



Making Moves: The Role of Demotion in School Leadership

Lauren P. Bailes
University of Delaware

Sarah Guthery
University of Oklahoma

This study examines the experience of demotion from a principalship to an assistant principalship and how race and gender can differentially impact career trajectories. Using administrative state dataset of 10,946 observations at the principal level, we used probit regression to determine the overall probability of demotion and Kaplan Meier survival analysis to estimate the differences in probability over time. Our analysis describes not only who experiences demotions, but includes the characteristics of the sending and receiving schools. Survival analysis illustrates how small differences over time in demotion by race resulted in statistically significant systemic differences. We also find that experience matters: for every additional year of experience in the principal role, the probability of experiencing demotion decreases by 0.34%.

VERSION: January 2024

Suggested citation: Bailes, Lauren P., and Sarah Guthery. (2024). Making Moves: The Role of Demotion in School Leadership. (EdWorkingPaper: 24-894). Retrieved from Annenberg Institute at Brown University: <https://doi.org/10.26300/z4pq-4p37>

Making Moves: The Role of Demotion in School Leadership

Principals are critically important to school improvement (e.g., Grissom et al., 2021), which in turn suggests the importance of understanding the assistant principalship as a step in the leadership pipeline (Bartanen et al., 2021). Research suggests, however, that the experience of promotion within a principal career pathway is likely to vary for individuals with different demographic characteristics. That is, career pathways for principals are likely to look different for White principals than for Black and Latine/x principals (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Previous studies have examined how assistant principals (APs) are promoted as well as the systematic disparities in gender and race among both school leadership promotions and demotions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Blanchard et al., 2019; Fenwick, 2022; Grissom et al., 2019; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). This study examines the specific experience of demotion, defined as the positional change from a principalship directly to an assistant principalship.

We investigate the likelihood and timing of a demotion given particular individual and school characteristics and offer a novel analysis of demotion in order to describe not only who experiences them, but to also examine the characteristics of the schools from which (‘sending’) and to which (‘receiving’) demoted assistant principals transfer. We engage Ray’s (2019) racialized organizations framework in order to frame questions about systematic racial and gender differences within the process of demotion. This article finds that demotions are a point of race-based sorting of educational leaders: Black principals are more likely to be demoted, more likely to be demoted more quickly following initial promotion, and more likely to be assigned to school contexts with fewer resources and a more varied array of student needs.

Main Contributions

This article contributes to a burgeoning literature base which examines the promotion experiences of educators in the leadership pipeline. We find that once principals are promoted, a small percentage (2.26%) are demoted. However, not everyone experiences the risk of or experience of demotion equally. Demotions tend to happen early and to inexperienced leaders; the greatest risk of demotion is during an individual's first year as principal and we find that male and nonwhite principals are most likely to experience demotion as part of their career trajectories. Further, when Black and Hispanic principals experience demotion to an assistant principalship, they transfer into less well-resourced schools with more diverse students and higher proportions of students eligible for free- and reduced-priced lunch (FRL) than do White principals. While it is not necessarily a common experience, a demotion comes with a decrease in pay and prestige. Additionally, when an educator is demoted, there is no guarantee of repromotion; that is, of the ability to move back up the hierarchy of school administration. We find that, among non-White male principals in particular, demotion further winnows the corps of school leaders.

Research Questions

We examine the overall probability of principal demotion using a binary outcome to identify the patterns of demotion by race and gender as well as other contextual school factors that may explain the likelihood of demotion. The administrative dataset used in this study does not include information regarding the circumstances of an individual's demotion such as whether those transfers are voluntary, involuntary, or informed by other factors (e.g., salary, school resources, working conditions) so we examined the probability of an in-district demotion and the

probability of switching districts while also experiencing a demotion. Specifically, we ask the following research questions:

RQ1) Are there patterns in the observable characteristics of demoted APs (e.g., gender, race)?

RQ2) What is the probability, given an individual's observable characteristics and school context, that they will be demoted at all? Given that districts cannot reassign an employee to another district, what are the characteristics of receiving schools when an AP experiences an out-of-district demotion?

RQ3) How the overall probability and timing of demotion vary by race and/or gender?

School administrator pipelines are not linear so principal movement across schools, districts, and sometimes states is common. Pay structures incentivize principals to move because they tend to receive a raise with every move (Papa, 2007) and this is especially true in schools that pay at least one standard deviation below the system's mean. Further, more experienced principals tend to move to schools characterized by better access to necessary resources, smaller proportions of at-risk students, and more favorable overall working conditions (Loeb et al., 2010). Additionally, some districts require that principals move among schools every few years as a way of distributing human resources and providing principals with varied types of leadership experience (Boese, 1991). Finally, depending on the person and the context, pathways through hierarchies of school and district leadership may be characterized as 'in and out' (moving among schools and district offices) or 'up or out' (direct upward movement through school leadership until the time comes to move to another school or district) (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

Davis & Anderson (2020) find that, within two years of a promotion to the principalship, “most first-time principals (50.1%) have turned over” (p. 187). That is, they have either left the education system or they have been demoted. A demotion is typically categorized by case law analysis as an “adverse employment action” (Mayger & Zirkel, 2014) along with employment categories such as involuntary transfer, suspension, nonrenewal, constructive termination, and termination (p. 219). In several states, a demotion must be characterized by an involuntary transfer and “reduction in all three features—responsibility, prestige, and salary—for the transfer to be considered a demotion” (Zirkel & Gluckman, 1981, p. 91). These definitions are important because they provide guidance about the individual’s agency and access to due process amidst the transfer as well as a reminder that a nontrivial proportion of principal transitions are involuntary. Further, demotion is gaining attention (e.g., Fenwick, 2022) as a kind of turnover that threatens the durability, sustainability, and equity of the school leader labor force, so this understudied process is worth empirical attention.

Consequences of principal demotion

Typically, research that addresses human resources in schools tend to define principal demotions as a “move to another school role, such as assistant principal or teacher” (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018, p. 360). It stands to reason that some districts which aim to maximize school effectiveness and to minimize the cost of replacing administrators, might demote—rather than dismiss—principals who fail to perform satisfactorily. While earlier scholars addressed the importance of distinguishing promotion from demotion in studies of principal career trajectories (e.g., Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Miller, 2013), Grissom and Bartanen (2018) were among the earliest to include principal demotion as a type of transfer or turnover in their quantitative study. Not only did their work treat demotion as a type of transfer across schools, but they also found

that low-performing principals were more likely to exit a school system altogether or to be demoted than were their higher-performing counterparts. Lower school average achievement rates and individual effectiveness ratings were both associated with an increased likelihood of that principal's demotion, which may indicate that school districts both identify and remove poor performers from school leadership. Turnover attributable to demotions constituted nearly one fifth of that study's sample (although that proportion varies in subsequent studies of principal trajectories, e.g., Grissom et al., 2019). There is, therefore, a critical need for more scholarship which understands and follows demoted APs as well as the affected schools—both sending and receiving. Our study takes up and advances these inquiries.

Further research by Grissom and colleagues (2019) examines the ways in which types of principal turnover—including demotion—influence the quality of administrators in a school and, consequently, the quality of the school. Their findings accord with those of the earlier study: demotions are clustered among lower performing principals. Additionally, when even low-performing principals are demoted and replaced by new hires, that new hire may contribute to the overall share of inexperienced leadership in schools. This has the potential to contribute to a cycle of turnover for a school which would benefit from a leader's experience and ensuing organizational stability (Guthery & Bailes, 2022a). A principal turnover due to demotion may, however, have positive outcomes for the sending school (the school from which a principal is demoted). Bartanen et al. (2019) find that, for most principal transitions, a decline in school performance starts a few years before the transition and continues until the second or third year after the transition. However, demotion is unique among transition types: relative to other types of principal transition, achievement falls most steeply in the 1.5 to 4 years prior to a principal's demotion. School achievement is also sensitive to principal transfers: for most transfer types,

school achievement begins to climb 1 to 2 years after the transfer (Bartanen et al., 2019). However, following a demotion, the sending school's achievement begins climbing more quickly and steadily after the principal's demotion.

Extant research addressing demotion has tended to treat the “type of principal turnover—exit, demotion, transfer, or promotion—[as] a proxy for elements of the school contexts. Principal promotions may suggest perceived positive leadership, while demotions may suggest ineffective leadership” (DeMatthews et al., 2022, p. 82-83). If principal transfer signals something about the culture, climate, or norms of the school, then there are likely to be consequences of principal demotion for teachers and students. Prior studies bear out this assertion: there are additional important consequences of principal demotion for teacher retention and turnover. In a school where a demotion takes place, there are precipitous drops in school climate for two years prior to the principal's transition. Principal demotions and their attendant negative climates tend to be highly disruptive to teacher workforces in schools: demotions decrease teacher retention and result in more new-to-school teachers than do any other transfer type (Bartanen et al., 2019). In schools where a principal has been demoted and replaced by a less experienced principal, teachers are three percentage points more likely to turnover relative to teachers who work with a veteran principal (DeMatthews, et al., 2022).

Equity Concerns among Principal Transfers

Prior research has addressed principal demotions largely by focusing on the effectiveness of the individuals and characteristics of their schools in the years before and after the transfer. Prior studies which examine principal demotion have drawn on data from Texas (Davis & Anderson, 2020; DeMatthews et al., 2022), Tennessee (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018; Grissom et al., 2019), and Missouri (Bartanen et al., 2019). Yet, only a few of those studies reported

descriptive statistics that contained individual principal demographics and none of those studies reported statistically significant relationships between principal demographics and demotions. While these findings may suggest that individuals' principal demography does not have a statistical relationship with their assignment to or experience of transfers such as demotions, we assert that historical context is critical. Looking instead to the demography of principal demotions over time may reveal more about how principals' race is associated with the sorting of the school leader labor force.

Conceptual Framework

People of color are likely to encounter a host of obstacles as they seek administrative or other leadership positions in schools (Burkhauser et al., 2012; Smith & Lemasters, 2010) which range from the racialized sorting that results from some principal licensure exams (Grissom et al., 2017) to the systematic lack support for such professional aspirations (Myung et al., 2011). In some states and contexts, these circumstances vary. However, schools are never race-neutral organizations, and the history of sorting school leaders by race is evident, especially in the years surrounding *Brown v. Board of Education*. As Karpinsky (2006) notes, "Even though the lack of racial diversity in today's teaching force has multiple origins...a reexamination of a consequence of *Brown*—the displacement, dismissal, and demotion of thousands of African American educators, and in particular, Black principals in the South—indicates a root cause" (p. 238). As desegregation advanced through the United States and schools consolidated to accommodate integrated groups of students, scores of Black educators were pushed out, demoted, or resigned when their jobs became untenable or when districts consolidated management positions (Hooker, 1970; Moore, 1977).

We employ Ray's (2019) theory of racialized organizations in order to frame our examination of principals' experience of demotion. Racialized organizations are "meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant racial group" (Ray, 2019, p. 36). An underlying assumption of this framework is that all organizations are racialized; there are no race-neutral organizations or processes within organizations. Specifically, racialized organizations do four things: shape the agency and access of racial groups, distribute resources unequally, treat whiteness as a credential, and decouple formal rules (such as commitments to equity or diversity) from organizational processes in racialized ways (Ray, et al., 2023, p. 140). Concurrent to the processes of limiting or enhancing agency, racialized organizations also distribute resources which perpetuate systems of power and privilege. Drawing from Sewell's (1992) definition, resources are defined as "anything used to gain, enhance, or maintain social position...these help to create, perpetuate, and grow racial structures and segregation within organizations" (p. 9). Organizations, Ray argues, connect racialization processes (that is, the processes which imbue racial meaning to individuals, places, and objects) with resources and the allocation of those resources.

Schools enact all four of Ray's characteristics of racialized organizations. The autonomy and agency of racial groups varies and tends to be constrained for marginalized groups. For example, according to the Center for Public Integrity, Black, Latino, and Native American students are disproportionately affected by school policing and referred to law enforcement more often relative to White students (Mitchell, 2021). Schools legitimate the unequal distribution of resources, often along lines of race. Darling-

Hammond summarizes: “policies associated with school funding, resource allocations, and tracking leave minority students with fewer and lower-quality books, curriculum materials, laboratories, and computers; significantly larger class sizes; less qualified and experienced teachers; and less access to high-quality curriculum” (2001, n.p.). Whiteness is often a credential in and of itself in schools: around 80% of teachers nationally are White. White men, in particular, appear to benefit from systems of selection and promotion in school leadership as they move quickly and easily up the ranks relative to equivalently qualified women and people of color (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; White, 2023). Finally, schools often decouple formal commitments to racial justice from the day-to-day practices which instead perpetuate racial hierarchies and disparities or allow Black individuals less leeway than White individuals within organizational processes. For example, “hiring criteria may be applied with more ambiguity in ways that support White candidates over racially minoritized ones” (Liera & Hernandez, 2021).

This conceptual framework, then, prompts us to look at organizational processes like promotion and demotion in order to understand how individuals of different races experience such processes. We expect that the four characteristics of racialized organizations will be evident in the distribution of demotions, and the ways in which resources are distributed to demoted individuals of different races.

Methods and Sample Analysis

For the purposes of this study, we define a demotion as a role reassignment from principal in Texas public schools to assistant principal (AP) in Texas public schools. While we acknowledge that administrative datasets do not capture information about individuals’ motivation, the role change from principal to AP is categorized as a distinct salary step in

Texas's pay scales and the AP position tends to be associated with substantively different pay, autonomy and prestige when compared to the principalship (Maranto et al., 2018).

Data Sources and Variable Definitions

We used an administrative dataset from Texas spanning 1999-2017, inclusive of all administrators (principals and APs). We follow prior research in that we define a demotion as the transfer of an individual who is classified in our dataset as a principal in school j in year t and who is an assistant principal in any school in year $t+1$. We only include instances of an immediately subsequent transfer and do not include principals who took another role and then were reassigned as assistant principals. We first identified all principals promoted to that role who had not been a principal in the two years prior. Of the 10,946 observations, we identified principals who were coded in an immediate subsequent year as an AP, and these we labeled 'demoted APs' because it combines both the change in assignment (demotion) and the new role into which they are assigned (AP). This is a role transfer by reassignment in the Texas administrative data although it is not necessarily a transfer of setting (school or district). We use 'demotion' as a neutral term designating only the lower rank, as it is not necessarily indicative of a punitive measure by district administration. We include in the dataset the principal's individual characteristics as well as characteristics of the school in which they were a principal (the sending school) and the school where they were subsequently an assistant principal (the receiving school).

For probit regression, we termed "non-demoted principals" as anyone who became a principal at least five years prior to the study ending but who was demoted in the entirety of the dataset. We consider a principal as non-demoted as long as that principal remained in that role of principal for five or more years, even if they moved among schools or districts. We used the

five-year benchmark based on previous analysis which suggests that a typical principal only stays in a school for a little over four years in Texas (Guthery & Bailes, 2022b), as well as prior studies of turnover that use five years as a mark of veteran administrator status (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

We also tracked principals across districts in order to investigate whether or not there is a difference in the characteristics of principals being demoted within their district and those who experience demotion out-of-district (Henry & Harbatkin, 2019). We name this move an out-of-district demotion while acknowledging that districts do not demote their own employees into another district and that this likely involves some agency (e.g., job-seeking) on the part of the demoted individual in order to obtain that position in another district.

We then calculated a persistence variable which is a count of how many years an individual was a principal prior to their demotion. Finally, we included observable demographic information for the principals and the schools (including school type and level) to account for moves in and out of public charter and traditional public schools. This dataset does not account for moves in and out of independent schools or to another state. Those principals were dropped from this dataset if they left prior to serving five years in a principalship.

Descriptive Analysis

Over the course of our study, we followed 10,946 principals for at least five years to identify who was demoted from the principalship to an AP (Table 1). In answer to RQ1, we find that there are differences in the characteristics of principals who are most likely to experience demotion (full results in Appendix A). We find the overall probability of experiencing demotion varies along several individual and school-level characteristics. First, the school context appears to be associated with the likelihood of demotion. Principals who are never demoted are more

likely to work in schools that are affluent: the average school for a principal who is never demoted has 21.3% fewer students eligible for free- and reduced-price lunch (FRL) than in the average school led by a demoted AP. Additionally, a principal who is never demoted is paid, on average, \$15,854.50 more than the average demoted AP. The demotion, then, is typically accompanied by fewer personal financial resources in terms of salary for the demoted person and fewer financial resources among the students in the receiving school.

In order to follow principals from the first year they accede to the principalship to the last year they appear in the data and to assess the likelihood of demotion over time, we used a survival analysis to identify when, if ever, a principal was likely to be demoted. We find that 1,713 of the promotions ended in demotion over the 18 years available in our dataset. About a third (32%) of all demotions happen in the first year following that principal's promotion to the position.

We identified patterns of both gendered and racialized differences in the probability that a principal would experience demotion over time. We examined the probability that a male versus female principal would be demoted and found that men were slightly more likely to be demoted with small but stable effects evident over time (Figure 1). While men comprise 38.6% of the all individuals initially promoted to the principalship, 51.2% of all demoted APs are men. Men were also more likely than women to experience an out-of-district demotion. Among demoted women, 75.8% experienced an in-district demotion whereas only 61% of demoted men experienced an in-district demotion. Men are therefore overrepresented in all types of demotions relative to their proportion of all principalships.

Table 1. *Demographic descriptives of principals* (insert here)

Characteristics of sending and receiving schools

We examined characteristics of the sending and receiving schools in our dataset; that is, the schools from which principals are demoted and in which they become APs. Characteristics of interest included whether the transfer to an assistant principalship was in-district or out-of-district, the schools' levels (elementary, middle, or high), and the schools' student demographic composition. We find that more than two-thirds of demotions happen within a district while the remaining proportion is comprised by out-of-district demotions.

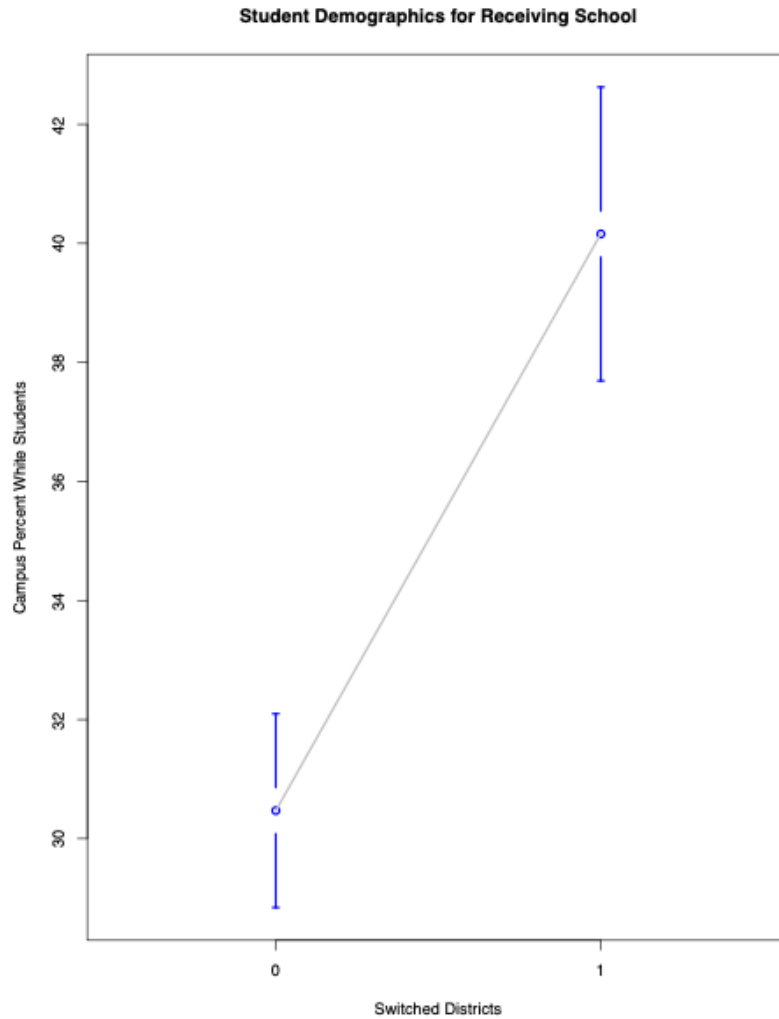
Elementary schools constituted most of the sending schools (n=693, 42.8%) while secondary (high) schools are the largest receivers of demoted APs (n=723, 45.2%). When principals are demoted from elementary schools, they most often go to other elementary schools. That pattern holds for high schools—demoted high school principals most often go to another high school—but demoted middle school principals most frequently go to high schools. Given the importance of high school-level leadership for potential promotion to district leadership positions (e.g., Maranto et al., 2018), moves among school level are worth mapping as possible advantageous career opportunities.

Among all schools in the dataset, the average student body composition is 40.8% White. However, schools which received a demoted AP were comprised of a slightly Whiter student population (53.0%). In schools that did not experience principal demotion, 26.2% of the students qualify for free- or reduced-price lunch (FRL). Demoted Black APs went to the schools where an average of about two-thirds (63%) of the student body qualifies for FRL. In comparison, demoted White APs went to schools with an average of 47% of students were FRL-eligible.

Black APs, then, are demoted to schools that may have increased needs but fewer resources with which to meet those needs.

We also found that there were significant differences in school characteristics if the demotion occurred in-district or out-of-district. Typically, principals who experienced an out-of-district demotion moved to schools with a higher percentage of White students. As Figure 1 illustrates, receiving schools within the same district are comprised of, on average, 30.47% White students. Out-of-district schools that received a demoted AP were comprised of more White students (40.16%). Figure 1 illustrates the differences between the sending and receiving schools in terms of the racial composition of the school's student body.

Figure 1. *Percentage of white students in the receiving schools by in and out-of-district transfer*



Methodology

We identified observable patterns of demotion among principal and school characteristics and analyzed the overall probability of demotion, as well as the probability that a demoted AP transferred among districts. We first used probit regression to examine whether either of these outcomes were differentially associated with race and gender. The benefit of using probit for binary outcomes is that the interpretation of the models is very straightforward: a one-unit change of x results in a percentage change in the probability of y occurring (Cappellari &

Jenkins, 2003). For example, in this study, a one-unit change in principal experience is associated with a specific percent change in the probability of demotion. Finally, we identified individual and school-level characteristics associated with a principal's out-of-district demotion.

We used the following probit equation to determine the overall probability of demotion:

$$M1: P(Y_i = 1|x_i) = \alpha_i + \beta_1(Principal\ Race_{is}) + \delta\beta_{ist} + \varepsilon_{ist}$$

The outcome variable of interest in the first model (M1), Y_i is the probability that a principal will be demoted at any point over the full time period represented in the dataset. We tested the possible association of principal race for individual i , in school s , in year t , with two possible binary outcomes: demotion or non-demotion. $\alpha_i(i = 1 \dots n)$ is the intercept for each principal, the reference group is White male principals in urban schools. $\delta\beta_{ist}$ includes a host of additional time-variant (e.g., pay, principal years of experience) and time-invariant characteristics (e.g., gender, urbanicity, school level, proportion FRL, etc.). Model 2 (M2) uses the same base equation and adds receiving school characteristics but the outcome variable is in-district demotion. Model 3 (M3) also include school characteristics of the receiving schools and the outcome variable of interest is out-of-district demotion.

We also address the question of whether or not the timing of demotion is experienced differentially depending on the race and gender of the principals. To answer this question, we employed Kaplan Meier survival analysis. This method of survival analysis allows for the risk in every time period to be calculated for every year in the dataset, as well as the cumulative year-over-year effect (Allison, 2014). Survival analysis has the added benefit of using partial maximum likelihood to diminish the influence of right censored data on the probability that the last year a principal appears in the data is not calculated as survival.

Main Findings

Table 2 illustrates the main results from the three models with White male principals in traditional and urban public schools as the reference group. M1 assesses the overall probability that a principal experiences a demotion. M2 calculates the probability that a principal is demoted in-district to a school level that is equal to or lower to the school they lead in year t . M3 calculates the probability that a principal will experience an out-of-district demotion.

Table 2.

Probit Model Results

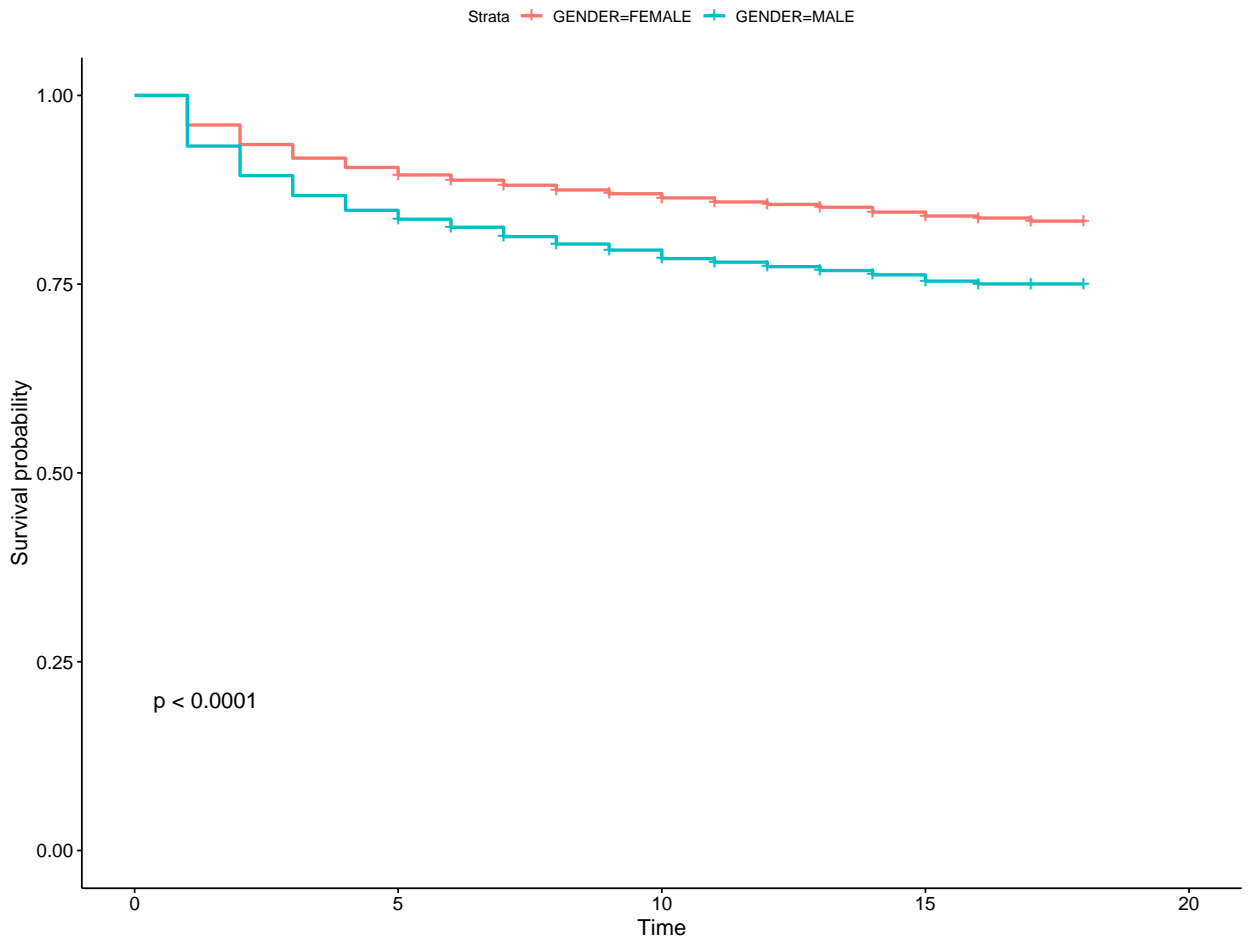
The overall probability of demotion is small, only 2.26% for a White male in an urban traditional public school. However, the percentage chance that demotion takes place for a White woman in a traditional public school in an urban setting is 1.99%. Black male principals in an urban school are much more likely to experience all types of demotion; they are more likely to experience both in-district and out-of-district demotions. Similarly, but to a lesser degree, Hispanic male principals are more likely than their White male counterparts to experience all types of demotions.

We also find that context matters: for every percentage increase in FRL-eligibility in a school, the principal's chance of demotion increases by .01%. That is, as student financial vulnerability increases, so does the principal's vulnerability in their administrative role. A principal working in a school that has a greater percentage of White students than students of color is less likely to ever experience demotion. Specifically, for every percentage point increase in the proportion of White students in a school, the chance that the school's principal will be demoted declines by 0.002%. Working as a principal in a charter school versus an urban public school decreases the chances of demotion overall, but increases the probability that a principal

will experience an out-of-district demotion. Finally, we find that experience matters: for every additional year of experience in the principal role, the probability of an individual experiencing a demotion decreases by 0.34%. Principals in rural schools are much less likely to experience demotion overall, and those who do experience demotion are more likely to switch districts than their urban counterparts. Finally, we found that female principals of color are less likely than any male counterpart to experience an out-of-district demotion.

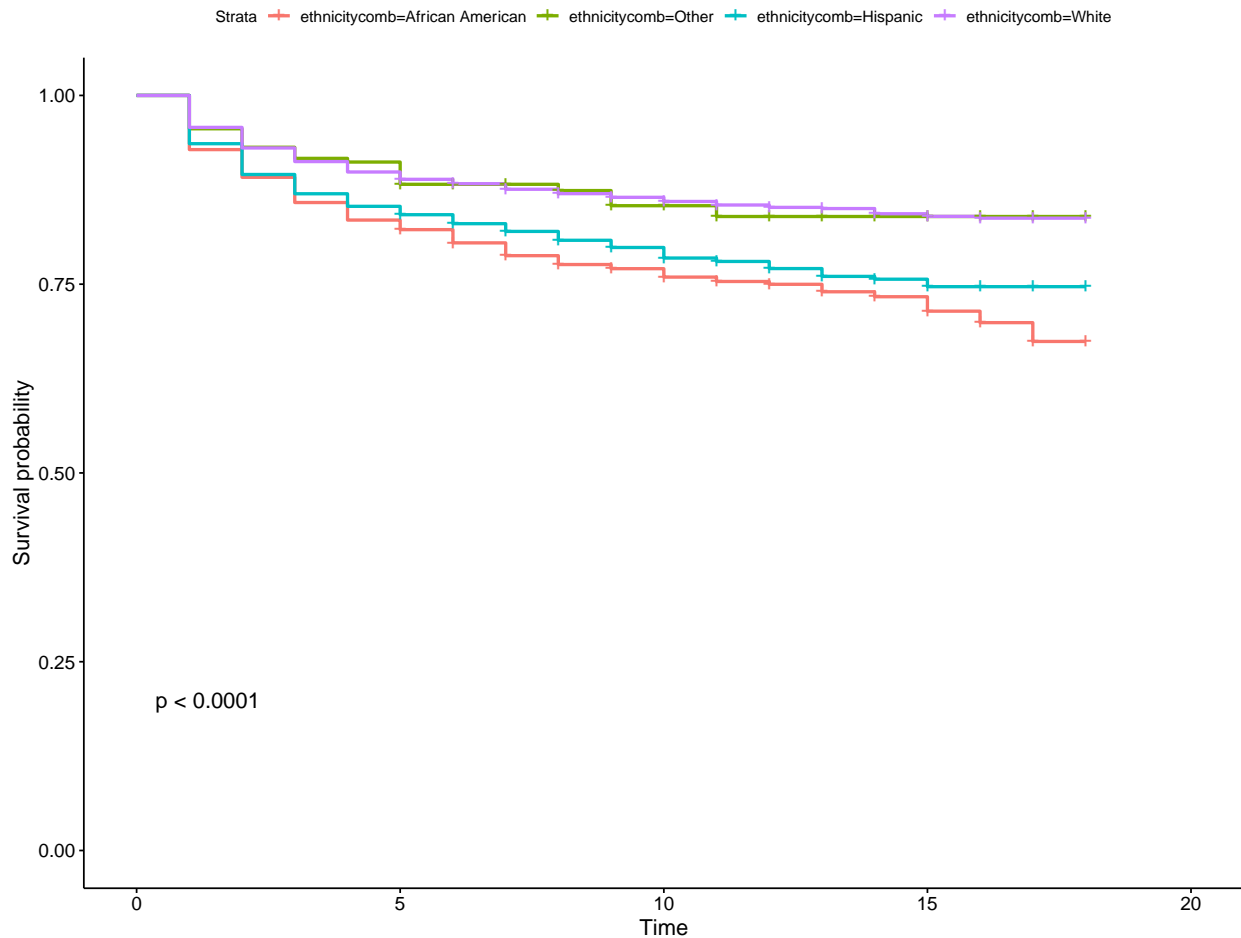
In answer to research question 3, we examined whether or not race and gender differentially affected the timeline on which people were demoted. Using Kaplan Meier survival analysis, we find that there are statistically significant differences in the timing of demotion (Full Model Results in Appendix B). We find that men experience demotion more frequently and more immediately into their principalships. And, over time, women are less likely in every time period to be demoted than their male counterparts (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Probability over time of demotion by gender*



Finally, we examined the probability that there are structural racial differences in the rate of demotion for principals. We found that Black principals were most likely to be initially demoted, and the most likely to be demoted over time (Figure 3). Black principals are more likely to be demoted more quickly (in the first year after initial promotion) than are Hispanic/Latino or White principals. The survival analysis illustrates how small differences over time in demotion by race resulted in statistically significant systemic differences.

Figure 3. *Probability over time of demotion by race*



Limitations

There are numerous challenges associated with identifying principal transfers as demotions within administrative datasets. By using Texas data, the generalizability may be limited since legal definitions vary and so principals are vulnerable to an array of involuntary transfer types at the will of the employing district. Moreover, any administrator's recourse to contest involuntary transfers are largely contingent on their educator tenure status or access to collective bargaining protections, which also vary nationally (Davis, 1997). Finally, we resist assumptions about why individuals experience out-of-district demotions; there are certainly endless possible scenarios (some of which are described below) which is why we adhere to the

research question about characteristics of sending and receiving schools associated with an in-district or out-of-district demotion.

In prior studies, definitions of demotion were marked by binary variables and constructed based on individuals' status changes from year to year in administrative datasets (e.g., "The binary variable takes a value of 1 if a principal in school j in year t is not the principal in school j in year $t+1$, and zero otherwise" [Grissom & Bartanen, 2018, p. 362]). However, while we add school level context to the equation by including sending and receiving school controls, we are not able to ascertain motivation. For example, a current principal may want to move to a better-resourced district and be willing to take what they assume to be a temporary and instrumental position change to an assistant principalship in order to resume climbing a more lucrative and prestigious ladder. This move is likely a reduction in authority and perhaps in compensation, but it may be voluntary and ultimately a beneficial career move. Similarly, a district may identify an ineffective principal and put them in another principalship in a highly effective school, perhaps masking or neutralizing the negative influence of the ineffective principal. While this may be a lateral move for the principal, it is not a signal of effectiveness.

As we considered numerous anecdotal examples and the nature of the administrative data we employ for this study, we determined that without data indicating whether a transfer was voluntary or involuntary, we are at best making assumptions about whether a transfer is ultimately a downward career movement for a given individual. Even so, the immediate change in rank from principal to AP is accompanied by a less prestigious title and lower pay. Thus, our definition of a demotion offers a way to slice through some of complexity of the role transfer for the purpose of the analyses presented here. That very complexity warrants further investigation in order to unearth individual motivations, circumstances, opportunities, and choice sets.

Discussion

Our study contributes to the emerging conversation about the nature and influence of principal demotions in schools, especially on school leaders who experience those demotions. We turn now to a discussion of our findings and implications for research, practice, and policy as well as a review of our results and discussion with an eye toward our conceptual framework.

Implications for Practice

Given prior research on different experiences of school-based promotions by gender (e.g., Kim & Brunner, 2009), it is perhaps surprising that there is a larger share of demoted men than women in our dataset. When considering men's pathways to the principalship, prior research suggests that they have a more linear and direct route into school leadership than do women, who often follow an *in or out* pathway that may include central office administration on route to the principalship (Kim & Brunner, 2009, p. 76). However, prior results from Texas (Bailes & Guthery, 2020) suggest that men enter the assistant principalship with less average instructional experience than women (13.93 years for men and 15.17 years for women) and are promoted on average to principalships more rapidly than women (4.94 years for men and 5.62 years for women). Districts may, in response, choose to inventory how effectively individuals lead schools relative to their years of experience. It may be that individuals with fewer years of instructional experience lack a particular skillset or sufficient development of those skills which could be a focus of professional development and thereby equip novice leaders to remain in the principalship.

Additionally, while principals of color may have positive influences on students of color in their buildings (Grissom, et al., 2017), they are disproportionately likely to work in urban schools where poverty is a common experience among students (Fairchild et al., 2012). A

strategy to ameliorating these disparities might be for a superintendent to audit both the rates of principal promotion and demotion and their causes. If subjective evaluations, for example, result in principal demotions because of implicit biases among the evaluators (e.g., Grissom et al., 2018), there may be opportunities to pursue more equitable evaluations in service of a more diverse administrator workforce.

Implications for Future Research

Next, it is critical to understand whether demotions are primarily associated with skill deficits or whether they are attributable to a lack of support, opportunity, and sustainability. If the latter, principals may be using demotion as a strategic choice to improve working conditions as well as future career options and earnings. The analysis of sending and receiving schools indicates that individuals who experience an out-of-district demotion do so for a demotion in title, but may be leaving for more desirable working conditions. Thus out-of-district demotions may be especially concerning for districts where leaders find their best future career options are elsewhere. Principals who leave their school and district to become an assistant principal in another district may be exercising more agency than those demoted within the district and may do so strategically for future benefits (Tran & Buckman, 2016). As indicated above, this warrants further investigation.

Implications for Policy

The findings with regard to race and demotion are likewise unsurprising. Relative to their proportional representation among all principals, we find Hispanic and African American principals are demoted at much higher rates than their White counterparts. Specifically, African Americans represent 12.45% of Texas principals yet accounted for 16.4% of principal demotions and Hispanic individuals represent 23.99% of Texas principals yet account for 27.0% of

principal demotions. White principals, on the other hand, comprise 61.13% of Texas principals and just 54.9% of principal demotions. Moreover, African American and Hispanic principals are more likely than their White colleagues to be demoted overall and more likely to experience those demotions early in their tenure as principal. Over the course of the 18 years represented by the dataset, African American principals in particular experienced 16% more demotions than White principals. Prior findings suggest that principals of color are less likely to be promoted from assistant principalships to principalships and that those promotions, if awarded, are likely to take longer than for White principals (Guthery & Bailes, 2022a). Hooker (1970) summarizes this bind well: “Nonhiring is a form of displacement as serious as dismissal and demotion” (p. 2). Taken together, these findings suggest that principals of color have both a very narrow window of time to prove themselves and may be held to different standards of effectiveness than are other principals.

Going forward, these and other questions of principal movement—the characteristics of the movers, the types of moves, and the characteristics of the sending and receiving schools—are relevant to researchers, practitioners, and policymakers who aim to recruit, retain, and promote effective school leaders.

Racialized Organizational Processes

Returning to our conceptual framework, we find that at least three of Ray’s four characteristics of racialized organizations are present in the patterns we identify within principal demotions in Texas over 17 years. Importantly, because we do not examine organizational practices such as mission and vision statements or individual schools’ and districts’ commitments to diverse leadership, we cannot say with certainty how the process of demotion is decoupled from formal organizational rules. We do find significant evidence that different racial

groups experience the demotion process differently and with different outcomes: Black and Hispanic principals are more likely than White principals to be demoted more quickly, more likely to be demoted over time, and more likely to be demoted within their district (which is an indicator that this demotion is not voluntary and accompanied by lower salaries), and more likely to be demoted into schools with higher proportions of minoritized or low-income students. All of these point to reduced agency on the part of some principals of color: in our analyses, they evince less control over their own careers and those patterns suggest Black and Hispanic principals, in particular, are asked to lead in challenging contexts and given very little time to demonstrate the effects of their leadership before they are demoted. On the other hand, White principals are less likely to be demoted and, when they experience an out-of-district demotion, they typically receive an increase in salary and are assigned to schools where the majority of the student body is White.

The agency, then, of White principals is less constrained in the demotion process than for principals of color: they appear to enact more agency over their career pathways because any placement in another district requires some action on the part of the candidate. Then, White principals experience material benefits of the demotion: increased salary and more desirable working conditions. It may be that what appears in our results as an out-of-district demotion represents exactly the kind of constrained agency proposed in the theory of racialized organizations. Black principals are more likely to experience an out-of-district demotion, which may indicate that they perceive more desirable career futures and working conditions to be available to them outside of their current organization. These transfers are also typically associated with decreased income and prestige, which may further constrain the agency and resource access available to Black school leaders.

Finally, the Whiter the student body in a school, the less likely a principal is ever to be demoted. Just being a leader of more White students, it seems, is sometimes sufficient insulation from demotion, which indicates that Whiteness is a sufficient credential for leadership and stability, rather than a particular set of skills that drive school improvement or equity.

Diversity, construed broadly but especially racial diversity, is beneficial for all students and has particular benefits for the learning, wellness, and belonging of students of color. It stands to reason, then, that researchers can partner with schools in enhancing diverse leadership by examining the mechanisms that tend to sort leaders of color out of the pipeline or reduce their influence in leadership positions over time. Our paper highlights the ways in which demotion within a racialized organization may in fact increase the agency of some groups of school leaders while constraining the agency of others.

References

- Bailes, L. P., & Guthery, S. (2020). Held down and held back: Systematically delayed principal promotions by race and gender. *AERA Open*, 6(2), 2332858420929298.
- Allison, P. D. (2014). Event history and survival analysis: Regression for longitudinal event data (Vol. 46). SAGE publications Inc. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452270029>
- Bartanen, B., Grissom, J.A. and Rogers, L.K. (2019), "The impacts of principal turnover", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 41 No. 3, pp. 350-374.
- Bartanen, B., Rogers, L. K., & Woo, D. S. (2021). Assistant principal mobility and its relationship with principal turnover. *Educational Researcher*, 50(6), 368-380.
- Blanchard, A., Chung, Y., Grissom, J. A., & Bartanen, B. (2019). Do all students have access to great principals. *TN Education Research Alliance*.
- Boese, B.D. (1991), "Planning how to transfer principals: a Manitoba experience", *Education Canada*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 16-21.
- Burkhauser, S., Gates, S. M., Hamilton, L. S., & Ikemoto, G. S. (2012). First-Year principals in urban school districts: How actions and working conditions relate to outcomes [Technical Report]. Rand Corporation. https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/technical_reports/2012/RAND_TR1191.pdf
- Cappellari, L., & Jenkins, S. P. (2003). Multivariate probit regression using simulated maximum likelihood. *The STATA journal*, 3(3), 278-294.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1536867X0300300305>
- Davis, B., & Anderson, E. (2020). Visualizing differential principal turnover. *Journal of Educational Administration*.
- Davis, S. H. (1997). The principal's paradox: Remaining secure in a precarious position. *NASSP Bulletin*, 81(592), 73-80.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2001). Inequality in teaching and schooling: How opportunity is rationed to students of color in America. *BD Smedley, AY Stith, L. Colburn, C. & H. Evans (Eds.), The right thing to do—The smart thing to do*, 208-233.
- DeMatthews, D. E., Knight, D. S., & Shin, J. (2022). The Principal-Teacher Churn: Understanding the Relationship Between Leadership Turnover and Teacher Attrition. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 58(1), 76-109.
- Fairchild et al., 2012—principals of color disproportionately likely to work in urban schools where poverty is a common experience among students
- Farley-Ripple, E. N., Raffel, J. A., & Welch, J. C. (2012). Administrator career paths and decision processes. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50(6), 788-816.
- Fenwick, L. T. (2022). *Jim Crow's Pink Slip: The Untold Story of Black Principal and Teacher Leadership*. Harvard Education Press.
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research. New York: The Wallace Foundation.
- Grissom, J. A., & Bartanen, B. (2018). Principal effectiveness and principal turnover. *Education Finance and Policy*, 14(3), 355-382.
- Grissom, J. A., Bartanen, B., & Mitani, H. (2019). Principal sorting and the distribution of principal quality. *AERA Open*, 5(2), 2332858419850094.
- Grissom, J. A., Blissett, R. S., & Mitani, H. (2018). Evaluating school principals: Supervisor ratings of principal practice and principal job performance. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 40(3), 446-472.

- Grissom, J. A., Mitani, H., & Blissett, R. S. (2017). Principal licensure exams and future job performance: Evidence from the School Leaders Licensure Assessment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 39(2), 248-280.
- Grissom, J. A., Rodriguez, L. A., & Kern, E. C. (2017). Teacher and principal diversity and the representation of students of color in gifted programs: Evidence from national data. *The Elementary School Journal*, 117(3), 396-422.
- Guthery, S., & Bailes, L. P. (2022b). Patterns of teacher attrition by preparation pathway and initial school type. *Educational Policy*, 36(2), 223-246.
- Guthery, S., & Bailes, L. P. (2022a). Building experience and retention: the influence of principal tenure on teacher retention rates. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 60(4), 439-455.
- Henry, G. T., & Harbatkin, E. (2019). Turnover at the top: Estimating the effects of principal turnover on student, teacher, and school outcomes. *Education Working Paper*, (19-95).
- Hooker, R. W. (1970). Displacement of black teachers in the eleven southern states. Special Report.
- Karpinski, C. F. (2006). Bearing the burden of desegregation: Black principals and Brown. *Urban Education*, 41(3), 237-276.
- Kim, Y. L., & Cryss Brunner, C. (2009). School administrators' career mobility to the superintendency: Gender differences in career development. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(1), 75-107.
- Liera, R., & Hernandez, T. E. (2021). Color-evasive racism in the final stage of faculty searches: Examining search committee hiring practices that jeopardize racial equity policy. *The Review of Higher Education*, 45(2), 181-209.
- Loeb, S., Kalogrides, D. and Horng, E.L. (2010), "Principal preferences and the uneven distribution of principals across schools", *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, Vol. 32 No. 2, pp. 205-229.
- Maranto, R., Carroll, K., Cheng, A., & Teodoro, M. P. (2018). Boys will be superintendents: School leadership as a gendered profession. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 100(2), 12-15.
- Mayger, L. K., & Zirkel, P. A. (2014). Principals' Challenges to Adverse Employment Actions: An Empirical Analysis of the Case Law. *NASSP Bulletin*, 98(3), 219-236.
- Miller, Ashley. 2013. Principal turnover and student achievement. *Economics of Education Review* 36: 60–72.
- Mitchell, C. (2021, September 8). *What you need to know about school policing*. The Center for Public Integrity. <https://publicintegrity.org/education/criminalizing-kids/what-you-need-to-know-about-school-policing/>
- Moore Jr, A. B. (1977). The disturbing revelation of the predicament of Black principals in southern school districts. *Urban Education*, 12(2), 213-216.
- Myung, J., Loeb, S., & Horng, E. (2011). Tapping the principal pipeline: Identifying talent for future school leadership in the absence of formal succession management programs. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 47(5), 695–727. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161x11406112>
- Papa, F. Jr (2007), "Why do principals change schools? A multivariate analysis of principal retention", *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 267-290.
- Sewell Jr, W. H. (1992). A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation. *American journal of sociology*, 98(1), 1-29.

- Smith, M., & Lemasters, L. (2010). What happened to all the Black principals after Brown. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, 5(4), 1–9.
- Ray, V. (2019). A theory of racialized organizations. *American Sociological Review*, 84(1), 26-53.
- Texas Education Agency. (2019). Employed principal demographics, 2014-2018. <https://tea.texas.gov/sites/default/files/Employed%20Principal%20Demographics%202014-2018.pdf>
- Tran, H., & Buckman, D. G. (2017). The impact of principal movement and school achievement on principal salaries. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 16(1), 106-129.
- White, R. S. (2023). Ceilings Made of Glass and Leaving En Masse? Examining Superintendent Gender Gaps and Turnover Over Time Across the United States. *Educational Researcher*, 0013189X231163139.
- Zirkel, P. A., & Gluckman, I. B. (1981). A legal brief: Demotion of public school principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 65(441), 91-93.

Table 1.

Table 1. Demotion Descriptives						
	Principal		Principal Demoted			
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>		%	
<i>Race</i>						
White	6195	67.1	941		13.19	
Black	974	10.55	281		22.39	
Hispanic	1888	20.45	462		19.66	
All Other	176	1.91	28		13.73	
<i>Gender</i>						
Men	3523	38.16	837		51.17	
Women	5710	61.84	836		48.83	
Years as Princ	8.79	3.45	3.34		2.82	
			<u>Sending School</u>		<u>Receiving School</u>	
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Base Pay	87365.9	16723.4	71511.5	14722.6	69481.7	14677.76
<i>Demographic</i>						
% FRL	26.23	32.74	47.49	32.72	42.25	30.91
% White	35.38	28.38	31.22	29.29	33.54	28.42
Total Students	720.17	594.04	646.61	576.57	1072.16	849.91
<i>Switch Districts</i>						
Switched					1172	68.42
Stayed					541	31.58
<i>Move Level</i>						
Same or Down					1461	87.85
Higher					202	12.15

Table 2.*Probit Model Results*

Model Results	M1 Overall Probability	M2 In-District Probability	M3 Out-of-District Probability
Female	-0.27*** (-0.34, -0.19)	-0.21*** (-0.30, -0.13)	-0.02 (-0.22, 0.19)
Black	0.32*** (0.20, 0.45)	0.29*** (0.16, 0.43)	0.52*** (0.19, 0.85)
All Other	0.16 (-0.13, 0.45)	0.10 (-0.22, 0.41)	0.22 (-0.65, 1.09)
Hispanic	0.23*** (0.12, 0.34)	0.22*** (0.11, 0.34)	0.35** (0.07, 0.63)
Principal % White Students	-0.002 (-0.003, 0.0003)	-0.002** (-0.004, - 0.0002)	-0.002 (-0.01, 0.004)
Principal Campus Student (100s)	0.004 (-0.004, 0.01)	0.01 (-0.003, 0.01)	-0.03*** (-0.05, -0.02)
Principal Campus FRL%	0.01*** (0.004, 0.01)	0.01*** (0.004, 0.01)	-0.0001 (-0.01, 0.005)
Principal Base Pay (1000s)	-0.02*** (-0.02, -0.01)	-0.02*** (-0.02, -0.01)	-0.004 (-0.01, 0.004)
Charters	-0.40*** (-0.64, -0.17)	-0.82*** (-1.12, -0.52)	1.37*** (0.76, 1.97)