



Understanding Aspiration to Principalship

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Abstract

The principal shortage crisis has been imminent for many years. The challenges facing the education systems, specifically in the education of school-age children and young people in 2025, are both complex and have the potential to be enduring if left unaddressed. Due to this rapidly changing environment and the complexity of the principal's role, the position of principal is becoming progressively less desirable to potential applicants. Finding suitably skilled and qualified individuals to lead schools is becoming an increasingly challenging task for educational systems. The principal shortage has been exacerbated recently with many beginning principals leaving prematurely. High rates of principal turnover and poor principals threaten school improvement, school stability and the very healthy and positive environments that improve student learning outcomes. Understanding how future aspiring principals perceive and value their work will allow educational systems more tailored and effective school leadership training. Furthermore, with fewer mid-career teachers present in schools, principals are often unable to implement forms of distributive leadership they had previously, with the assistance of experienced mid-career teachers who were willing to coach and mentor to enhance leadership capacity. Understanding the connection between the teacher shortage and an increasing demand on principals, my doctorate explores the experiences of aspirational Catholic Education South Australia (CESA) leaders to understand what creates, sustains, and diminishes leadership aspiration in CESA in a climate that is becoming increasingly difficult. The educational sector's capacity to decrease principal turnover could serve as an effective strategy to tackle the ongoing issue of chronic teacher attrition.

Keywords: principals; head-teacher; enablers; inhibitors; shortage