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The Impact of Teacher Termination on the Level of Stress of Elementary Principals

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THE IMPACT OF TEACHER TERMINATION
ON THE LEVEL OF STRESS OF ELEMENTARY PRINCIPALS

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April 12, 2001

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This dissertation is being submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy from Lynn University, College of Graduate Studies.
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Abstract

Considering the key position principals hold and the impact that this has on all aspects of school life, it was reasonable to argue that better understanding of the problems and stresses they face would shed more light on the complex nature and dynamics of stress. Walter Gmelch maintained that sources of stress for the school principal were divided into four broad categories: role-based, task-based, boundary-spanning, and conflict-mediating. Public and political pressure to improve student performance coupled with the arduous task of removing tenured incompetent teachers poses pressing problems for school principals.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the levels of stress of principals. If there was increased stress associated with teacher termination, was the stress more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship?

This qualitative study was conducted in one of the largest school districts in the state and in the nation.
The Administrative Stress Index questionnaire was administered to selected principals and follow-up interviews were conducted, tape recorded, and transcribed.

Principals in this study clearly indicated that a central difficulty for them, as administrators, was the excessive amount of time needed to assist and support teachers who were less than effective. The interviews also indicated that the experienced principals were more critical of the events that occurred out of their locus of control and therefore increased the level of boundary-spanning stress. The less experienced principals continued to struggle with the issue of career termination and its' impact on the person and on task-based stress.

It was recommended that school districts recognize the stress associated with termination by providing comprehensive training programs for principals in stress maintenance. Colleges and universities who prepare educators should introduce a distance-learning program in stress management for school administrators. Further study was recommended on this topic as it related to middle-school and high-school principals.
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Chapter I

Our children’s future success is tied directly to the education that we provided for them. The new mission of public education is to educate a cross-section of children, many of whom would have previously dropped out, and bring them up to world-class standards using complex teaching strategies and curricula that are not only motivational but are connected to the real lives and needs of all students (Neisler, 2000). In the midst of growing demands upon principals is the legislative mandate that students shall be taught by competent teachers.

Cheryl Riggins (2001) feels that today’s urban principalship had become increasingly more demanding as the spectrum of responsibilities increase at an alarming rate. Those responsibilities which continue to broaden, include: relationships with staff, parents, and community; recruitment, hiring, and retention of teachers; staff development and evaluation; and budget and facilities management. Other demands on principals include developing a multicultural focus on the curriculum and combining with strategies for inclusive instruction and behavioral
intervention. Additionally, there was an essential need to maintain adequate support mechanisms for families in poor and highly diverse communities, and to involve those families in their children’s education.

Considering the key position principals hold and the impact that this has on all aspects of school life, it is reasonable to argue that a better understanding of the problems and stresses they face will shed more light on the complex nature and dynamics of stress (Borg and Riding, 1993). Stress is unavoidable and could be helpful (eustress) and motivating or it could be overwhelming (distress) and debilitating (Selye, 1956).

Gmelch (1992) maintains that sources of stress for the school principal are divided into four broad categories, administrative tasks (those sets of demands placed on the individual), role ambiguity (the perception or interpretation of the stressor by the individual), hierarchical authority (presented by choices to the individual, depending upon the perceptions made), and perceived high expectations (long-range effects). The initial stage of stress is subdivided into four sources of stress: role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress (Gmelch, 1982).
Principals are motivated by the eustress in their role in the school setting. Eustress makes the principalship a challenge because no day is the same, the principal needs to be ready to make quick and conclusive decisions. The focal point of this study was not the positive nor negative effects of stress, as it related to teacher termination but, rather, to accurately report the research investigation of the effect of teacher termination and its relationship to the level of stress of the principal.

The dismissal of incompetent teachers is a complicated and expensive process that requires accurate documentation, patience, perseverance, and emotional expenditure (Johnson, Petrie, and Lindauer, 1999). Although, the Florida Legislature had enacted significant legislation to facilitate and expedite the removal of those teachers who did not meet the necessary standards of proficiency the process is expensive and time consuming. (Florida State Statute 231.36).

Public and political pressure to improve student performance coupled with the arduous task of removing tenured incompetent teachers has posed pressing problems for school principals. The decision to pursue termination is made after careful assessment of the degree of support from the following entities:
• Union support for removing incompetent teachers
• District personnel
• School board

In the event any of the three factors are unsupportive of termination, the school site administrator ought to proceed cautiously (Johnson, Petrie, and Lindauer, 1999).

The decision to terminate a teacher is not one that is reached frivolously. It requires intensive support from school-site staff and administrators, as well as, district-level support staff who offer interventions that address specific areas of concern. Educators across the geographic spectrum agree that if ineffective teaching is caught early it can be dealt with through comprehensive observations, evaluations, and improvement plans, rather than formal legal proceedings. This would motivate teachers to take pride in their craft and the less competent teacher could be successfully counseled out of the profession (Cambor, 1999).

Jon Saphier (1993), founder of Research for Teaching, believes that good evaluation systems could help principals document ineffective teachers and give them the courage to take the necessary steps to remove them from the school.
When evaluations are conducted fairly and thoroughly, unions are more likely to accept the administration’s decision without a grievance procedure.

Unfortunately, principals often have neither the time nor the training to thoroughly address the needs of incompetent teachers. Without an adequate paper trail of accountability and a clearly developed, fairly administered evaluation process, charges of incompetence or unsatisfactory teaching could be easily challenged by the teacher with the support of the union (Cambor, 1999). Additionally, the removal of teachers could be an expensive and time-consuming process.

Many school districts choose to avoid court expenses through arbitration conducted by a hearing officer. An agreement could be negotiated with the teacher’s union to assign an ineffective teacher a satisfactory rating in return for an agreement with the principal to transfer the teacher to another school district site. The process is known as “the dance of the lemons” (Scheizer, 1998) but is frequently used to get around the problem.

Although not ideal, a substantial rationale surrounded a decision to retain poorly performing teachers. According to Mary Jo McGrath, an attorney for California’s Santa Barbara County School District, “Teachers are more
protected than any other class of employees, with all the procedural rights that can drag a civil case out for five years”. The overlapping statutory process and procedures coupled with union contract provisions often provide automatic job protection for all but the very least effective teachers (Sullivan, 1999).

The New York State School Board Association has estimated that the average termination case, in their state, took nearly a year to complete with an average of $112,000.00 in expenses. In the event the case was appealed, the costs soared to an average of over $300,000.00 (Scheizer, 1998).

To compound this expense, many states had negotiated union contracts with language that guaranteed the teacher full pay throughout the dismissal process, regardless of the severity of the offence. The costs to the teacher were minimal because expenses were born by the teacher’s union rather than out-of-pocket monies of the teachers. If, however, the teacher was not a member of the union, the teacher incurred the expenses. Many non-union teachers are hesitant to pursue a confrontation of employment retention with the school district because of the costs involved (Sullivan, 1999).
The Supreme Court (Cleveland Board of Education v. Loudermill, 1985) ruled that there existed an important distinction between tenured and probationary (non-tenured) teachers as it related to the right to due process. In the ordinary case of the non-renewal of a contract of a probationary teacher, there is no constitutional right to due process because no property right is being violated. Legal precedent, based upon rights granted in the Fourteenth Amendment was established regarding due process in the 1985 Supreme Court case of Cleveland Board of Education v. Loudermill where "...the U.S. Supreme Court further extended due process protection by holding that public employees with constitutionally protected property interests in employment be given 'some kind of hearing' prior to discharge."

It was paramount that the hearing officer demonstrate impartiality as it is a violation of due process for a school district to perform both the role as prosecutor and as a hearing officer (Fischer et al., 1999).
This is further magnified by the possible financial expense and the consumption of time and because the statute provides grounds for termination of school personnel, is punitive in nature, and must be construed in favor of the punished employee (Rosario v. Burke, App. 2 Dist., 605 So.2d 523, 1992).

It is imperative for district personnel and school site administrators to conduct themselves prudently to insure that they are legally correct regarding due process procedural guidelines.

Vagueness in procedure, application, or due process must be avoided. Florida Statute Section 231.36 provisions state that any ambiguities within the procedure must be construed in favor of the employee (Gainey v. School Board of Liberty County, App. 387 So. 2d 1023 (1980); School Board of Pinellas County v. Noble, App. 384 S.2d 205 (1980).

Consequent to strict procedural safeguards of the teacher, the State of Florida mandated that all school-district contracts contain provisions for dismissal during the term of contract for just cause. The Florida State Code of Professional Ethics states: Any member of the school district may be suspended or dismissed, at any time, during the term of their contract, when the charges against
him or her are based upon immorality, misconduct in office, incompetence, gross insubordination, willful neglect of duty, drunkenness, or conviction of any crime involving moral turpitude.

Most terminations initiated by principals involved teacher incompetence which is defined as "...one who cannot perform the duties required by the teaching contract" (Fischer et al., 1999). Teachers are rarely found to be incompetent based upon only one professional competency, but a deficiency in management of student conduct is one of the most commonly cited problems. Reasoning that even the best-prepared teacher could not be effective in a chaotic classroom, the courts have emphasized that the inability to maintain discipline is a characteristic of an incompetent teacher (Fischer et al., 1999). Moreover, professional competence must be determined using standard performance criteria that could be used to improve teacher performance or document lack of teaching competencies.

All teacher contracts contain provisions for dismissal during the term of contract, only for just cause. In Florida, the first 97 days of a non-tenured teacher contract is a probationary period. During the probationary period, the employee may be dismissed without cause or may resign from the contractual position. Once the 97-day
probationary period has lapsed, the teacher is on an annual contract for the remainder of the school year.

In year two and year three there are also annual contracts and teacher termination can only proceed according to the negotiated teacher contract and state statutes. After the first 3 years, the contract may be renewed for a period not to exceed 3 years and shall contain provision for dismissal during the term of the contract, only for just cause (231.36, Florida State Statute).

To further expand and frame the legal issues, a review of the case law is necessary to provide the reader with a relevant precedent. The most common cases follow the profile whereby plaintiffs attempted to expose violations in due process procedures.

A common scenario may follow when procedures are brought before a school board that leads to the discharge of a teacher for lack of competence after notice and after hearing. An attorney represents the teacher; witnesses are called, sworn, and examined. The teacher is given an opportunity to testify and to be cross-examined along with
other witnesses, and testimony is recorded. This approach substantially complied with the requirement of procedural due process (Blunt v. Marion County School Board, M.D.Fla.1973, 366 F.Supp. 727 affirmed 515 F.2d951).

Age Discrimination Court Case

Cramner & Nahoum v. School Board. 11th Circuit, Florida (1998). Cramner and Nahoum appealed to the district’s judge on their disparate impact claim under Age Discrimination and Employment Act ("ADEA"). Both Plaintiffs were performing in an unsatisfactory manner and were placed on an Assistance Plan to remediate the identified deficiencies. The claim alleged that the Assistance Plan had a disparate impact on teachers over 40 years of age by forcing them into retirement, transferring them to nonteaching positions, or terminating them. The district judge determined that Cranmer and Nahoum had failed to establish a prima facie case: "The Plaintiffs have offered no evidence, statistical or otherwise, which would demonstrate that the Defendant’s challenged practices have a disproportionately negative effect upon the protected group of persons over the age of forty."
Ultimately Cranmer and Nahoum failed to meet their burden of persuasion that the Assistance Plan discriminated against them because of their age.

**Teaching Competencies/Deficiencies Court Case**

*Palm Beach County v. Mann (1999).* Mann, a tenured teacher for 25 years, alleged that she had been placed on an Assistance Plan for improvement during the 1996-97 school year and that she failed during the 1997-98 school year to correct the alleged deficiencies in performance. Such continuing deficiencies were cited as the basis for the decision not to reappoint her despite the numerous and continuous efforts of school personnel to assist in the improvement of the deficiencies. Mann also argued that the district cited and utilized an incorrect procedure for its determination not to renew her contract.

Section 231.36 (4) (b), Florida Statutes, provided that a continuing contract teacher may be dismissed at the end of the school year (as in this case) when a recommendation to that effect is submitted in writing on or before April 1 of the school year, giving good and sufficient reasons. After 2 years of Mann’s failure to correct the deficiencies noted in evaluations, Mann received a timely notice that she would not be renewed.
Mann timely challenged the results; the matter was forwarded to the Division of Administrative Hearings. Mann was afforded all procedural rights to contest the non-renewal decision. The Administrative Hearing Officer issued a final order affirming the decision not to renew Mann’s teaching contract.

Self Control Court Case

_Palm Beach County Classroom Teachers Association (CTA) v. School District_ (1999). Grievant was not recommended for reappointment for the following school year based upon his inability to demonstrate self-control. Grievant was involved in a number of incidents with students and staff during the 1996-1997 school year. Grievant agreed to teach mathematics to students with a learning disability, even though he was not certificated in either area. Grievant alleged that he was verbally promised a transfer to another school to teach within his subject area after a year of successful teaching.

During discovery it was revealed that there were numerous incidents of student complaints and excessive numbers of student discipline referrals were written by grievant during the school year. There were documented observations that the grievant was acting in an
unprofessional manner on more than one occasion where staff and/or students were present. Grievant felt that he was not being reappointed because he was teaching a subject out of field. He felt that if he were reappointed to teach in his area of certification, his performance would have been satisfactory. The grievant alleged that the due process language in the teacher's contract was violated, and notification was not performed in a timely manner.

The Hearing Officer determined that the grievant had no valid complaint under the contract for that school year. Under the contract signed by the grievant, he had acknowledged that the Board does not "owe any further contractual obligation...after the last day of the contract term." The Union has not shown an enforceable promise that "he could transfer to another school after completing the 1996-1997 school year". From a technical standpoint, the elements of contract such as consideration and specificity were not shown. Any oral statements were barred by the express "Disclosure Statement", which grievant signed after his alleged conversation with a
district personnel employee. The grievant knew, when he talked to the district personnel employee, that the personnel employee had no actual or apparent authority to bind the School Board to an oral contract, for an appointment, for a future year, at another school.

The award stated that the School Board did not owe the grievant any further contractual obligations and was not required to reemploy grievant beyond the last day of his term contract in accordance with Florida Statutes 231.29, with regard to annual contract teachers. The reason for non-reappointment was not the out of field agreement. Therefore, there was no violation of the contract.

Aside from the legal ramifications, principals placed themselves in a vulnerable position professionally, personally, and psychologically. The principal was exposed to professional attack and placed at risk for punitive litigation, loss of personal property, and professional and/or personal injury (Johnson, Petrie, and Lindauer, 1999).

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the levels of stress of principals. If there
was increased stress associated with teacher termination was the stress more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship? Did the associated stress caused by teacher termination manifest itself in atypical ways? This topic was examined based upon gender, years of administrative experience, years on site, educational level of the administrator, school setting, socio-economic strata (SES) and size of student population.

Definition of Terms

The following terms were specifically defined to assure clarity of understanding and uniformity of meaning:

**Stress**: refers to the non-specific response of the body to any demand whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions (Selye, 1975).

**Principal**: the chief administrator of the elementary school.

**Years of Experience**: the total number of years the principal has served in the administrative position.

**Years in the current position**: the number of years that the school principal has served in their present position.

**Elementary School**: the determination that the school is an elementary school with grades kindergarten through five.

**Type of School Setting**: refers to one of the following school classifications: urban, suburban, or rural as determined by the School District of Palm Beach County Report FY00.
Size of School Population: the number of students enrolled in the school at the time of the interview of the principal.

Socio-economic Strata: the number of students in the school who qualify for on free or reduced meals based upon their parents/guardians income.

Educational Level: the most advanced degree earned by the principal informant.

Demographic Information

The county under study is one of 67 counties in the state of Florida, located on the southeast coast. It has a geographic landmass of 2300 square miles, stretching from the Everglades to the Atlantic Ocean. The chief industries are agriculture, tourism, human services, and construction. The county is diverse in living conditions consisting of both urban and rural areas, as well as, both affluent and very poor areas. The county is an area experiencing a transformation of rapid growth and swift. These changes are rooted in the migration to the Sun Belt by people of varying socio-economic levels from all over the nation, as well as, immigrants from other countries. This community is an authentic multicultural, multi-ethnic mixture that serves to both strengthen and challenge other communities within the county (Marlin, 2000).
In an address to administrators on August 14, 2000, the district superintendent of schools shared information that the county school district currently serves in excess of 151,000 students in 143 schools (elementary, middle, and high schools) and was growing by approximately 4,500 students per year. This district is one of the largest school districts in the state and in the nation.

The budget for the school district is $1.9 billion. Students come from more than 150 countries, 10,000 students are foreign born, and approximately 104 languages other than English are spoken. Of the entering kindergarten students, 34% are from families that qualify for free or reduced lunch and 40.12% of the total student population is eligible for free or reduced meals.

Over 18,000 Limited English Proficient (LEP) students are enrolled, comprising the second largest LEP student population in the state of Florida. This population of LEP students continues to grow at a rate of 12% per year, twice the growth rate of the non-LEP student population. The school district also has the highest migrant population in the state of Florida. The school district has more identified migrant children than many states on the eastern seaboard of the United States. Approximately 7,000 – 8,000 of the students come from migrant homes.
The school district is divided into five administrative areas: Area 1, Area 2, Area 3, Area 4, and Area 5. There are approximately 9,000 teachers employed and 39% of the instructional staff has advanced degrees. The school district's Gold Report indicated that the average classroom teacher has 12 years of classroom teaching experience.

The dismissal of incompetent teachers could be a complicated and expensive process that requires immense documentation, patience, and perseverance (Johnson, Petrie, & Lindauer, 1999). The right to an education is not specifically granted in the United States Constitution, but is provided through the framework of each state. There is a delicate balance between the students' right to a quality education and the rights of a tenured instructor.

Conceptually, the dismissal procedure of a tenured teacher should be procedurally fair, not arbitrary. It is not reasonable to protect their rights under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution (Sullivan, 1999). The reality, however, is that some less-than-competent teachers petition and regain employment but not necessarily on the merits of their abilities.
Legal technicalities and/or shoddy or incomplete documentation by the school district administrators are the nemesis of the termination process and often allow the less-than-competent teacher to reclaim/retain their employment (Johnson, Petrie, & Lindauer, 1999).

For competent educators the right to due process is an invaluable protection of property interest. To a less-than-competent educator, however, it served as a vehicle to impede the compelling interests of the school administration, the public at large, and the need to provide an optimum education for children (Sullivan, 1999).
Chapter II

Principals lead hectic lives. Many events are scheduled into their days, and many more unexpected and unplanned events become part of their days. The increasing demands of federal and state mandates, special education, accountability for teacher performance, accountability for student achievement, political interests, human relations, procedural concerns, and quickly changing technology has resulted in role overload (Osipow & Davis, 1988).

Considering the key position principals hold and the impact that this has on all aspects of school life, it is reasonable to argue that a better understanding of the problems and stresses they face would shed more light on the complex nature and dynamics of stress (Borg and Riding, 1993). Through this understanding, a reasonable district-level response would be the provision of support mechanisms/strategies to provide additional administrative support to the principal.

The dismissal of less-than-competent teachers is a lengthy process and easily challenged by the teacher with the support of the union. The burden of proof is placed on the principal to provide adequate, lengthy, and
comprehensive documentation and, therefore, can be extremely stressful (Bridges, 1992). Wragg et al. (1999) suggests that studying allegations of incompetence is a most tortuous and frustrating area of research and is one of the best examples of multiple perceptions of reality.

Without an adequate paper trail of accountability and a clearly developed, fairly administered evaluation process, charges of incompetence or unsatisfactory teaching can be challenged by the teacher with the support of his/her union (Cambor, 1999). The amount of documentation, meetings with the teachers and their union representation, and time spent coordinating support staff, create an unconscionable situation. Some principals avoid confronting a less-than-competent teacher, particularly when the teacher is tenured (Johnson, 1999).

Some tenured teachers could be less-than-competent which reflects poorly on the school district and those performing the evaluation. Tenure, with its due process guarantees, creates a formidable legal buffer between teachers and termination. Consequently, this leads to exacerbated levels of stress for the principals, which, in turn, affects the emotional well being of the principal, but, also, potentially adversely affects their job performance and the school culture (Cambor, 1999).
Whitaker (1999) stated that the role of the principal has changed markedly in the context of school reform and accountability. Many sources of stress for principals are associated with site-based management and shared decision-making; the principal serves as the knowledgeable resource for staff, parent, and community. Stress is such a crucial issue, that more than 10,000 books and articles have been published on the topic (Gmelch & Chan, 1994).

Research pertaining to stress in the field of educational administration did not come about until the 1970’s. Hans Selye (1978), a Canadian physician, was a medical researcher in the area of stress and was known as "The Father of Stress Theory". Selye defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand whether it is caused by, or results in, pleasant or unpleasant conditions" (p. 74). Selye (1975) acknowledged that stress was not a completely negative experience but an unavoidable life experience.

Historically, the study of stress has been approached from two perspectives; the medical approach and the behavioral science approach. Neither can adequately explain stress. Therefore, Ivancevich and Matteson (1980) developed an integrated approach in the study of stress.
In addition, multiple definitions and models of stress exist. McGrath (1976) proposed a managerial stress model that is divided into a four-stage, close-looped process starting with the situation (A) in the environment which is then (B) perceived by the individual whereby (C) the individual selects a response and (D) concludes with results for both the individual and the situation. The following diagram illustrates the McGrath Paradigm Model for Managerial Stress as cited by Gmelch (1991).

Figure 1


Each of these four stages is coupled by the linking processes of cognitive appraisal, decision, performance and outcome.
Walter Gmelch and others (1982) concluded that "the job environment was central in the experience of stress, and those in the people-related professions seemed to be more susceptible to the phenomenon of occupational stress than those in other occupations" (p. 4). Both Lazarus and Launier (1978) and Revicki and May (1984) agreed that stress occurs when environmental or internal demands exceeded the adaptive resources of an individual and that many occupational settings were potentially stressful.

Gmelch (1982) cited French (1976) in defining stress as "any characteristic of the job environment which posed a threat to the individual." The threats could be excessive demands or insufficient supplies to meet the demands of the individual. Seaward (1997) defined stress as feeling overwhelmed, panicked, angry, frustrated, helpless, anxious or bored. Distress, a negative stress, was described in terms such as pressure, apprehension, fright, and weariness. This stress can be long lived and debilitating.

Gmelch (1991) formulated a positive definition of stress called eustress. "Eustress was the anticipation of one's ability to respond adequately to a perceived demand accompanied by anticipation of a positive consequence for an adequate response" (p. 91). Eustress, a positive stress, was described in terms of excitement, challenge and...
opportunity. This stress was temporary and helpful.

The Administrative Stress Index (ASI)

In 1977, Gmelch and Torelli developed The Administrative Stress Index (ASI), (Appendix C), a 35-item questionnaire. The ASI had a five point Likert scale ranging from (1), rarely or never bothers me; to (5), frequently bothers me (Torelli, 1990). This index was designed, validated, and sent to members of the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators to identify perceived job stress, establish stress categories, and discover how administrators cope with stress.

Responses were received from 1,156 principals, superintendents, and central office administrators. The typical subject was male, 42 years old, had 9 years of administrative experience, and worked 55 hours per week. Relationships were found between stress dimensions and age, tenure and health. Some stress factors were observed to increase with age and tenure. Data from this study also suggested that despite similarities between their jobs, principals and superintendents experienced widely different degrees of stress. Coping activities fell into three categories: physical activity, mental control, and management skill development (Gmelch, 1982).
The ASI is a diagnostic tool used to measure the needs of school administrators at the local level (Frick, 1990). Frick further explained that the ASI identified the five major stress factors with seven individual stress items within each cluster. The stress factors are: (1) Administrative Constraints - related to time, meetings, workload, and compliance with federal, state, and organizational rules and regulations; (2) Administrative Responsibilities - related to tasks characteristic of nearly all management positions, including supervision, evaluation, negotiations, budget and finance, and gaining support for programs; (3) Interpersonal Relations - related to resolving differences between parents and the school, between subordinates, superiors, or staff members, and the handling of student discipline problems; (4) Interpersonal Conflicts - related to conflicts between performance and one's internal beliefs and expectations; (5) Role Expectations - related to stress caused by a difference in expectations of self and the various people serviced.
Managerial Stress Cycle

Gmelch (1982) viewed stress as a four-stage cycle.

Figure 2

The initial stage, Stage 1 Demands/Stressors, was a set of demands placed on the individual. These demands, or stressors, were separated into four sources of stress, which are:

Role-based stress - defined as role ambiguity and role conflict. Beliefs, attitudes, interactions, and lack of autonomy of the individual within the organization promotes role-based stress.
Task-based stress - arose from work overload, task difficulty and the need for high achievement. Communication with faculty, coordination of activities, and the everyday performance of the administrator lead to this stress.

Boundary-spanning stress - originated from external conditions, such as negotiations and gaining public support. These factors changed the environmental setting and, in the process, promoted stress within the person.

Conflict-mediating stress - arose from the administrator handling conflicts within the school.

The second stage, or perception/interpretation stage, consisted of the perception or interpretation of the stressor by the individual. The third stage, or response stage, presented choices to the individual depending upon the perceptions made. And the final stage, or consequence stage, were consequences that factor in the long-range effects of stress (Tortelli & Gmelch, 1992).

Perception appeared to play a key role when one defined whether an event was stressful or not. There was a general consensus that the lack of a universally accepted definition of 'incompetence' resulted in different interpretations of the term, at different times, in different schools, and in school districts. A teacher who was valued in one school may be subjected to allegations of
incompetence in another (Wragg, 1999). Two individuals may react completely differently with the same stressor.

**Principals and Stress**

Edwin Bridges, in studies conducted in 1986 and updated in 1992, theorized that the difficulty principals had dealing with less-than-competent teachers was directly related to the teacher’s job security and the need to prove incompetence in the legal system; this was overshadowed by the strong desire of the principal to avoid conflict. Principals would withhold negative information from the teacher, gloss over problems, and give good evaluations to encourage the teachers.

Borg and Riding (1993) supported the findings of Bridges. Interestingly enough, Borg and Riding postulated, from their study of school administrators, that the level of stress experiences was not related to demographic characteristics, i.e., sex, type of assignment, years of experience, or size of school. As the employment longevity of principals increased so did the level of stress. It was the nature of the work not the amount of work that contributed to job stress. One would think that experience would have caused a principal to have less stress because he/she had faced similar situations in the
The principal makes daily decisions affecting the school, its staff, and its students. The decision-making is made more difficult by the increased focus on student's rights, improved test scores, teacher preparation, student discipline, increased diversity in the student population, and providing a safe school environment. Finding the proper balance between the need to make quick decisions and the need to gather input from those affected by the decisions has become increasingly difficult (Shelton, 1991). Additionally, Reisert's study (1992) further expanded on these frustrations by pointing out that apathy, societal problems, and bureaucratic requirements had precipitated many of the changes in the principalship. It concluded with a strong recommendation that prospective principals understand the time requirements and learn to manage and control pressure, stress, and conflict.

A 1990 study by Kirby et al. addressed the perceived stress levels of Kentucky elementary principals. Findings indicated that the most stressful events involved forcing the resignation or dismissal of a teacher and dealing with
unsatisfactory performance of professional staff. After an extensive review of the literature, limited data or information was available relating to the litigious ramifications that appear to magnify a principal's stress as it related to employee termination.

In summary, Howard Gardner (1995) stated that leaders achieved their effectiveness chiefly through the stories they related. Leaders present a dynamic perspective to their followers, not just as a headline or a snapshot but a drama that unfolds over time, in which they (leader and follower) are the principal characters or heroes. The stories of the leader must compete with many other extant stories and, if the new stories were to succeed, they must be transplanted, suppressed, complemented, or in some measure, outweighed by the earlier stories. The ultimate impact of the leader depends most significantly on the particular story that he or she relates or embodies and the reception to that story on the part of the audience.
Chapter III

This school district recently hired 49 new principals to replace experienced principals, some of who retired due to a lucrative retirement package. This reduction in administrative research population limited the scope of the research study. However, the researcher believed that the results would be valid and reliable.

Public and political pressure to improve student performance coupled with the arduous task of removing tenured incompetent teachers posed serious problems for school principals. The decision to pursue termination was made after careful assessment of the degree of support from the following entities:

- Union support for removing incompetent teachers
- District personnel
- School Board

In the event any of the three are unsupportive of termination, the school site administrator must proceed cautiously with this in mind (Johnson, Petrie, and Lindauer, 1999).

The decision to terminate a teacher is a difficult one for principals, and not one that is reached frivolously, nor without intensive support and interventions to
remediate the areas of concern. The policy of the school district mandated that the Superintendent’s Office and Office of General Counsel reviewed each principal’s decision to terminate. Cases are analyzed to determine if there is adequate teacher support, staff involvement and participation from peers, building administrators, subject area/grade level support personnel, area office administrative staff, administrators from the Office of Professional Standards, and university experts in education.

Common support strategies in the school district are outlined in the Administrative Guide for Teacher Support (1999). These strategies are: (1) on-site assistance by administrators and grade level/department chairperson, (2) summative observations or anecdotal observations with written feedback and recommendations for improvement within five working days, (3) school level or district level opportunities for professional development in the form of workshops or seminars, (4) coursework at local colleges and universities, paraprofessional assistance in the classroom, and (5) smaller class size.

Most educators agreed that if poor teaching could be caught early, and is dealt with through comprehensive observations, evaluations, and improvement plans, rather
than formal legal proceedings, it would motivate teachers to take pride in their craft and the occasional difficult case could be successfully counseled out of the profession (Cambor, 1999). Jon Saphier (1993) believed that good evaluation systems could help principals document less-than-competent teachers and give them the courage to take the necessary steps to remove them from the school. When evaluations were conducted fairly and thoroughly, unions were more likely to accept the administration’s decision without a fight.

The Office of Professional Standards, in conjunction with the researcher, provided professional development to new principals during the previous two years. However, no professional development training was provided to the experienced principals in the area of teacher support/termination. This professional development could be provided during the school vacations or during the extended summer vacation.

University course work, or management academies could be additional vehicles to provide this support.
Without an adequate paper trail of accountability and a clearly developed, fairly administered evaluation process, charges of incompetence or unsatisfactory teaching could easily be challenged by the teacher with the support of the union (Cambor, 1999).

Although not ideal, substantial rationale surrounded the decision to transfer poor teachers. Again, Mary Jo McGrath, an attorney for the Santa Barbara County School District pointed out, "Teachers were more protected than any other class of employees, with all the procedural rights that could drag a civil case out for five years". The overlapping statutory process and procedures coupled with the union contract provisions often provided automatic job protection for all but the very least effective teachers.

The investigator contacted the Manager of Professional Standards of the School Board of the county, who was a dissertation committee member, and identified those principals who have had experience in the teacher termination process. The investigator contacted those principals by letter, and made a follow-up telephone contact, asking them to participate in this phenomenological study.
The response from the principals included their gender, education level, years experience as a principal, the years of experience in their current assignment, grade levels of the school, socio-economic status of the population served, number of teachers on staff, and number of teachers they have terminated in the last five years.

**Sample Population**

Gay (1992) stated that qualitative research was deductive. The researcher isolated the variables to be studied, collected standardized data from all participants which permitted the original question (teacher termination is a stressor) to be supported or not, and then stated conclusions related to generalizable ability. In the attempt to control all variables the environment can appear artificial. However, key to the qualitative researcher was his/her ability to be open and gain insights into the phenomena.

Six principals were interviewed in order to acquire an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. Table 3.1 outlines the research specific demographics for the sample population:
Table 3.1
Research Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Years as Principal</th>
<th>Grade Levels</th>
<th>Socio Economic Status**</th>
<th>Staff Size</th>
<th>Teachers Terminated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>M.S.Ed.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>K-5</td>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>0*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Did not terminate but participated in the counseling of the teacher to retire/resign.
** As determined by the number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch.

Kerlinger (1992) stated that this purposive sampling was “...characterized by the use of judgments and a deliberate effort to obtain representative samples...” (p 120). Therefore, the purposive sampling in this study was indicative of this phenomenon. Ideally, the number of principal participants should have been higher, however, time and money constraints did not permit a larger sample population.

Methodology

The sample population was contacted by letter to invite them to participate in the study (Appendix A). Interviews took place at the school site and were tape recorded.
Pre-visitation took place in order for the researcher to become acclimated to the school, the population served, to provide a comfort level for the administrator being interviewed. Although, interviews took place at one setting when necessary, additional times were arranged at the convenience of the principal informants.

Initially, the principals completed the ASI developed by Gmelch and Swent in 1977 (Appendix C) and the Demographic School Profile (Appendix E). The ASI is a 35-item questionnaire to identify perceived job stress, to establish stress categories, and to discover how administrators cope with stress (Gmelch, 1982). The interview continued with questions developed by the researcher and clarification questions developed from the participants’ responses to the ASI. The open-ended interview questions were structured so complete responses were encouraged. Observations were made and recorded during the interview (Appendix F).

Maxwell (1996) recommended that the researcher questions formulate what the researcher wanted to understand; the interview questions were those asked in order to gain understanding. Some questions were developed prior to the interview. The opportunity for follow-up arose so the researcher was able to probe in-depth to better understand the informant’s perspective.
Data Collection

The tape-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for themes, dimensions, codes, or categories through a meticulous process of data collection and analyzing. The coding corresponded to the four sources of stress: role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress.

The results from the data collection were used to develop a narrative for the reader. The researcher reviewed the data to determine which common stress themes the principals' experienced. This information was cross-checked with the information provided by the data obtained from the ASI to determine and further substantiate information provided by the principal informants.

A qualitative design was chosen to support the rigorous data collection that took place. Qualitative research is open-ended and less structured than quantitative research. An integral component of qualitative research is its exploratory aspect (R. Burke & Johnson, 1997). Through the data collection and analysis, a narrative was developed and story told.

Data is presented based upon the participants' perspectives and partly based upon the researcher's interpretation. The researcher collected multiple forms of data with the primary focus being occupational stress as it related to teacher termination.
The data collection (interviews and the ASI) and data analysis were simultaneous. Information was an accumulation based upon the participants' perspective, the data provided by the ASI, and the researcher's interpretation, informant all relayed in a qualitative format. Through this systematic research the investigator gained information and insight that is to be shared with professionals in the field of educational leadership.

**Researcher Bias**

The researcher had been the principal of an urban elementary school for three years. He had served as an assistant principal and various other instructional and leadership roles for thirty years spanning elementary, middle and high school settings. He has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology, a Master of Science degree in Elementary Education, and an Educational Specialist degree in Specific Learning Disabilities.

He has participated in the teacher termination process at a previous school, where he served as assistant principal, and at a school site where he served as principal. His participation in the teacher termination process was the impetus for this dissertation topic. The researcher had authored an administrative manual for district level administrators on the Florida State Statute
231. 36 dismissal process. This manual had been used as a training tool for inexperienced district administrators and as a guide for veteran administrators. Additionally, the researcher has provided the necessary professional development to those administrators who needed additional assistance in the termination process.

Validity

The reader should have an understanding of the validity of qualitative research utilized in this particular study. R. Burke Johnson (1997) referred to descriptive validity as the factual accuracy of the accounting as reported by the researcher (p. 161). Interpretive validity is the accurate portrayal of the meaning attached by the principal informants to termination and its’ associated stress (p. 162). This was accomplished through member checking.

Member checking is the sharing of the researchers interpretation of the principal informants viewpoints to avoid miscommunication. The participant’s exact words (verbatim) are provided in direct quotation format. Informant’s responses were transcribed into text using a tape recorder and a computer word processing program. Informants reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and
meaning, corrections were made by the researcher where necessary. This expanded the principal’s interpretation and personal meaning attached to their experiences, and improved the researchers understanding of the stressors involved, and their impact on the school principal.

Theoretical validity was defined by Johnson (1997) as “the degree that a theoretical explanation develops from the research study, fits the data, and is credible and defensible” (p. 162). A sufficient amount of time was spent studying the interview participants to maintain a high confidence level from the data gathered and resulting relationships identified by the researcher.

Through the qualitative research methodology, the researcher provided an open-ended, exploratory view of the topic and related research findings. Important and credible information was provided through critical self-reflection and the recognition of potential personal bias and predisposition on the dissertation topic. The researcher had extensive personal experience in the psychological and physiological manifestations of stress as they related to his role in the termination of teachers.

The researcher attempted to include a principal informant that has not terminated a teacher, and therefore, will support his expectations and explanations about the
stress phenomenon. The inclusion of this information made it more difficult to ignore important information and, therefore, made the results more credible and defensible (Johnson, 1997). There are many principals who decline to terminate a less-than-competent teacher because they are aware of the time involved and the processes and staff involved to adequately provide an objective view of the teacher. The principals realize that the burden of proof of incompetence rests on them (Wragg, 1999).

The researcher anticipated that one of the most distinctive characteristics of this qualitative study was the information that will be provided as a result of this investigation. Furthermore, the researcher intends to share this information both locally and nationally in conference format and professional journals.
Chapter IV

Charles Fenwick, et al., (2001) feels that good principals champion their school’s instructional purpose. They are master teachers with the expert knowledge of teaching strategies, curriculum content, classroom management and child development. They regard their work as a mission rather than a job. Principals are willing and able to assist teachers by reviewing lesson plans, offering suggestions and demonstrating instructional techniques. Furthermore, they know what to look for in a classroom - active learning and engaging purposeful teaching. More importantly, principals know what to do when these ingredients are not present.

Fenwick further proposes that the principalship is one of the few professional positions that require its holders to understand and practice democratic governance. The principal must be able to listen and respond to school advisory councils, parent organizations, social service agencies, community leaders, union representatives and teachers. Such is the case with each of the six informants that participated in this study. Each principal is a highly educated and skilled professional who provides support and assistance to their staff and to teachers that were not performing at an acceptable level.
Contact letters (Appendix A) were sent to 14 principals during the last week of December, 2000. Six principals responded and the researcher made follow-up telephone contacts during the second week of January 2001.

The researcher confirmed appointments for the interviews. Appointments were scheduled and interviews began during the first week in February 2001. The semester ended during the last week of January and the principals were very busy completing budget requests and paper-work to bring closure to the first semester (18 school weeks) of the school year.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the levels of stress of principals. If there was increased stress associated with teacher termination was the stress more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship?

The findings are divided into two sections. The first section, Principal Interview and In-Case Analysis, provides an in-depth look into the principal’s responses to the termination process (Tables 4.1 through 4.18) and answers research Question 1: Is there a relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the level of stress of the principal? The second section: Cross-Case Analysis, responds to Research Question 2: If there was increased stress associated with teacher termination was the stress
more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship? This question is answered in a Cross-Case analysis of the principal respondents (Tables 4.19 through 4.22).

Principal Interviews and Within-Case Analysis

Each interview took place in the office of the principal. The researcher took special care to arrive at the interview early, so attention could be paid to the atmosphere in the school office and the demeanor of staff and students. Each interview was tape-recorded. The principal signed a release form (Appendix B), and was provided with an explanation of the researcher’s dissertation.

The principal was asked to complete the ASI in the presence of the researcher, before the interview took place. This provided time to set up the interview materials. An informant observation assessment was completed during the interview (Appendix F).

Each of the interviews took approximately 1.5 hours. The respondents were cooperative and candid. The researcher took great care in assuring the respondents that all
information was confidential and that responses and quotes would be masked to protect the respondent’s identity. Interviews were coded according to the following categories:

- **Role-Based Stress** - defined as role ambiguity and role conflict. Beliefs, attitudes, interactions and lack of autonomy of the individual within the organization promoted role-based stress.

- **Task-Based Stress** - arose from work overload, task difficulty and the need for high achievement. Communication with faculty, coordination of activities, and the everyday performance of the administrator led to this stress.

- **Boundary-Spanning Stress** - originated from external conditions, such as negotiations and gaining public support. These factors changed the environmental setting and, in the process, promoted stress within the person.

- **Conflict-Mediating Stress** - arose from the administrator’s handling conflicts within the school.

Each of the interviews began with a brief overview of the dissertation topic followed by the question, “Have you ever participated in the teacher termination process?” In every case, the principal began an expedition into their history and feelings about their participation in the termination of teachers.

Termination had different meanings to different people. Some principals understood termination as the actual act of notifying the teacher that they were being fired, while
others, understood termination as "anything you need to do to get rid of an unsatisfactory teacher". During the course of each interview the particular parameters of the principal’s definition and experiences with termination were explored.

Interviews were transcribed, reviewed, and categorized in alignment with the four areas of stress: Role-based stress, task-based stress, boundary-spanning stress, and conflict-mediating stress. Interviews were reviewed for stress themes based upon the verbatim principal’s statements.

Codes were used to delineate the presence (+) or absence (-) of stress. The use of multiple codes (+, ++, +++) indicated a strong principal response for the particular stressor. Coding ranged from + = presence indicated, ++ = moderate presence of the stressor, +++ = strong presence of the stressor.

Interview and Within-Case Analysis - Principal A

This veteran administrator has been an educator for 34 years. Principal A was a classroom teacher for 20 years before becoming an assistant principal and then a principal. Her current assignment is in an urban school with a large minority population. Principal A was
the principal of a suburban school for five years and has been in her current school approximately three years. She was a positive individual and was eager to provide pertinent information to the researcher.

Principal A terminated three teachers during her tenure as a principal. Termination, in this case, referred to the process as outlined by the school district and followed by the principal. This process specified that, following assistance and support provided to a teacher, the teacher’s performance was less than acceptable, the school board, upon recommendation of the principal, would terminate the teacher.

Principal A’s stressors related the termination process was exacerbated by the lack of district support (boundary-spanning stress), the pressure the less than effective teacher placed on other staff members by the less than effective teacher (task-based stress and conflict-mediating stress), parental based concerns (conflict-mediating stress), and the perceived demands of her position (role-based stress).

When asked if she had terminated any employees, she responded that she had pursued assistance/termination for three employees. The principal reported, "I have followed the old process, which is the two-year process, for two
employees. I have implemented the 30 plus 90-day process, the new process, for one employee." She continued with "Neither of the two employees improved to a satisfactory level, however they were transferred to other school sites. One teacher resigned soon after that, and the other is still working." She said this with much frustration in her voice, and continued, "I was never given any reason why they were reassigned as opposed to being terminated, but I didn’t care, because they were off my campus." This preceding conversation revealed the boundary-spanning stress that she was experiencing.

This boundary-spanning stress became a dominant theme in her interview. She expressed frustration over the hours spent in the documentation process required for termination only to be over-ruled at the district level and with “no explanation”.

When you add up the time of two building administrators, the principal and assistant principal, professional(s) from the area office, a university professor, and staff from professional standards… all working to identify areas that need assistance and then turn around and not support the committee recommendation… what kind of a message is that sending?

She further stated, “After a while, you begin to question your own ability as an administrator.” Her frustration continued when she stated,
The district changed mid-stream and let the teacher transfer in the middle of the process. I was never involved in the decision-making. I received a telephone call notifying me an agreement has been made to transfer the teacher to another school. I never saw the teacher again. I felt like I wasted two years of time that I could have spent with other teachers or working on curriculum improvement.

The principal’s voice wavered after this statement and she continued with:

My first reaction to the district’s decision not to back me up was that I would never again spend the time on this process because I am not going to be backed up [sic]. Everything else (principal’s additional duties) had to slide, in order to provide the necessary documentation. Then they turn around and not back me.

Role-based stress was an extension of the boundary-spanning stressors. The principal stated, “...going in early, staying late, working through lunch and, if I have time, taking work home on the weekends...”

An additional role-based stress was revealed by Principal A, in the following statement,

My personal life is put on the back burner during the assistance process. At the school level you are not able to get into the other classrooms because you are spending all of your time doing formal observations on those who are not performing and then spending hours writing up the observations. You work with the teachers trying to get them into workshops that they need to enroll in and working with the district trying to coordinate meeting after meeting, after meeting.
Parent questions and concerns were conflict-mediating stressors for this principal. The principal found that urban and suburban settings presented different types of conflict-mediating stressors.

In the higher Socio Economic Strata (SES) setting, I had parents decline placement in one teacher’s classroom because of his inability to teach. One parent transferred their child to another school. It was difficult to find parents who would not complain if their kid was in that classroom... it was extremely difficult; the parents were knowledgeable and knew what was going on in the classroom.

The statements indicating conflict-mediating stress continued, “I found it very difficult sitting with a parent and hearing that the parent knew that the teachers were incompetent. But not being able to say how you feel about the teaching ability of the teacher, I sidestepped the truth to that parent. However, we both knew what the truth was!”

Interestingly enough, Principal A revealed that the parental concerns surfaced much later in the school year at the lower-SES school. She said, “...I was able to provide the ineffective teacher with extra paraprofessional support, a reading tutor in the classroom as peer support, changed her grade level, and later changed her teaching assignment to a resource teacher position in the middle of the year.” Principal A felt these interventions helped assuage parental concerns. Additionally, she reported that
many of the lower-SES parents were holding down two to three jobs, and a majority of the students were not living with the biological parents, but a member of the extended family. "The older grandparents have great trust and respect for the school, they do not question what is going on in the classroom. They have to be very upset to come in knocking at my door...".

The principal made this comment toward the end of the interview "...the SES of the school, doesn't make a difference in the stress level; the type of stress is different. The parents at the higher SES are more demanding, the students in the lower SES are more demanding of staff..."

The ASI also revealed some interesting information that further supports the findings of the interview. Principal A indicated there were additional work-related situations with the principalship that "frequently bothered her" as measured by the ASI which are described in Table 4.1.
Table 4.1

Principal A Administrative Stress Index Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflicts-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that I have too much</td>
<td>Not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, or how</td>
<td>Knowing that I can get the information</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences with my</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>responsibility delegated to me by</td>
<td>they evaluate my performance.</td>
<td>needed to carry out my job properly.</td>
<td>superiors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>my supervisor.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that I have too little</td>
<td>Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the</td>
<td>Attempting to meet student performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me.</td>
<td>conflicting demands of those who have authority over me</td>
<td>standards measure by standardized tests.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to influence my immediate</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>supervisor's actions and decisions that</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>affect me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Conversations with my supervisor are</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>one-sided.*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling that I have too little authority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>to carry out responsibilities assigned to me</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hearsay is taken for face value-not given</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>opportunity for input.*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview are illustrated in Table 4.2.
Table 4.2
Principal A Interview Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No, I can’t encourage anyone going into administration, it just isn’t worth it, anymore.</td>
<td>The stress is higher and comes from both directions.</td>
<td>I felt like I had wasted two years of my time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my setting, your school grade came up this year, however, under the watchful eye of the state it meant little to us. We had only gone up one letter grade and were still under intense scrutiny.</td>
<td>It (principalship) is like being in a fish bowl, state visitation, area office visitations, visitation from press, media...</td>
<td>I was never involved in the decision making... (once it got to the district office)...</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were two work-related situations that caused Principal A additional stress. They were written as follows:

"Conversations with my supervisor are one-sided," this would correspond to boundary-spanning stress as would the following statement from Principal A: "Hearsay is taken at face value and not given opportunity for input [sic]." Each of the statements was included in Table 4.2.

Based upon the review of the interview, boundary-spanning stress was noted as a primary stressor for Principal A. Task-based and role-based stress were indicated, but to a much lesser degree.
In summary, Table 4.3 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of ASI for Principal A.

Table 4.3

Principal A - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment  (+) stressor present  (-) stressor absent

The results indicated that both the interview and ASI support the premise that Principal A experienced a high degree of boundary-spanning stress during the assistance/termination process. This was followed by role-based, task-based and, to a minimal level, conflict-mediating stress.

Interview and Within-Case Analysis - Principal B

This administrator has been an educator for 21 years and a principal for 2 years. This lower-SES school was the principal's first assignment as a lead administrator. The informant was an energetic and positive person. The interview took place on a day when neither staff nor students were present.
When Principal B was asked to compare and contrast the former 231.36 process (two years of assistance) and the revised 231 process (30 + 90 days of assistance), she was quick to express that "I did not like the two year process because it was too long, drawn out, and frustrating". Then she said, "Knowing that someone was not making adequate progress and drawing it out and buying [sic] this person for two years is excessive".

The principal further explained that she was not the sole support for the "less-than-adequate teacher." This task-based stressor "was an assistance effort on the part of many people."

She was animated when she explained,

I made sure that I involved all the stake holders and that I was not the sole support for the teacher. Having other teachers as mentors took the stress off of me. I involved someone from the Professional Standards office, two people from her grade level, and sent her to numerous workshops at the district and also assigned my assistant principal as additional support.

Furthermore she did not personalize the task-based process, as many other administrators have done, and indicated so by stating,

My ownership of the termination process is not a problem. I made sure I was meeting her needs and that I conferenced with her a lot; I followed up with the
necessary paperwork and conference notes...I broke it down into different areas and assigned (support) activities to different people.

Again, the assistance and termination task was reduced to a robotic process,

I was constantly involved in the documentation process to the point that I even involved my secretary...the amount of paper work is a frustration, the more areas you designated as problem areas, the way the process worked, and you had to keep touching those areas to see if they had improved [sic]...

The researcher observed that this administrator was in control of the situation (task-based stress). Upon probing for more information, however, the researcher uncovered an area of anxiety, or role-based stress, which appeared diametrically opposed to the task-based approach of this administrator, when the following statement was made during the interview:

The termination process is stressful to me because I truly believe that there is good in every person and I try to separate the good in the person from what is best for the children [sic]...and it was hard because you go through the emotions of somebody who had dedicated nineteen (19) years to her profession of teaching kids and college and all of that. And I feel empathy for anyone who is going through that situation.

I feel torn between what is best for kids and what is happening to this person’s career. You know it was very difficult for me. And I felt very badly, in the meetings. I felt like I was empathizing with some of the emotions that she was going through. Then you see them react and cling to anything for their job and sometimes they are not being too realistic and know that they are just not making it. She just wasn’t getting it and that she was not making progress and until the last week, you know, she was in the blaming stage.
This continued as the principal related the following:

It is difficult to talk to someone who doesn’t see their weaknesses and I felt like I was banging my head against a wall sometimes. Talking to her, telling her what I expected and then I would walk in, the next day, and see the same mistakes time and time again. That was frustrating. She made the process very easy for me, because she was absolutely blatant about the problems and her not willing to correct them.

“I have worked with different people who have turned around and they say, ‘you are right, I understand now’. However, in one instance, the teacher was blaming me one hundred percent and she felt that I was going after her, for no reason, or didn’t breakdown and admit that ‘yes’ she was frustrated and didn’t have it any more, and didn’t admit it til the very end.” At this juncture in the interview it became obvious to the researcher that is was important to Principal B that the teacher understand her administrative rationale.

This significance of role-based stress is further supported, but somewhat softened, by the following, “The basis of why I became a principal is because I care about kids... if I just focus on that and think about what is best for kids. This teacher had some of the neediest kids in the school.”
The principal continued in an animated fashion,

I would have placed my strongest teacher in there, but she was already placed when I arrived here. I thought several times about moving her to another instructional setting, but I knew it would have interrupted the continuity of her support (task-based). Knowing that those kids were not getting what they needed was a source of strength for me going through this process.

Interestingly, the principal explained that role-based stress is "anticipatory" and that the stressors are self-imposed. Principal B related an incident that involved the teacher union representative and herself,

A great deal of my stress is anticipatory. I remember a day when I was to meet with the teacher’s union...I got butterflies and wondered if they were going to attack me or that they were going to find a loophole, so I made sure I had all my ducks in a row so no one could come in and say that I did not give all the necessary support that the teachers are supposed to have.

She further acknowledged the boundary-spanning stress to which the previous principal alluded "...I don’t think principals are supported (by the district) in the termination process, or that many principals want to go through what is necessary for the termination process. The time it takes and knowing others have put in all the time and then find out the teacher is rehired.” This boundary-spanning stress is a recurrent theme in the principal interviews.

Principal B further stated, “You hear from your peers of the unbelievable situations (in the termination process)
and the hoops they have jumped through (to terminate a teacher) only to have a teacher win when it went to a hearing. To be cross-examined (by an attorney) would be a very high stressor for me." When she was making these statements her hands were clenched and face animated.

The ASI completed by Principal B furnished similar information. This principal was not stressed by any of the 40 work-related situations that are addressed on the index. She did, however, attribute a high stress rating to the other stressors not mentioned. Those stressors are listed in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4
Principal B Administrative Stress Index Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of state and local funding for education*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher union representation.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State grading system for schools. *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

When Principal B was asked if she felt that the school district provided adequate support for her as a new administrator, she responded, "The district doesn't supply anything (a principal support mechanism)... to
survive you have to find one or two people who you can trust and count on." She continued, "My two colleagues are always there for me when I need them. We are close and provide the needed support when one of us is going through some stressful situations."

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview are illustrated in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Principal B Interview Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Ownership of the termination process was not a problem. I made sure that I was meeting her needs.&quot;</td>
<td>&quot;I broke the process into different areas and assigned them to different people.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I made sure that I did things (documentation) in depth.&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The termination process is stressful to me because I believe there is good in everyone...&quot;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based upon a review of the interviews, role-based stress was the primary contributor to the stress level of Principal B. To a much lesser degree, task-based and boundary-spanning stress were consistent themes through the assistance/termination process. There was no evidence of conflict-mediating stress.
A majority of the 40 work-related situations on the ASI were marked in the "rarely or never bothers me" category. This principal appeared to have a systematic approach to the assistance/termination process. She appeared self-assured and this was an additional theme that was extrapolated from the tape-recorded interviews.

In summary, Table 4.6 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of the ASI for Principal B.

Table 4.6
Principal B - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment  
(+) stressor present  
(-) stressor absent

The results of the ASI and interview for Principal B did not appear to experience boundary-based stress during the assistance/termination process. On the whole, the principalship is not a stressful position for this principal.
Principal C has been a principal for 2 years and began his teaching career in this county. He spent 6 years as a classroom teacher before he was promoted to an assistant principal position. He was an assistant principal for 2 years and then promoted to a principalship.

His current assignment is principal of a middle-class school in the suburbs. Upon entry into his office the researcher noticed a huge aquarium. He spoke enthusiastically about the fish tank and relayed stories of students who had come into his office. After students had read a story to him, they would add "jewels" (pieces of colored glass) to the bottom of his fish tank. The jewels were an intriguing addition to the aquarium and added excitement to students' impending visit to the principal's office for the students. This vignette set the stage for the interview.

The interview took place during a day when neither students nor staff were present. The researcher had visited this school site many times while it was in session, and the students and staff were pleasant and energetic.

The respondent has orchestrated the termination process with two different teachers. It is important for the reader to understand that the actual 231.36 (Florida State Statute) process was not brought to fruition. One
teacher was an 8 year veteran. Principal C met with the
teacher on many occasions:

I met with her on many occasions and developed a
rapport with her...after a year and a half of support the
teacher became convinced that there were some
professional problems that needed to be addressed. I
provided her opportunities to go to workshops, have peer
support, and observe other teachers.

Complicating this situation was the personal feeling
of the principal when he stated, "I hated knowing that I
was going to end her career. The only thing that kept me
going was that every time I visited the classroom, it was
stressful for the kids to be in the classroom with that
teacher." He continued, "This stress outweighed my
personal stress. Kids were verbally abusive toward each
other in the classroom, called the teacher names, and hurt
each other. It was an unsafe emotional climate for the
students." This combination of role-based and task-based
stress caused a great deal of anguish for the administrator
as he painstakingly described the classroom setting and the
feelings he was having about the assistance/termination
process.

The informant continued by stating, "Weighing the
decision to terminate vs. not terminate is a very difficult
decision to make. However, when I asked myself this one
question, 'Are the students receiving the best possible
education?' there was no question that the teacher was not good for the kids.” This statement evoked emotion in this principal.

The following quotes shoe the actual task of termination (task-based stress) presented additional tribulations for this administrator,

The pressure is great to complete everything that you have to do. I guarantee that I have given the teacher every opportunity to be successful and that is hard to do in a shorter period of time (the 90 day process vs. the 2 year process).

When he addressed the longer process he commented, “It (the assistance phase) is an easier thing to do by months under this time frame. You have to have great organization and a time frame plotted out. Hopefully, at the end of the time period, things will work out and you will have a good teacher on your hands. However, you have all the necessary documentation available to you in order to do what you have to do to terminate the teacher, if necessary.” This presented another interesting perspective from the principal’s point of view as he addressed the time-line pressure.

Task-based stress was also an issue when addressing the time line necessary for prompt and adequate support for the teacher, “The process preempts all the other things on my schedule. I have to do this, I have to keep the
timeline, otherwise you are the weak link. You have nothing accomplished and you have wasted your time." These statements were made in a very terse and frustrated tone of voice.

The pressure placed upon the principal was extreme, and placed additional stress upon him when he has to...

...Find the time to get things done between 5 and 10 at night and/or on Saturdays. I have to find the time to complete the necessary work and I find that I have a small element of resentment because my family time is taken from me, but I can handle this as long as my school family is getting what they need from me during the process.

This statement suggested great commitment and compassion on the part of the principal. He gestured many times and placed his hand on the table as if to count the demands on his time.

The philosophy that this principal shares with the staff at the beginning of each year and at the support meetings that are held is "...when you are not successful as a classroom teacher, then I am not successful as a principal. It is my job, as the principal, to make them successful, and to provide them the opportunity to succeed." This principal’s statement was used to preface the support meetings that are held at the school. Additionally, the researcher has heard Principal C make the same statement at county level administrator meetings.
However, the position of this principal is compromised by the necessity of documentation during the support time frame. The principal can say, “Trust me, we are in this together...” all he wants. The mandates and documentation further muddle the trust level and is best described, as “a tough process to go through; you want to treat the teacher in a humane and dignified way. However, because of the mandates by the teacher’s union and the district office of professional practices, the approach is anything but team like.” This impassioned statement alludes to a profound role-based, task-based, and boundary-spanning stress, all of which are a common theme for this principal. The frustration of being supportive, providing the necessary coaching, and then terminating a staff member was a reportedly taxing and stressful experience.

He continued, “In order for the teacher’s union to be satisfied, the teacher has to sign for everything he/she is given. That act does not build a bond of trust. You ask them to sign for the notes and then you may have to turn around and use them against them for termination documentation.” This statement was made in a voice that appeared both emotional and trembling.
This frustration was further reiterated by the principal as he continued, “At the end of the support period, you have enough signed documentation to terminate them if they have not demonstrated improvement in all areas. On one side, you are saying ‘trust me’ and on the other side, you are saying ‘sign this’ when they are given a copy of a document or conference notes.” The principal leaned forward in his chair to accentuate the stress level that this held for him and to be sure the researcher understood this dilemma.

When asked if there were other stressors surrounding the termination/assistance process he responded,

There are stressors every single day. I think the biggest thing in the past two years, is trying to get the trust level built-up with the people I am working with (task-based) in terms of their job performance because if they do not trust that you have the best intentions. They are not going to be open for any type of changes. And I have to work real hard at that because the termination process doesn’t lend itself to trust building. The actual termination process is divisive. This statement summarized the principal’s feelings regarding the termination process.

He continued with “I think the things that wear people down, we as principals are proactive, and are people
of action, when you see so much that you can't change; it adds up [sic]. Knowing that you don't have the power to fix all of the problems takes it toll on each and everyone of us.”

A review of the ASI revealed that the following work-related situations frequently bothered this principal and is indicated in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7
Principal C Administrative Stress Index
Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that staff members don't understand my goals and objectives</td>
<td>Preparing and allotting budget resources.</td>
<td>Working with special education parents and students within the guidelines of IDEA and reauthorization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imposing high accessibility or high expectations on myself.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Improving staff performance while meeting the teacher's union and school district expectation. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview with Principal C is illustrated in Table 4.8.
Principal C had multiple stressors when he dealt with the assistance/termination of a classroom teacher. The majority of those stressors cluster in the areas of role-based stress, task-based stress and boundary-spanning stress. Unique to this principal is his view that stress situations arise that are not clear-cut but are convoluted and intermeshed.

In summary, Table 4.9 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of the ASI for Principal C.
Table 4.9

Principal C - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment
(+): stressor present
(-): stressor absent

The results indicate that both the interview and the ASI support the determination that Principal D experienced role-based and task-based stress during the assistance/termination process. The stressors were present to some degree in the results of the ASI. Boundary-spanning stress did appear to be a higher than normal stressor for Principal C during the performance of his everyday duties. There was no indication that conflict-mediating stress was exhibited during the ASI. During the interview, however, evidence was presented that indicated the presence of that stressor.

Interview and Within-Case Analysis - Informant D

This principal has been an educator for 26 years. She has served as an administrator at various levels of positions and 9 years as an elementary-school principal.
She was candid and forthright in her responses and articulated about her experiences. There were neither staff nor students present during the interview. Principal D indicated that she had terminated two staff members during her tenure as principal.

When addressing the issue of the principalship in its entirety, the following comments were made:

It is one of the loneliest jobs I have ever had. You have to develop your own mindset and learn to cope with the stress. You take the stress home, and you are totally alone. I was shocked at the lack of support from the district and from my peers after an incident that occurred a few weeks earlier.

The incident she was referring to was an out-of-context television interview shown locally and "blown out of proportion. The situation that occurred the previous week consumed the principal and overshadowed her ability to keep on task. She continued with "I have always been able to handle everything. At the beginning, I would never admit to anyone that I needed help...God forbid...I will turn to God for assistance, but He is the first one that I will turn to. Life is more important than the job that you do."
When she was asked to speak about the assistance/termination process she responded,

In the termination process you are re-establishing your credibility. The district level support staff go into the classroom to observe and then return to me and question my motives and reasons for expressing concerns about this particular teacher. Then I begin to question my reasoning behind my reaction. The only thing that convinced me that I was on the correct path was what I heard in the hallway when I walked outside her classroom. When I entered, the teaching began, however, when I left, things moved back to their previous level.

This statement revealed indications of boundary-spanning and role-based stress. Many of her statements were emotional and pointed to her continued frustration with the process.

The explanation of the role-based stress was further revealed in the following, "This (principalship) is a job where you learn by the seat of your pants and you learn every single day by every experience that you have. I would rather stand up for what I believe in rather than have people scurrying around me looking for answers." This statement appeared to be flavored by the events of the previous week and may have been a response to her hurt and disappointment.
When specifically addressing the termination and assistance process the principal stated "...the termination process is worse now, because you have people go out to workshops and return and teach to the letter [sic] but once I leave the classroom they go back to their old behaviors. You provide the teacher with so many opportunities and chances to try and get it right, and if you can't break them of the pattern, they are never going to get it right." She alluded to the fact that she, sometimes, had to become a detective to find the teacher teaching as she normally did rather than the planned presentation for the observation by the principal.

When asked about the time necessary for the assistance/termination process she responded that, "This affects the productivity of the principal and his/her availability and how the principal handles it. I use email all the time, find that it is invaluable. It has stopped those quick hallway conversations that go on for 15 minutes, and are solved in a few key strokes." The amount of time necessary for assistance appeared to be a high stressor for Principal D.
The frustration with the time element is further revealed when Principal D stated, "I am being heavily burdened, and get more and more tired, everyday. I come in at six in the morning and get home after six in the evening.

The only time I can catch up is when teachers are not here." "I refuse to take stuff [sic] home with me. I have to be a wife and a mother during the weekend. There is more stuff to do every single day that should be dealt with at the district level. And then filtered down through us. In this age of technology, there is no way they can’t put this on computer and we respond accordingly." The dissatisfaction began to spill over onto other issues with the assistance/termination process.

The principal became most animated when describing her reaction to the school district support provided to the less-than-adequate teacher,

The district’s response, when I call, is to save the teacher. Right now we are in such a critical teacher shortage, that standards appear to have been decreased. I had a teacher placed at my school because he was having difficulty at his other school. Because I document well, I was told to document his behaviors. Initially I felt that I would assist, however, now, I am not going to take any more leftovers."
Indicating that she was no longer able to provide the expert administrative assistance to anyone other than the employees who were hired by her and her staff.

She continued to address the moving of a less-than-effective teacher to her school, "If the principal had done his/her job at the sending school, there wouldn’t be an issue of placing this teacher. Now, the district is giving extra chances. We get caught up with the documentation and then they turn around and question our motives for documentation and termination." Exasperation and indignation appeared strong during this statement. She held her hands tightly and leaned forward across the desk to address the interviewer.

The local support appears to be waning as well, since "my peers don’t care. The only person they care about is himself or herself. What I see in this district is a clique just like in high school." Also "...the area superintendent’s office continually questions what you do, as a principal, they loose sight of what happens on a campus from day to day." Again, there was a great deal of coloring of her position based upon the events of the past week.
Anxiety was quite evident in this principal. Asked if she would ever become a principal again, she responded, "I would definitely do it again, because it is who I am and the personality that I have." This statement was made in what seemed apologetic tone and came as a surprise to the researcher.

The review of the ASI revealed that the following work-related situations "frequently bothered" Principal D. See Table 4.10.

Table 4.10
Principal D Administrative Stress Index Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Imposing accessibly high expectations on myself.</td>
<td>Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time.</td>
<td>Feeling pressure for better job performance over and above what I think is reasonable.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serving as a positive role model for all. *</td>
<td>Working with the School Advisory Council. *</td>
<td>Attempting to meet social expectations beyond my job duties</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with community and business partners. *</td>
<td></td>
<td>Attempting to meet student performance standards measure by standardized tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview are illustrated in Table 4.11.
Table 4.11
Principal D Interview Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stress in the principalship is like your credibility factor is completely gone.</td>
<td>It becomes a 'he said', 'she said' situation</td>
<td>I could be more effective as a principal and less stressed if things were handled in a timely manner at the district level.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is one of theloneliest jobs I have ever had.</td>
<td>You are double dipping because it is time misspent.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I have always been able to handle everything...but after a while, you begin to wonder...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bottom line...you’re the principal, and you gotta do what you gotta do [sic].</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based upon a review and analysis of the interviews, the areas of role-based and task-based stress were primary stress themes for Principal D. Second to these themes was boundary-spanning stress. There was no evidence of conflict-mediating stress exhibited by Principal D. However, the researcher observed that the significant events of the previous week appeared to impact the interview and magnified the dissatisfaction of Principal D.

In summary, Table 4.12 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of the ASI for Principal D.
Table 4.12

Principal D - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment
(+): stressor present
(-): stressor absent

The results indicate that both the interview and the ASI support the conclusion that Principal D experienced role-based, task-based, and boundary-spanning stress during the assistance/termination process.

Interview and Within-Case Analysis - Principal E

Principal E was an educator for over thirty years. He served as a classroom teacher, an assistant principal, a principal, a superintendent of schools, and school-board member. The informant was an administrator in this county for 8 years. Two years as an assistant principal and six years as the principal of this school.

The interview took place, in the school, at the end of the school day. The researcher had an appointment, arrived early, and was delayed because the principal had unexpected events occur which precluded the meeting.
When questioned about the number of teachers he terminated during his career, there was a long pause. He stated, “I have terminated approximately 20 teachers during my career. In this county, however, both recommendations to terminate were carried forth to the district office and not upheld. The teachers were transferred to other schools.” This statement was made with the principal’s eyes looking down and his hands crossed tightly.

He continued, “In one case, I felt that the reason behind the decision not to terminate centered on the ethnicity of this particular teacher.” This is something that had not arisen in the previous principal interviews and may bear some research in future studies.

He then acknowledged, “The other teacher that was carried forth to be terminated was placed at another school. Principal E felt that this might have been due to the teacher’s poor health. The principal stated, “In both cases, the teachers were provided the necessary support to become acceptable teachers. District support staff was involved, as well as outside university staff. When the cases were taken to the district office, they were not supported and the teachers were placed at other schools.”
The termination process takes on more significance in the eyes of this principal.

It has always been the case of weighing professional vs. personal when deciding on a person’s competence. To me there are always two groups of people in a school, the kids and the rest of us. We are here because of them. I absolutely value the dignity of every person. However, there are some people who are not cut out to be rocket scientists and those who are not fit to be teachers. The earlier we realize it, the better it will be for the children.” One question is posed each time, “What is the impact going to be on the students if this person is allowed to continue his/her involvement in the classroom”?

When addressing principal preparation the principal has some unique input to provide the readers.

Primarily, the essence of a school is not the building, but the people, their elements and their frailties. If you, as the principal, provide an environment that people like being in … you will get the necessary results. There are hundreds of truly capable people out there who have value and should be encouraged to become administrators. However, we do not do enough to truly encourage them to stand tall and maintain their dignity and identity. One of the keys to a successful administrator is to surround himself/herself with good people who will ensure your success as a principal.

This statement was one of many that were philosophical regarding the state of the principalship in this county.

The review of the ASI revealed that the following work-related situations frequently bothered Principal E and is indicated in Table 4.13.
Table 4.13
Principal E Administrative Stress Index Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are</td>
<td>Preparing and allocating budget resources</td>
<td>Knowing that I cannot get information needed to carry out my job properly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling that I have too heavy a workload, and that I cannot possibly finish during the normal workday.</td>
<td>Not knowing what my supervisor thinks about me or how they evaluate my performance.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time</td>
<td>Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Feeling that meetings take up too much of my time.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Overload of paperwork. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Duplication of requests from the district office. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>School district inability to communicate. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview are illustrated in Table 4.14.
Upon review of the interviews the most obvious stressor for Principal E was the role-based stress that he incurred during the assistance/termination process. Second to this was the boundary-spanning stress that Principal E endured during the assistance/termination process. There were repeated instances that he described in which decisions were made to terminate staff and reversed at the district level. Finally, the third stressor, task-based stress, was present but to a significantly lesser degree. This was supported by results from the ASI that Principal E completed.
In summary, Table 4.15 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of the ASI for Principal E.

Table 4.15
Principal E - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment (+) stressor present
(-) stressor absent

This table confirms the facts that Principal E consistently experienced role-based stress, task-based stress and boundary-spanning stress during the assistance/termination process. However, there was no evidence that conflict-mediating stress existed during the interview or was reflected in the results of the ASI.

Interview and Within-Case Analysis - Principal F

Principal F was an educator for 23 years. In this county, she had been an assistant principal for 3 years and a principal for 2 years. She held administrative positions in an eastern school district. The interview took place in the school center at the end of the school
day. The school is located in a middle class neighborhood in the suburbs.

Perhaps one of the most unique characteristics of this principal is that she succeeded a principal who had been in the school for sixteen years. Principal F was hired as the assistant principal and was promoted to principal after the former principal retired. She stated, "It was a non-confrontational former administration and all teachers were experienced and outstanding when I arrived at the school." This placed the principal in a very precarious position, one of walking the fine line between doing what is correct professionally and maintaining the dignity of the outgoing principal.

This was reaffirmed when the statement was given, "I think my principal was so happy to have someone come on board and be proactive. It was a breath of fresh air for him, too. He came to me, many times, asking what he could do to help. I was afforded opportunities that most assistant principals don’t have and was very happy for them." This is perhaps the only example given of eustress, or positive stress, throughout the entire research study.

When asked if she had ever terminated a teacher, she responded that she had participated in one assistance/termination process with a teacher who had eventually been transferred to another school. The personnel office had traded this less-than-effective
teacher for another less-than-effective teacher. This swap took place during the summer of the second year of school site assistance.

Principal F related that the first day on the job, parents were lined up to see her. “I came on board as assistant principal, I had a line of parents at my door demanding that their children not be placed in this teacher’s classroom.”

“I got to know the teacher quickly and observed her many times during the course of the year, the only time she had been given concerns on her evaluation was the previous year. This put me in another precarious position between the parents and the principal. The parent pressure forced me to confront the principal to act on the teacher’s inadequacies.” Not only is this an example of conflict-mediating, but also role-based stress as well.

She continued, “I had to garner the support of the principal. However, I was impugning his ability to administer a school. The school was a reputable institution in the community when I arrived. Even though this was happening; the principal and I had a wonderful relationship.” Again, another example of boundary-spanning and role-based stress.

Principal F repeated that she assisted this teacher for a complete school year. There were many parent meetings and parent requests to move the students from the
teacher's classroom. The administration, however, stood firm. At one point, parents were organizing a movement to take their children to any other classroom and not the classroom where they were assigned. "The police had to be called and the area superintendent. We had to go to a lock-down situation. Five parents ended up transferring their children to other schools, and one child was moved, because the father was so abusive to me and the staff." The multiple stressor examples can be coded as conflict-mediating, role-based, task-based, and boundary-spanning stress.

There were many assistance and support meetings during that school year. The principal stated that the teacher did not demonstrate any improvement of skills and was going to continue on a support plan into the next school year. At one point, however, things got dangerous. "At one point, during a meeting, I felt as though the teacher was going to strike me with her plan book. She stood up and yelled that she would see me in court, and stormed out of the office." The informant then added, "I think it would have been better and faster if she had hit me" and she laughed. The principal stated that "Humor plays an important part of my survival system."
The teacher completed that school year and Principal F had a conversation with the personnel officer of the school district. “By the end of the summer, I was coming back. However, I felt risk of bodily harm from this teacher if she returned. The teacher was transferred to another school and we received another teacher who was also in the assistance process.” It can be inferred from the conversation that the switching of less-than-competent teachers is not an everyday occurrence in this school district. The school district, however, uses this as an alternative assistance activity to provide the teacher every possible opportunity to perform at an acceptable level in the classroom.

The principal relayed that the needs and issues with the second teacher were much different. She was a teacher who had been teaching for more than 30 years. She was a “lovely lady who fit into the school, like a glove”. When the teacher arrived the parents were very happy to see her and noted, with some relief, the absence of the other teachers.

However, she stated, as time wore on, it became evident that the teacher was not capable, “...subject matter, no planning, and poor instructional delivery...” of teaching students. “Parents started calling in the middle of November. Even though the teacher appeared to be working hard and involving the parents as volunteers,
nothing was happening in the classroom.” “The teacher “loved the kids, and the kids loved her.” This conversation is a good example of role-based and task-based stress as they related to the personal investment a principal made in assisting a teacher.

Support was provided from the Office of Professional Practices. Information was shared that there was a complete support team available to help this teacher including peer teachers, area support staff, and a university professor. As time wore on, however, no improvement was noted and there came a time that a decision had to be made to terminate the teacher or she would tend her resignation.

“Until the last day, she was a very positive woman. She looked at me, teary eyed, and asked me what I was telling her, after I informed her, for the tenth time, that she had to either resign or be terminated.”

The teacher could not comprehend that after her long career in teaching that she was going to be dismissed.” The teacher left the meeting and never returned to that campus. She resigned the following day at the district office.
The principal felt that the preparation that was provided, as an administrator, did not come from the current school district and that "I was only prepared for this challenge as a result of the professional training I received in another school district. If I had been an assistant principal, just coming out of the classroom, there is no way I would have been prepared to deal with either of these situations."

The principal further explained, "The whole process causes one to question your own ability to assess a teacher's performance in the classroom. However, when you provide such intense assistance and support, you are doing what is professionally correct". This task-based stress was made in a strong voice while constant eye contact was maintained.

The termination process "is stressful, and I didn't have a life for a whole year. School was my life, because what I couldn't get done during the day, I would stay after and arrive early, and take things home" [sic]. Her closing statement was "even though, the whole process was extremely
stressful, I called it a tremendous opportunity to strengthen my administrative skills." This is a further example of the attitude that the principals have as they approach the assistance/termination of less-than-competent teachers.

The review of Principal F’s responses for the ASI revealed that the following work-related situations frequently bothered Principal F and are indicated in Table 4.16.

Table 4.16
Principal F Administrative Stress Index Frequently Bothersome Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling that I have too heavy a workload, on that I cannot possibly finish during the normal workday.</td>
<td>Feeling that I have to participate in school activities outside of he normal working hours at the expense of my personal time.</td>
<td>Receiving directives late, and having to implement plans &quot;yesterday&quot;. *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trying to complete reports and other paperwork on time.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* A written comment at the conclusion of the ASI assessment instrument.

Examples of work-related stressors that were revealed about the assistance/termination process during the interview are illustrated in Table 4.17.
Table 4.17
Principal F Interview Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role-Based Stress</th>
<th>Task-Based Stress</th>
<th>Boundary-Spanning Stress</th>
<th>Conflict-Mediating Stress</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I was going to be at risk for bodily harm from this teacher.</td>
<td>I never left this office once before 8 p.m. and was the first one here in the morning, and the last one to leave at night.</td>
<td>It causes one to question your ability to assess a teacher’s performance in the classroom.</td>
<td>When I came on board as the new Assistant Principal, I had a line of parents at my office door demanding that I NOT place their child in a teacher’s classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This was my life, how many sleepless nights, how many white knuckle trips into work in the morning, worried about your own health and safety.</td>
<td></td>
<td>I am a worked and do whatever I need to do to get the job done.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Upon review and analysis of the interviews, the researcher determined that the most obvious stressors for Principal F were role-based. This principal appeared to be comfortable with the tasks at hand when she was involved in the assistance/termination of the teacher. Reportedly, however, the role she played during the process was quite stressful. This may be attributed to the fact that she was pursuing the termination while the current principal was still the administrator in charge. There were minimal examples given, during the interview, of boundary-spanning or conflict-mediating stress nor evidence of conflict.
In summary, Table 4.18 provides a synopsis of the interview coding and the results of the ASI for Principal F.

Table 4.18

Principal F - Response Comparison Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>ASI*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task-Based Stress</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundary-Spanning Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict-Mediating Stress</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Administrative Stress Index

NOTE: User assessment
(+ stressor present
(- stressor absent

This table confirmed the fact that Principal F consistently experienced task-based and boundary-spanning stress during the assistance/termination process. However, neither role-based nor conflict-mediating stress were corroborated as stressors using the results of the ASI.

Cross-Case Analysis of Principal Responses

The within-case analysis identified the similarities and differences in the stressors in each of the principals. The data for the analysis were derived directly from the interviews and the ASI and are reflected in Table 4.1 through Table 4.18.
The Cross-Case analysis assessed the types of stressors and the roles they played and their impact on the principalship. The analysis explored and interpreted the data and managed and synthesized ideas while identifying themes and patterns. This was accomplished through the close examination of each construct, employing the user coding of stressor present (+), or stressor absent (-) to determine the influence on the principal. Information was provided to the reader in Tables 4.18 through 4.22.

Role-Based Stress

Role-based stress is defined as role ambiguity and role conflict. This stress is promoted by the beliefs, attitudes, interaction, and a lack of autonomy of the individual within the organization. A summary review of this construct is provided in Table 4.19.

Table 4.19
Cross-Case Analysis of Role-Based Stress for Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Administrative Stress Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: User Assessment
(+ stressor present
(-) stressor absent
In each interview the principal related instances of role-based stress as it manifested itself during the assistance/termination process. For four principals the ASI assessment tool indicated that role-based stress was present as they performed their daily duties as elementary principals. One principal experienced extreme role-based stress during the termination process and during her everyday duties as a principal. Subsequent to her interview, Principal A transferred to another administrative position in the school-district office.

Of note, Principal B and Principal F, less-experienced principals, did not indicate that they experienced role-based stress as part of their role as principal, except during the assistance/termination process. Also, Principal B and Principal F expressed less stress than other participants in the study. The researcher postulated that the credibility of principal B and F (with respect to their decision to terminate) had been maintained (and therefore decreased stress resulted) because the upper-level school district administrators upheld the termination recommendation and school board action terminated the teachers. Table 4.13 indicated that level of role-based stress among elementary principals was elevated due to the teacher assistance/termination process.
Task-Based Stress

Task-based stress arises from work overload, task difficulty and the need for high achievement. The administrator and his/her role as communicator with faculty, coordinator of activities, and as an everyday performer contributes to this stress. A summary review of this construct is provided in Table 4.20.

Table 4.20

Cross-Case Analysis of Task-Based Stress for Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Administrative Stress Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: User Assessment

(+) stressor present

(-) stressor absent

In each interview, the principals described the task-based stress as it related to the assistance/termination process. Five of the principals indicated that this stress was also present during their regular duties as indicated
Principal B, one of the less-experienced principals, did not indicate that task-based stress was "bothersome" to her in her everyday role as a principal, however, this was a theme in her interview on the assistance/termination issue.

Table 4.20 indicates that the level of task-based stress among the elementary principals’ was due to teacher assistance/termination process. Principals A and B did not appear to exhibit a high degree of stress during the everyday role as a principal or during the assistance/termination process. Whereas, Principals C, D, E and F did appear to be more stressed in both assistance/termination process and their everyday environments.

Boundary-Spanning Stress

Boundary-spanning stress originates from external conditions, such as negotiations and gaining public support. These factors change the environmental setting and in the process promote stress within the person. A summary review of this construct is provided in Table 4.21.
Table 4.21

Cross-Case Analysis of Boundary-Spanning Stress for Principals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Administrative Stress Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+++</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: User Assessment

(+ stressor present
(- stressor absent

In each interview the principal described the boundary-spanning stress as it related to the assistance/termination process of teachers. This was further substantiated in the ASI as “a bothersome” experience. This theme was the most predominant theme that arose from the data analysis of principal responses. The reader should note that boundary-spanning stress was a significant contributory factor that was indicated both in the interview and the ASI.

Table 4.21 indicated that the elementary principals’ boundary-spanning stress associated with the assistance/termination process created an even higher level of stress when compared to the other stressor areas.
Again, it is significant that Principals A, D, and E appeared to have a significantly higher level of boundary-spanning stress than the less-experienced principals do. In addition, there also appears to be a somewhat higher level of boundary-spanning stress in the performance of their everyday duties.

**Conflict-Mediating Stress**

This stress arises from the administrator handling conflicts within the school. A summary review of this construct is provided in Table 4.22

Table 4.22

**Cross-Case Analysis of Conflict-Mediating Stress for Principals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Construct</th>
<th>Interview</th>
<th>Administrative Stress Index</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: User Assessment
(+): stressor present
(-): stressor absent
The results indicated that conflict-mediating stress was present in half of the assistance/termination interviews and was present in one out of the six principal's ASI results. This appeared to be the least significant principal stressor and was one that appeared to cause little or no anxiety on the part of the principals in this research study. This phenomenon may be the result of a policy adopted by the school district approximately five years ago, in a concerted effort to train all professional staff in conflict-resolution strategies.

Furthermore, during the 231.36 termination process at least five to six support meetings are held with the teacher and the school based support team (principal, assistant principal, teacher, union representative, ancillary support personnel) to provide support to the teacher.
Chapter V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A 1998 survey conducted by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Association of Secondary School Principals found that increased responsibilities, long work days, difficult parents, pressure from school boards, and low pay made the principalship less desirable than ever before. It is not surprising that over half of the districts surveyed reported difficulty in filling their principal vacancies (Potter, 2001).

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the levels of stress of principals. If there was increased stress associated with teacher termination, was the stress more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship? This topic was examined based upon gender, years of administrative experience, years on site, educational level of the administrator, school setting, socio-economic strata (SES), and size of student population.
Summary of Procedures

Utilizing information provided by the department of professional standards, a group of 14 principals were identified as potential participants for this study. Letters were mailed to each principal explaining the purpose of the study. Ten of the principals who received the contact letter and information responded to the request.

From that group, six principals were chosen to participate based upon the immediacy of their response to the contact letter. Each of the participating principals received a telephone call from the researcher confirming their willingness to participate and answer preliminary questions.

This study, combined with others, substantiated that principals’ experience elevated levels of stress. A study done by Kilgore (1999) evidences that long hours, vague and sometimes conflicting demands, interminable contact with people (both on and off campus), requirements to execute ever-increasing state and federal policies, and accountability are inherent components of the principal’s role and responsibilities in the elementary school.
These components can potentially merge to generate optimal conditions for distress and subsequently, occupational burnout.

Summary of Major Findings

This study addresses two questions. Is there a relationship between teacher termination and its effect on the level of stress of the principal? If so, was the increased stress associated with teacher termination and was the stress more significant than other stressors associated with the principalship?

The respondents were concerned about their anonymity. In some interviews, the administrators expressed their mistrust of this process. Therefore, the researcher made all possible attempts at anonymity. Additional care was taken to conceal the site, as well as, the identity of the principle informants.

Principals cannot control nor anticipate outside forces, circumstances, or people as they relate to the principalship. Therefore, boundary-spanning stress is one of the most challenging stressors to address from the perspective of the principal.
The evaluation of data indicated that the lack of support and follow through, on the part of the upper-level management, was significantly more stressful for the principals than the actual act of termination. This was especially true for the veteran administrators. This was shared by each of the more experienced principal informants that had over seven years in the principalship.

Each of the principal informants experienced the stress surrounding the termination of teachers differently. All understood that it was a condition of employment and a less desirable part of the position. For some it was a major stressor and for others it was less distressing. Sometimes, the teacher termination was not carried forward once it reached upper level school-district administration. This may have been for political reasons, professional reasons, or reasons unknown to the principal (fear of lawsuit when terminating minority, handicapped, protected class).

It was the researchers concern that these findings would motivate our present and future administrators to affect positive change at the district level to bring about further excellence in their profession.
Conclusions

Stress was an everyday occurrence in the principalship and was tolerated only because of the principals’ love of children, their desire to make a difference in children’s lives, and to foster education. Principals in this study agreed that a major problem for them, as administrators, was the excessive amount of time needed to assist and support teachers who are less than effective. This time detracted from the day-to-day activities of a principal and necessitated longer hours and some home and weekend work. This impacted their ability to perform their duty as leaders in the school, because (a) they were not available to other staff or parents and (b) it had a negative impact on their family life.

The interviews additionally indicated that the veteran principals were much more critical of the events that occurred out of their locus of control. Even when all parties agreed that a teacher needed to be terminated, sometimes this just did not happen. Although the necessary documentation was provided, the upper level management of the district, in many instances, acquiesced to political pressures and did not support the recommendation of termination.

Eustress, or good stress, was alluded to once during the interviews by one of the less experienced principals. Each of the principals had an excellent sense of humor
and interjected humor during the interview when on topic of termination, however, the mood changed from one of humor to seriousness.

The veteran principals had additional areas that were bothersome (role-based and task-based stress), as measured by the ASI. This was further supported by information gathered during the principal interviews. The data revealed that the veteran principals experienced a higher level of stress than that of their less experienced counterparts. This was also supported by a study done by Borg and Riding (1993) which found that as the employment longevity of principals increased, so did the level of stress. It was the nature of the work not the amount of work that contributed to job stress.

The researcher hypothesized that as a principal gained more and diverse experiences; the stress level would decrease. However, this hypothesis could not be supported, in this study, based upon the information gained during the interviews and the results of the ASI from the elementary school principals.

Recommendations

This study determined that stress is a significant part of the elementary school principalship, it is therefore recommended that school districts recognize this fact by providing training programs for principals in stress management.
Colleges and universities that prepare educators should also introduce a distance-learning program in stress management for school administrators. Modernizing their administrative degree programs to help individuals recognize and understand various stressors that are associated with the principalship and offering coping techniques would provide an adequate foundation for a healthy career.

Many times principals find themselves thrust into a stressful situation for which they are not prepared. Procedures to resolve this dilemma might include internships and mentoring programs that are developed between the business community and the school district. This would allow 'principals-in-training' to become more familiar with day-to-day stressors of the position, and also develop a support network.

Another recommendation is for school districts to incorporate a mentoring program for those who are already principals. They would greatly benefit from shared experiences, as principals are often isolated in their work.

A fifth recommendation would be for school districts to provide consistent training for school principals in the assistance, support and termination process. The training would involve teacher union representation to ensure that training was consistent and would be provided by the professional standards department.
A sixth recommendation is for the school district to provide individual administrative support for all principals involved in the 231.36 process. Florida State Statute 231.36 outlines the process to be followed in order to terminate a teacher.

A seventh recommendation is that this study be replicated and expanded to include middle-school and high-school principals.

An eighth recommendation would be replicate this study across county to provide an awareness of the nature of principal stress or to indicate that further research is needed on other facets that cause professional stress in the principal’s role.

A final recommendation would be to provide training in time management and organizational skills. This would aid in alleviating stress related to task-based issues.

The following tips, taken from an article in Principal magazine (March, 2001) also may prove useful in surviving the principalship:

- Maintain a sense of humor
- Grow thick skin to deflect the negative comments that will be hurled at you
- Do not take the negative comments too personally
- Realize that is impossible to please everyone, no matter how hard you try
- Regard parents as your greatest potential ally.
- Work as teams with your entire staff
• Value and respect the individual strengths of each staff member
• Hire the best teachers available
• Take time to enjoy the students
• Above all, always make decisions based do what’s best for students
References


Cambor, Kate (1999). Bad apples. The American Prospect, 46, 79-84.


Case Citations


Gainey v. School Board of Liberty County, App. 387 So. 2d 1023 (1980).


School Board of Pinellas County v. Noble, App. 384 So. 2d 205 (1980).
Dear __________________ (Person’s name will be typed into this script)

I am a Ph.D. candidate at Lynn University in Boca Raton, Florida. My degree will be in Educational Leadership with a Global Perspective. The final challenge to complete the Ph.D. degree requirements is the performance of original research in an area of personal interest. Dr. William J. Leary, Professor of Education, Lynn University and former Superintendent of the Broward County Schools will guide this research.

My topic is “The Impact of Teacher Termination on the Level of Stress of Elementary Principals”. As a principal who has participated in the teacher termination process, as outlined in Florida State Statute 2341.36, I respectfully request that you be one of the six participants in this study.

The confidential interview will take as long as you need and will be done at your convenience. My goal is to be able to relate your professional experiences in a qualitative manner to our community of educators locally and globally. Additionally, I will ask you to complete The Administrative Stress Index to validate your experiences. All information is confidential and your involvement will be critical to my research. Your cooperation is genuinely appreciated.

I will be contacting you within the next week. Should you have any questions, please contact me at __________________ at your convenience. If you have concerns about this study that you do not wish to address with Lawrence A. Heiser, you may call Dr. William J. Leary, Dissertation Committee Chairperson, Lynn University, at __________________.

Sincerely,

Lawrence A. Heiser  
Ph.D. Candidate

William J. Leary, Ed.D., Ed.D.  
Professor of Education  
Chairman of Dissertation Committee  
Lynn University

I agree to participate in this research study. I understand that all information is kept confidential and will be shared on an anonymous basis.

_________________________________________  ________________________
Informant  Date
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent to Audio Record

I, ________________________________, give permission to have this interview recorded by means of an audio recording device. I understand the interview will be taped for data collection purposes specific to this research project only.

The recording will be transcribed and coded to protect the identity of the participants. The recording and transcription will be maintained for a period of five years. At that time, the recording and transcripts will be destroyed.

I understand that these tapes, as well as all written materials, are completely confidential and that I may choose not to continue, at any time, during the study without negative consequences.

Name of Participant (Printed) ________________________________  Telephone Number ________________________________

Signature of Participant ________________________________  Date ________________________________

Lawrence A. Heiser, Researcher ________________________________  Date ________________________________
The Administrative Stress Index  
(Grnelch & Swendt, 1977)

School administrators have identified the following 35 work-related situations as sources of concern. It is possible that some of these situations bother you more than others. How much are you bothered by each of the situations listed below? Please place an “X” in the appropriate response box.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
<th>Rarely or Never Bothers Me</th>
<th>Occasionally Bothers Me</th>
<th>Frequently Bothers Me</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Being interrupted frequently by telephone calls</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Supervising and coordinating the tasks of many people.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Feeling staff members don’t understand my goals and expectations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Feeling that I am not fully qualified to handle my job</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Knowing I can’t get information needed to carry out my job properly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thinking that I will not be able to satisfy the conflict demands of those who have authority over me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences between/among my superiors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Feeling that not enough is expected of me by my superiors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Having my work frequently interrupted by staff members who want to talk to me.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Imposing accessibly high expectation on myself</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Feeling pressure for better job performance over and above what I think is reasonable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Writing memos, letters and other communications.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences with my superiors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14 Speaking in front of groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Attempting to meet social expectations (housing, clubs, friends, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Not knowing what my supervisor thinks of me, or how they evaluated my performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too much responsibility delegated to me by my supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Feeling I have to participate in school activities outside of the normal working hours at the expense of my personal time</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Feeling that I have not enough responsibility delegated to me by my supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Trying to resolve parent/school conflicts</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Preparing and allocating budget resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too little authority to carry out responsibilities assigned to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Handling student discipline problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Being involved in the collective bargaining process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Evaluating staff members’ performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Feeling that I have too heavy a work load, one that I cannot possibly finish during the normal work day</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Complying with state, federal, and organizational rules and policies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Feeling that the progress on my job is not what it should be or could be</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Administering the negotiated contract (grievances, interpretations, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Being unclear on just what the scope and responsibilities of my job are.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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126
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Feeling that meetings take up too much time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Trying to complete reports and other paper work on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Trying to resolve differences between/among staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Trying to influence my immediate supervisor’s actions and decisions that affect me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Trying to gain public approval and/or financial support for school programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Trying to perform duties within the site-based management concept</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Feeling that working with diverse student populations makes the job more difficult</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Working with special education parents and students, within the guidelines of the IDEA reauthorization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Trying to perform duties and develop programs within legal constraints</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Attempting to meet student performance standards measured by standardized tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other situations about your job that bother you</td>
<td>NA 1 2 3 4 5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Use reverse side if more space is needed.

©Walter H. Gmelch, Iowa State University, 2001
Dear Mr. Gmelch,

You are hereby granted permission to use the ASI in your dissertation study. My only request is that you print the copyright at the bottom of the instrument (copyright Walter H. Gmelch, Iowa State University) and provide me with a summary of the results when completed. Best of luck with your research. Thank you.

Walt Gmelch

Dr. Gmelch,

I am an elementary school principal from Palm Beach County, Florida. I am also a doctoral candidate at Lynn University, Boca Raton, Florida.

I am working on my dissertation which is titled "The Impact of Teacher Termination on the Level of Stress of Elementary Principals." I would like your permission to use the Administrative Stress Index (A.S.I.) instrument in my study.

Please let me know if the A.S.I. is available to use in the study. I also need the copyright permission and cost information.

Thank you very much.

Larry Heiser
APPENDIX E

Demographic School Profile

1. Sex:  _____ Male  
  _____ Female

2. Education Level:  _____ Master of Education  
  _____ Educational Specialist  
  _____ Doctorate

3. Years in this principalship:  _____

4. Total years in Administration:  _____

5. Grade range of school:  _____ K-5  
  _____ K-6

6. Type of school:  _____ Urban  
  _____ Suburban  
  _____ Rural

7. Total student enrollment:  _____
APPENDIX F
INFORMANT OBSERVATION

Principal (CIRCLE ONE): A B C F E F

1. What was the demeanor of the principal informant during the interview?

2. What body language was exhibited during the interview?

3. What was the general condition of the principal's office?

4. Were there interruptions during the interview? How did the principal handle those interruptions?

5. How was the interviewer greeted and dismissed?

6. Other general observations