliance issues.
   9a) Provide an example of a typical interaction between you and your principal supervisor regarding an operational/compliance issue.
Appendix F
Interview Protocol #1 for Principal Supervisors

1) Describe the role of a principal supervisor. What are the responsibilities of a principal supervisor?

2) Do you believe that the responsibilities you just described the “right” responsibilities for principal supervisors? Is this the work that you believe principal supervisors should be doing? Please explain.

3) Describe a typical day for you in your role as a principal supervisor.
   3a) On a typical day, approximately what percent of your day do you spend on issues that directly relate to teaching and learning?

4) In any organization, there are policies and job descriptions on the one hand and day-to-day practice on the other hand. Do you believe that there is a difference between what the job description for principal supervisors outlines and what principal supervisors do in daily practice? Please explain.

5) Describe your interactions with the principals in your network regarding instructional issues.
   5a) Provide an example of a typical interaction with the principals in your network regarding an instructional issue.

6) Describe your interactions with the principals in your network regarding operational/compliance issues.
   6a) Provide an example of a typical interaction with the principals in your network regarding an operational/compliance issue.

7) What challenge(s) do you experience in your role as a principal supervisor?
   7a) Provide an example of a time when you experienced these challenge(s).
   7b) What challenges do you experience in supporting principals’ development as instructional leaders? Please explain.

8) In what ways are you supported by top district leaders? In what ways do you think support by top district leaders could be improved?

9) What do you think should be done to improve the role of principal supervisors so that they can better support principals with instructional issues?
   9a) What challenges, if any, do you think there would be in improving the role of principal supervisors in the way(s) you have described?
Appendix G
Interview Protocol #1 for Top District Leaders

1) Describe the role of a principal supervisor. What are the responsibilities of a principal supervisor?

2) Describe your interactions with principal supervisors. What are your interactions usually about?
   2a) Describe a recent interaction you had with a principal supervisor that is typical of the kinds of interactions you have with them.
   2b) What challenges do you experience in your interactions with principal supervisors?

3) In any organization, there are policies and job descriptions on the one hand and day-to-day practice on the other hand. Do you believe that there is a difference between what the job description for principal supervisors outlines and what principal supervisors do in daily practice? Please explain.

4) What challenges do principal supervisors experience in supporting principals?
   4a) Provide example of times when you observed principal supervisors experience these challenge(s).
   4b) When I asked principals what challenges they experience in getting support from their principal supervisors, they described ............. I’m interested in hearing from you how you view these challenges.

5) In what ways are principal supervisors supported by top district leaders?
Appendix H
Interview Protocol #2 for Principals

1) Describe the district’s organizational chart.
   1a) In what ways is it followed?
   1b) In what ways is it not followed?

2) Who do principal supervisors serve? To whom is their primary obligation?

3) Imagine that you have become a principal supervisor. What do you think you would be doing on a daily basis and why would you be doing it?

4) Do you and other principals talk with each other about your interactions with your principal supervisors? If so, what do you talk about?
   4a) Describe the requests you and other principals make of principal supervisors. For what kinds of issues do you enlist their support?

5) What challenge(s) do you experience in obtaining support from your principal supervisor?
   5a) Provide examples of ways or areas in which you wish you could get more support from your principal supervisor.

6) In my first set of interviews, principal supervisors said they often serve as brokers between central office personnel and principals. I’m interested in how you see this playing out.
   6a) Do you see examples of times when principal supervisors have intervened and not allowed requests by central office personnel to go to principals? Please explain.
   6b) Do you see examples of times when principal supervisors have facilitated central office personnel and principals’ interactions or requests? Please explain.
   6c) Do you see examples of times when principal supervisors have functioned as intermediaries between central office personnel and principals? Please explain.

7) What do you think should be done to improve the role of principal supervisors so that they better support principals with instructional issues?
   7a) What challenges, if any, do you think there would be in improving the role of principal supervisors in the way(s) you have described?
Appendix I
Interview Protocol #2 for Principal Supervisors

1) Describe the district’s organizational chart.
   1a) In what ways is it followed?
   1b) In what ways is it not followed?

2) Who do you serve as a principal supervisor? To whom is a principal supervisor’s primary obligation?

3) How do you operate as a member of the district leadership team? What are your obligations as a central office staff member?

4) Think back to when you first became a principal supervisor. Is there anything about the responsibilities of your role that you did not anticipate? If so, what?
   4a) Were you a principal prior to becoming a principal supervisor? If so, to what extent do the practices of your principal supervisor when you were a principal influence your practices as a principal supervisor? Please explain.

5) Do you believe that having principals serve primarily as instructional leaders will lead to improved academic outcomes for students? Why or why not?
   5a) Do you believe that having principal supervisors serve primarily as instructional leaders who develop principals’ instructional capacities will lead to improved academic outcomes for students? Why or why not?
   5b) If you believe that having principal supervisors serve primarily as instructional leaders who develop principals’ instructional capacities will lead to improved academic outcomes for students, what do you do to support them in becoming instructional leaders? What gets in the way of your ability to do so? How do you try to overcome these challenges?

6) Do you believe that the district’s current organizational structure and practices allow principals to serve primarily as instructional leaders? Why or why not?
   6a) Are there any district policies, procedures or practices that is getting in the way? If so, what is driving these policies, procedures or practices?
   6b) If you believe that they do not, do you think this will change in the foreseeable future? Why or why not?
   6c) Do you believe that the district’s current organizational structure and practices allow principal supervisors to serve primarily as instructional leaders? Why or why not?
   6d) If you believe that they do not, do you think this will change in the foreseeable future? Why or why not?
7) Describe your interactions with top district leaders. Provide some examples of your typical interactions with them.

8) What is your “north star” in your work as a principal supervisor? What does effectiveness in the role of principal supervisor look like to you?
   8a) Do you believe that your objectives for your role and the district’s objectives for the role of principal supervisors are fully aligned? Why or why not? Please explain.
   8b) Do you believe that you received adequate pre-service training and/or receive ongoing professional development opportunities to be effective in the intended role of a principal supervisor? Why or why not? Please explain.

9) Do you believe that you have been effective in your role as a principal supervisor?
   9a) In what ways do you believe that you have been effective?
   9b) Why do you believe that you have been effective in these ways?
   9c) In what ways do you believe that you have not been effective?
   9d) Why do you believe that you have not been effective in these ways?
   9e) To what extent has the organization contributed to your success or lack thereof?

10) During our last conversation, you described how you often serve as a broker between central office personnel and principals. I’m trying to understand the “why” behind decisions to serve different brokering functions. How do you decide when to intervene and not allow requests by central office personnel to go to principals, when to facilitate central office personnel and principals’ interactions or requests, and when to take an active role in functioning as an intermediary between central office personnel and principals?
    10a) What are some examples of times when you intervened and did not allow requests by central office personnel to go to principals? Why did you do so?
    10b) What are some examples of times when you facilitated central office personnel and principals’ interactions or requests? Why did you do so?
    10c) What are some examples of times when you took an active role in functioning as an intermediary between central office personnel and principals? Why did you do so?

11) In my discussions with principal supervisors, principal supervisors have described the requests and expectations of principals and the requests and expectations of top district leaders. Do you see these requests and expectations as ever being in conflict? If so, how do you negotiate this conflict?
Appendix J
Interview Protocol #2 for Top District Leaders

1) Describe the district’s organizational chart.
   1a) In what ways is it followed?
   1b) In what ways is it not followed?

2) Who do principal supervisors serve? To whom is their primary obligation?

3) How do principal supervisors operate as members of the district leadership team?
   What are their obligations as central office staff members?

4) Imagine that you have become a principal supervisor. What do you think you would be doing on a daily basis and why would you be doing it?

5) Describe requests you and other district leaders make of principal supervisors. For what kinds of issues do you enlist their support?

6) During my conversations with principal supervisors, they described how they often serve as a broker between central office personnel and principals. They said that sometimes they intervene and do not allow central office personnel’s requests to go to principals, other times they facilitate central office personnel and principals’ interactions or requests, and sometimes they take an active role in functioning as an intermediary between central office personnel and principals. Have you noticed them engaging in this kind of brokering? Please explain.
   6a) If you were to experience, or if you have experienced, a principal supervisor blocking a request you have made of principals, how would you or did you feel?

7) Do you believe that having principals serve primarily as instructional leaders will lead to improved academic outcomes for students? Why or why not?
   7a) Do you believe that having principal supervisors serve primarily as instructional leaders who develop principals’ instructional capacities will lead to improved academic outcomes for students? Why or why not?

8) Do you believe that the district’s current organizational structure and practices allow principals to serve primarily as instructional leaders? Why or why not?
   8a) Are there any district policies, procedures or practices that is getting in the way? If so, what is driving these policies, procedures or practices?
   8b) If you believe that they do not, do you think this will change in the foreseeable future? Why or why not?
   8c) Do you believe that the district’s current organizational structure and practices allow principal supervisors to serve primarily as instructional leaders? Why or why not?
8d) If you believe that they do not, do you think this will change in the foreseeable future? Why or why not?
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196


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