Job Stress and Coping Strategies of Elementary Principals: A Statewide Study

Lori Boyland
Ball State University

The purpose of this exploratory study is to gather and examine data regarding the job-related stress of elementary public school principals in Indiana. Specific job issues that principals perceive as stressful are explored, as well as self-reported changes in the stress levels of experienced principals. Objectives of this research are to deepen understanding of the evolving climate surrounding public school leadership, in particular, to investigate current roles, challenges, and stress levels of principals. Findings suggest that supportive measures should be considered in order to assist principals in dealing with increasing job stress and time demands. Several such supportive practices are discussed. In addition, the 20 most common stress-management strategies that principals self-reported as helpful are presented in the appendix.

Keywords: principal stress, coping strategies, job stress, task overload, leadership issues

The public school principalship has evolved considerably in recent years. Changes in society, such as demographic fluctuations, economic downturns, and political shifts, have significantly affected public schools and impacted the role of the school leader (De Leon, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While the principalship has long been described as a challenging position, many principals are reporting escalating pressure as well as serious concerns regarding time demands (Cushing, Kerrins, & Johnstone, 2003; Friedman, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2005). Increasingly long hours, growing lists of responsibilities, funding difficulties, and rising accountability standards are creating what some are characterizing as a culture of stress for school principals (Bottoms & O'Neill, 2001; Combs, Edmonson, & Jackson, 2009; Queen & Queen, 2005).

Although some stress is a common and necessary element of life, excessive unmanaged stress has been linked to a long list of physical and mental health problems (Colbert, 2008; Sapolsky, 2005; Weil, 2005; Wheeler, 2007). As Colbert (2008) explains, not all stress is harmful and a certain amount of stress is a normal part of life.

However, when an individual experience high levels of ongoing stress, the excessive release of stress hormones can, over time, cause damage to cells, organs, and tissues (Colbert, 2008; Sapolsky, 2005; Wheeler, 2007).

The term that doctors use for excessive stress that continues for months or years is "chronic stress" (Colbert, 2008; Weil, 2005; Wheeler, 2007). Chronic stress is typically measured through self-reporting methods, either in interviews or with survey instruments using checklists, scales, or open-ended questions in which participants document their perceived stress levels and stressors (Cohen, 2000). Health care specialists are becoming increasingly concerned about chronic stress because it has been associated with a variety of health problems including muscle tension and pain, memory loss, suppression of the immune system, and even damage to the heart or other organs (Colbert, 2008; Larimore, 2003; Weil, 2005; Wheeler, 2007). In addition, Larimore (2003) explains that chronic stress can weaken the functioning of the adrenal system (the source of one of the energy producing hormones, adrenalin), resulting in decreased energy during the day and disrupted sleep at night. Left untreated, chronic

stress can eventually lead to exhaustion, burnout, and serious physical or mental illnesses (Colbert, 2008; Wheeler, 2007).

Armed with this knowledge, one can clearly see the value in identifying and assisting individuals who are experiencing high levels of ongoing job stress. In terms of the principalship, this issue has even broader implications because an entire school can be negatively affected when a principal becomes ill or can no longer perform at optimal levels due to chronic stress. Chronic stress has been shown to negatively impact job performance and can lead to burnout or position change (Brock & Grady, 2002; Combs et al., 2009). Therefore, as the principalship evolves, it is important to monitor the stress levels of individuals in this position and to promote practices that can assist school leaders in coping successfully with their challenging jobs (Brock & Grady, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2005).

Review of Literature

The review of literature reveals several characteristics of the principalship that distinguish it as a diverse and demanding position. In addition to the daily rigors of maintaining the operations of a school, principals face a variety of taxing issues on a regular basis including meeting state and federal mandates, criticism from parents, large amounts of paperwork, funding cuts, escalating accountability, troubled students, and frustrated teachers (Cushing et al., 2003; De Leon, 2006; Whitaker, 1995). Combs et al. describe the position as "unrelenting" (2009, p. 14). In this fast-paced setting, principals may feel besieged and have difficulty finding adequate time to efficiently handle every aspect of the job (Brock & Grady, 2002; Carr, 1994; Queen & Queen, 2005). However, a great deal of research has shown that successful principals really do make a positive difference in terms of student and staff achievement, parent involvement, and overall program success (Edmonds, 1979; Sergiovanni, 1995). Larsen (1989) claimed that the effectiveness of the principal was the one consistent finding as primary to a high-achieving school. Ubben, Hughes, and Norris (2004) stressed the magnitude of the principal's role and summarized the research by indicating that the principal was the key element in school success. Clearly, it is the public's best interest for principals to be highly effective and productive in their important leadership positions.

Curiously, the research presents conflicting information regarding how principals feel about their positions. There are many reported positives about the principalship, but also many accounts of negatives associated with the role. Some of the perceived positives that principals report include the opportunity to help students, leading a faculty towards a vision, being involved in the community, working collaboratively with others, serving as a change-agent, and managing an efficiently run organization (Sergiovanni, 1995; Malone, Sharp, & Walter, 2001). In addition to these perceived positives, studies have indicated that the majority of principals at both the elementary and secondary level find their work rewarding (Doud & Keller, 1998; Graham & Messner, 1998; Malone et al., 2001).

However, in the literature, there are also many negatives associated with the role of principal. Some of these include reports of a hectic lifestyle, intense pressure, and constant conflict resulting from an inability to please all constituencies (Carr, 1994; Cushing et al., 2003; Doud & Keller, 1999). For many years, the principalship has been described as a stressful position and the degree of stress appears to be increasing over time (Brock & Grady, 2002; Queen & Queen, 2005; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). In the 1980's, Hiebert and Mendaglio (1988) found that principals reported moderate levels of job stress, confirming results described by Hembling and Gilliland in 1981. However, by the mid-1990's and early 2000's, job-related stress was identified as a growing problem for principals by several researchers including Carr (1994), Whitaker and Turner (2000), and Brock and Grady (2002). Brock and Grady found that over the past twenty years, principals have indicated higher levels of exhaustion and stress, resulting in reduced mental and physical stamina (2002). Queen and Queen called the principalship an "undoable position," claiming that increased demands in a changing society caused great stress for principals and exposed them as major candidates for exhaustion and serious health concerns (2005, p. 10). Cushing et al. (2003) also reported that the long hours and high stress of the position were taking a toll on principals' personal lives and their health.

While both elementary and secondary principals have reported feeling overwhelmed with their positions, elementary principals typically do not have assistant principals, which might put them at additional risk for high job stress (Combs et al., 2009; Doud & Keller, 1998). In a recent study, Combs et al. (2009) found that 8.8% of the elementary school principals in their study were stressed to the point of experiencing job burnout. Mitchell (2010) described the modern elementary principalship as being, "…filled with constant challenges such as meeting the needs of diverse student populations, budget cuts, and strict accountability measures" (p. 116). Mitchell goes on to say that due to the pressures of the position, many elementary principals are considering leaving the profession (2010).

It appears that principals are under more pressure now due to several changes in recent years that have increased the variety, scope, and demands of the position. Researchers have identified time constraints, conflicting desires and needs of various constituencies, role overload, and lack of role clarity, among other things, as potential sources of increased job-related stress (Holt, 1982; Queen & Queen, 2005; Whitaker, 1995; Wiggins, 1988). For example, *No Child Left Behind*, which was signed into law in 2002, brought several challenges to the nation's school principals including higher overall accountability, mandatory standardized student testing, highly qualified teacher requirements, the pressure for schools to meet adequate yearly progress goals, and the threat of sanctions

(including principal replacement) for inadequate student academic performance (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002).

In addition to the challenges presented by *No Child Left Behind*, there are many other issues that principals now face on a regular basis. Some of these include increasing student discipline concerns, excessive bureaucracy (especially in larger urban school corporations), conflicting internal and external expectations, deteriorating and overcrowded facilities, community dissatisfaction, unfunded mandates, special interest groups, and teacher shortages (Combs et al., 2009; Cushing et al., 2003). School leaders have also indicated that changing demographics in many communities, for example, population increases of students who are new English Language Learners, combined with funding cuts, have stretched their schools' thin resources close to the breaking point (De Leon, 2006; Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Cushing et al. stated that for principals, "Stress comes from high levels of responsibility, while authority and flexibility are simultaneously reduced via union contracts and fiscal and legal requirements" (2003, p. 29). In addition, Cushing et al. reported that many principals were working a 60 - 70 hour work-week and still not feeling that they were getting the job done.

It is interesting that principals have not been found to be highly motivated towards the job by features such as higher salaries, benefits, or status (Malone et al., 2001). Actually, in the literature, the main factors that appear to be drawing people to the principalship are altruistic in nature, that being the opportunity to serve others, to be a change agent, and to make a positive difference for children (Cushing et al., 2003; Malone et al., 2001). Cushing et al. (2003) suggested that the rewards for principals were intrinsic and came simply from doing a good job and seeing children achieve. Malone et al. reported that the majority of principals surveyed, 72.8%, asserted that their work was rewarding because they had "…an opportunity to impact students" (2001, p. 10). Therefore, it is important to recognize that even though research indicates that the demands on principals are increasing, it appears that many principals still believe that the position is rewarding, primarily because of their interest in helping others. However, when an individual faces intense job-related stress for long periods of time, even the most rewarding position can become unmanageable and undesirable. Consequently, further research is needed in order to investigate principals' current levels of job-related stress and examine factors that may promote the health and retention of quality individuals in this critically important leadership role.

Method

Theoretical Framework

This study views job stress from a transactional perspective, which has become a widely accepted framework for understanding the nature of stress (Cox & Griffiths, 2010; Hiebert & Mendaglio, 1988; Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984; Torestad, Olah, & Magnusson, 1985). Transactional stress theories propose that the level and duration of the stress response an individual experiences is influenced by the interplay between environmental factors and the person's ability to cope with the stressor (Cox & Griffiths, 2010; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Principals can be described as high-achieving, well-educated individuals who have been found to generally have effective coping capabilities (Hiebert & Mendaglio, 1988). However, there is a point for an individual when the demands outweigh his or her coping abilities and stress results. The levels of stress can range from very low to very high, or anywhere in between. Stress levels that remain high for extended periods of time are of particular concern, as are the abilities of the individual to identify and cope with the stressor(s) (Colbert, 2008; Sapolsky, 2005; Weil, 2005). Therefore, in addition to identifying the stress levels of principals, it is important to examine principal's personal coping strategies and compare those with research-based stress management strategies in order to determine the effectiveness of the techniques that principals are currently employing.

Assessment and Measures

The purposes of this study are to gather and examine data regarding the job-related stress of elementary school principals and their successful coping strategies. Based on these exploratory objectives, a mixed methodology using a survey assessment was deemed most appropriate.

The survey first gathered participants' demographic information, including age, gender, years of experience as a principal, and highest degree earned. Then, to determine perceptions regarding stress about their positions, principals were asked to rate their levels of job stress as "low stress," "medium stress," or "high stress." Answers were assigned a numerical value, applying a Likert-type scale that has been successfully used by other researchers in this field (e.g., Hiebert & Mendaglio, 1988). The participants' demographics and reported levels of job stress are located in Table 1.

A secondary objective of this study was to gather principals' perceptions regarding stress-related job issues, as well as their successful methods and techniques for coping with stress. This secondary purpose was significant in itself as helpful stress-management strategies should be documented and shared, especially with those who may be experiencing unusual high levels of job-related stress. As Gmelch and Chan (1995) indicated, most studies of this nature have looked at the sources of stress, while few have discussed how school administrators manage their job pressures.

Gathering this qualitative information was accomplished through a series of open-ended questions, which were written by the researcher and then reviewed by a panel of educators including college professors and practicing school principals. The open-ended questions on the survey included:

Table 1

Participants' demographics

	Frequency (n=193)	Percent	Mean (SD)
Gender			
Female	88	45.6%	2.43 (0.58)
Male	96	49.7%	2.21 (0.62)
No answer	9	4.7%	
Age			
<41 years	44	22.8%	2.47 (0.59)
41-50 years	55	28.5%	2.33 (0.61)
51-60 years	84	43.5%	2.36 (0.61)
>61 years	10	5.2%	2.00 (0.58)
Total years as principal			
<5 years	51	26.4%	2.25 (0.63)
6-10 years	52	26.9%	2.35 (0.59)
11-15 years	33	17.1%	2.34 (0.60)
16-25 years	45	23.3%	2.40 (0.67)
>25 years	12	6.2%	1.92 (0.61)
Highest degree earned			
MS or MA	155	80.3%	2.34 (0.61)
Ed.S. or Ed.D.	38	19.6%	2.16 (0.60)
School community			
Rural	132	68.4%	2.27 (0.62)
Suburban	38	19.7%	2.24 (0.54)
Urban	23	11.9%	2.65 (0.61)
Student enrollment			
<400 students	71	36.8%	2.28 (0.70)
401-600 students	89	46.1%	2.27 (0.54)
>601 students	32	16.6%	2.48 (0.57)
No answer	1	0.5%	

Note: Higher mean indicates higher reported job stress level with 3=high stress

1) What do you find most stressful about your job?
2) What do you enjoy most about your job?
3) For experienced principals (practicing for 5 or more years), do you feel more or less stress on the job now than in previous years?
4) For experienced principals who report more job stress now, what accounts for the increased stress?
5) Do you feel that job-related stress has impacted your overall health?
6) What helpful stress-reduction strategies do you practice that you would like to share with other principals? (See Appendix.)

The researcher established face validity of the survey questions by identifying appropriate queries and concepts through a review of applicable literature. Content validity was determined by forwarding the survey for review to a panel experienced in the development and use of educational surveys including college professors and public school principals. Several changes were made in wording and sequencing on the instrument after this review. Then, the survey questions were pilot tested with a group of practicing principals. After a two-week interval, the same group completed the questions again and results were compared, demonstrating overall favorable stability

reliability of the instrument. For the standardized (quantitative) questions using Likert-type scale responses, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency reliability was computed at .881.

The entire survey and a cover letter explaining the study were mailed to a random sample of 25%, or 290, of Indiana's elementary public school principals. To identify the sample, a random number generator program was employed and applied to a list provided by the Indiana Department of Education of all currently employed public school elementary principals (Indiana School Directory 2009-2010). The subjects voluntarily completed the survey and returned it sealed in an enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope. All surveys were anonymous (the name of the principal, school or school corporation were not asked). The counties of postmark from the return envelopes were recorded, but not matched in any way with the returned surveys. Then, the return envelopes were destroyed in order to ensure participants' anonymity was not compromised by postmark information.

In summary, this study was an attempt to check principals' current levels of job stress, to recognize the specific issues that principals find stressful in today's schools, and to identify coping strategies that principals perceive as helpful. By examining multiple perspectives, the information from this study contributes to the body of knowledge about this topic. The fundamental goal of the researcher was, and still is, to help educational leaders develop successful stress management plans and learn to cope effectively in their high-pressure positions.

Results

Data for this study came directly from the survey results. A total of 193 principals from 79 counties in Indiana responded to the survey. This was a return rate of 67% and represents 86% of the counties in the state of Indiana. Based on this response, there was wide representation from around the state. All survey results were entered into a spreadsheet and reported in a combined format in order to protect respondent's confidentiality. Table 1 shows the demographics of the 193 respondents whose surveys were returned.

Based on the analysis of data received from the participating principals, the majority were found to be experiencing moderate to high levels of job stress. Of the respondents, 38.5 % reported high job stress, 53.6 % reported moderate job stress, and 7.8 % reported low job stress. With almost 40% of the principals in the high stress category, these results support the work of previous researchers in this field who have suggested the job stress for principals is increasing over time (Brock & Grady, 2002; Cushing et al., 2003; Queen & Queen, 2005; Whitaker & Turner, 2000). Table 2 shows these results.

ANOVA tests were calculated using participant demographic information as the independent variables and the reported stress levels as the dependent variable. No statistically significant relationships were found. However, it is worth noting that urban principals indicated the highest mean of any demographic group in terms of their reported levels of job stress. The principals who had been on the job the longest, 25 years or more, reported the lowest levels of job stress of any demographic group. Table 1 also documents these results.

In analyzing the qualitative data, the open-ended question responses were grouped using content analysis. In order to accomplish this, the responses were first coded to identify general themes and then placed into categories and also quantified (Saldana, 2009; Weber, 1990).

On the first open-ended question, which asked principals what they found stressful about their jobs, the majority of principals reported that the difficulty of "task overload" caused them the most job stress. For this study, task overload is described as having too many tasks to accomplish in a given amount of time. While everyone experiences task overload at times, many Indiana principals appear to be in a continual state of work-related task overload. There were 88 separate written comments from principals that related directly to the theme of ongoing task overload. Many of these comments revealed that principals felt overwhelmed by their managerial duties, for example, "The position is stressful because I always have too much to do and not enough time as I'm bogged down in paperwork and meetings," and "All the paperwork, deadlines, state reports, and the continual budget cuts are very stressful." Many other principals' comments indicated

Table 2

Level of Job Stress Reported by Participants

	Frequency	Percent
Low job stress	n=15	7.8%
Moderate job stress	n=103	53.6%
High job stress	n=74	38.5%

concerns about lack of time for instructional leadership. For example, "I'm working longer and longer hours to try and get everything done, but there is not enough time left to be an instructional leader," and "I'm trying to get into classrooms more, but just don't have enough time. I'm always behind on something."

Do principals feel that their job stress has increased over time? Of the experienced principals (five or more years in the principalship), 70% reported more stress now than in previous years. There were 113 experienced principals who answered this question. Most experienced principals felt that the additional stress was due to expansion of the scope and demands of the job, in particular, a greater emphasis on accountability. Principals commented on increased paperwork and reports, the difficulty in meeting the needs of special populations, and generally feeling "spread too thin" by responsibilities. Again, the majority of the comments could be categorized under the theme of task overload that is escalating over time. Many principals specifically mentioned meeting Adequate Yearly Progress requirements under *No Child Left Behind* and the rising emphasis on test scores, for example, "The job is more stressful now because of increased pressure and time demands by the state and federal government, like more paperwork, testing, and making AYP, but we get no additional help."

The majority of this study's participants reported that they believe that job-stress from the principalship has negatively impacted their health. Of the total respondents, 69% perceived that job stress had affected their overall health and wellness. This supported reports by Cushing et al. (2003) who claimed that due to high job stress, health issues were prevalent among principals, especially those who had been on the job a few years. While this researcher cannot validate the relationship between respondents' medical problems and their job stress, it is interesting that this study's participants perceived a relationship between the two variables. Some principals even made note of the health issues that they have developed since taking the job, even though this information was not requested. These included high blood pressure (n=22), trouble sleeping (n=21), fatigue (n=16), anxiety or depression (n=13), and headaches (n=8). In addition, a large number of principals commented that they do not have time to exercise regularly and several mentioned that they frequently eat on the run. For example, one principal remarked, "I used to exercise at least four times a week, now I'm lucky to get one day in." Principals also reported that their job responsibilities often consumed their family and recreational time, for example, "There is simply not enough time to work on your own agenda or have balance between home and school."

What do principals enjoy most about their jobs? "Students" was the overwhelming response on this question. There were 116 separate comments from principals regarding the importance of their students, which was the most common response categorized under any one theme. For example, "I have the opportunity to impact 500 students in a positive way," and "The thing I enjoy most is making a difference in the lives of children." This research supports work previously mentioned by Sergiovanni (1995) and Malone, Sharp, and Walter (2001), which found that principals consider the opportunity to help students a leading positive attribute of the position.

Discussion

Principals are expected to be many things to many people. At times, the messages are conflicting. Principals are the managers of their buildings and are expected to "run a tight ship," yet they must also be creative risk-takers and flexible change agents. Principals should be talented instructional leaders, well-versed in the latest learning research; however, they are also required to work within the confines of many financial and legal restrictions. Principals are charged with promoting equity and diversity, yet must make difficult financial decisions in a very tight economy. To be successful, principals must work collaboratively with a variety of constituency groups while keeping the best interest of the students they serve at the forefront, which can be problematical when some groups have their own self-serving agendas. In short, the principalship is a difficult job. One can understand how in this age of amplified accountability and public dissatisfaction with schools; even the most effective principals are feeling under immense pressure.

This study found that a large majority of Indiana's elementary principal participants are experiencing moderate to high levels of job stress. In addition, most of the experienced principals indicate more stress now than in previous years. These results are concerning, especially if this trend continues, as high levels of ongoing stress could adversely affect the physical and mental well-being of principals currently practicing. Chronic stress can also impact job performance and could negatively affect a principal's ability to lead a school effectively. Furthermore, the principalship being seen as an increasingly stressful position could hinder the attraction of new recruits into the profession.

This research suggests that supportive structures for principals should be implemented. There are several ideas found in the literature that might be of help to principals. Some of these include increased professional development regarding particular aspects of the job, training in problem-solving skills, communication workshops, time-management classes, mentoring support, improved principal evaluation procedures, and opportunities for principals to observe one another (Cushing et al., 2003; De Leon, 2006). However, the results of this study indicate that reducing the problem of ongoing task overload might provide principals with the greatest relief. In this study, principals reported that they were responsible for an unrealistically large number of duties. It appears that the pace and complexity of the job has increased to the point of great frustration for some

principals. In addition, principals repeatedly described in their comments that the tasks that kept them the busiest were managerial in nature, yet many indicated a desire for more time to focus on meaningful leadership issues, such as school climate, instructional improvement, and professional development for teachers.

Consequently, the results of this study suggests that principals need to be relieved of some of their managerial responsibilities in order to provide the time necessary to be effective leaders. Ideas for this include reducing paperwork, adding assistant principals, and reallocating responsibilities that do not have to be taken care of at the building level to the central office. Assigning some administrative duties to teachers in exchange for additional release time or other perks might be helpful (Cushing, 2003). Queen and Queen supported this view when they said, "Recognizing which tasks principals must do and which tasks can be shared or delegated will not only alleviate stress for the principals but also empower their staff members" (2005, p. 104).

In addition to a reduction in managerial duties, today's principals must be educated about stress management. They should gain a basic knowledge of the negative impacts that chronic stress can have on their health and their job effectiveness, and learn strategies to combat negative effects. School leaders need to develop a repertory of stress-management techniques and understand the importance of taking care of themselves. In short, they need to develop and follow personal stress-management plans. Professional development should be offered to all principals on this topic. Also, it would be helpful to make stress management information available to candidates studying to be future school administrators, at the university level, as an early preventative measure.

Conclusion

The principalship is a complex and challenging position. An examination of data regarding principals' job stress gives us clues as to ways we can help principals cope effectively in this high-pressure position. As the public school principalship continues to evolve, it appears that the position is becoming even more taxing, which could impact not only the health of principals, but also the functioning of entire schools. Therefore, it is important that we consider the stress levels of the people taking on this difficult leadership role.

Principals are high achievers who are intrinsically motivated and very dedicated to their students (Cushing et al., 2003; Malone et al., 2001). However, the problem of task overload due to the huge variety and number of duties principals are responsible for each day warrants a closer look by superintendents, school boards, Department of Education officials, and researchers alike. Steps should be taken to assist and support principals in coping with the demands of their jobs. Keeping job-related stress under control is a critical step towards avoiding health issues, burn out, and job or career change (Colbert, 2008; Gmelch

& Torelli, 1994). The results obtained from this study, and others of this nature, may help us reach the important goal of retaining and recruiting quality principals who are able to perform at maximum levels.

References

Brock, B. L., & Grady, M. L. (2002). *Avoiding burnout: A principal's guide to keeping the fire alive*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Bottoms, G., & O'Neill, K. (2001). *Preparing a new breed of school principals: It's time for action.* Atlanta, GA: Southern Regional Education Board.

Carr, A. (1994). Anxiety and depression among school principals: Warning, the principalship can be hazardous to your health. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *32*(3), 18-34.

Cohen, S. (2000). Measures of psychological stress. Psychosocial Working Group. Retrieved from http://www.macses.ucsf.edu/research/psychosocial /stress.php

Colbert, D. (2008). *Stress Less.* Lake Mary, Florida: Siloam Publishers.

Cox, T., & Griffiths, A. (2010). *Work-related stress: A theoretical perspective*. In S. Leka, & J. Houdmont (Eds.), Occupational Health Psychology (pp. 31-56). West Sussex, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing.

Combs, J., Edmonson, S. L., & Jackson, S. H. (2009). Burnout among elementary school principals. *Journal of Scholarship and Practice, 5*(4), 10-15.

Cushing, K. S., Kerrins, J. A., & Johnstone, T. (2003). Disappearing principals. *Leadership*, 32(5), 28-37.

De Leon, A. G. (2006). The school leadership crisis: Have school principals been left behind? *Carnegie Reporter*, *4*(1), 1-5.

Doud, J. L., & Keller, E. P. (1998). The K-8 principal in 1998. *Principal, 78*(1), 10-12.

Edmonds, R. R. (1979). Some Schools Work and More Can. *Social Policy, 9*, 28-32.

Educational Research Service (2000). *The principal, keystone of a high-achieving school: Attracting and keeping the leaders we need*. National Association of Elementary School Principals; and National Association of Secondary School Principals. Arlington,VA.

Friedman, I. A. (2002). Burnout in school principals: Role related antecedents. *School Psychology of Education, 5*(3), 229-251.

Glass, T., & Franceschini, L. (2007). *The state of the American superintendency: A mid-decade study.* Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Gmelch, W.H., & Torelli, J.A. (1994, May). The association of role conflict and ambiguity with administrator stress and burnout. *Journal of School Leadership*, *4*, 341-357.

Graham, M. W., & Messner, P. E. (1998). Principals and job satisfaction. *International Journal of Educational Management, 12*(5). 196-202.

Hembling, D. W., & Gilliland, B. (1981). Is there an identifiable stress cycle in the school year? *Alberta Journal of Educational Research, 27*, 324-330.

Hiebert, B., & Mendaglio, S. (1988, April). *A Transactional Look at School Principal Stress.* Department of Educational Psychology. University of Calgary. Paper presented to the 1988 annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA.

Holt, R. R. (1982). Occupational Stress. In L. Goldberger & S. Breznitz (Eds.), *Handbook of stress: Theoretical and clinical aspects* (419-444). New York, NY: Free Press.

Indiana School Directory (2009-2010). Listing of public school principals. Indianapolis, IN: Published by the Indiana Department of Education.

Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal and coping.* New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Larimore, W. (2003). *Ten essentials of highly healthy people.* Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing.

Larson, T. (1989). Effective schools? Effective principals! *Thrust for Educational Leadership, 19,* 35-36.

Linn, R. L., Baker, E. L., & Betebenner, D. W. (2002). Accountability systems: Implications of requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. *Educational Researcher, 31*(6), 3-16.

Malone, B. G., Sharp, W. L., & Walter, J. K. (2001, Oct. 24-27). *What's right about the principalship?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Mid-Western Educational Research Association, Chicago, IL.

Mitchell, C. M. (2010). *Job satisfaction of elementary principals in large urban communities.* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from http://ecommons.txstate.edu/eapstad/12

Queen, J. A., & Queen, P. S. (2005). *The frazzled principal's wellness plan.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Sapolsky, R. M. (2004). *Why zebras don't get ulcers.* New York, NY: Holt Inc.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1995). *The principalship: A reflective practice perspective.* 3rd ed. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Torestad, B., Olah, A., & Magnusson, D. (1985). Coping, control, and experience of stress: An interactional perspective. *Reports from the Department of Psychology* (No. 643), University of Stockholm.

Ubben, G. C., Hughes, L. W., & Norris, C. J. (2004). *The principal: Creative Leadership for excellence in schools.* Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Weber, R. P. (1990). *Basic content analysis*, 2nd ed. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Wheeler, C. M. (2007). *Ten simple solutions to stress: How to tame tension and start enjoying your life.* Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications.

Whitaker, K. S. (1995). Principal burnout: Implications for professional development. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 9,* 287-296.

Whitaker, T., & Turner, E. (2000). What is your priority*? NASSP Bulletin, 84*(617), 16-21.

Weil, A. (2007). *Healthy Aging.* New York, NY: Random House, Inc.

Wiggins, T. (1988). Stress and administrative role in educational organizations. *Journal of Educational Research, 92*, 120-125.

Sharing of Principals' Stress-Management Strategies

Following are the twenty most common techniques principals reported as helpful in managing their job stress. These techniques came directly from school administrators around the state of Indiana. However, they closely mirror research-based strategies found in the literature, which validates their effectiveness (Larimore, 2003; Queen & Queen, 2005; Weil, 2007).

1. *Regular exercise* (this was the number one strategy principals reported as helpful). When you can't leave work, take a brisk walk in or outside your school.
2. *Try to leave your work at work.* Don't allow yourself to think about school problems when you are at home. Get out of the habit of taking work home every night.
3. *Take time to eat during the day.* Principals often work through lunch. Try to force yourself to set aside some time to eat and take a break each day. Also, keep healthy snacks on hand and drink plenty of water.
4. *Don't dwell on your mistakes.* We all make mistakes, so learn from them and move on. Be as forgiving of yourself as you are of others.
5. *Journaling.* Many principals said that they journal after a tough day to relieve stress and reflect. Journaling can also help you put your school issues in perspective.
6. *Get out of the office and go be with the kids.* They bring you back to your purpose and adjust your focus.
7. *Network with others.* The principalship can be very lonely. Build a supportive network. Find another administrator you can talk to. Get away to a conference occasionally.
8. *Play relaxing or inspirational music* in your office during the day.
9. *Increase your daily levels of communication* with staff and parents. More communication means fewer problems. People like to feel "in the know."
10. *Write out tomorrow's "to do" list before you leave each day.* It will help you start the next day feeling prepared.
11. *Look at the big picture* and realize that you can't get it all done in one day, or one week, or even one month. Stay organized and plan ahead, but take each day a day at a time.
12. *Don't make snap decisions* (unless it is an emergency). Don't rush to judgment, especially when people are upset. Slow down your reaction to an emotional situation. Gather input and data before you make a big decision.
13. *Don't take it personally*. Realize that it is usually the position, not you as a person that is upsetting people. Plan to serve others and realize that "thank yous" are seldom given. When you need a lift, do something nice for someone else.
14. *Keep your sense of humor.* As one principal said, "learn to laugh at the little stuff and don't take yourself too seriously."
15. *Be optimistic*. Don't lose your positive attitude. Start each day with a smile. Count your blessings. Several principals said they keep a file of positive notes and re-read them on crazy days to regain their perspective.
16. *Hire good staff.* Surround yourself with great people who love kids and let them do their jobs. Don't feel that you have to control everything.
17. *Balance your life.* Make time for family, friends, recreation, a hobby. Schedule some "down time" for yourself. Schedule some fun too!
18. *Identify something you really enjoy that is healthy and positive for you,* for example, a hot bath, a walk in the woods, or getting a massage, and do it regularly.
19. *Deep Breathing*. When you are stressed, your breathing becomes shallow. So, focus on breathing deeply, into the abdomen, hold it for a few seconds and then exhale.
20. *Get Organized*. Organize your office, your desk, your computer files, and your paper filing system so that you don't waste time and energy looking for items.

Author Notes
Lori Boyland, Ed. D.
Ball State University
Teachers College 907
Muncie, Indiana 47306
765-285-8490
lgboyland@bsu.edu

Lori Boyland is assistant professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Ball State University. Before joining the faculty at Ball State in 2008, Boyland served as a public school principal for 16 years in the state of Indiana.

Current Issues in Education

Mary Lou Fulton Teachers College · Arizona State University
PO Box 37100, Phoenix, AZ 85069, USA

Editorial Team