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**"How about being a school principal?" – "I'd rather not, thank you!"**  
**International comparative studies on the motivation for taking over and remaining in school leadership positions**

To cite this article:

Müller, Ulrich; Hancock, Dawson. R. & Wang Chuang (2022): "How about being a school principal?" – "I'd rather not, thank you!" International comparative studies on the motivation for taking over and remaining in school leadership positions.

Ludwigsburg: Pädagogische Hochschule.

To link to this article: **(wird noch eingefügt)**



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<http://www.ph-ludwigsburg.de/bildungsmanagement>

Stand: September 2022

**"How about being a school principal?" – "I'd rather not, thank you!"  
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Abstract.....	2
1. On the importance of school principals.....	2
2. Filling vacant school principal positions - a global problem .....	3
3. On the motivation for taking on school leadership responsibilities .....	4
4. School leadership in the US and Germany.....	5
5. Comparative studies US - Germany.....	7
5.1 Studies with teachers.....	7
5.2. Studies with principals.....	10
6. Discussion and possible consequences.....	14
7. Outlook.....	16
References.....	16
Appendix 1: Study 1 .....	21
Appendix 2: Study 3.....	23

**Abstract**

Effective school leaders significantly influence the performance of their schools. Unfortunately, in many countries worldwide attracting qualified candidates to become school principals is becoming increasingly difficult. This paper reports on several comparative studies that were carried out within the framework of a long-term research cooperation between a German and an US-American University. The aim of these studies was to clarify the motivation of teachers in deciding for or against taking over a position as a principal. For a better understanding of the background, the article also includes a section on the similarities and differences between the school systems of Germany and the USA and the responsibilities of principals.

**1. On the importance of school principals**

The actions of school principals have been the subject of numerous studies in recent decades. Particularly in the context of school effectiveness research (cf. Feige 2012, p. 66ff., Leithwood & Jantzi 2008), studies have looked into the question of the contribution of school principals towards the quality and results of a school. On the basis of the available findings, it can be regarded as almost certain that the actions of a school's

leader represent a central influencing factor on the performance of its pupils, the significance of which is only surpassed by the direct teaching events in the classroom (Hattie 2009, Dhuey & Smith 2018).

Examining an array of published articles in the field of education, Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe (2008) discovered that student learning is most directly impacted by leaders who: (a) establish goals and expectations; (b) strategically deploy resources; (c) plan, coordinate and evaluate teaching and the curriculum; (d) promote and participate in teacher learning and development; and (e) ensure an orderly and supportive environment in the school. Similarly, the Wallace Foundation's (2018) review of principal leadership concluded that effective schools have principals who can: (a) create a vision of success for all students; (b) establish a climate hospitable to learning; (c) cultivate leadership in others; (d) improve instruction; and (e) manage people, data and processes that support school improvement.

The competencies of a school principal make a decisive contribution to a school's success (Feige 2012; Huber & Gordel 2006; McEwan 2003). Meta-analyses comparing 21 leadership tasks with different student performances showed that a significant improvement in student performance correlates with the school principal's competence in performing his or her diverse tasks (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson 2010).

Other studies show that the ability of a school principal to develop a common vision and set clear goals at school (Harris 2002), to understand and support employees in their development (Hallinger & Heck 2002), to develop productive contacts with parents and the community at large (Louis & Kruse 1998), is directly linked to the motivation and commitment of teachers (Sammons, Day, Stobart, Kington & Gu 2007); Fend 1998; Leithwood & Mascall 2008) and indirectly related to enhanced students' achievement (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe 2008).

Louis and others summarize the results of numerous studies as follows: "To date we have not found a single case of a school improving its students' achievement record in the absence of talented leadership" (Louis, Leithwood, Wahlstrom & Anderson 2010, p. 9).

The influence of the school principals does not have a *direct* impact on student achievement, but rather an *indirect* one. The actions of a school principal have an effect on the teaching and learning atmosphere, on the self-image and motivation of the teachers, and thus, through the teachers, influence the quality of teaching and education - and thus ultimately also on the students' learning achievement (Hattie 2009; Huber 2010).

## **2. Filling vacant school principal positions - a global problem**

Despite this great importance of the school leadership for the quality of the school and the performance of its students, many educational institutions have a problem finding and retaining suitable future leaders - and this is a worldwide phenomenon (Bonsen, Gathen, Iglhaut & Pfeiffer 2002; Knapp, Coplan & Talbert 2003, Chu and Cravens 2019, Lyons 2019). The fluctuation rates of school principals are also very high in many countries (Battle & Gruber 2010; Huber 2010).

In a large-scale study, the OECD paints a comprehensive picture of the situation of school principals from an international perspective. Of the 22 countries taking part in the study, 15 report difficulties in finding enough suitable applicants for leadership positions (OECD 2008, p. 158). In Hungary, for example, an average of only 1.25 candidates apply for vacant leadership positions. In England, almost a third of all job adverts have to be re-issued because no suitable candidate can be found. Similar difficulties have also been encountered in Norway, the Netherlands and Scotland (ibid.).

One of the few countries that has no difficulty filling leadership positions is Portugal. Those responsible attribute this to the fact that 80% to 90% of head teachers are elected from among and by the teachers at the relevant school (ibid.).

These general trends must be differentiated according to the type of school. In most countries, these difficulties do not affect all school types and regions. In Australia, New Zealand, Ireland and Northern Ireland, for example, there are particular difficulties in finding head teachers for small schools, while Belgium and England have problems above all in urban areas (cf. ibid., p. 160).

The US did not participate in the OECD study, but the problem of a lack of applicants has been known for more than 20 years. Whitaker summarizes the results of several studies from the 1990s and 2000s, which all report difficulties in filling leadership positions. His own survey, in which 108 superintendents took part, showed that "90 percent indicated a moderate to extreme shortage of principal candidates, with the problem more severe at the high-school level" (cf. Whitaker 2001, p. 1). Numerous recent expert assessments and studies point in the same direction (Goldring & Taie 2014).

In Germany, too, many federal states have for a number of years had considerable difficulties in filling vacant school leadership positions. According to a study by the Institute of the German Economy, only a few states have no problems recruiting school principals, while every second state lacks suitable applicants (cf. Klein 2008, p. 27). In 2017, the education and culture ministries of the 16 German states reported that between 1.3% (Bavaria) and 15% (North Rhine-Westphalia) of the head teacher positions were vacant (Etzold & Haerder 2017, p. 28). Similar situations are reported by other states (Nieder-Egelmeier 2017).

### **3. On the motivation for taking on school leadership responsibilities**

Why are so few teachers willing to apply for school principal positions? What are the motives that play a role in their decision whether or not to become a head teacher?

The authors of the OECD study already cited summarize the state of research on the motivational factors defined by several international studies. According to this study, intrinsic motives are the most important: teachers decide to apply for a school leadership position because they

- want to improve schools;
- are looking for personal, professional and intellectual challenges;
- want to influence their teacher colleagues and the school atmosphere (OECD 2008, p. 159).

The authors identify the following inhibiting factors:

- the partially discouraging selection procedures on the path to a headship;
- the heavy workload and the associated negative effects on their work-life balance are mentioned: demands on their time, stress, negative effects on the family, etc.
- the relatively low pay compared to the demands made on them, and
- the frequent lack of a perspective for further career development (cf. ibid., p. 159f.).

In Germany, the German Institute for International Educational Research (DIPF) carried out a study on the actions of school principals on behalf of the Federal Government in which school principals from primary schools and grammar schools in six states were asked about their responsibilities and the demands made of them. This study, too, cites as the main motive for taking up a school leadership position the overwhelming *desire* to improve schools prevailing among just under 90% of the principals surveyed (Brauckmann 2013, p. 34).

In interviews school principals repeatedly criticize the heavy workload, especially due to increasing responsibilities at schools, a lack of support with their administrative

tasks, low pay and insufficient recognition of their work (e.g. Wetzel 2014, Breyer 2014). On the whole, there is a strong imbalance between demands and incentives: exacting obligations and tasks are not offset by sufficient recognition and remuneration (Brauckmann 2013, p. 7).

The results of a study in which almost 5,400 school principals in Germany, Austria and Switzerland took part show just how much the diverse and complex demands placed on school principals today are perceived as a burden by many school principals: 58% of those surveyed felt moderately or severely over-burdened, 16% of whom belonged to the group of those who are severely over-burdened, have low job satisfaction and show clear signs of emotional exhaustion (Huber, Wolfgramm & Kilic 2013, p. 4).

In an in-depth interview study on the stress experienced by school principals, in which qualitative interviews were conducted, a similar picture emerged. In response to a question about stress factors, the head teachers cited:

- the high number of weekly working hours,
- the severe complexity of the task structure,
- too little secretarial support (especially in small schools), "fragmented" work phases,
- blurring of the line between working hours and leisure time,
- multiple demands, role diversity and conflicts.

In the combination of general challenges in school management with situational leadership tasks, domino effects and stress cascades were also very clearly identified, resulting in a corresponding exponential intensification and negatively experienced stress (Stricker, Iberer & Huber 2014). The stress experience described by the school principals also affects their motivation to perform their duties (*Hancock, Müller, Wang & Hachen 2019*).

#### **4. School leadership in the US and Germany**

There are several organizational differences between the education systems of the U.S.A. and Germany. Germany's structure is organized into 16 federal states that each have their own school system. These individual state systems have control over many educational issues including policy goals, school structures, and curriculum (Huber, Tulowitzki & Hameyer 2017). Each state, or "Land", controls the administrative laws, education-policy goals, school structure, and curricula within its jurisdiction (Huber, Gördel, Kilic, & Tulowitzki 2016). The responsibility of appointing school leaders lies with the ministry of education of each Land (Huber & Pashiardis 2008). School leaders in Germany lack considerable authority and autonomy over important school decisions such as staff employment and financial resources (Brauckmann & Schwarz 2015; Huber, Tulowitzki & Hameyer 2017).

Educational jurisdiction in the U.S.A. is delegated to the states by the 10th Amendment of the American Constitution (U.S. Const. amend. x). The 50 states are charged with direct oversight of educational issues within their political boundaries and are responsible for providing the majority of school funding, licensing schools and educational professionals, and enforcing state education laws and regulations. The U.S.A. differs from the German system as each state further decentralizes administrative control through the establishment of local school districts, of which there are over 13,000 nationwide. These districts exercise broad oversight of daily operations, budgets, staff, and local school curricula (U.S. Department of Education 2008a, 2008b). School principals in the U.S.A. have a higher degree of authority and autonomy than their German counterparts.

School principals' responsibilities in the U.S.A. and Germany are similar in many ways. In both countries, principals oversee basic school functions, supervise teachers, staff and other administrators, influence curricular decisions, ensure compliance with rules imposed by local and federal governments, prepare a variety of reports and records,

and interact with constituencies such as parents and community leaders (Hallinger, 2003; Huber, Gördel, Kilic & Tulowitzki 2016; Murphy & Orr 2009). These activities require great competence on the part of school principals (Hallinger & Heck 2002; Hancock & Müller 2014)

Although there are many similarities, differences do exist between school leaders' responsibilities in these countries. U.S.A. principals have historically been more centered on administrative management while German principals were considered *primus inter pares* (first among equals), generally being seen as the best teacher in the school with a handful of managerial tasks (Braukmann, Geißler, Feldhoff & Pashiardis 2016). German principals maintain a position as a classroom teacher, spending a considerable part of their weekly working hours on their own lessons (Braukmann & Schwarz 2015). U.S.A. principals are not expected to teach classes upon their transition to the principalship.

The role difference between school leaders in the two countries is trending towards similarity, as principals in both nations are increasingly being viewed as instructional leaders. In the U.S.A., principals are held personally accountable for student learning and performance and are viewed as the primary instructional leaders of their schools (Easley & Elmeski 2016; Fink & Resnick 2001).

Likewise, recent trends in Germany have been toward expanded leadership roles for principals as they also lead the instructional development of a school to ensure externally determined standards are taught with fidelity (Braukmann, Geißler, Feldhoff & Pashiardis 2016). Over the past two decades, decentralization of the decision-making process in Germany has shifted more control from the state and regional authorities to the school level (Huber, Tulowitzki & Hameyer 2017).

Another difference lies in the manner in which school leaders prepare for their positions. Prospective principals in the U.S.A. engage in leadership training as a precondition to application and completion of certification as a principal does not come with a guarantee of employment (Huber 2010). Due to the decentralization of the U.S.A. education system, the various states establish specific guidelines and prerequisites for attaining a school administrators license, which must be obtained by all principals from the respective State Boards of Education (Miller 2013). The requirements to apply for a position as a school principal generally include a masters degree in Educational Leadership or similar content area and a certificate/license that requires certain courses, professional field experience, and sometimes a special test (Huber & Hiltmann 2010). Generally, the responsibility for training aspiring school leaders lies with universities (Huber & Hiltmann 2010). Whereas school leaders in the U.S.A. are trained and credentialed before they assume their leadership positions, school leaders in Germany often complete their training after being assigned a principalship (Huber, Gördel, Kilic & Tulowitzki 2016; Murphy & Orr 2009). The only prerequisites to becoming a school principal in Germany are experience as a teacher in the respective school type and good evaluations in previous performance assessments (Huber & Hiltmann 2010; Huber & Pashiardis 2008; Tulowitzki 2015).

A structural difference between the two countries is the level of federal control over the preparation of school leaders. In Germany, the system is often centralized with a centrally regulated development program for school principals (Rosenbusch & Huber 2001; Tulowitzki 2015). In the U.S.A., professional organizations establish standards of professional competence and individual states license principals to lead schools based on established competency standards (Marzano, Waters & McNulty 2005). An additional difference between the principalship in Germany and the U.S.A is the salary scale. Principals in Germany are typically paid only slightly more than German teachers, whereas in the U.S.A., principals often earn significantly more than teachers (Hancock, Hary & Müller 2012). The median wage for a high school principal in the U.S.A. is \$35,220 higher than the median wage for high school teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor 2018).

Although the roles and responsibilities of principals in Germany and the U.S.A. differ in many ways, both countries are experiencing the formidable challenge of recruiting

talented people to become principals (Goldring & Taie 2014; Nieder-Entgelmeier 2017). Given the importance and influence of school leaders and the increasing difficulty of recruiting them in the U.S.A. and Germany, an understanding of why people join the profession is a pressing issue for both education systems.

## **5. Comparative studies US - Germany**

In the following, we will report on several studies that were carried out within the framework of a long-term research cooperation between the Institute for Educational Leadership at PH Ludwigsburg, University of Education and the Department for Educational Leadership at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. The aim of these studies was to clarify the motivation of teachers in deciding for or against taking over a position as head teacher and to explore how similarities and differences in the role of the principalship in Germany and the U.S.A. may impact people's motivation to become principals. Through the comparison between Germany and the US, we hoped to gain a deeper understanding. Over the years, we developed a multi-perspective approach in which we collected both quantitative and qualitative data and included not only the perspective of teachers, but also that of school principals.

In the following we give an overview of these studies and summarize the most important results. We will not go into the details of the methodological procedure here, but will refer to the original contributions.

### **5.1 Studies with teachers**

In our first study (Study 1, quantitative), we interviewed participants who were taking masters programs in education management (Germany) or school administration (USA) (Hancock & Müller 2009). The sample comprised 311 US-American and 117 German participants. The participants filled out a questionnaire to find out the reasons for and against taking on a school management position. This questionnaire was designed in accordance with an instrument devised by Harris, Arnold, Lowery & Crocker (2000) and contained 14 items with potential motivators and 17 items with potential obstacles, which could be answered on a 4-point Likert-scale (1 very important, 2 important, 3 unimportant, 4 very unimportant). Figure 1 (Appendix) shows the questionnaire.

In a follow-up study (Study 2, qualitative), we re-interviewed a selection of the participants of the first study. We conducted interviews with 20 participants from the German sample and 9 participants from the US sample (Hancock, Hary & Müller 2012). The participants received the lists of potentially motivating and potentially hindering factors again. Subsequently, we conducted semi-structured interviews on the topics of the study. We subjected the transcripts of these interviews to a qualitative content analysis based on Mayring (2007).

In the following we summarize the results of both studies.

### **Motivating factors (in Germany and the USA)**

#### *Opportunities to make a positive impact on the lives of students and teachers*

In both countries, the teachers interviewed unanimously stated that the strongest motivation for taking on a leadership position comes from the desire to have a positive influence on the students and teachers at their school. A school principalship is perceived as a position that offers opportunities to influence important issues: Setting work priorities, developing lesson plans, planning personnel deployment, realizing development and further education opportunities - all these tasks are decisively shaped by the

school leadership. The participants in our study find these design options attractive. The statement of a German participant from the qualitative survey illustrates this: *"I would like to take on a leadership role because no one at school can have a greater influence on the lives of teachers and students than the school principal."*

#### *Opportunities for shaping pupils' learning opportunities*

Participants in our studies mention as another strong motive the chance to shape students' learning opportunities. Most teachers recognize that decisions about the school program, the curriculum and teaching strategies can be influenced to a great extent by the principal. Although a school's resources are decided elsewhere, respondents believe that principals can have a significant influence on where and how these resources are used in a school. As one US participant put it: *"The greatest motivating factor for me is that I can have a much greater influence on student learning than if I am only involved in the classroom."*

#### *Opportunities for initiating change*

Head teachers are perceived as "change agents" who can initiate changes in a school. This may involve, for example, increased coordination within the school, better communication with parents or better networking with those responsible in politics and school administration. Many of our participants are frustrated by the inactivity of some head teachers and say that if they were in this role, they would take more initiative for the good of the school in order to contribute to the improvement of the general conditions at their school. One participant explained: *"I often see 'little things' that could be changed in our school, but which could lead to enormous improvements - as principal I would tackle such things."*

#### *Opportunities for coping with personal and professional challenges*

Often the personal and professional challenges associated with the management role were presented as a motivating factor. The days of head teachers are long, appointment after appointment in a dense rhythm and are full of critical situations with staff or parents, challenging tasks and difficult decisions. It is known from other studies that leadership positions attract certain personality types who like to take responsibility and take action in key situations. The participants in our study also feel motivated to face and master these personal and professional challenges.

### **Inhibiting factors (in Germany and the USA)**

#### *Amount of paperwork/administrative work – wide range of tasks*

Many of the participants in our study who would generally be open to leadership roles are deterred by the extent of administrative tasks and the variety of commitments faced by school principals. They are not prepared to spend such a large proportion of their work time on bureaucratic tasks. One participant expresses this as follows: *"Already as a teacher I have to do more and more paperwork and meet bureaucratic requirements, it is clear that this is even more the case with head teachers ... Who would want to do such a job?"*

#### *Potential for conflict*

In both countries, the general readiness for conflict has increased considerably in recent years. In schools, too, not only has the number of disputes with parents or other stakeholders increased, but also the risk of becoming involved in legal proceedings. School principals are increasingly faced with the task of having to devote their time

and attention to such conflicts - time that is then lacking for the real tasks of leadership responsibility. This, too, is cited as a reason not to apply for a leadership position. A highly qualified teacher who had already been nominated for leadership positions reported: *"I have seen the toll on two of my bosses who were involved in a lawsuit... I would never want to experience that level of stress."*

### *Lack of autonomy*

Teachers complain about the lack of personal responsibility and freedom in decision-making on the part of principals. Even if they perceive head teachers as persons with great influence in the school (see above), they also see that many issues are decided at other levels. The increase in demands and obligations imposed on school principals considerably reduces their scope for action and influence. One participant expresses this as follows: *"My boss spends her whole day responding to the demands of all kinds of people ... this is a thankless task that I did not want to have."*

### *Distance from the pupils*

Participants from both countries agree that the greatest factor that has a detrimental effect is the greater distance from the students that they would have to experience in a leadership role. Many fear that their increased administrative tasks would not only lead to a greater physical distance from the pupils, but that they would also be alienated from the pupils and thus lose interest in the actual teaching and educational task. These teachers maintain close relations with their students and experience their educational tasks as a meaningful and valuable activity. They are afraid that the change of roles would endanger these kinds of relationships. One participant pointed out: *"I chose this profession because I enjoy working with children. But the further I progress in my career, the less time I will actually spend with children ... My superiors see leadership potential in me, but I am not yet ready to abandon my students."*

## **Differences between the USA and Germany**

The results of our studies also showed interesting differences between the two countries in some respects.

In the case of motivational factors, this applies, for example, to the payment factor. In the quantitative study, a good 80% of the US participants cited a higher salary as a factor motivating them to take up the position. In the German group it was only about 45 %. This result may also be due to cultural differences (financial incentives are more widely accepted in the US than in Germany), but it also reflects the different levels of pay in the two countries. A German participant explained: *"My salary as a principal would not be so much better that it would motivate me to become a head teacher ... I can just continue with my teaching - and get almost the same salary as my principal, but without having his problems weighing me down "*

With regard to motivational inhibitors, teachers in the USA are very concerned about the increasing pressure from the ongoing implementation of standardized performance tests. These tests are much more widespread in the USA and are of great importance - also for principals themselves. Unlike in Germany, where teachers are civil servants ("Beamte") and a principal has a very secure position, principals in the USA can lose their job relatively quickly. For example, they risk losing their job if students continue to score badly on comparative performance tests. Accordingly, many teachers in the US complain about the lack of job security for principals.

In Germany, on the other hand, teachers cite alienation from colleagues and the need to move house as inhibiting factors, whereas in the USA this plays a subordinate role.

## 5.2. Studies with principals

In the two studies presented above, we interviewed teachers. In order to gain a further perspective on the problem under investigation, our next studies turned to school principals.

In our third study, 159 German and 134 U.S. principals completed a survey that was divided into five parts (Study 3, quantitative, Hancock & Müller 2014). Part I solicited demographic information from the participants such as gender, educational level, experience as an educator, levels of schools, and length of service as a principal. Part II explored the participants' levels of current and expected job satisfaction as principals on components often experienced in principals' work environments. The participants were asked to rate their satisfaction with 20 job components in their current jobs and their expected satisfaction with the same 20 components in the job of a principal. The 20 job components were derived from previous job satisfaction studies (Hulin 1991; James & Lawrence 1989) involving instruments that allowed ratings of job components that were common across several job classifications (e.g., salary and autonomy) and had been examined for reliability and construct validity (Cranny, Smith & Stone 1992). Part III (nine items) explored the reasons that the participants became principals. Participants evaluated each component in Part II and III using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important). Part IV (22 items) explored the participants' perspectives about barriers to becoming a principal using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Part V (15 items) was designed to measure school principals' perspectives about the strategies for motivating teachers to pursue principalships. These 15 items were adapted from items in Parts I–IV. Figure 2 (appendix) shows the questionnaire.

In a follow-up study, selected participants of study 3 were asked to engage in a semi-structured interview designed to gain greater insights around the issues contributing to or detracting from their decisions to become school principals in Germany and the U.S.A. (Study 4, qualitative; Hancock, Müller, Wang & Hachen 2019). The interview questions were:

- 1 What are the reasons that you chose to become a principal?
- 2 How can teachers be motivated to become principals?
- 3 What obstacles exist that prevent teachers from becoming principals?

Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed verbatim for scrutiny by the researchers. Analysis of these qualitative data was conducted using the constant-comparative method of qualitative content analysis developed by Glaser & Strauss (1967) and refined by Mayring (2007). This method of qualitative content analysis allowed the researchers to develop a rich understanding of the motivators and inhibitors that impacted the participants' decisions to become principals in Germany and the U.S.A.

In the following we summarize the results of study 3 and 4.

### Job Satisfaction

The U.S. and German principals of these studies experienced a substantial difference between their current job satisfaction and what they had expected to experience in the role of principal. Of the 17 items evaluated by the participants in both samples, four items demonstrated statistically significant differences between the level of current job satisfaction and expected job satisfaction for both the U.S. and German principals—*my salary, hours I work per week, time I have to spend with my family, and recognition I receive for doing a good job.*

*My Salary*

Whereas the average salary of a U.S. principal is approximately thirty percent higher than the average of a U.S. teacher, German teachers who become principals rarely receive a significant pay raise. Although Hancock, Hary & Müller (2012) found that the lack of increased salary sometimes serves as a disincentive for German teachers to pursue the principalship, the current study extends that finding by noting that despite the higher pay experienced by U.S. principals, in both countries principals become displeased with their salary levels after having gained some experience in the role of principal. In other words, in both the U.S. and Germany, principals believe that their salaries are not high enough once they experience the demands of the position. One implication of this finding is that regardless of how much one is paid as a principal, the demands of the position in both countries may cause principals to lose motivation to perform in that role. This finding suggests that incentives other than salary may need to be provided in order to enhance a principal's willingness to remain in that position.

#### *Hours I work per week*

In both the U.S. and Germany, the responsibilities of principals have increased significantly in recent years. Historically, German principals were responsible for overseeing the centralized and bureaucratic administration of their schools. However, these days, the leadership of German schools is much more decentralized with principals expected to accomplish a host of new tasks such as establishing a vision for their schools, recruiting teachers, selecting curriculum, and supervising instruction. In the U.S., principals historically focused on management issues such as planning, organizing, supervising, and scheduling. However, these days, U.S. principals are also expected to be instructional leaders, transformational leaders, community leaders, budget experts, and effective mediators between students, parents, and staff. This rapid increase in responsibilities of principals in both countries in the past few years has resulted in expressions of concern by many experienced principals that the demands of the position are too great and serve as a disincentive to be a principal. Many administrators are reporting that the job is simply no longer "doable" (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran 2003; Harris, Arnold, Carr, Lowery & Worsham 2004). One implication of this finding is that more support personnel and services may need to be provided to principals in order to entice them to remain principals.

#### *Time I Have to Spend With My Family*

Related to the significant number of hours needed to perform the responsibilities of a principal in both Germany and the U.S. is the issue of how little time school leaders have to spend with their families when serving as a principal. The quantity of paperwork and number of commitments in schools has increased significantly commensurate to the escalation in complexity of responsibilities assigned to principals. The amount of time needed to address all of the externally mandated accountability issues alone has increased dramatically the amount of time that principals must forfeit with their loved ones. Although most teachers who pursue the role of principal understand that sacrifices in family time will be expected in their new role, experienced principals in both Germany and the U.S. express displeasure regarding the amount of time that they must spend away from their families. Hancock, Hary & Müller (2012) noted one teacher's expression of the sentiment of many others when she wrote, "As more and more demands involving paperwork and accountability have been placed on teachers, it is obvious that similar demands on principals have increased also... who would want *that* job?!" One implication of this finding is that school districts may want to help principals achieve greater balance between work demands and home life by relieving them of some of the more mundane responsibilities of their positions.

In both Germany and the U.S., new principals expect to receive moderately high amounts of recognition for their performance as principals. Specifically, in the U.S., novice principals report anticipating appreciation for their efforts from the parents of the children in their schools and accolades from their supervisors and colleagues in the school districts in which they serve. In Germany, new principals report an expectation that their new role will result in heightened status among colleagues, many of whom are teachers with whom they served as a teacher. Unfortunately, in both countries, experienced principals report that the amount of recognition that they receive is far less than the amount that they expected when they became principals. In the current study, the difference between expected and current level of satisfaction with the recognition received for doing a good job was a full standard deviation in both countries. As reported by Hancock & Müller (2009), the motivation of teachers to pursue the principalship and of serving principals to remain in their positions is significantly influenced by factors that enhance satisfaction with the role of principal. Failure to be appropriately recognized for one's good efforts can serve as a disincentive for a principal to continue to serve in that position. This finding suggests that persons responsible for hiring school principals may need to find ways to recognize principals more overtly and aggressively in order to attract and retain qualified principals in the profession.

### **Motivation for becoming a principal**

#### *Positive impact on teachers and students*

In both countries, principals were attracted to their leadership roles by opportunities to influence their learning environments in order to have a positive impact on teachers and students. Specifically, the principalship was seen as a highly influential position with opportunities to exercise autonomy over issues of importance to teachers and students alike. Most respondents believed that the ability to exercise control over a school's climate, working conditions, curriculum and instruction, personnel assignments, teaching schedules, and student learning were largely under the purview of the principal and many of the principals were attracted to the principalship in order to positively influence these outcomes. Representing the sentiment of most U.S.A. and German principals, one principal stated: "As a teacher, my influence was limited to only one classroom; as a principal, I have an opportunity to have a broader impact in lots of new ways."

#### *Professional development and personal growth*

Another reason for becoming a principal cited by respondents in both countries was the desire to experience personal professional development and growth. Studies have shown that school principals often have a strong desire to make critical decisions and to take decisive actions, even when confronted with significant obstacles (Hancock & Müller 2009). As a result, the role of principal often attracts people who possess characteristics of personal resolve and determination to negotiate the constant challenges of leading a school. Many respondents in this study stated that they aspired to the role of principal to experience the individual and collective leadership challenges inherent in the position. Although issues such as hectic work schedules, personnel problems, and large quantities of paperwork were part of their everyday lives, most respondents suggested that overcoming these challenges was personally rewarding. They enjoyed being in the central position of impacting important outcomes in their educational environments. As one principal stated: "Every day I'm on a mission to improve my school... I never let all the problems and naysayers stop me."

### **Inhibitors**

### *Lack of authority*

Although professional development pursuits characterize principals in both the U.S.A. and Germany, principals in this study from both countries expressed significant frustration with their lack of authority to make selected decisions in their schools. For example, in Germany, principals felt a significant lack of authority to hire and fire staff members because German school employees are generally protected from disciplinary actions by State hiring policies. These policies often limit a principal's ability to take punitive action. One frustrated German principal wrote: "I can never really discipline a poor performer because that person knows she won't lose her job no matter what she does." In the U.S.A., many principals expressed frustration regarding a lack of authority over ways to measure student learning outcomes because centralized testing mandated by federal and state authorities has become the standard practice. As a result, a principal has few opportunities to make decisions about how and on what topics students will be examined. As one U.S.A. principal in this study stated: "The legislative policies of No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top have severely limited my authority to influence testing practices in my own school."

### *Lack of increased compensation*

A final reason impacting U.S.A. and German principals' decisions to become school leaders involved compensation. In neither country did respondents indicate on the Likert scale of the survey that an increase in salary was their primary motivator in their decisions to become principals. However, in their narrative comments, German principals expressed significant frustration about the lack of increased compensation when transitioning from a teacher position to a principalship. In most cases, German principals earned only slightly more than they had earned as full-time teachers. Representing the opinions of many German principals, one principal wrote: "My hours are longer and my work is harder, but my paycheck is no bigger; that's not right." Unlike in Germany, U.S.A. principals typically experience a pay increase over their teacher salaries. Nevertheless, like German principals, U.S.A. principals also indicated on the Likert scale of this study's survey that making more money was a not the most significant reason for pursuing a principalship. As one U.S.A. principal noted: "I got into this role to help teachers and kids do better in school and life, not to get rich."

## **Implications**

In summary, our studies contributed to ongoing research efforts to identify factors that motivate and inhibit individuals from choosing to remain school principals in the U.S. and in Germany. Whereas previous research focused on the perspectives of teachers to become principals, these studies explored the views of serving principals regarding their levels of current and expected job satisfaction with the role. As suggested by Locke's Range of Affect Theory (1976), the clear implication is that in order to entice principals to remain in their positions, the gap between principals' current job satisfaction and the expectations that they have for the position of principal must be narrowed in at least four areas—*salary, hours worked per week, time spent with family, and recognition received for doing a good job*. In addition, other areas valued by both U.S. and German principals (e.g., *opportunities to serve others and opportunities to experience varied activities in their jobs*) should be maximized. Additional empirical research is needed to identify other specific factors that influence school principals' motivation to remain in their positions in each country.

Our data show that U.S.A. principals are more motivated by concrete incentives such as salary increases, career opportunities, leadership roles, and job status than their German counterparts. It stands to reason that because more of these concrete incentives are available to U.S.A. principals, that it would be a stronger motivator. U.S.A. principals experience a larger salary increase than German principals when transitioning from a teacher role and are afforded more autonomy over the management of the school. Several German principals that participated in the study expressed frustration at the lack of increased compensation they received despite the longer hours and more

difficult work. If more concrete incentives were offered, especially to German principals, school systems could experience increased motivation within their teacher core to transition to the principalship.

The studies discovered that being an innovative leader, assisting teachers with curriculum development and instructional innovations, and improving student learning opportunities are all important factors influencing participants from both nations to become school principals. In fact, these factors were identified as more important by principals of both nations than the aforementioned concrete incentives. For these goals to be realized, school leaders need access to effective and comprehensive leadership training before entering the profession and a high degree of decision-making power within their schools.

## **6. Discussion and possible consequences**

The surveys we carried out cover only relatively small samples and were only conducted within a very limited geographical radius. They cannot therefore be considered representative of the two countries. They do, however, shed additional light on the problem of a lack of candidates for vacant school principal positions. While aware of the limited validity of our results, we will conclude by developing considerations on possible consequences in the sense of “lessons learned”.

### **What the US school administration could learn from Germany**

#### *Greater security in school management positions*

Even though a certain risk of losing one's job in the event of failure may be reasonable in the sense of performance orientation, the job risk for school principals in the US represents a considerable inhibiting factor. Principals in Germany have a secure position and have little to worry about losing their jobs. This has a positive influence on their motivation. Those responsible in the US should consider whether an increased level of job security could not be provided.

#### *Moderate use of school performance tests*

School performance tests with sometimes harsh consequences for teachers and school principals are widespread in the US. Our surveys have shown that these tests have a strong negative influence on the motivation for applying for school principal positions. Against this background, “high stakes testing” should be reconsidered as a central control instrument of educational policy.

### **What the German school administration could learn from the US**

#### *Recognize school management as a profession in its own right*

In recent decades, the responsibilities of school principals have expanded dramatically; nowadays school principals are expected to perform tasks such as staff management, personnel and organisational development, budget responsibility, development of mission statements, etc. competently and with supreme confidence. Against this background, school leadership today must be understood as a new, separate profession.

#### *Appropriate academic-level preparation*

To perform these tasks it is not enough just to be a good teacher. Teachers are in no way prepared for the above-mentioned tasks through their initial training. The training courses offered are often too short and do not cover enough of the responsibilities and tasks. School principals require appropriate preparation and qualifications at an academic level (e.g. a masters degree in school management or education management) in order to fulfil their responsibilities professionally. Furthermore, systematic personnel

development should contribute to the early identification of potential candidates for school management tasks and prepare them for taking on these responsibilities in the long term.

#### *Higher remuneration for school management tasks*

School principals in both the US and Germany feel a strong imbalance between what the task demands of them (time, commitment, responsibility) and what they get in return. They experience their tasks as very demanding and stressful and expect adequate compensation for their achievements. Therefore, head teachers in both countries consider themselves underpaid with respects to the demands made upon them.

Nevertheless, the higher remuneration in the US is an incentive that motivates potential candidates to take on school leadership positions. In Germany, the difference in salary between a normal teacher and a head teacher is so small that it has little motivating effect. It should be considered in Germany too whether higher remuneration could be used as an incentive for getting teachers to take over school leadership positions.

### **What the school administration in both countries could learn**

#### *Reduction of bureaucratic tasks*

Head teachers are often overloaded with bureaucratic tasks. While their duties have increased, the resources available to the school administration have not grown at nearly the same rate. Ways should therefore be sought to relieve and support school principals in the management of their tasks. This can be done by relieving vice-principals of a larger part of their teaching workload and thus enabling them to take on more management tasks; however, it is also essential to have more secretarial and administrative staff. Not all statistics have to be compiled by the school principals themselves.

#### *More appreciation and recognition for the achievements of school principals*

Our surveys confirm the results of other studies: school principals perform their duties predominantly for intrinsic motives. Certainly, it is difficult to gain additional financial resources to increase the pay of school principals. However, school principals not only want higher salaries, they also feel that they lack adequate recognition for their performance. More recognition and appreciation for headmasters would be a possible way to compensate them for their efforts. The resources for recognition and appreciation are much easier to gain than financial means - and at least as important.

#### *Greater scope for decision-making*

Another implication of this finding involves decision-making by principals. For example, in both the U.S.A. and Germany, principals seek and appreciate opportunities to make decisions related to student learning. In the U.S.A., where testing has become centralized under federally mandated programs such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, principals are often frustrated by their lack of authority to select and implement tests of student knowledge and performance. As evidenced by our survey and interviews, U.S.A. principals are especially interested in adopting testing procedures that will allow greater autonomy over which, how, and when tests are implemented in their schools. Educational officials in the U.S.A. could experience an increase in potential candidates if they allocated more decision making around testing to individual school leaders. In Germany, decentralization of the decision-making process has been trending towards the school level over the past two decades (Huber, Tulowitzki & Hameyer 2017). According to our findings, this trend will increase motivation to become a school principal because it will allow more influence in curriculum development, instructional innovations, and expanding student learning opportunities, which were all identified as important motivating factors by German participants.

## 7. Outlook

In order to broaden our picture of the subject matter, we have conducted further studies. It has become clear again and again that school principals have to cope with a heavy and broad workload and are exposed to a high degree of stress. This also has a clear influence on the motivation of teachers to go into school leadership. For this reason, we have also been conducting a study in which school principals are asked how they deal with stress (Hancock, Müller, Stricker, Wang, Lee & Hachen 2019b). We have also expanded the range of countries we have included in our studies. For example, we have collected data in Korea and China and compared them with the results from Germany and the US (Wang, Hancock, Lim, Müller, Tulowitzki & Stricker 2019). Both approaches have contributed significantly to an even deeper understanding of the topic.

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Appendix 1: Study 1

(Hancock & Müller 2009)

**Survey**

**Part I. Background Information**

How many years did you serve as a teacher before entering the MSA degree program?

4-9 years     10–14 years     15–19 years     20+ years

In which area have you had the most experience?

Preschool     Elementary     Middle     High School

What is your highest degree?

Bachelor’s Degree     Master’s Degree     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

What college or university are you currently attending while working on your MSA degree?

\_\_\_\_\_

What is your sex?

Male     Female

What position are you most interested in seeking when you complete your MSA degree program?

Principal     Assistant Principal     Other: \_\_\_\_\_

**Part II. Motivators**

Below are motivating issues that may potentially encourage teachers to pursue a career as a school administrator. From your perspective, circle “1” for no importance, “2” for little importance, “3” for some importance, and “4” for great importance.

	Importance			
	None	Little	Some	Great
1. Increased salary and fringe benefits	1	2	3	4
2. Positive impact on people	1	2	3	4
3. Personal challenge	1	2	3	4
4. Professional challenge	1	2	3	4
5. Teacher of teachers	1	2	3	4
6. Ability to initiate change	1	2	3	4
7. Support and encouragement from others	1	2	3	4
8. Stepping stone to higher position	1	2	3	4
9. Prestige and status	1	2	3	4
10. Relocate to a more desirable location	1	2	3	4
11. Desire to make a difference	1	2	3	4
12. Influence over staffing	1	2	3	4
13. Increased freedom in daily routine	1	2	3	4
14. Leave the classroom	1	2	3	4

### Part III. Inhibitors

Below are inhibiting issues that may potentially discourage teachers from pursuing a career as a school administrator. From your perspective, circle "1" for no importance, "2" for little importance, "3" for some importance, and "4" for great importance.

	Importance			
	None	Little	Some	Great
1. Salary differential too small	1	2	3	4
2. No tenure (lack of security)	1	2	3	4
3. Increased commitments (meetings, longer days, etc.)	1	2	3	4
4. Paperwork/bureaucracy	1	2	3	4
5. Lack of autonomy	1	2	3	4
6. Pressures from standardized tests	1	2	3	4
7. Potential litigation	1	2	3	4
8. Need to relocate	1	2	3	4
9. Concerns for personal safety	1	2	3	4
10. Longer year	1	2	3	4
11. Isolation/alienation from staff	1	2	3	4
12. Discipline problems	1	2	3	4
13. Distance from students	1	2	3	4
14. Fear of failure	1	2	3	4
15. Outside groups influencing your answers	1	2	3	4
16. Discouraged by family/friends	1	2	3	4
17. Requirements of No Child Left Behind legislation	1	2	3	4

Appendix 2: Study 3

(Hancock & Müller 2014, Hancock, Müller & Wang 2015, Hancock, Müller & Wang 2016)

**PRINCIPAL SURVEY**

We invite you to complete this survey because you are a Principal and your opinions about the Principalship are valuable for improving school leadership. Your completion of this survey is voluntary. There are no risks or benefits to you for participating.

The survey should take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your completed survey will be held in strict confidence. Responses to the survey will be aggregated for reports or publications; thus, your identity will never be disclosed.

**Directions:**

1. Please provide a response to every question. If none of the alternatives provided for a question corresponds exactly to your position or opinion, select the alternative that is closest to your position or opinion.
2. Follow the directions for each section. If you change a response, be sure that the change is legible.

**Thank you for your participation in this survey!**

**PRINCIPAL SURVEY**

**PART I: DEMOGRAPHICS**

Gender (check one):  Female  Male

Marital Status (check one):  Married  Single

Educational Level (check all degrees that apply):

Bachelor's  Master's  Specialist  Doctorate

Degrees you are currently pursuing (check all that apply):

Second Master's  Specialist  Doctorate

What year did you earn your highest degree? \_\_\_\_\_

**Experience as an Educator**

Since becoming an educator, what positions have you held and for how long? Please list chronologically beginning with your most recent position (i.e., teacher, counselor, resource teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, other?)

<u>Position</u>	<u>Year Began</u>	<u>Year Ended</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

How long have you served as a Principal?

- |                  |                   |                        |
|------------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| _____ 0-3 years  | _____ 12-15 years | _____ 23-26 years      |
| _____ 4-7 years  | _____ 16-19 years | _____ 26-29 years      |
| _____ 8-11 years | _____ 20-23 years | _____ 30 or more years |

At what level are you currently serving as a Principal?

- |                     |                              |
|---------------------|------------------------------|
| _____ Elementary    | _____ High School            |
| _____ Middle School | _____ Other (specify): _____ |

**PART II: CURRENT AND EXPECTED JOB SATISFACTION**

For the job characteristics identified below, there are two sets of rating scales ranging from a low of 1 (not at all satisfied) to a high of 5 (extremely satisfied). The scales to the left relate to your satisfaction with your current job. The scales to the right relate to job satisfaction that you expected to have in your current job. Please circle the one number for each scale that reflects your opinion regarding current and expected job satisfaction.

Job Characteristics		CURRENT JOB SATISFACTION					EXPECTED PRINCIPAL JOB SATISFACTION				
		In my current job, I rate my satisfaction with the below job characteristics as . . .					As Principal, I would expect to rate my satisfaction with the below job characteristics as . . .				
		Not at All Satisfied				Extremely Satisfied	Not at All Satisfied				Extremely Satisfied
		1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1.	The opportunity to use my talents										
2.	My salary										
3.	The work climate										
4.	The freedom to make my own decisions										
5.	The sense of achievement I experience on the job										
6.	The opportunity to try my own way of doing things										

7.	The vacation time I have												
8.	Income I receive from extra-service pay												
9.	The time I have to spend with my family												
10.	My overall job security												
11.	The hours I work per week												
12.	The opportunity to advance my career												
13.	The hours I work per year												
14.	The effect my job has on my spouse's career												
15.	The opportunity to experience varied activities on the job												
16.	The opportunity to serve others												
17.	The way district policies are implemented												
18.	The opportunity to give direction to others												
19.	The recognition I receive for doing a good job												
20.	Extra income I can earn in the summer												

**PART III: REASONS WHY YOU BECAME A PRINCIPAL**

Reasons people choose to become a Principal are listed below with scales ranging from left to right and from a low of 1 (not at all important) to a high of 5 (extremely important). Please circle the one number on each scale that reflects how important this reason was in your decision to become a Principal.

Became a Principal to:		Not at All Important				Extremely Important
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Increase my salary					
2.	Expand my career options					
3.	Pursue professional development					
4.	Assume a greater leadership role in my district					
5.	Improve my job status					
6.	Be an innovative leader					
7.	Assist teachers with curriculum development					

8.	Assist teachers with instructional innovations					
9.	Improve student learning opportunities					

If applicable, list other reasons that led you to become a Principal...

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#### PART IV: CHANGING THE JOB OF PRINCIPAL

Some policy makers believe changing some aspects of the job of Principal would make the position more attractive to potential job applicants. Some changes are listed below with scales ranging from left to right and from a low of 1 (not at all likely) to a high of 5 (very likely). Please circle the one number for each change that would motivate teachers who you know to pursue a job as a Principal.

Principal Job Changes		Not at all Likely				Very Likely
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Higher Principal salary?					
2.	Help with Principal paperwork?					
3.	Better Principal retirement benefits?					
4.	Assignment of some duties (e.g., records, extra-curricular activities) to other personnel?					
5.	More principal vacation days?					
6.	Increased job authority for Principals?					
7.	Make more classroom visits?					
8.	Time to supervise teachers?					
9.	Work on curriculum development?					
10.	Time to observe student work?					
11.	Helping teachers with instructional strategies?					
12.	Making school a safe place for students?					
13.	More involvement with student activities?					

14.	Help with school safety and violence issues?					
15.	Help with the school budget?					

If applicable, list other changes in the job of Principal that would motivate teachers who you know to pursue a job as a Principal...

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### PART V: BARRIERS TO BECOMING A PRINCIPAL

Possible barriers to becoming a Principal are listed below with scales ranging from left to right and from a low of 1 (strongly disagree) to a high of 5 (strongly agree). Please circle the one number that reflects your agreement or disagreement that the barrier would make it unlikely that teachers you know, who are interested in school leadership, would pursue a job as Principal.

Teachers are unlikely to pursue the job of Principal because		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	They might have move to another school district					
2.	The work year becomes longer					
3.	They would be the primary person responsible for new initiatives					
4.	Their spouse must change jobs					
5.	The hours they work per week increases					
6.	The extent of their job duties increases					
7.	The degree Principals are held accountable for student achievement increases					
8.	The hours per day their work increase					
9.	Becoming a Principal requires them to make a career change					
10.	They may be satisfied with their current job					
11.	They would have to deal with the issues surrounding school councils					
12.	They may not want to be a Principal					
13.	The Principal application/selection process is too burdensome					

14.	Being a Principal would cause them to lose touch with students					
15.	They would have inadequate authority given the high-stakes accountability demanded of them					
16.	They could be assigned to a school with a high percentage of at-risk students					
17.	They would first have to be an assistant principal primarily assigned to student discipline					
18.	They need to know too much about school laws					
19.	Special education issues take too much time					
20.	They have little knowledge about doing school budgets					
21.	School safety and violence problems					
22.	They would have to evaluate teacher peers					
23.	They might be assigned to a school that is below its goal on NCLB					
24.	They would be held responsible for NCLB and standardized test results					

If applicable, list other barriers that would make it unlikely that teachers you know would pursue the job of Principal...

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