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States' licensure requirements typically mean that new school principals and assistant principals must come from the pool of educators holding an administrative license. Yet if many license-holders are uninterested in leadership positions, even districts with large numbers of licensed educators may face a constrained supply of leaders. Using statewide administrative and survey data from Tennessee, we take a mixed-methods approach to characterize educators who hold administrative licenses but are not currently in school leadership roles, distinguishing an "available" pool of educators who are pursuing or intend to pursue such roles from an "unavailable" pool who are not. We find that 53% of the pool of seemingly eligible leadership candidates is, in fact, unavailable. The unavailable pool is older and more experienced than the available pool, and many unavailable license-holders report having once aspired to school leadership before losing interest. Analysis of open-ended survey responses shows that perceived stress and unrealistic expectations of the role, incompatibility with family obligations, insufficient compensation, and a scarcity of open positions are the most common reasons license-holders give for opting out. These findings suggest that the pool of leadership candidates available to districts may be considerably smaller than license-holder counts imply, and that improving leaders' pay and working conditions may be necessary to expand the effective supply of school leaders.

A persistent challenge for school districts is filling school leadership vacancies with qualified leaders—both principals and assistant principals (APs). According to National Teacher and Principal Survey data, approximately 11% of public school principals exited the profession in 2021, a proportion that grew almost two percentage points from four years earlier (Taie et al., 2023). Survey evidence suggests that principal attrition may continue to climb in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with more challenging working conditions potentially shortening principals' timelines for how long they plan to remain (National Association of Secondary

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School Principals, 2021; Woo & Steiner, 2022; Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). Meeting demand for new APs may be even more strenuous. The number of AP positions—already much higher than the number of principal positions—is on a steady upward climb (Goldring et al., 2021). At the same time, districts must replace both the 10% of APs who leave each year and the roughly 10% who progress into principal positions (Bartanen et al., 2021).

This high demand means that school districts need access to a ready supply of new school leaders to take on these essential roles. For each vacancy, supply must come from the pool of educators holding administrative licenses. Every state has a process for issuing licenses that designate which educators are eligible to serve in formal school leadership roles. State requirements for obtaining a license, which commonly includes completion of an approved leadership preparation program and passage of a licensure examination, constrain supply to ensure leaders meet minimum training or competency standards.

Given the strong propensity for new leaders to be hired from within the school district (e.g., Pendola & Fuller, 2021), district officials may well see the number of administrative licenses held by the district’s educators as a good proxy for the local leadership labor pool. This study proceeds, however, from the observation that the actual labor pool may be substantially smaller because not all license-holders are open to a career in school leadership (Winter et al., 2002). The field knows little about these unavailable licensees. We aim to characterize this group and their motivations to stay out of roles for which they have obtained necessary qualifications.

We ground our study in research on employee job search. We adapt a model from Manroop and Richardson (2016) to emphasize that employees learn about potential job roles and the processes for obtaining them as they engage in career development and job search processes. For prospective school leaders, learning from experiences in their preparation programs and in

schools as their careers unfold likely informs their desire to pursue a career in school leadership. Differences in this learning may produce differences in the characteristics not just in who obtains a license but—more germane to our analysis—in who seeks a leadership position even after obtaining a license to do so.

We use statewide administrative and survey data from Tennessee to characterize the pool of educators licensed to be school leaders who do not occupy school administration positions and learn more about their intentions to fill those positions. Using survey responses regarding these licensed educators' career plans, we differentiate an *available pool* of license-holders who may occupy school leadership positions in the future and an *unavailable pool* of those who are not seeking such positions. We document the characteristics of educators falling into the two groups. We further inductively code and analyze open-ended survey responses to understand those career plans—especially why some licensed educators make themselves unavailable. We also track the labor market outcomes of the available and unavailable pools.

We answer three research questions. First, what are the characteristics of Tennessee educators with administrative licenses? Second, what are the characteristics of administrative license-holders who are and are not looking for an administrative position? Third, how do Tennessee educators with administrative licenses describe their career plans, and to what extent do those plans predict future administrative job placement? Answers to these questions can provide district and state decisionmakers with a better understanding of their actual leadership labor pools. They can also provide insights into factors limiting the size of those pools, identifying potential opportunities for policy interventions to ensure that a more robust supply of leaders is available to fill these important roles.

Why Do Educators Pursue Administrative Licenses?

All states require prospective school administrators to complete licensure requirements to be eligible to occupy a school leadership role. Typically, the main requirement is completion of a state-approved school leadership preparation program (SLPP), though there may be others such as an experience minimum or passage of a licensure examination (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015). Presumably, these requirements exist to ensure that those eligible to move into school leadership roles have met some baseline for leadership skill or expertise, though research has raised questions about whether that goal is met, given, for example, concerns about SLPP quality and the usefulness of licensure tests (e.g., Grissom et al., 2017; Hess & Kelly, 2007).

Whether or not these requirements are sufficient for ensuring minimum competency, meeting them requires investments of educators' time and financial resources. Obviously, many educators make these investments primarily to make a move into leadership possible. Yet critics charge that some educators make the investment not because they want to pursue school leadership but because completing an SLPP guarantees a pay increase on the typical district's salary schedule (e.g., Levine, 2005). SLPPs, they argue, are good candidates for Master's programs that can secure this increase because they lack rigor (Hess & Kelly, 2007). Indeed, leadership placement rates for some SLPPs are low (Grissom, Mitani, & Woo, 2019), and one study—albeit from a small sample in a single district—suggests that some administrative license-holders do not want to advance into school administration (Winter et al., 2002), supporting the idea that some educators pursue eligibility to become a leader without intent to do so.

Acknowledging that some educators may pursue school leadership licensure to secure a salary increase while continuing to serve in non-leadership roles, our conceptual focus is on educators who begin the process of fulfilling licensure requirements to create the possibility of

moving into school leadership. Pursuing or even obtaining a license with intent to become a leader does not mean they will secure such a position, or even that they will try. What distinguishes this group is their initial aspirations.

For understanding the career paths of this group with initial aspirations, we adapt a framework for conceptualizing job searches set forth by Manroop and Richardson (2016) and used to study school leadership job search strategies by Gordon et al. (2025). Our adapted framework appears in Figure 1.

At the heart of the model is the educator's career path. Like other frameworks (e.g., Riehl & Byrd, 1997), we describe this path as beginning with career aspirations—in this case, aspiring to school leadership—followed by engaging in necessary training and fulfilling licensure requirements. After completing requirements, the educator searches for employment in the chosen career (leadership), at which stage they may be rejected for or be offered positions. Lastly, they obtain their desired employment outcome. Importantly, however, this process is not deterministic; educators may exit, temporarily or permanently, at any point.

Three other forces represented in Figure 1 can inform progression along the career path, exit from the path, and reengagement: (1) learning, (2) individual and relational antecedents, and (3) labor market factors and social context. We describe each in more detail.

Learning

Learning is central in Manroop and Richardson's (2016) conceptualization of employee job search. Given their focus on how job-seekers search for jobs, they emphasize learning about job search processes and consider how that learning—gained via experience or other means—may change search behaviors. We adapt this basic idea that prospective school leaders' learning

over time may affect their job-seeking behavior and, ultimately, their career path. Yet we distinguish between two types of learning, which we label *job learning* and *search learning*.

Job learning refers to how a potential school leader forms perspectives and understanding of what the job of being a school leader entails or demands. This learning can occur all along the administrative career path. For instance, during preservice education, prospective school leaders learn about the knowledge and skill requirements of school leadership (Brody et al., 2010; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; Hess & Kelly, 2007). Clinical experiences, during which trainees shadow current leaders and take on school leadership tasks as part of their preparation, may especially shape prospective leaders' beliefs about the job (Browne-Ferrigno, 2003). Less formally, educators regularly observe and interact with the leaders in their own schools, which may also change how they think about leadership roles. For example, an educator may witness the time demands placed on their own principal and decide the job is not for them. Alternatively, they may work with an excellent school leader who inspires them to emulate their career path.

Search learning refers to how potential leaders learn the formal and informal steps necessary to get a school leadership job. This idea is similar to Manroop and Richardson's (2016) conception of search learning. In our framework, search learning can occur anywhere along the career path. Educators likely learn about search through formal means, such as leadership pipeline programs (Gates et al., 2020; Turnbull et al., 2016), and informal means, such as communication with others who have gone through the job search process. New learning about search processes may make future searches more or less likely. For example, educators may learn that processes are more taxing than they expected, that they are more competitive than they thought, or that other candidates seem to have an "inside track" for leadership jobs, each of which may make future search engagement less appealing.

Antecedents: Individual and Relational Factors

Both moves along the leadership career path and sources of learning are shaped by individual and relational factors. *Individual factors* refer to background characteristics, motivations, and experiences, all of which inform both initial and ongoing decisions to pursue (or not) a leadership career as well as what might be learned about the school leadership roles or the search processes that choose leaders for those roles (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Manroop & Richardson, 2016). For example, educators of color are more likely to work in schools serving higher proportions of students of color and students from low-income households (Xu et al., 2024). Experiences in such schools may inspire those educators to become leaders who can improve the educational experiences for their students (Gordon et al., 2025). At the same time, educators of color may have different learning about leadership hiring processes than their white colleagues if, as some research has found, they are more likely to encounter discrimination (Weiner et al., 2022). As another example, a teacher selected to be an instructional coach in their school may gain opportunities to see themselves in school leadership but also come to understand the challenges of school leadership differently as they work more closely with the school's leadership team.

Relational factors refer to ways that a potential leader's relationships shape career paths and learning. Relationships can be pivotal to educators' initial leadership aspiration formation, as many sitting leaders report being encouraged to go into school leadership by supervisors or mentors (Myung et al., 2011). This informal encouragement may continue to be influential as potential leaders complete training and engage in the leadership job search. Similarly, ongoing relationships with current principals or district leaders can give potential leaders insights about

coming vacancies and how to make themselves competitive for those vacancies (Gordon et al., 2025).

Labor Market and Social Context

Educators' progression along the leadership career path and the learning associated with it take place against the backdrop of a (mostly local) labor market and a broader social context. *Labor market factors* refer to the structural and organizational characteristics of the job search, including the availability of leadership jobs, the number of jobseekers, how the role is compensated, and associated job market dynamics (Manroop & Richardson, 2016). These factors shape the opportunities available to jobseekers and competition for those roles. For example, vacancies for first-time school leaders are more likely to arise in schools with higher concentrations of poverty and lower achievement (Bartanen et al., 2021; Grissom, Bartanen, & Mitani, 2019). Leaders may see such jobs as less desirable (Loeb et al., 2010), making leadership roles at more advantaged schools very competitive—and potentially affecting engagement with the leadership job market for potential leaders repeatedly turned down for those roles. Similarly, urban districts tend to have both more leadership opportunities and offer higher salaries to school leaders than their rural counterparts (Pendola, 2022; Pendola & Fuller, 2018), which may differentially affect how urban and rural educators see the role and its accessibility.

Broader social forces, such as societal stereotypes regarding who holds leadership potential or different expectations for men and women, may also be relevant. For example, historically women have been less likely to obtain school administration jobs or take longer to move into those roles than men (e.g., Davis et al., 2017). Underrepresentation or delayed entry of women has been attributed to numerous factors, including expectations that women avoid or delay moving into time-consuming leadership positions to spend time on parenting (Monna &

Gauthier, 2008; Riehl & Byrd, 1997) or biases against seeing women as authority figures that make them less likely to be hired (Lee & Mao, 2023).

Summary

The model described in Figure 1 theorizes that prospective leaders moving through their career path may learn—about the leadership role and about the process of obtaining such a role—in ways that affect their engagement with that career path. Specifically, as an educator takes steps toward a school leadership career, those steps may change their beliefs, which may lead them to exit from the path towards school leadership, or perhaps exit temporarily, gain further learning through other experiences, and re-engage. Their movement and that learning are affected by individual and relational factors, and against a labor market and social backdrop, that mean that these dynamics may look different for differently situated potential leaders.

Our empirical analysis homes in on a subset of potential leaders navigating the administrative career path. We examine educators who already have obtained the necessary training and license to become a school leader. They are not, however, currently working in school leadership. We explore whether their status is one of continuing to engage with pursuit of a school leadership position or one of having exited, and, among this latter group, what changing conditions may lead them to re-engage in the future.

Data and Measures

Setting

We analyze data from Tennessee. Tennessee's 147 school districts serve nearly 1 million public school students. The state employs approximately 1,750 principals and 2,350 assistant principals (APs) who lead schools across urban, suburban, small town, and rural settings.

In Tennessee, eligibility to be hired as an AP or principal requires an administrative license, which the state calls an Instructional Leader License (ILL). To obtain the license, an educator must meet three criteria. First, they must have served at least three years in an instructional role. Second, they must have completed one of the state's 20 university-based SLPPs (referred to as Instructional Leader Preparation Programs by the state), which typically confer a degree in educational leadership or something similar. Third, they must have taken and achieved the state's required score on the School Leaders Licensure Assessment (SLLA).

Upon meeting these criteria, a prospective leader can apply for an ILL.² Holders of an ILL can serve as an AP or principal in any Tennessee public school. After serving as a school leader for at least two years and completing additional learning requirements, a leader with an ILL can advance to an ILL–Professional (ILL–P). The state also offers a third administrative license type, the ILL–Aspiring (ILL–A), which is a temporary license that allows educators who are completing an SLPP or who have completed an out-of-state SLPP but have not passed the SLLA to serve as an AP.

Our analysis considers any educator holding an ILL, ILL–P, or ILL–A to be the holder of an administrative license. Because we limit ourselves to studying administrative license-holders who are not currently in a leadership role, however, in practice, holders of the ILL–A are dropped from most analyses.

Administrative and Survey Data

Our analysis relied on administrative records provided by the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) via a data-sharing agreement with the Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE). These records contained demographic, degree attainment, licensure, job

² Some educators have licenses that predate this licensing regime.

history, and compensation data for every public school educator employed in the state. We use administrative data spanning the 2019–20 through 2022–23 school year.

We supplemented administrative records with data from the Tennessee Educator Survey (TES). The TES is a statewide survey of teachers, school leaders, and other certificated educators that is administered each spring by TERA in partnership with TDOE. We made use of data from the 2020, 2021, and 2022 editions of the survey, though with an emphasis on 2022. Survey response rates were approximately 50% in 2021 and 2022, though somewhat lower in 2020 due to the COVID-19 school closures, which occurred during the survey window. TES responses are confidential but can be linked by TERA to administrative records for research purposes.

Identifying the “Available Pool” of Potential School Leaders

From 2020 to 2022, the TES asked a series of questions specific to teachers and other school-level certificated educators who held administrative licenses but were not in AP or principal roles. These questions appear in Appendix Table 1.³ Most importantly, respondents were asked whether they were currently conducting a leadership job search and, if not, the likelihood they would seek a job as a school administrator in the future.

Using responses to these questions, we identified an “available” and “unavailable” pool of administrative license-holders. Those who reported they were actively pursuing or were likely to seek a job as a school administrator in the future constituted an “available pool” of administrative candidates in that year—that is, they were a pool of license-holders who, at the time, districts could plausibly draw from for administrative roles, even if they were not actively

³ The response rate for this set of questions, which we calculate by dividing the number of responses by the number of responses in surveyed categories of educators holding administrative licenses in that year’s staffing data, is somewhat lower (35%) than for the TES overall. This lower rate may reflect the higher concentration of administrative licenses in urban districts, where TES response rates historically are lower. To account for nonresponse, we employed analytic weights included with the TES to recover representativeness. As shown in Appendix Table 2, the weighting does not appreciably affect descriptive characteristics of the sample, and results are substantively similar with weighting or without. For simplicity, we show only the unweighted results.

pursuing a role. Those who were not actively pursuing a position *and* responded that they were unlikely to search for a job in the future constituted an “unavailable pool” of administrative candidates. We restricted our sample to those who also held an administrative license at the time they responded.

Further, in 2022 the TES asked those in the unavailable pool (1) whether they were *ever* interested in a school leadership position and (2) why it was not of interest to them currently. Responses were open-ended. We made use of the 1,549 responses to these questions to better understand why these license-holders had made themselves unavailable for school-level leadership positions. Characteristics of respondents are shown in Appendix Table 2.

Methods

Our main goals were to document the characteristics of administrative license-holders who are or are not available for school-level leadership roles and to understand why they are in one group or the other. We took a convergent mixed-methods approach in which we concurrently conducted quantitative analysis of administrative and closed-response survey data and qualitative analysis of open responses to the survey (Creswell & Clark, 2017). We then triangulated findings emerging from the two data types and conducted additional qualitative and quantitative analysis to delve further into those findings. We continued this analytic process until we exhausted what we were learning from each data source.

Descriptive Analysis

Our analyses were largely descriptive. We characterized available license-holders and the schools and districts in which they work. We then summarized the characteristics of the “available pool” of license-holders and compared them to the characteristics of the unavailable

pool. Throughout, we examined survey responses for the available pool, including the kinds of jobs they were searching for and where they were searching for those jobs.

Using Tennessee administrative data, we compared the roles administrative license-holders occupied in the years following their survey responses. The purpose of these analyses was to understand whether those who expressed intentions to move into administration did so at rates different from those who did not express those intentions. Furthermore, we compared the characteristics of those in the available pool who did and did not move into administrative jobs in the years after their survey responses. Because we had between zero and three years of subsequent administrative data for survey respondents, these analyses only captured educators who moved quickly into administrative roles.

To support our descriptive findings, we also modeled the probability of an administrative license-holder being in the available pool conditional on personal, workplace, and district characteristics. We fit the following model:

$$\Pr(Y)_{idy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 S_i + \beta_2 W_{iy} + \beta_3 D_d^2 + \delta_y + \varepsilon_{dy}$$

where $\Pr(Y)_{idy}$ represents the probability of license-holder i working in district d during year y being in the available pool. S_i represents a license-holder's social characteristics (gender and race), W_{iy} represents a license-holder's workplace characteristics in year y (years of educator experience,⁴ role), D_d represents district characteristics (locale type, wage premiums). Models included a year fixed effect (δ_y), and standard errors were clustered at the district-by-year level.

⁴ We exclude age because it is highly correlated with experience ($\rho=0.74$). Models replacing experience with age or including both age and experience show similar patterns: older and more experienced license-holders are less likely to be in the available pool.

Qualitative Analysis of Open-Ended Survey Responses

We used a flexible coding approach (Deterding & Waters, 2018) to organize the survey responses and inductively develop themes that emerged from the data. Using NVivo, we applied attributes to the responses (e.g., district name, locale type, gender, race/ethnicity) to organize responses. Then, we applied analytic codes to the data based on common responses and elements of our conceptual framework (Charmaz, 2014). The codes can be found in Appendix Table 3. Through memoing, we elucidated the themes in the survey data and returned to the data to conduct comparative analysis across attributes (Deterding & Waters, 2018).

This analysis was exploratory, meant to map out the potential reasons why license-holders may eschew administrative roles. In some cases, we report frequencies in our analysis—for example, citing that a proportion of respondents included a certain sentiment in their response. However, respondents were not asked directly about a given theme or sentiment, meaning these frequencies should not be understood as the prevalence of that sentiment among our sample (see Gillespie et al., 2021; Reif & Guenther, 2021). Where we report comparative frequencies and statistical tests, they are meant to be suggestive, not conclusive.

Results

Over Two-Thirds of License-Holders Do Not Occupy Administrative Positions

Column 2 of Table 1 shows the characteristics of all 13,893 administrative license-holders who were employed in Tennessee in the 2021–22 school year. For comparison, Column 1 shows all educators in the state. Educators with administrative licenses are roughly three years older and about five years more experienced than the average educator in Tennessee. There are 9 percentage points fewer women with administrative licenses (70%) than women educators (79%). Black educators constitute 7 percentage points more educators with administrative

licenses (19%) than educators total (12%). White educators constitute 6 percentage points fewer educators with administrative licenses (79%) than educators overall (85%) but still make up the overwhelming majority of educators with administrative licenses.

Twenty-nine percent of administrative licensees occupy principal or AP roles. Our primary interest is in the remaining 71% of licensees who do not hold school-level administrative roles but are eligible to do so. This group is primarily teachers (49% of all license-holders) and support services professionals (14%), most of whom are counselors, interventionists, or instructional coaches. This group of school-level, administration-licensed educators not working in school administration numbers approximately 8,700. Columns 5 and 6 of Table 1 describe their characteristics. Compared to the overall population of educators, these two groups are older (approximately 1–3 years) and more experienced (approximately 3–5 years). They are also more likely to be Black. Teachers with administrative licenses are found more often in rural schools, while support services staff with licenses are more often in urban schools.

Another, smaller set of administrative license-holders (7%, or about 980) works in district central offices. Table 1, column 7 describes this group. Although technically eligible to move into principal or AP positions, we exclude this group from subsequent analyses for two reasons. First, as column 7 shows, 64% of this pool has already held a school leadership position in the past; having been “promoted” to central office, we suspect that it is unlikely that these license-holders systematically pursue school-level leadership positions. Indeed, in a typical year in our data, just 3% of administrative license-holders in central office jobs move into principal or AP positions. Second, as a practical matter, central office staff do not answer the TES, a key data source for our analysis.

Few License-Holders are Searching or Intend to Search for Administrative Positions

Table 2 shows survey responses for teachers and support services personnel, like librarians and instructional coaches, who had administrative licenses and responded to the 2020, 2021, or 2022 iterations of the TES. The survey sequenced questions about future career plans slightly differently across the three administrations. We focus on 2022 responses (Column 3) because the question sequence provides the clearest picture of an available pool, though our topline available pool numbers are consistent across years.⁵

Of the educators surveyed in 2022, only 31% were seeking administrative roles; the other 69% were not. Out of those seeking administrative roles, 90% are seeking an AP job, while 20% are seeking a principal job, and 20% are seeking other administrative roles.⁶ Nearly two thirds (62%) were only seeking AP roles, 4% were only seeking principal roles, and 6% were only seeking other administrative roles. Three-quarters were looking for roles only at public schools, and 50% were looking for roles only in their own district. Out of those who were searching, 64% indicated they would continue their search the following year if they were not placed in an administrative position during their current search. Of those not searching, only 23% indicated they were likely or very likely to search for an administrative job in the future. Over half (55%) indicated that they had never sought an administrative job.

Taken to the full sample, these findings suggest that fewer than half of educators (47%) with administrative licenses are searching for a position or intend to in the future. The

⁵ In the 2022 TES, respondents were asked whether they were currently seeking a role and then, if they were not currently seeking a role, whether they were likely to do so in the future. This second question was asked to a smaller subset of respondents in 2021 that said they had sought a job in the past but were never selected, leaving out respondents who were not currently seeking a job, may do so in the future, and had never sought a role in the past. In 2020, respondents were only asked whether they were likely to seek a job now or in the future but were not asked whether they were currently seeking a role.

⁶ Respondents were provided an open response field to specify which job they were searching for. Most educators were searching for central office roles (e.g., director of special education) or instructional coaching positions (which do not require administrative licenses).

unavailable pool is slightly larger: 53% of educators with administrative licenses are not pursuing administrative roles and do not intend to do so in the future. Thirty-six percent of those currently searching for jobs do not intend to search for an administrative job in future years.

Table 3 shows characteristics of 2022 educators in the available pool (Column 1), the available pool disaggregated by those pursuing a position (Column 2) and likely to pursue a position in the future (Column 3), and educators in the unavailable pool (Column 4). License-holders in the unavailable pool are 5.5 years older ($p<0.01$) and have 6.3 more years of experience as an educator in Tennessee ($p<0.01$) than those in the available pool, suggesting license-holders may “age out” of the available pool. Women are less likely to be pursuing an administrative job than men: the share of women is four percentage points higher in the unavailable pool (75%) than the available pool (71%, $p<0.05$). The share of Black educators in the available pool (9%) is four percentage points higher than in the unavailable pool (5%, $p<0.01$), though they constitute a small share of both. Concomitantly, the share of white educators in the available pool (89%) is four percentage points lower than the unavailable pool (93%, $p<0.01$). Educators of other racial/ethnic groups constitute very small fractions of both pools.

Educators in the unavailable pool are five percentage points more likely than those in the available pool to work in a rural district ($p<0.05$) and two percentage points less likely to work in an urban district ($p<0.10$). Observation ratings are substantively similar between those in the available and unavailable pool, with a difference of only 0.02 standard deviations between the two groups that is not statistically significant at conventional levels, suggesting that less effective educators are not necessarily being screened out of pursuing administrative positions.

Educators in the available pool who were actively pursuing a position or likely to do so in the future had similar characteristics with a few exceptions: those who were actively pursuing a position were less likely to be female, less likely to work in rural districts, and slightly older than those who were likely to pursue a position in the future.

In Table 4, we present results from models predicting available pool membership as a function of individual and workplace characteristics. We focus on column 3.⁷ The results generally are consistent with the conditional means. Female educators with administrative licenses are about seven percentage points less likely than their male counterparts to be in the available pool, while Black educators with administrative licenses are more likely than white educators by about 13 percentage points. More experienced license-holders are less likely to pursue leadership positions; license-holders with 16+ years of experience are 42 percentage points less likely to be in the pool than those with 0–5 years of experience in the state, and 29 percentage points less likely than those with 6–15 years of experience. Rural licensees are four percentage points less likely than urban licensees to be in the available pool.

Educators in the Available Pool Are More Likely to Move into Administrative Positions in Subsequent Years

Using personnel files, we followed educators in the available and unavailable pools during the 2020, 2021, and 2022 administrations of TES and assigned which roles they occupied in subsequent years. We tracked them through the 2022–23 school year, meaning that we observed fewer subsequent years for more recent survey administrations.

⁷ In Appendix Table 4, we show similar models predicting the probability of currently pursuing an administrative role compared to being in the unavailable pool or being likely to pursue a role in the future. The patterns are substantively similar.

Table 5 shows the results of this analysis for 2020 respondents (Panel A) and 2021 respondents (Panel B). Almost none of the 2022 respondents had moved into administrative positions by the following year, so do not show this group.

The general pattern across survey administrations is that very few respondents advanced into administrative roles in the year following their survey response, although available pool members were much more likely to advance than those in the unavailable pool. For instance, among 2020 respondents, by 2022–23, 11% of the available pool (Panel A, Column 7) had moved into administrative roles, and just 2% of those in the unavailable pool (Panel A, Column 8) had done the same. Similarly, by 2022–23, 8% of the available pool from 2021 was in a principal or AP role vs. just 1% of the unavailable pool. Although not shown, if we instead looked only at 2021 respondents who had said they were *actively* pursuing a school leadership role, a slightly higher proportion, 11%, had moved into administration by 2022–23.

The number is small, but some members of the unavailable pool become school administrators, suggesting that current perceived unavailability may shift for some educators. Indeed, among TES respondents who responded to these items in multiple years, about 10% moved from the unavailable to the available pool at least once, suggesting a small proportion of license-holders can be “activated” into the available pool. Respondents were similarly likely to move from available to unavailable, however, consistent with some respondents’ expectations that they would give up if their current search was unsuccessful.

Lastly, transitions into administrative roles among the available pool are more common among license-holders with some characteristics. Compared to all license-holders in the available pool, those becoming APs or principals within two years are 11 percentage points more likely to be male, one percentage point less likely to be white, and two years younger (Appendix Table 5).

Why Some License-Holders Do Not Want School Administration Roles

We now turn to unavailable pool members' responses to an open-ended question that asked whether the respondent was ever interested in a school administrator role and why the role was not of interest now. We start with a few topline observations. First, 44% of respondents indicated they were interested in a position in the past but reconsidered, and 7% suggested they never wanted an administrative role. This finding to some degree belies the conventional wisdom that educators complete SLPPs to simply earn master's degrees to get a pay bump (Levine, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007). In fact, only a few respondents cited the pay increase as a reason to complete the program, although one respondent outlined this exact reasoning, saying "I did it for the raise in pay—teachers barely make a living wage and going in debt for an additional degree is the only way to make more \$\$."

Instead, candidate responses focused on the challenges of administrative jobs. Responses centered around a few themes, which map onto elements of our conceptual framework: stress and expectations associated with the role (job search learning), incompatibility of the position with family life (individual factors), politics or bias in the hiring processes or decisions (relational factors), and low administrative pay or too few open positions (labor market factors). Among these factors, the stress and expectations associated with administration positions was cited most often (17%), followed by family considerations (9%). Low administrative pay and too few open positions were highlighted by 5% and 3%, respectively. Hiring politics or bias was mentioned by 5% of the sample. We explore these themes in the subsections below.

Stress and Expectations of the Role

Our framework posits that job searchers may learn more about the role by observing sitting administrators, which can shape and reshape their decisions to pursue school leadership

positions. Responses from the survey suggest that unavailable license-holders often observed the stress and expectations associated with the principalship after completing licensure and reconsidered their job search as a result. For example, one respondent explained:

Administrators are face[d] with too many problems, at least at my school. There are always behavior problems that must be addressed. I am sure it is not like this everywhere. However, what I have seen over the last several years is too much and makes me not at all interested.

Another respondent described observing the stress of the job over a long career, remarking:

Honestly, I have watched what our administrators are going through on a daily basis. The stress on them from families and the state make it to where it isn't as desirable a position. I am also close to retirement and I really love teaching students.

Indeed, two themes these two quotes evince—stressors related to student discipline and relationships with parents or families—were each cited by 5% of the sample. Concerns about discipline typically centered on the inordinate amount of time spent on discipline and a lack of support from the district or the state in giving administrators the flexibility to deal with discipline effectively. For example, a respondent working in an urban district noted that “support for student discipline is severely lacking and consequences for their behavior is minor; therefore, it is getting harder and harder to maintain student control because of laws and policies.” Similarly, some in the unavailable pool described parents as “unsupportive” and not respecting principals’ and teachers’ authority to discipline students or hold students accountable for their academic challenges. Some respondents also portrayed parent interactions as time-intensive, taking away time spent working with students—with one respondent describing this work as “spending more time placating parents than supporting students.” Several such members of the unavailable pool referenced a desire for the school leadership role to be more focused on students and teachers than on parents or other stakeholders.

Another five percent of respondents emphasized that state and district policies led to unrealistic expectations of what administrators could do in their schools. Several expressed concerns about state mandates, which one respondent described as “increasingly overwhelming, over-abundant, demanding, and nearly impossible to achieve in the manner that the rules and regulations require.” Others characterized relationships between state and local leaders as oppositional, labeling state leaders as “bullies,” “watch dogs,” and “out of touch.”⁸ Several respondents specifically referenced state requirements to conduct frequent classroom observations and make use of testing data in decisions, framing such expectations as inconsistent with their own values, as did the respondent who called the principal role a “constant battle between my conscience of doing what’s right for students and doing what’s required by the state.”

Lastly, the stresses of the COVID-19 pandemic were specifically cited by 2% of respondents as contributing to their decision not to serve as a school leader, especially in rural districts. For example, one respondent in a rural district explained that during the pandemic they saw “how our administrators struggle with all that is going on in schools now and how much of their own personal lives and well-being they have to sacrifice.” Several similar respondents highlighted the burnout they observed as principals responded to COVID-era demands. Others noted the damage the pandemic did to school relationships, with a rural license-holder highlighting that the pandemic “created a large divide between teachers and administrators in our school.” Another respondent said that the pandemic revealed teachers’ “political agendas,” which made them no longer want to supervise teachers.

Incompatibility of the Position with Family Life

⁸ We counted such sentiments as arising about twice as often in urban districts as in suburban or rural ones.

A key individual factor that shaped candidates' decisions to forgo school leadership was the perceived incompatibility of the role with family life. Respondents in this group consistently noted that the time required to succeed in administration would compete with the time they could devote to family obligations and that they were unwilling to make that tradeoff. Although some respondents referenced caring for spouses or parents as a consideration, caretaking of children was by far the most common concern among those citing incompatibility with family life. One female respondent in a suburban district gave a typical response:

Now that I have a family and two small children, I would not be able to devote the necessary time to being an administrator. Administrators practically live at their school. I do not want to spend my time away from my children other than in a typical teaching day.

Another educator similarly stated:

It was of interest at one time but not anymore. I do not want to put in the time and energy it takes to be an administrator. I have 3 teenagers that I like to spend time with and watch their activities. As an admin, I would be devoting time to other kids that are not my own.

Interestingly, although across professions women are much more likely to take on caretaking responsibilities in families (Monna & Gauthier, 2008), men were just two percentage points less likely (8% vs. 10%) to discuss family obligations as a reason to eschew a career in school administration. As a typical respondent in this group stated: "I have 4 kids. The role and responsibilities of administrators would require me to miss too much of my family's life."

Similarly, a former principal in the sample noted:

I was a school principal for 7 years. I am currently teaching by choice. I could have stayed in my administrator role but chose to go back to the classroom. Being a school principal was/is the toughest job in education. It consumed my entire life. I made a family decision to leave it behind.

Insufficient Pay

Compensation was also a concern, cited by 5% of respondents. Although administrators typically earn higher salaries than teachers (Pijanowski & Brady, 2009), the increase in salary

was not enough to take on the additional stress, responsibility, and time commitment associated with the job. One female respondent working in a rural district explained:

The pay for school administrators in my county is embarrassingly low. The demands on administrators in my county are embarrassingly high, especially for administrators working in K-8 schools.

Several respondents specifically noted that administrators were not paid enough for the additional time required beyond what they were already putting in as a teacher. A male teacher in a suburban district suggested that if he became an administrator he would take a “pay cut in salary when you calculate in the extra hours I would have to work.”

Indeed, quantitative evidence suggested that this wage premium was a factor in licensed educators placing themselves in the available pool. For this test, we first estimated the monthly wage premium associated with being a principal or AP relative to being a teacher with an administrative license with the same years of experience in the same school district in the same year.⁹ Results, which are shown in Appendix Table 6, suggest that this wage premium is \$1,238 per month, on average. We then used this model to predict wage premiums for every school district and added these predicted wage premiums as a covariate in our model of likelihood of being in the available pool. Results of this model appear in Column 4 of Table 4. The positive coefficient indicates that license-holders are more likely to be “available” in districts offering higher premiums to be a school leader. A \$1,000 increase in the predicted monthly wage premium is associated with a three percentage point increase in the probability of available pool

⁹ We consider differences on a monthly basis because many administrators work on 11- or 12-month contracts while most teachers work on 9- or 10-month contracts. We estimate the following model:

$$SALARY_{idy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ADMINJOB_{idy} + \beta_2 YRSEXP_{iy} + \beta_3 YRSEXP_{iy}^2 + \delta_{dt} + u_{id}$$

The dependent variable is the CPI-adjusted salary ($SALARY_{idy}$) of license-holder i in district d during year t .

$ADMINJOB_{idy}$ is an indicator variable equal to 1 if the license-holder holds an administrative position that year.

$YRSEXP_{iy}$ represents the years of experience that candidate has in a state, followed by a squared term to account for nonlinearities in salary scales. Importantly, we include district-by-year fixed effects (δ_{dt}), which allow us to compare the salaries of administrators and teachers in the same district in the same year.

membership ($p < 0.01$). The addition of this wage premium appears to attenuate the negative association between being in a rural district and availability (Column 3), suggesting that the lower wage premiums for leadership in rural districts contribute to rural educators' relative disinclination to seek leadership positions.¹⁰

Too Few Positions

Other structural factors in the labor market can influence how candidates approach their job search. For some respondents, a lack of open administrative positions in the school district emerged as such a factor. Notably, this concern was reflected in responses from license-holders working in suburban (2%) and rural (3%) districts, but no respondents in urban districts reported these concerns. As one suburban respondent explained:

I love my school and my school district, and I have no intentions of seeking an admin position outside of the district. There are few administrative openings in our district. If a position opens that I would be interested/qualified for, I would apply.

According to some respondents, the lack of open positions was related to low turnover among administrators in their district. One rural respondent stated that administrators “usually have the job until they retire.” Several rural educators in hard-to-staff subjects thought they would be especially disadvantaged in seeking the few school leadership roles that arose because if they were hired in administration, the district would have to fill a difficult vacancy. As one such rural educator stated: “Because I teach math and a foreign language, both of which are hard to fill, I do not feel like I have a chance in my home county.”

Politics or Bias in Hiring Processes

¹⁰ Indeed, among similarly experienced educators, the monthly wage premium in rural districts is \$763. In suburban and urban districts, it is approximately \$1,500, or roughly double. Notably, the wage premium also declines substantially with educator experience, which may help explain why average educator experience is higher in the unavailable pool.

The last major theme referenced by respondents explaining why they were not pursuing school administration was the perception of unfairness in hiring processes. These respondents expressed that their districts hired candidates with “connections” rather than those with the skills necessary to succeed. This response from a rural respondent was typical of this group:

I have seen how there is a ‘good ole boy’ system of choosing people for administrative positions, and I realize that it is not ‘what you know’ but ‘who you know’ that determines placement in administrative positions. This has discouraged me from applying.

This response suggests that even the perception of such a system may discourage applicants from pursuing a role. Others described having to “play the game” or “jump through hoops” to be considered for an administrative position in their district. Such responses spanned rural, suburban, and urban districts, and candidates from all racial/ethnic and gender groups.

Respondents from rural districts specifically noted concerns that administrative roles were given out to close friends or family of district leaders. One respondent from a rural district outlined this concern in her hiring process:

In my small district..., administrative personnel are only chosen if someone is related to the Director of Schools, or a close friend of [the director]. [The director] was born in our county, has always lived in our county, and only looks within [the director’s] small circle of friends/family.

A small share (1%) of license-holders discussed perceived biases with regard to race, gender, or age in district hiring processes that led them to exit the administrative job search. Yet although people of color were about twice as likely to mention bias as white respondents, we noted that respondents from across the identity spectrum perceived themselves to be disadvantaged. For example, in the same urban district, a Black woman and a white woman both described racial bias in the hiring process. The Black woman said:

In this particular district, one is not hired on merit, experience or licensure. Being a black female, I have been removed from positions and replaced with white men with little or no experience (younger female also).

The white woman described similar biases against her social group, stating, “Males get the positions first, then African American females.” In other words, both respondents felt men were favored but disagreed about how district hiring processes treated women by race.

Another woman directly linked bias in the hiring process to her caretaking responsibilities, describing being “asked about childcare etc. in several administrative interviews at my previous position.” She exited the job search process due to the inappropriate nature of those questions.

Elsewhere, some men described biases against men in hiring processes; indeed, men and women were equally likely to cite bias in their responses. For instance, one male respondent stated that he was the “wrong color and sex” to be hired in his “woke” district. Another said that he has “always been beaten out by a woman or minority candidate. I don’t see that changing in today’s world.”

Unavailable license-holders also sometimes perceived that they were passed over for younger candidates or exited the job search process because they believed they have “aged out” of being selected. A female respondent working in a rural district explained that she “applied for several administrator positions, but at my age, retirement is close and most of the jobs I did interview for hired people much younger than myself.” Few respondents, however, offered explanations for these perceived district preferences.

Some Participants Would Consider Taking on a Role in the Future

Despite the challenges they discussed, 12% of respondents indicated they would consider searching for an administrative role in the future. These responses reflect the recursive nature of job search: as individual and relational factors change, job seekers may re-engage with a job

search after exiting. While many responses were unclear about what circumstances would lead a license-holder to seek a job in the future, two explanatory factors emerged from open-ended responses: the respondents' children growing up (a change in an individual condition) and the possibility of more administrative openings in the school district (a change in a labor market condition).

Incompatibility with family life was one of the primary individual factors cited by license-holders who did not want to pursue the principalship. It follows, then, that candidates may re-engage with the job search after childcare responsibilities wane. One female respondent in a rural district described this process succinctly, explaining:

At one time, I was interested in administration. After having my children, I didn't want to dedicate the time that is required by administration. I'm sure that after my kids are older, I will seek an administration job.

This sentiment that the license-holder would potentially seek an administrative job once the demands of family life became less acute was more common among female than male respondents.

Additionally, in rural districts especially, license-holders indicated they would be interested in an administrative job in the future should there be an opening in their district, which, as discussed above, they perceived as infrequent. A related response found across locale types was that the license-holder was waiting for a specific type of vacancy to occur. In some cases, respondents were waiting for an opening in a specific grade level. Others were waiting for an opening at a specific school—often their own. A few others anticipated that there may be new roles that did not yet exist in the district, such as a technology administrator.

Discussion and Conclusions

Our analysis of educators holding licenses to be APs or principals in Tennessee arrives at several important conclusions about the labor market for school leaders. First, fewer than a third

of license-holders not currently in an AP or principal role reported actively searching for an administrative job. Among the remainder, fewer than a quarter thought they were likely to search for such a job in the future. Thus, while Tennessee employs approximately 8,700 license-holding teachers or other staff who are *eligible* to move into school leadership vacancies, our estimates suggest that just 47% of this group, or about 4,100, are or would make themselves *available* to take on such a role. Limiting to current active searchers, availability is just 2,700—and only 64% of this number, or 1,700, think they would continue their search if not successful. Tennessee hires roughly 450 new administrators (i.e., APs or principals not serving in either role in the prior year) each year.¹¹ The relative scarcity of available educators to fill those roles—approximately 6 current active searchers per vacancy—illustrates why district leaders often report difficulties in finding qualified leaders to take on school leadership positions (e.g., Pijanowski et al., 2009; Roza, 2003).¹²

Second, contra concerns that many license-holders are not in the available labor pool because they had only pursued school administration credentials for a pay increase without an intent to move into leadership (e.g., Levine, 2005), only 7% of the unavailable pool said they never were actually interested in school leadership, only in a few of those cases was pay mentioned. Instead, unavailable license-holders consistently noted they had aspired towards school leadership but changed their minds as they observed and learned about the role and the selection process, as their own individual circumstances or priorities shifted, or as they became aware of conditions in the local leadership labor market. The most common reason for this change in their plans was an assessment that the stresses and expectations of school leadership

¹¹ Source: authors' calculations, 2015 to 2022.

¹² The distribution of the available pool is not uniform across school districts. Our estimates suggest that rural and suburban districts employ about 12 available pool members for every school leadership vacancy. Urban districts, in contrast, employ only four.

simply were not worth it. Relatedly, the second most common reason was incompatibility of the demands of school leadership with parenting and other family obligations. Others cited insufficient pay, a small number of desirable positions, or politics in hiring decisions as barriers to pursuing school leadership roles.

This dynamic presents a challenge. License-holders not currently in administrative roles represent an untapped pipeline of future school leaders: educators in public schools who have (mostly) aspired to and trained for school leadership positions. Yet as these educators progress in their careers, learning more about administrative roles or observing or engaging in the job search process, half come to eschew a career in school leadership. To the extent that these attitudes have calcified, these educators may, in fact, represent an *untappable* pipeline: leaders who have invested in becoming a licensed administrator, often with at least some support from public funds, who cannot be engaged to fill critical leadership roles.

Is this sizable group permanently untappable? In line with the recursive nature of our job search framework, our data suggest that at least some are not. Twelve percent of open-ended responses indicated a potential willingness to consider administrative roles in the future if, for example, their family circumstances changed. Moreover, other reasons respondents gave for checking out of the potential applicant pool appear amenable to state or local policy intervention. Increasing AP and principal pay to make the roles more attractive relative to teaching and other positions, for example, may bring some licensees back in. Taking steps to reduce the time demands of school leadership, which can be substantial (Hochbein et al., 2021), likely would reduce perceptions of the role as stressful and incompatible with family commitments, attracting inactive license-holders back to the profession. Other steps to improve leader working conditions may have similar effects, including finding strategies to alleviate leaders' time on student

discipline (Grissom et al., 2025) and promote more productive relationships between leaders and external stakeholders (Prado Tuma & Spillane, 2019). School district leaders may also re-attract licensees by ensuring that leader selection processes are fair and transparent.

Our study also contributes to our understanding of leadership labor market dynamics for subpopulations of prospective leaders, including by gender and race/ethnicity. In Tennessee, women make up 74% of administrative license-holders working in teaching or support services, yet only 58% of principals and 62% of APs. Compared to men, women reporting interest in school leadership were less likely to move into an administrative position, reflecting other research on leadership advancement (Bailes & Guthrey, 2020; Davis et al., 2017). Yet we also show that female license-holders are less likely to report interest in administration or to say they are actively pursuing such a role, perhaps because of consequences of administrative roles to which they are more often attuned (e.g., family considerations). Disengagement from the administrative job search of female license-holders appears to be a contributor to the gender gap in school leadership (Martinez et al., 2021).

In contrast, Black educators, who prior research has suggested also face challenges in moving into school leadership positions (Bailes & Guthrey, 2020; Davis et al., 2017), demonstrate different patterns. Black educators hold administrative licenses at higher rates than white educators and are overrepresented in principal and AP roles relative to their proportions in teaching. A reason may be that Black license-holders are overrepresented in the available pool and in the pool of current job seekers, though they are also more likely to move into administration conditional on being in the available pool. This greater availability may reflect geography, as license-holders of color in Tennessee are more likely to live in urban districts, where such concerns as insufficient pay and available vacancies are less prevalent.

Our study has several limitations. First, our data come from a single state, and our results may not generalize to other contexts. Exploring the movement of administrative license-holders into school administration and potential barriers to that movement in other states would be valuable. Second, we rely heavily on survey data. Open-ended responses on surveys are a poor vehicle for communicating nuance and depth in respondents' potentially multifaceted reasons for their job search decisions. Supplementing our research with interviews with licensees likely would provide a richer understanding of their perceptions and motivations. Third, our reliance on survey data means reliance on the sample of respondents who chose to participate. We do not know whether that group is representative. In particular, license-holders of color were numerically underrepresented in the open-ended responses, given overall lower response rates from Tennessee's urban districts. We cannot be sure that we accurately represented perspectives of Black license-holders, given their relatively low participation, and we had vanishingly few responses from other, non-white, non-Black racial/ethnic groups. Studies conducted in more diverse contexts may better elucidate job search differences by educator race/ethnicity.

Still, our analysis provides a meaningful first look at the way disengaged job seekers view the leadership labor market and points to several areas for further investigation. Longitudinal work that follows license-holders over more years could clarify what specifically triggers movement between the available and unavailable pools and could more directly test the recursive re-engagement process our framework proposes, including whether the individual and relational antecedents we describe help explain who moves forward along the leadership career path and who does not. Understanding these dynamics for women and educators of color would be especially valuable. Tests of whether increases in administrator pay or reductions in leader time burdens meaningfully expand the available pool also would be worthwhile. Additional

research might also examine the AP-to-principal transition specifically, given that the large majority of active searchers in our sample sought AP rather than principal roles. Finally, our finding that a majority of central office staff previously served as principals or APs suggests central office roles may function as an alternative, underexamined pipeline back into school leadership, one worth studying directly.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

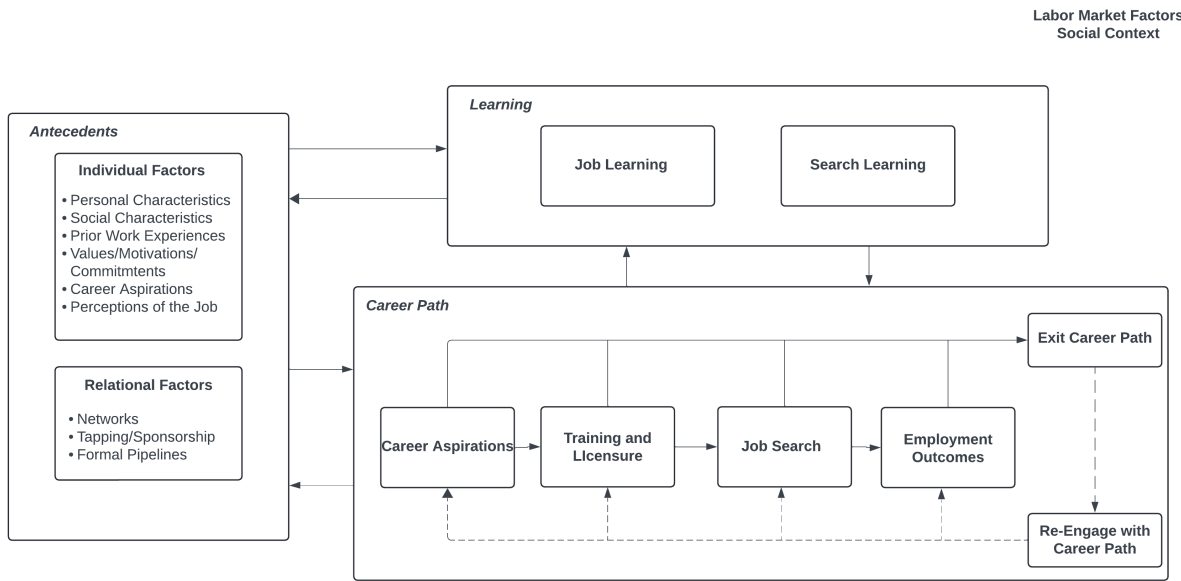


Table 1. Characteristics of Tennessee Educators with Administrative Licenses, 2021-22

	All Educators	Educators Holding Administrative Licenses					
		All License Holders	Principals	APs	Teachers	Support Services	Central Office
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Has Administrative License	0.17	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>Role</i>							
Principal	0.02	0.13	1	0	0	0	0
AP	0.03	0.16	0	1	0	0	0
Teacher	0.81	0.49	0	0	1	0	0
Support Services	0.12	0.14	0	0	0	1	0
Central Office	0.02	0.07	0	0	0	0	1
Missing	0.01	0.02	0	0	0	0	0
Years of Experience	12.6	17.5	21.4	17.7	15.2	17.7	24.3
as Teacher	8.8	9.4	6.3	8.5	11.7	7.5	4.6
as AP	0.3	1.6	3.4	4.7	0.3	0.7	1.8
as Principal	0.2	1.2	5.8	0.5	0.1	0.5	3.2
in Central Office	0.1	0.5	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.4	5.2
in Student Services	1.0	1.1	0.6	0.8	0.3	4.5	1.4
Never Principal or AP	0.92	0.59	0	0	0.92	0.81	0.36
Female	0.79	0.7	0.58	0.62	0.72	0.83	0.63
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>							
Black	0.12	0.19	0.19	0.23	0.17	0.23	0.15
White	0.85	0.79	0.8	0.74	0.82	0.75	0.84
Age	43.6	46.2	49.3	46.0	44.4	46.7	52.1
<i>School Locale Type</i>							
Rural	0.39	0.43	0.47	0.36	0.44	0.37	0.6
Suburban	0.26	0.25	0.22	0.27	0.25	0.25	0.2
Urban	0.35	0.33	0.31	0.38	0.31	0.38	0.2
Observations	80171	13893	1744	2267	6769	1897	977

Note. Hispanic, Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial educators not summarized due to small cell sizes. Licensees missing job codes in the administrative data are excluded from columns 3–7 (N = 239).

Table 2. Intentions to Pursue Administrative Roles for Teachers and Support Services Personnel with Administrative Licenses

	2020 (1)	2021 (2)	2022 (3)
Available Pool: Pursuing Now or Future	0.42	0.45	0.47
Pursuing an Administrative Role		0.32	0.31
Pursuing Principal		0.21	0.20
Pursuing Principal Only		0.03	0.04
Pursuing AP		0.92	0.90
Pursuing AP Only		0.60	0.62
Pursuing Other		0.23	0.20
Pursuing Other Only		0.06	0.06
Pursuing Public School Only		0.76	0.75
Pursuing Current District Only		0.51	0.50
Will Continue Search Next Year		0.71	0.64
Likely to Pursue in Future			0.23
Not Pursuing, Likely to Pursue in Future		0.27	0.23
Unavailable Pool: Not Pursuing Currently or in Future	0.58	0.55	0.53
Never Sought a Job	0.51	0.79	0.55
Observations	2574	2737	2568

Note. In 2020, the TES did not ask administrators whether they were currently pursuing administrative roles or which kinds of roles license holders were pursuing, meaning the 2020 number may underestimate the available pool by excluding those who were pursuing in 2020, but did not intend to do so in the future. In 2021, the TES only asked whether a license-holder would seek a job as an administrator in the future if they had never sought a job, so this value is suppressed. In 2022, the TES asked whether a license-holder would seek a job as an administrator in the future if they were not actively pursuing a role.

Table 3. Characteristics of Respondents in Available and Unavailable Pool, 2022

	Available Pool (1)	Pursuing Position (2)	Likely to Pursue Position (3)	Unavailable Pool (4)
Observation Ratings (Std.)	0.13	0.11	0.18	0.15
Years of Experience	13.28***	13.25***	13.35***	19.54
as Teacher	11.17***	11.21***	11.11***	14.25
as AP	0.19***	0.20***	0.18***	0.44
as Principal	0.13***	0.13**	0.13*	0.28
in Central office	0.02	0.03	0.01	0.04
in Support Services	0.41***	0.41***	0.41**	0.71
Never Principal or AP	0.93***	0.92***	0.93***	0.88
Female	0.71**	0.68***	0.75	0.75
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Black	0.09***	0.10***	0.07	0.05
White	0.89***	0.88***	0.90	0.93
Age	42.87***	43.44***	41.84***	48.38
<i>District Locale Type</i>				
Rural	0.53**	0.49***	0.60	0.58
Suburban	0.27	0.30**	0.22	0.26
Urban	0.19*	0.20**	0.17	0.17
Observations	1047	678	373	1259

* p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. Stars indicate results of a two-sided *t*-test of the difference between each column and the unavailable pool. Observations with missing data excluded.

Table 4. Predicting Available Pool Membership

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.07** (0.01)		-0.07** (0.01)	-0.07** (0.01)
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>				
Asian	0.02 (0.19)		0.02 (0.19)	0.02 (0.19)
Black	0.12** (0.02)		0.13** (0.02)	0.13** (0.02)
Hispanic/Latino	0.12 (0.07)		0.07 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
White (base)				
<i>Years of Experience</i>				
0-5 Years (base)				
6-15 Years		-0.13** (0.02)	-0.13** (0.02)	-0.13** (0.02)
16+ Years		-0.42** (0.02)	-0.42** (0.02)	-0.42** (0.02)
Observation Rating (Std.)		0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
<i>Role</i>				
Teacher (base)				
Stu/Sch Services		-0.01 (0.03)	0.00 (0.03)	0.01 (0.03)
<i>Locale Type</i>				
Rural		-0.06** (0.02)	-0.04** (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)
Suburban		-0.03* (0.02)	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Monthly Wage Premium (Thousands)				0.03** (0.01)
Constant	0.48** (0.01)	0.76** (0.02)	0.78** (0.03)	0.74** (0.03)
Educator-by-Year Obs.	6940	6940	6940	6940
R^2	0.01	0.11	0.12	0.12

Note. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered at district-by-year level. All models include year fixed effects. Wage premium is the estimated wage premium for an administrator in the district compared to a teacher with similar experience.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 5. Respondents Roles in Years Following Survey Responses by Available and Unavailable Pool

	<i>t</i>		<i>t</i> +1		<i>t</i> +2		<i>t</i> +3	
	Available	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable	Available	Unavailable
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Panel A: 2020 Respondents								
Principal or AP	--	--	<0.01	<0.01	0.06	0.01	0.11	0.02
Teacher	0.95	0.95	0.96	0.95	0.86	0.89	0.73	0.81
Support Services	0.04	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.05	0.05	0.06	0.05
Central Office	--	--	<0.01	<0.01	0.01	<0.01	0.01	0.01
Exit Data			<0.01	<0.01	0.04	0.05	0.08	0.11
Observations	1208	2667	1206	2667	1208	2667	1208	2667
Panel B: 2021 Respondents								
Principal or AP	--	--	0.01	<0.01	0.08	0.01		
Teacher	0.96	0.95	0.96	0.94	0.81	0.87		
Support Services	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.06	0.06		
Central Office	--	--	<0.01	<0.01	0.01	<0.01		
Exit Data			<0.01	0.01	0.04	0.06		
Observations	1397	1912	1397	1901	1397	1790		

Note. Available Pool = respondents who are actively pursuing or likely to pursue an administrative job in the future. Unavailable pool = respondents who are not actively pursuing or are not likely to pursue an administrative job in the future.

APPENDIX MATERIAL

Appendix Table 1. TES Questions Used for Analysis

Question	Responses
You indicated that you are licensed to be a school administrator in Tennessee but are not currently working as a school administrator (e.g., as a principal or assistant principal). Are you currently actively pursuing a school administrator position?	a. No, I am not currently pursuing a position in administration b. Yes, I have already applied or plan to apply in the coming months. c. I do not hold a license to be a school administrator in TN
How likely are you to seek a job as a school administrator in the future?	Five-Point Likert Scale (Very Unlikely/Very Likely)
You indicated that you have never sought a job as a school administrator and don't think it's likely that you will seek one in the future, even though you hold a license. Was having a school administration role ever of interest to you? Why would you say it is not of interest now?	Open-ended response
Which of the following are true about your search for school administrator positions this year? (Select all that apply.)	a. I am only pursuing positions in public schools. b. I am only pursuing positions in my current school district. c. If I am not hired as a school administrator this year, I am very likely to continue my search next year.
You indicated that you are currently pursuing (or are planning to pursue) a school administrator position. Which kind of school administrator positions are you pursuing? (Select all that apply.)	a. Principal b. Assistant Principal c. Other: _____

Appendix Table 2. Characteristics of 2022 License-Holders and TES Survey Respondents

	All Potential Respondents (1)	Respondents (Unweighted) (2)	Respondents (Weighted) (3)	Respondents to Open Response (4)
Teacher	0.92	0.93	0.94	0.95
Student Services	0.08	0.05	0.03	0.05
Yrs. Experience	16.07	16.70	16.75	19.82
as Teacher	12.35	12.85	12.97	14.64
as AP	0.33	0.33	0.40	0.29
as Principal	0.14	0.21	0.20	0.18
in Central Office	0.06	0.03	0.04	0.05
in Student Services	0.48	0.57	0.35	0.58
Female	0.73	0.73	0.73	0.75
<i>Race/Ethnicity</i>				
Black	0.15	0.07	0.09	0.06
Hispanic/Latino	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.00
White	0.82	0.91	0.88	0.92
Age	45.27	45.88	46.27	49.48
<i>Locale Type</i>				
Rural	0.43	0.56	0.46	0.54
Suburban	0.27	0.26	0.29	0.25
Urban	0.31	0.18	0.25	0.20
Observations	6589	2313	2252	1523

Note. Asian, Native American, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, and Multiracial educators excluded due to small cell sizes. Column 1 includes all administrative-license holders who were teachers, librarians, interventionists, or instructional coaches.

Appendix Table 3. Open Response Code Names and Definitions

Code	Code Definition
Stress and Expectations of the Role	Any reference to stressors or expectations associated with school leadership, even if it is general.
<i>Time Demands</i>	Any reference to the time associated with doing a school leadership job as a stressor for leaders.
<i>Political Atmosphere</i>	Any reference to the political atmosphere in the school or community as a stressor for leaders.
<i>Interactions with Parents</i>	Any reference to interactions with parents as a stressor for leaders.
<i>COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	Any reference to the COVID-19 pandemic as a stressor for leaders.
<i>Discipline</i>	Any reference to student discipline as a stressor for leaders.
Current Role Pay Increase	Any reference to respondent getting administrative license to get a pay increase in their current role.
Pay is Not Enough	Any reference to school leadership pay not being “worth it” or enough to take on the role.
<i>Time Demands</i>	Any reference to a link between school leadership pay and the time demands of the job.
<i>Stress and Expectations</i>	Any reference to a link between school leadership pay and the stress and expectations of the role.
Few Administrative Openings	Any reference to a lack of administrative openings generally or a lack of specific administrative roles.
<i>Looking for Specific Opening</i>	Respondent describes a looking for a specific job opening for administration (e.g., elementary school, within district)
<i>Need to Stay in Current Position</i>	Respondent describes a need for them to stay in their current position, either on their own accord or at the request of others.
Disagreement with State and District Policies	Any reference to personal disagreement with state or district policies related to schools.
<i>Evaluation</i>	Any reference to disagreement with teacher or leadership evaluation systems in Tennessee.
<i>Data</i>	Any reference to disagreement with the use of data in schools, even if referred to generally.

Continued on next page.

Appendix Table 3 Continued. Open Response Code Names and Definitions

Code	Code Definition
Bias in Hiring	Any reference to bias on the basis of social identity in the hiring process.
<i>Racial or Ethnic Bias</i>	Any reference to bias in hiring on the basis of the race or ethnicity of the license-holder.
<i>Gender Bias</i>	Any reference to bias in hiring on the basis of the gender identity of the license-holder.
<i>Age Bias</i>	Any reference to bias in hiring on the basis of age.
Politics to Get the Role	Any reference to having to participate in “politics” to get the role, even if the reference is general.
<i>Social Status in the District</i>	Any reference to the district relying on social status for leadership roles. For example, having a “good ‘ole boy” system among leadership, or something similar.
<i>Family and Close Friends</i>	Any reference to the district leadership preferring to hire family or close friends for leadership roles.
Pipeline Programs	Any reference to pipeline programs being a barrier to getting a school leadership position.
Interested in the Past	Respondent indicates that they were interested in a leadership position in the past, even if the reference is general.
Family Considerations	Respondent indicates having family responsibilities that may inhibit their ability to do a leadership job, even if the reference is general.
<i>Children</i>	Respondent indicates having children may inhibit their ability to do a leadership job.
<i>Sick Relative</i>	Respondent indicates having a sick relative may inhibit their ability to do a leadership job
Age	Respondent indicates that their age may inhibit their ability to do a leadership job
Interested in the Future	Any reference to the respondent being interested in pursuing a leadership job in the future.
<i>Children Getting Older</i>	Respondent links their interest in the future to their children getting older.
<i>Looking for Specific Opening</i>	Respondent links their interest in the future to a specific administrative job opening up.

Note. Parent codes in bold and child codes in italics.

Appendix Table 4. Predicting Currently Pursuing a Role Relative to Being in the Unavailable Pool or Being Likely to Pursue in the Future

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Female	-0.11** (0.02)		-0.10** (0.02)	-0.10** (0.02)
<i>Race and Ethnicity</i>				
Asian	-0.28** (0.01)		-0.31** (0.04)	-0.29** (0.04)
Black	0.15** (0.03)		0.14** (0.03)	0.13** (0.03)
Hispanic/Latino	0.07 (0.09)		0.01 (0.09)	0.01 (0.09)
White (base)				
<i>Years of Experience</i>				
0-5 Years (base)				
6-15 Years		-0.10** (0.03)	-0.10** (0.03)	-0.10** (0.03)
16+ Years		-0.27** (0.03)	-0.27** (0.03)	-0.27** (0.03)
Observation Rating (Std.)		-0.00 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
<i>Role</i>				
Teacher(base)				
Stu/Sch Services		0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)
<i>Locale Type</i>				
Rural		-0.09** (0.02)	-0.07** (0.02)	-0.04 (0.02)
Suburban		-0.01 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.03)	-0.00 (0.02)
Wage Premium (Thousands)				0.04** (0.01)
Constant	0.39** (0.02)	0.54** (0.03)	0.59** (0.03)	0.53** (0.04)
Educator-by-Year Obs.	4286	4286	4286	4286
R ²	0.02	0.05	0.07	0.07

Note. Standard errors in parentheses and clustered at district-by-year level. All models include year fixed effects. Wage premium is the estimated wage premium for an administrator in the district compared to a teacher with similar experience.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Appendix Table 5. Characteristics of 2020 Active Pool and License-Holders by 2022 Employment Outcomes

	Available Pool	Became Administrator	Did Not Become Administrator
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Female	0.70	0.59	0.71
White	0.90	0.89	0.90
Age in Years	41.03	38.97	41.17
Observations	392	29	360

Note. Hispanic/Latino, Native American, Asian, Pacific Islander/Native Hawaiian, and Multiracial License-Holders Excluded due to small cell sizes.

Appendix Table 6. Predicting Wage Premiums for Principals and APs Compared to Other Educators with Administrative Licenses (DV = Monthly Salary in Dollars)

Principal or AP	1238.19*** (13.35)
Yrs. Experience	147.16*** (2.87)
Yrs. Experience ²	-1.90*** (0.08)
Constant	4873.31*** (20.57)
Observations	55976
R^2	0.43

Note. Standard errors in parentheses. Models includes district-by-year fixed effects.

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$