



Assistant Principals' Career Aspirations: Exploring the Supply Side of the School Leadership Pipeline

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Assistant Principals' Career Aspirations: Exploring the Supply Side of the School Leadership Pipeline

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Abstract: Most assistant principals (APs) seek to become principals in the future. However, little is known about why some APs aspire to the principalship while others wish to remain in the AP role. This study examines the factors that predict APs' aspirations to the principalship, which is key to understanding the supply of future principals. We use data from the 2024 Tennessee Educator Survey to examine the extent to which APs' personal characteristics, relationships with their principals, school settings, and professional experiences relate to their self-reported aspirations to the principalship, using crosstabulations and linear probability models. We estimate that 60% of APs in the Tennessee sample aspire to the principalship. Encouragement from their principals and early-career status are the strongest predictors of whether an AP wants to become a principal. Black APs are more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to white APs (a pattern concentrated among Black men), and high school APs are less likely to aspire compared to elementary and middle school APs. Findings from this study highlight opportunities for districts to differentiate development opportunities by APs' career stage and school level, and can offer guidance for principals on how to intentionally encourage APs to build a strong pool of future leaders.

Keywords: Assistant principals, career aspirations, school leadership, principal pipelines, survey data

Note: Notwithstanding any Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) data or involvement in the creation of this research product, the TDOE does not guarantee the accuracy of this work or endorse the findings. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

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The assistant principal (AP) role is frequently a stepping stone to the principalship, but not all APs become principals. In Tennessee and Missouri, at least half of APs never move into the principalship after more than a decade of observation (Bartanen et al., 2021). In a large, southeastern urban district, only about a third of APs submit an application (Guthery et al., 2026). The extent to which APs move into the principalship (and how quickly) varies by who they are and where they work. In Texas, Black APs wait longer for promotion and are less likely to advance than their white peers, and women take longer to advance compared to men (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). In Tennessee, there is no evidence of differential movement by race or gender, but there is evidence of differential movement based on school context and professional characteristics. APs in elementary schools and those with higher evaluation scores are more likely to succeed their departing principals (Bartanen et al., 2021). However, the mechanisms underlying these patterns remain unclear.

One plausible explanation for the differential movement of assistant principals along the principal pipeline that is underexplored is differences in individuals' career aspirations. While some APs view their role as a precursor to the principalship, others view the assistant principalship as a career destination in itself. Aspirations may also shift over time; as APs gain experience in their leadership roles, they may reconsider their desire to become principals. Understanding assistant principals' attitudes about pursuing the principalship is important because APs are the primary supply of future principals.

The purpose of this study is to identify the extent to which APs in Tennessee aspire to become principals and identify factors that explain the career aspirations and future leadership career plans of APs. We focus on career aspirations because they are the first step in the movement to the principalship. Understanding the factors associated with career aspirations may

help explain differential movement into the principalship and ensure a more diverse principalship, especially at a time when many districts face high principal turnover and shrinking pools for open principal vacancies (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024; Santelli & Grissom, 2026). Using data from an annual statewide survey of Tennessee educators, we ask: To what extent do assistant principals aspire to the principalship, and what personal characteristics, AP-principal relational factors, school settings, and professional experiences explain their likelihood of aspiring to the principalship in the future? We find that APs are more likely to aspire to the principalship if they are early-career administrators and if they were encouraged by their principals to move into the principal role. We also find that Black APs—particularly Black male APs—are more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to white APs.

Assistant Principals' Aspirations for the Principalship and the Principal Pipeline

Assistant principals represent the largest supply of future principals. Educators who obtain school administrator licenses often take on their first leadership role as APs, and most aspire to be principals (Conley et al., 2007; DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Loeb et al., 2010). In recent years, the proportion of principals with prior AP experience has increased; in the 2020-21 school year, 80% of U.S. principals had previous experience as APs compared to only half of principals in 1987-88 (Goldring et al., 2025). As districts contend with high principal turnover (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), the assistant principalship represents the primary pool of leaders to fill these roles.

We conceptualize movement to the principalship as a funnel, where a larger number of individuals aspire to become principals, a smaller number apply for positions, and an even smaller number ascend to the role (Figure 1). Many APs do not apply for principal jobs or advance to the principalship. Guthery and colleagues (2026) find that approximately one-third of

APs in a case study district submitted an application for a principal job between 2014-15 and 2021-22. In Tennessee and Missouri, 50-60% of APs do not move into the principalship over more than a decade of observation (Bartanen et al., 2021), either because there are no vacancies, because they are not interested, or because they were not selected if they did apply. The funnel suggests a narrowing of the supply of future principals as individuals become interested in, apply for, and advance into these roles.

While a relatively large body of research examines educators' pathways to the principalship (e.g., Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Bartanen et al., 2021; Davis et al., 2017), less attention has been paid to why assistant principals choose to remain in their roles. APs in Delaware who were content to stay reported that they valued the "more limited responsibilities" of the role relative to the principalship (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012, p. 805). Assistant principals also report being broadly satisfied in the role and in school administration as a career, even while describing excessive workloads, difficult student issues, and confrontations with teachers and parents as the hardest parts of the role (Goldring et al., 2025). It's unclear whether APs stay because they prefer the role or because they have limited opportunities to advance.

This study focuses on APs' aspirations for pursuing principal positions, which typically occur *before* the application or advancement phases. Sometimes referred to as "leadership intention" in the organizational psychology literature, career aspirations are shaped by multiple factors that affect an individual's decision to engage in leadership training and take on new roles and responsibilities (Chan & Drasgow, 2001; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). We focus on aspirations because they are frequently the catalyst for assistant principals to take actions that move them into the principalship, such as pursuing leadership development opportunities and applying to principal roles.

A Framework for Understanding Assistant Principals' Aspirations to the Principalship

We build a framework that examines four factors that may explain APs' aspirations to move into the principalship: (1) personal characteristics; (2) the AP-principal relationship; (3) school settings; and (4) professional experiences. We describe the existing evidence related to these factors in the sections that follow.

Personal Characteristics. Several studies focus on how race, gender, and ethnicity are related to differences in how educators move into the principalship, but there is limited research on how personal characteristics are related to the career aspirations of assistant principals.

Female teachers with administrative credentials in Tennessee are less likely to aspire to school leadership positions compared to their male peers (Santelli & Grissom, 2026), but it's not clear if these gendered patterns extend to assistant principals' aspirations to the principalship. A growing body of evidence finds that male and female APs move into the principalship at similar rates (see evidence from Tennessee (Bartanen et al., 2021; Goldring et al., 2021), Missouri (Bartanen et al., 2021), North Carolina (S. M. Gates et al., 2004), and Pennsylvania (Goldring et al., 2021)). In Texas, male and female APs move into the principalship at similar rates overall, but female APs in high schools are less likely than male APs to move into the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Evidence of application patterns in a large urban district also finds that male and female APs apply to the principalship at similar rates (Guthery et al., 2026); however, compared to men, women take longer to apply (Guthery et al., 2026) and ascend to the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). There is some research on why women delay the principalship. Female administrators surveyed in Florida identify both self-imposed barriers to advancement—including lack of confidence, reluctance to take risks, and anxiety about family responsibilities—and structural barriers such as district politics and the “good ole boy” network

(McGee, 2010). Multiple studies show that women weigh family and caregiving responsibilities in their career decisions (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Gordon et al., 2025; McGee, 2010; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Santelli & Grissom, 2026).

In Tennessee, Black educators are overrepresented at each stage of the leadership pipeline relative to their share of the teaching workforce. They are more likely than their white counterparts to hold administrative credentials, and they constitute a larger share of APs (23%) than teachers (13%) and principals (19%) (Bartanen et al., 2021; Santelli & Grissom, 2026). Black and white APs in Tennessee ascend to the principalship at similar rates (Bartanen et al., 2021; Goldring et al., 2021). However, less is known about their aspirations and application patterns (which occur prior to movement). In a large urban district in the Southeast, Black APs are less likely to apply to principal roles, and when they do, they take longer to apply (Guthery et al., 2026). These differences are especially acute for women of color (Guthery et al., 2026), highlighting the need for an intersectional approach when examining individuals' aspirations for the principalship.

AP-Principal Relational Factors. Relationships with colleagues and supervisors are key to how individuals form career intentions (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Gordon et al., 2025). The AP-principal relationship is important because principals typically directly supervise assistant principals. Principals can serve as role models and provide APs with opportunities to practice critical school leadership skills such as instructional leadership (Goldring et al., 2021). These experiences may, in turn, shape their career aspirations.

Principals are key to encouraging APs to move into the principalship. Educators are often “tapped” for leadership positions through encouragement from their supervisors or colleagues (Bohannon et al., 2026; Myung et al., 2011). Tapping is a multidimensional process that can

encourage or prompt individuals to pursue a leadership path, including taking on informal or teacher-leader roles and obtaining required licensures and certifications (Bohannon et al., 2026; Parylo et al., 2012). Recruitment by a colleague or supervisor was one of the most common circumstances surrounding educators' entry into administration, though many also described their entry as at least partly self-initiated (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). In interviews with recently hired principals in two urban school districts, candidates reported being tapped for specific positions and were told exactly where they should apply (Gordon et al., 2025). In some of these cases, they were not actively looking for a principal job, but sought one *because* they had been encouraged to apply (Gordon et al., 2025). In this way, tapping may both shape APs' career aspirations for the principalship *and* prompt the actions that move them toward it.

There is some evidence that AP-principal racial and gender congruence shifts educators' career decisions, though less is known about its link to career aspirations. Female educators are less likely to be tapped for leadership compared to male educators, regardless of whether their principals are male or female (Goldring et al., 2021; Myung et al., 2011). Black and Hispanic teachers are more likely to be tapped by their principals compared to white teachers; principals are more likely to tap teachers who share their racial identity (Myung et al., 2011). Teachers who share race and gender with their principals report more workplace support than their colleagues in the same school, particularly Black teachers with Black principals (Viano et al., 2023). Racial matching also has also been theorized to influence promotion in workplaces outside education (Baron & Pfeffer, 1994).

School Settings. Assistant principals' school contexts may shape their aspirations to the principalship and the opportunities they apply for. Principal applicants tend to pursue positions at the school level where they have served as a teacher or AP, and elementary educators in

particular overwhelmingly target elementary principalships (Gordon et al., 2025). This may be because secondary school principal roles are challenging for novice principals due to their organizational complexity (Gordon et al., 2025), or it may reflect uneven supply and demand across levels. Secondary schools employ more APs compared to elementary schools (Smith et al., 2026), and secondary principals turn over at higher rates than their elementary counterparts (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024). However, secondary APs are less likely to move into principal roles than their elementary peers (Bartanen et al., 2021). This may be because secondary schools are also larger and, thus, have multiple APs who take on specialized grade levels or roles (Smith et al., 2026).

School working conditions and student demographics are associated with educators' movement along the principal pipeline. School leaders are sorted unequally across schools, with more experienced and more effective APs and principals serving schools with fewer historically disadvantaged students (Goldhaber, 2015; Grissom et al., 2019; Lankford et al., 2002; Loeb et al., 2010). Survey evidence from Miami-Dade County finds that APs and principals prefer safe, well-resourced schools that they perceive to have good working conditions (Loeb et al., 2010). However, recent evidence from two urban districts finds that principal candidates were not necessarily less likely to apply to typically harder-to-staff schools; instead, many applicants expressed a desire to lead schools with historically marginalized students (Gordon et al., 2025). In another large district, APs in schools serving higher proportions of white students were less likely to apply to principal roles (Guthery et al., 2026). Beyond applications, there is mixed evidence about the association between school context and movement into the principalship; some studies find that certified teachers in higher-poverty schools are less likely to move into the principalship (Davis et al., 2017), while others find that APs in high-poverty schools are more

likely to move into the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Together, this evidence points to school context as a factor in educators' pathways to the principalship, but provides little information about how these factors relate to APs' aspirations.

Professional Experiences. Assistant principals' professional experiences—such as their years of experience in the AP role—may influence their aspirations for the principalship. Fifty-seven percent of APs in Tennessee never become principals, while 7.5% advance to the principalship each year (Bartanen et al., 2021). In Texas, the majority of promotions to the principalship occur within the first six years of the assistant principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020) and first-time principals in North Carolina average 4.15 years as an AP (Bastian & Henry, 2015). APs with more experience may be those who see the role as a long-term career rather than a stepping stone. It is unclear if this is because they have received “signals” that they cannot move into the principalship or because they prefer not to. Job satisfaction may also be positively related to APs' career aspirations. APs who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to aspire to the principalship, whereas those who are less satisfied are more likely to remain in their current role (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006).

APs' leadership tasks and job performance may play a role in their aspirations for the principalship. Research suggests that APs' roles are primarily focused on student affairs and school management rather than instructional leadership (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003; Moyer & Goldring, 2023; Ricciardi & Petrosko, 2001; VanTuyle, 2018). This has implications for their career trajectories, as instructional leadership is an important skill for effective principals (Fuller et al., 2018; Robinson et al., 2008). Indeed, evidence shows APs who spend less time on instructional leadership are less likely to move into the principalship (Moyer & Goldring, 2024). Some APs may also enjoy their uniquely AP-focused tasks—such as student

affairs—and would prefer not to move into the principalship. Prior experiences in specific tasks required for the principalship, such as instructional leadership, teacher evaluations, and budgeting, may influence aspirations. In Tennessee, elementary APs are more likely to report spending time on instructional leadership compared to secondary APs (Goldring et al., 2021; Moyer & Goldring, 2023). Because instructional leadership is valued in the principalship, APs with more exposure to it may form different aspirations than those whose work centers on student affairs or school management (Moyer & Goldring, 2023).

Finally, evidence from Tennessee finds that APs with higher evaluation scores are more likely to be selected for a same-school promotion when their principals depart (Bartanen et al., 2021). APs with higher evaluation scores may feel confident in their leadership abilities and may be more likely to pursue the principalship as a result. Alternatively, as strong performers well-suited to their role, they may be content to remain APs.

Data & Sample

This study uses three data sources: (1) the 2024 annual Tennessee Educator Survey (TES); (2) Tennessee administrative data from the Tennessee Department of Education; and (3) the National Center for Education Statistics' (NCES) Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates (EDGE). In 2024, 1,232 APs responded to the TES (a 52% statewide AP response rate). We use the survey items to create our outcome of interest: APs' career aspirations. We use statewide administrative data for information about APs' evaluations and the context of the schools where the APs work (including information about their principals). We use the NCES EDGE data for information about their school locales.

Our final analytic sample consists of 882 assistant principals from 674 schools across the state.² Table 1 compares the characteristics of APs in our sample to all APs in the state. Although non-response bias is a typical issue in survey research (Groves & Peytcheva, 2008; Singer, 2006), our sample is fairly representative of the state's AP population. Roughly two-thirds of APs are female in both the sample and in the state, and a similar proportion (just over one-half) of APs have gender congruence with their principals. About half of APs in the sample are novice APs in their first three years in the role (similar to the state), and APs in the sample and across the state both have approximately 18 years of experience as educators. School level is broadly similar as well; comparable shares of APs work in middle (22%) and high schools (31%), though elementary-school APs are somewhat overrepresented in the sample relative to the state (38% compared to 34%).

There are some notable characteristics of the survey sample of APs that differ from the APs in the state. Though approximately one-third of APs in both groups work in low-poverty schools, APs in the sample are statistically significantly less likely to work in a high-poverty school compared to APs in the state (16% compared to 22%, respectively). APs in the sample are also more likely to work in rural settings (54% in the sample compared to 40% statewide) and less likely to work in urban settings compared to APs statewide (21% in the sample compared to 37% statewide). Finally, white APs are overrepresented in our sample compared to the state (90% in the sample compared to 77% statewide), and Black APs are underrepresented (10% in our sample compared to 23% statewide). APs in the sample are also more likely to have racial

² Our analytic sample is smaller than the total number of APs who completed the survey (n=1,232) because we restrict it to APs with complete data on all analysis variables. One such variable is administrator evaluation scores, which are not required of all APs—for example, charter schools do not use the Tennessee TEAM evaluation system. When we instead run models without evaluation scores, which retain a larger sample of APs (n=948), our key findings for gender, race, and secondary-school status are similar.

congruence with their principals compared to those in the state, although this is mostly a product of the overrepresentation of white APs and principals in the sample. As a result of these differences between the sample and APs in the state, we use non-response survey weights for administrators in our analyses.

Measures

This study investigates assistant principals' career aspirations. Our dependent variable of interest is a self-reported measure of APs' aspirations for the principalship. The survey asked: "Are you currently seeking, or do you plan to seek a principal role?" APs choose from three responses: (1) "Yes, I am currently seeking a principal role"; (2) "Yes, I plan to seek a principal role in the future, though I am not yet doing so"; and (3) "No, I do not plan to pursue a principal role." We use this information to create a binary indicator of whether an AP aspires to the principalship (currently seeking or planning to seek the principalship) or does not plan to pursue the principal role.

Measures of APs' personal characteristics include their gender and racial identities. APs in our sample self-identify on the survey as either female or male and can select multiple racial identities, including white, Black, Asian, American Indian or Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander. APs also self-identify as Hispanic or Latino in a separate survey item. We create binary indicators for whether an AP identifies as female, white, or Black.³ We also examine interactions of gender and race to capture the intersectional dimension of these racial and gender identities (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis et al., 2017).

We include five constructs related to AP-principal relationships in our model. First, we use a binary measure to capture whether an AP has been "tapped" by their principal (Myung et

³ We focus on these groups, because more than 99% of APs in Tennessee identify as either white or Black.

al., 2011) using the survey item that asks, “Has your current principal encouraged you to become a principal in the future: Yes/No.” Second, we measure AP-principal gender and racial congruence. Third, we include the number of years an AP’s school leader has served as a principal, as this may serve as a proxy for their mentorship capacity. We also include a measure of the frequency of AP-principal interactions, which is one aspect of closeness in interpersonal relationships (Marsden & Campbell, 1984; Moyer & Goldring, 2023; Reagans, 2011), and APs often report that mentoring occurs through informal interactions with their principals and other school leaders (Searby et al., 2017). We group responses to a survey item on the frequency of informal AP-principal interactions into four categories, from a limited number (none to two per day) to a great number (11 or more per day). Exact wording and categories appear in Table 1. Finally, we include a measure of the length of the relationships between APs and their principals by capturing how long they have worked together in the same school.

To analyze school settings, we include measures of the percentage of economically disadvantaged students and teachers’ perceptions of school and school leadership climate. Specifically, we identify high-poverty schools as those in the top quartile by the proportion of economically disadvantaged students. We also measure school level (elementary, middle, and high) and locale (urban, suburban, and rural). We construct a factor-based measure of teachers’ perceptions of their school and school leadership climate based on eight survey items answered by teachers within the AP’s school (see Appendix A for survey items).⁴

In terms of APs’ professional experiences, we focus on individual-level measures of how APs experience their current role. We use survey responses and administrative data to identify

⁴ We conduct exploratory factor analysis on responses to these items from 35,330 teachers in 1,834 schools (see Appendix A). Our analysis yields a single-factor solution with factor loadings between 0.79 and 0.90. We use this information to create an underlying construct for each teacher that is standardized ($M = 0$; $SD = 1$) and then averaged within schools to create a school-level measure associated with each AP.

novice APs (those with three or fewer years of experience as APs) and include measures of assistant principals' leadership tasks using a self-reported survey item. The survey asked assistant principals to respond to the following question: "In an average week, what percentage of your work time do you devote to each of the following activities?" We use this information to develop three measures of assistant principals' leadership tasks: instructional leadership, student affairs, and school management (Moyer & Goldring, 2023; see Appendix B for survey items). Instructional leadership, in particular, is important because the principal role frequently emphasizes instructional leadership for school improvement, and APs who have fewer opportunities to practice instructional leadership may be less likely to aspire to the principalship (Bryk et al., 2010; Heck et al., 1990; Robinson et al., 2008; Supovitz et al., 2010). We include a factor-based measure related to individual APs' job satisfaction⁵ because it is often a predictor of aspiring to leadership positions (Kwan & Walker, 2009; Marshall & Hooley, 2006; Sutter, 1996). We include APs' overall observation scores on the Tennessee TEAM evaluation system, which includes 17 indicators scored against a statewide rubric from 1 to 5 where "5" is "significantly above expectations," "3" is "at expectations," and "1" is "significantly below expectations." We include measures of the four categories (significantly above, above, at, or below expectations)⁶ in our descriptive results, and we standardize APs' average observation score in regression models.

Analytical Method

⁵ We conduct exploratory factor analysis using three survey items related to job satisfaction ("I am generally satisfied with being an administrator in this school;" "I feel appreciated for the job that I am doing;" "I like the way things are run in this district") to create a standardized measure ($M=0$; $SD=1$) that captures APs' job satisfaction (see Appendix A for survey items). Our analysis yields a single-factor solution with factor loadings between 0.71 and 0.87.

⁶ No APs had an average observation score between 1.0 and 1.99 (significantly below expectations).

We take both a descriptive and an explanatory approach to understanding APs' career aspirations.⁷ We first explore descriptive levels of APs' career aspirations and then examine differences in APs' career aspirations by their (1) personal, (2) AP-principal relational, (3) school, and (4) professional factors. We then estimate APs' career aspirations related to these factors with the following linear probability model:⁸

$$Y_{isdp} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \mathbf{X}_{1i} + \beta_2 \mathbf{X}_{2s} + \beta_3 \mathbf{X}_{3ip} + \beta_4 \mathbf{X}_{4i} + \theta_d + \varepsilon_{isdp}$$

Our outcome, Y , is the binary indicator for whether an AP i in school s and district d working with principal p aspires to the principalship. We include four vectors of variables related to the four theoretical categories defined above.

Vector $\mathbf{X}_{1i}$ includes APs' gender and racial identities. Given that nearly all APs in our state identify as white or Black, we limit our analysis to these two racial groups and compare APs who identify as Black to APs who identify as white. We include an interaction variable ($Female_i \times Black_i$) to account for the intersection of these racial and gender identities in Models 2 and 3 (Davis et al., 2017).

Vector $\mathbf{X}_{3ip}$ includes variables related to the AP-principal relationship. This includes the binary measure of whether an AP's principal has encouraged them to become a principal and a measure of the frequency with which APs have informal interactions with their principals. We also include measures for how many years the principal has served as a principal and how many years the AP and the principal have worked together. To examine racial and gender congruence

⁷ In line with EdWorking Paper's policy on AI, we acknowledge the use of Claude (Anthropic) to support the development of this manuscript. All Stata programs were human written; however, we used Claude to check these programs for potential errors. Claude had no access to the underlying data. Claude was also used to copyedit the manuscript. All suggestions made by Claude were reviewed and verified by the authors, who take full responsibility for the contents of the published article.

⁸ We estimate linear probability models for ease of interpretation. Results are substantively consistent with logistic regression: across models, average marginal effects from logit specifications match the linear probability estimates in sign, magnitude, and significance for all key predictors.

between APs and their principals, we include an interaction of AP and principals' racial identities (*Black AP_i X Black Principal_p*) and an interaction of AP and principals' gender identities (*Female AP_i X Female Principal_p*) in Table 4.

We measure APs' school settings in vector X_{2s} . This includes whether an AP works in a high-poverty school (compared to all other schools), level (high school compared to elementary and middle school), locale (urban and rural compared to suburban schools), and a standardized measure of teachers' perceptions of their school and school leadership climate. We include assistant principals' professional experiences in vector X_{4i} . We compare novice APs (with three or fewer years of experience in the role) to experienced APs (those with more than three years of experience). We also include a binary measure of APs in the bottom quartile of weekly time on instructional leadership tasks (compared to those who spend more time on instructional leadership tasks) and a standardized measure of their job satisfaction. We also include a standardized measure of APs' average evaluation scores on the observation rubric.

In Table 3, Model 3, we include district fixed effects (θ_d) to compare APs within districts. We do this to account for district policies that might support or hinder APs' aspirations to the principalship. Across all models, we use analytic weights and cluster our standard errors at the district level to account for the nested nature of APs within districts.

Findings

Table 2 displays differences in APs' aspirations to the principalship across APs' personal characteristics, relationships with their principals, school settings, and professional experiences. Overall, 60% of APs in our sample aspire to the principalship, while 40% report that they plan to remain in their current roles (n=882). Female and male APs aspire at similar rates, but Black APs are more likely to aspire than white APs (71% compared to 58%). APs whose gender or race

differs from their principal's aspire somewhat more than those who match their principal (63% versus 57% by gender; 67% versus 59% by race).

There are some differences in APs' aspirations to the principalship based on their relationships with their principals (Table 2). Most notably, APs who have been encouraged by their principal to become a principal are substantially more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to those who have not been encouraged (68% compared to 35%). On average, APs who aspire to the principalship have been working with their principals for less time compared to those who do not (5.5 years compared to 7.2 years). However, this may be a function of their time in role, as novice APs are more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to experienced APs (69% compared to 52%). We do not observe substantial differences in the frequency of APs' interactions with their principals.

Finally, we examine differential aspirations by school and professional experiences. High school APs are less likely to aspire to the principalship (53%) compared to middle school (67%) and elementary school (63%) APs. APs who aspire to the principalship work in schools where teachers report less positive perceptions of school and school leadership climate. While we do not observe differences in the average time APs spend on different types of leadership tasks, the averages in Table 2 mask some important variation. Specifically, APs in the bottom quartile of instructional leadership aspire to the principalship at the lowest rates (53%) compared to those in the second (56%), third (70%), and fourth (58%) quartiles (not reported in Table 2). We do not observe substantial differences in aspirations by school locale or poverty status, APs' job satisfaction, or APs' observational evaluation scores.

Table 3 presents the linear probability models, which allow us to examine the personal, AP-principal relational, school, and professional factors that predict APs' aspirations for the

principalship. In terms of personal factors, we do not find evidence that women and men aspire to the principalship at different rates. Black APs are approximately 9 percentage points more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to white APs. The higher aspiration among Black APs is concentrated among men: Black male APs are approximately 27 percentage points more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to white APs, whereas Black female APs aspire at similar rates to white APs.

Assistant principals with principals who encouraged them to become principals in the future are substantially more likely (35 percentage points) to aspire to the principalship compared to those who were not encouraged. Other variables related to the AP-principal relationship are weaker predictors of APs' aspirations. There is a statistically significant negative relationship between APs' time spent working with their principals and their aspirations; for every year that APs work directly with their principal, they are one percentage point less likely to aspire to the principalship. This holds regardless of whether the AP is a novice or more experienced. We do not find statistically significant relationships between APs' aspirations for the principalship and the frequency of informal interactions APs report having with their principals or the years of experience their principals have in the position. We find no evidence that AP-principal racial congruence is associated with aspirations; however, female APs are less likely to aspire when their principal is also female, about 11 percentage points lower than the same comparison among male APs (Table 4).

Turning to school characteristics, high school assistant principals are approximately 8 percentage points less likely to aspire to the principalship compared to elementary and middle school APs. APs in schools with more positive teacher-reported climate are less likely to aspire to the principalship; a one standard deviation increase in school/school leadership climate is

associated with a 7-percentage-point decrease in the likelihood of aspiring to the principalship.

We do not observe statistically significant differences between high-poverty schools (compared to all other schools) or across school locales.

In terms of professional experiences, novice APs (those with three or fewer years of experience in the role) are 14 percentage points more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to more experienced APs (those with four or more years of experience). APs in the bottom quartile of time spent on instructional leadership (those who spend the least time on these tasks) are 8 percentage points less likely to aspire to the principalship compared to those who spend more time on instructional leadership. Notably, APs' evaluation scores are not statistically significantly related to their aspirations: higher-rated APs are no more likely to aspire to the principalship than lower-rated ones, and job satisfaction is not statistically significantly related to aspirations. These patterns are generally consistent across models. In Model 3, we add district fixed effects, which allow us to compare APs within districts to account for districtwide policies that may influence APs' career aspirations; our findings largely persist even after accounting for differences across districts.

Discussion

A growing body of evidence documents differences in who applies and advances to the principalship, yet little is known about the extent to which these differences are explained by APs' aspirations. Unlike advancement and application, which are partly a function of available vacancies and hiring decisions, APs' career aspirations are largely independent of demand. Overall, we find that 60% of APs in our sample aspire to the principalship. This is well above the roughly one-third of APs who ever apply to the principalship (Guthery et al., 2026), highlighting a narrowing supply as APs move from *aspiring* to the role to *pursuing* it. Our findings are

consistent with existing evidence that most APs want to become principals (Goldring et al., 2021), but lower than previous estimates from Miami-Dade County, which find that 80% of APs aspired to the principalship (Loeb et al., 2010). This may reflect differences in local context or broader shifts in schooling, including the stresses and expectations of school leadership and, less commonly, lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the politicization of schooling (Neumerski et al., 2025; Santelli & Grissom, 2026). Some APs may prefer the working conditions of the AP role, which they perceive as less stressful (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Santelli & Grissom, 2026). More broadly, the gap between aspiring and applying may reflect not only barriers to advancement but also that APs are selective about when and where they pursue the principalship (Gordon et al., 2025) and that aspirations can fade over time.

For Black APs, higher aspirations do not necessarily translate to likelihood of advancement. In Tennessee, Black and white APs ascend to the principalship at similar rates (Goldring et al., 2021); however, we find that Black APs aspire to the principalship at higher rates than their white peers. This pattern is driven by Black men: Black male APs are considerably more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to their white counterparts, while Black female APs aspire at similar rates to their white peers. Together, these patterns suggest that the funnel from aspiration to application to advancement narrows more steeply for Black APs—not because they aspire less, but for reasons that we cannot fully observe in this study. One possibility is the hiring process; in a study of Tennessee license-holders, some individuals cite unfairness in how positions are filled as a reason for not pursuing school leadership, with some respondents explicitly naming racial biases in hiring (Santelli & Grissom, 2026). We interpret our own results about aspirations cautiously; the small sample of Black APs (n=90) may be particularly sensitive to outliers. In terms of gender, male and female APs are

similarly likely to aspire to the principalship, which aligns with patterns of movement into the principalship in the state; neither Goldring et al. (2021) nor Bartanen et al. (2021) find evidence of differential movement from the AP to principal positions by gender in Tennessee.

Aspirations also vary with APs' school setting and professional experiences. High school APs are less likely to aspire to the principalship than their elementary and middle school peers. This may reflect differences in how the secondary principalship is viewed: one early-career principal in a Tennessee district described the added organizational complexity of high schools as too difficult for novice principals (Gordon et al., 2025). High school APs are also more likely to take on specialized, less instruction-focused work than their elementary peers (Moyer & Goldring, 2023; Smith et al., 2026), giving them less of the instructional leadership experience valued in the principalship. Consistent with Gordon and colleagues' findings that principal applicants were not disinclined to apply to harder-to-staff schools, we do not find evidence that *aspirations* differ by school poverty level. APs in schools with more positive teacher-reported climate, however, are less likely to aspire to the principalship. APs who are satisfied in supportive schools may feel less pull to leave for the principalship, while those in more difficult settings may be more motivated to seek a role with greater authority to make change. Finally, we find no evidence that APs' evaluation scores are related to their aspirations, potentially because of limited variation in evaluation scores.

The strongest predictors of APs' aspirations are their experience in the role and whether their principal has encouraged them to pursue the principalship. Novice APs are 14 percentage points more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to APs who have four or more years of experience as administrators, which is consistent with evidence that longer-serving APs are less likely to move into the principalship (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Qualitative research reports that

educators view the principal role as having “conflicting demands,” while the AP role has a narrower scope of responsibilities (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012, p. 805). APs with more experience may have observed these differences in working conditions first-hand and concluded that the principal role is less attractive. Alternatively, later-career APs may have attempted to become principals in the past without success and no longer aspire to the principalship. Further research should examine to what extent (and why) APs' aspirations shift over time.

“Tapping”—an informal recruitment mechanism for school leadership (Bohannon et al., 2026; Myung et al., 2011)—is the single largest predictor of APs' aspirations in our models. APs who report they have been encouraged (by their principals) to become principals are 35 percentage points more likely to aspire to the principalship compared to those who have not been similarly encouraged. This is consistent with qualitative studies of educators' career decisions, which find that educators often enter school leadership because they are encouraged to do so by someone else (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Our results highlight the significant role that principals play in supporting and developing APs' interest in becoming principals. This is important because principal shortages—fueled by high rates of principal turnover—will likely require more APs to enter the principalship to fill vacancies, especially in harder-to-staff schools (Levin et al., 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2024).

Existing research finds that tapping is unevenly distributed: male teachers are more likely to be tapped than women, Black and Hispanic teachers are more likely to be tapped than their white peers, and principals more often tap teachers who share their racial identity (Myung et al., 2011). This uneven distribution may contribute to the demographic differences we observe in aspiration, since who is encouraged shapes who comes to want the role. The importance of tapping in predicting APs' aspirations for the principalship raises questions about how principals

make choices about how and when to encourage their APs to become principals. To our knowledge, there is no research on the nature of the decisions and approaches principals use when choosing which APs to encourage.

These findings should be interpreted within the context of our limitations. We acknowledge the endogeneity in the relationship between tapping and aspirations; we cannot determine whether encouragement shapes aspiration or if principals encourage APs who already aspire. Our use of statewide data adds to the literature on AP applications (typically studied at the district level) and advancement to the principalship (typically studied at the state level); however, our findings may not generalize beyond Tennessee. The lack of educator diversity also limits our analysis to only Black and white APs. The cross-sectional nature of our work does not explain or model how individuals' aspirations form or change over time, which may be important to understand the supply of future principals.

Implications & Conclusion

This study raises several important implications for policymakers and practitioners. First, given the large proportion of APs who aspire to the principalship, districts can intentionally build their supply of future principals by creating formalized principal pipelines that provide mentoring or coaching, cohort-based professional learning communities, and leadership development opportunities (S. Gates et al., 2019; Goldring et al., 2023). Our findings point to ways that districts might differentiate these opportunities based on APs' professional experiences. For example, given that novice APs are more eager to move into the principalship compared to more experienced APs, districts may consider providing cohort-based learning opportunities or AP academies aimed at identifying and developing future leaders. Mid-career APs might benefit from targeted development opportunities; they aspire to the principalship at

lower rates but may possess important leadership skills and experiences that would make them successful in the principalship.

Our findings inform efforts to diversify the principalship by suggesting that female and Black APs aspire to the principalship at high rates. Black APs aspire to the principalship at higher rates than their white peers, yet efforts to diversify the principalship remain somewhat stagnant (Grissom et al., 2021). Women are underrepresented in school leadership compared to their representation in the teaching profession (Bartanen et al., 2021), yet male and female APs aspire to and move into the principalship at similar rates. This study adds to a body of literature that aims to understand differential movement to the principalship based on educators' personal characteristics (e.g., Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Davis et al., 2017).

Tapping is strongly associated with APs' aspirations to the principalship, making it a tool for building and diversifying the supply of future principals. This study builds on existing research that finds that tapping is an important factor in whether and where educators seek leadership positions in districts with and without formal principal pipelines (Bohannon et al., 2026; Farley-Ripple et al., 2012; Gordon et al., 2025; Myung et al., 2011; Parylo et al., 2012). Tapping can facilitate leadership advancement and also be a potential source of bias. Male teachers are almost twice as likely to be tapped by their principals compared to female teachers, and Black and Hispanic teachers are more likely to be tapped compared to their white colleagues (Myung et al., 2011). Developing principals' awareness of why and whom they are tapping can support Black, Hispanic, and female APs who are often underrepresented in the principalship.

As districts continue to face high rates of principal turnover (National Center for Education Statistics, 2024), the most likely supply of future principals comes from the ranks of APs (Goldring et al., 2025). Less is known about what shapes APs' aspirations to move into the

principalship. This study suggests there are specific actions central office leaders can undertake to develop APs for the principalship and support their career goals, developing a ready supply of future principals for the district. Future research can design interventions and policies to support APs' career aspirations by developing AP-to-principal development and support programs, helping principals mentor, sponsor, and tap APs, and providing guidance to principals on how to provide APs with opportunities to develop key leadership skills.

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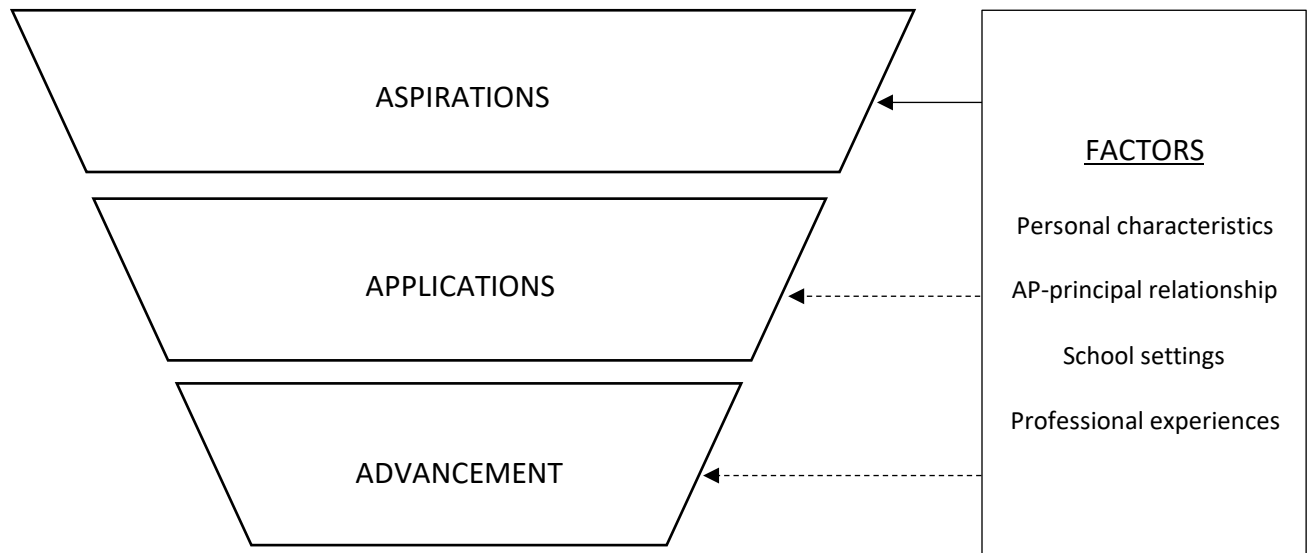
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Figure 1. *Conceptualizing the movement into the principalship as a funnel from aspiration to application to advancement*



Note: This study models how the factors relate to career aspirations (solid line). Other studies model how these factors relate to applications (e.g., Gordon et al., 2025; Guthery et al., 2026) or advancement (e.g., Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Crawford & Fuller, 2017; Davis et al., 2017).

Table 1. *Descriptive Statistics of Assistant Principals in the Analytic Sample Compared to All Assistant Principals in the State*

	Analytic Sample APs	State Population APs
<u>AP Characteristics</u>		
Female	0.67	0.65
White	0.90	0.77***
Black	0.10	0.23***
Asian, American Indian/Alaska Native, or Native Hawaiian	†	<0.01
Ethnicity: Hispanic or Latino	†	0.01
AP-Principal same gender	0.56	0.55
AP-Principal same race	0.85	0.80**
<u>AP-Principal Relationship</u>		
AP encouraged (by principal) to become a principal	0.74	-
Years AP and principal have worked together	6.18 (5.24)	4.66*** (4.55)
Principals' years experience (as principal)	6.98 (4.83)	7.02 (4.91)
Number of daily Informal Interactions with principal:		-
A Limited Number of Interactions (0-2)	0.13	-
A few interactions (3-5)	0.25	-
A fair number of interactions (6-10)	0.29	-
A great number of interactions (11+)	0.33	-
<u>School Setting</u>		
Level		
High School	0.31	0.33
Middle School	0.22	0.22
Elementary School	0.38	0.34*
Poverty		
Low Poverty School	0.34	0.31
High Poverty School	0.16	0.22***
Locale		
Urban	0.21	0.37***
Suburban	0.25	0.23
Rural	0.54	0.40***
<u>Professional Experiences</u>		
Novice AP (3 or fewer years of experience)	0.45	0.44

Educator experience (years)	18.00 (7.75)	17.86 (7.97)
Evaluation scores:		
Significantly above expectations	0.05	0.04
Above expectations	0.55	0.50**
At expectations	0.39	0.44**
Below expectations	0.02	0.02
% of week spent on leadership tasks		
Instructional leadership	32.73 (15.16)	-
Student affairs	51.32 (18.13)	-
School management	15.95 (11.54)	-
Observations	882	2,465

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses where appropriate; survey weights not applied. Data for some variables are missing for some observations in the state population. Low-poverty school refers to the bottom quartile of schools by the proportion of students considered economically disadvantaged; high-poverty school refers to schools in the top quartile of this measure. Novice assistant principals have three or fewer years of experience. Evaluation scores are observation scores based on a statewide rubric scored from 1 to 5, where 5 = significantly above expectations and 1 = significantly below expectations. Unless otherwise specified, means refer to the proportion of the sample across each measure. Asterisks indicate statistically significant differences between the survey sample and the state population. Dash indicates information not available for state population (because information comes from the survey). Dagger (†) denotes cell suppression to protect confidentiality due to small cell sizes ($n < 10$).

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. *Assistant Principals' Aspirations to the Principalship by Their Personal Characteristics, AP-Principal Relationships, School Settings, and Professional Experiences*

	N	Aspire to the Principalship	Wish to Remain AP
<i>AP Characteristics</i>			
Female	592	0.60	0.40
Male	290	0.59	0.41
White	792	0.58	0.42
Black	90	0.71	0.29
<i>AP-Principal Race and Gender Congruence</i>			
Same gender	494	0.57	0.43
Female AP & female principal	346	0.58	0.42
Male AP & male principal	148	0.54	0.46
Different gender	388	0.63	0.37
Female AP & male principal	246	0.63	0.37
Male AP & female principal	142	0.63	0.37
Same race	727	0.59	0.41
White AP & white principal	691	0.58	0.42
Black AP & Black principal	36	0.68	0.32
Different race	130	0.67	0.33
White AP & Black principal	65	0.62	0.38
Black AP & white principal	50	0.70	0.30
<i>AP-Principal Relationship</i>			
AP encouraged (by principal) to become a principal	657	0.68	0.32
Not encouraged (by principal) to become a principal	225	0.35	0.65
Years AP and principal have worked together	882	5.46 (4.67)	7.20 (5.75)
Principals' years experience (as principal)	882	6.98 (4.78)	7.05 (5.12)
Number of daily informal interactions with principal:			
A limited number of interactions (0-2)	113	0.61	0.39
A few interactions (3-5)	223	0.59	0.41
A fair number of interactions (6-10)	253	0.58	0.42
A great number of interactions (11+)	293	0.62	0.38
<i>School Setting</i>			
Level			
High school	270	0.53	0.47
Middle school	192	0.67	0.33

Elementary school	337	0.63	0.37
Poverty			
Low poverty school	303	0.60	0.40
High poverty school	142	0.59	0.41
Locale			
Urban	189	0.62	0.38
Suburban	221	0.59	0.41
Rural	472	0.59	0.41
Average teachers' perceptions of school and school leadership climate (standardized)	882	-0.02 (0.48)	0.06 (0.44)
<i>Professional Experiences</i>			
Novice AP (3 or fewer years of experience)	400	0.69	0.31
Experienced AP (4+ years experience)	482	0.52	0.48
Evaluation scores:			
Significantly above expectations	40	0.60	0.40
Above expectations	486	0.59	0.41
At expectations	340	0.61	0.39
Below expectations	16	†	†
% week spent on leadership tasks			
instructional leadership (%)	882	33.55 (14.58)	31.63 (15.95)
Student affairs (%)	882	50.99 (17.13)	51.74 (19.29)
School management (%)	882	15.46 (9.91)	16.63 (13.47)
Job satisfaction (standardized)	882	0.05 (1.02)	0.01 (0.90)
Number of APs	882	530	352
Proportion of APs		0.60	0.40

Note: Standard deviations in parentheses. Analytic survey weights applied. Low-poverty school refers to the bottom quartile of schools by the proportion of students considered economically disadvantaged; high-poverty school refers to schools in the top quartile of this measure. Teachers' perceptions of school and school leadership climate is a standardized, composite measure of items related to school culture and school leadership (see Appendix A); AP job satisfaction is a standardized, composite measure of items related to job satisfaction (see Appendix A). Evaluation scores are observation scores based on a statewide rubric scored from 1 to 5, where 5 = significantly above expectations and 1 = significantly below expectations. Years of experience as an administrator is self-reported by APs on the Tennessee Educator Survey. Unless otherwise specified, means refer to the proportion of the sample. Dagger (†) denotes cell suppression to protect confidentiality due to small cell sizes (n<10).

Table 3. *Linear Probability Models Predicting Assistant Principals' Aspirations*

	(1)	(2)	(3)
<u><i>AP Personal Characteristics</i></u>			
Female	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)
Black	0.09 ⁺ (0.05)	0.27** (0.10)	0.24* (0.11)
Female X Black (interaction)		-0.25* (0.10)	-0.22 ⁺ (0.11)
<u><i>AP-Principal Relationship</i></u>			
Encouraged by principal	0.35*** (0.04)	0.35*** (0.04)	0.35*** (0.05)
Daily informal interactions with principal	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.01)	-0.02 (0.02)
Principal years of experience as principal	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
AP-Principal years working together	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)
<u><i>School Setting</i></u>			
High school	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.08* (0.04)	-0.11* (0.04)
High-poverty school	-0.04 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.03 (0.06)
Urban	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.02 (0.06)
Rural	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)	0.00 (0.07)
School/school leadership climate (standardized)	-0.06 ⁺ (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.08* (0.04)
<u><i>Professional Experiences</i></u>			
Novice AP	0.14*** (0.04)	0.14*** (0.04)	0.13** (0.05)
Bottom quartile of weekly time on instructional leadership tasks	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.07 ⁺ (0.04)
APs' job satisfaction (standardized)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.02 (0.03)
Evaluation score (standardized)	0.00 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)
Constant	0.48*** (0.06)	0.47*** (0.06)	0.43*** (0.09)
District fixed effects			Y
Observations	882	882	882
R ²	0.16	0.16	0.26
Adjusted R ²	0.14	0.15	0.13
F	23.66	24.04	20.63

Note: Standard errors in parentheses where appropriate; analytic survey weights applied. Low-poverty school refers to the bottom quartile of schools by the proportion of students considered economically disadvantaged. Teachers' perceptions of school and school leadership climate is a standardized, composite measure of items related to school culture and school leadership (see Appendix A); AP job satisfaction is a standardized, composite measure of items related to job satisfaction (see Appendix A). Time as an administrator is self-reported by APs on the Tennessee Educator Survey.

+ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Table 4. *Linear Probability Models Predicting Assistant Principals' Aspirations to the Principalship with a Focus on AP and Principal Race/Gender Congruence*

	(1)	(2)
<u><i>AP Personal Characteristics</i></u>		
AP female	0.01 (0.05)	-0.04 (0.03)
AP Black	0.09 ⁺ (0.05)	0.10 ⁺ (0.06)
<u><i>Principal Personal Characteristics</i></u>		
Principal female	0.05 (0.06)	
Principal Black		-0.01 (0.05)
<u><i>AP-Principal Race and Gender Congruence</i></u>		
Female AP X female principal (interaction)	-0.11 ⁺ (0.06)	
Black AP X Black principal (interaction)		-0.04 (0.08)
Constant	0.45 ^{***} (0.08)	0.50 ^{***} (0.07)
School characteristics	Y	Y
AP-P relational	Y	Y
Professional	Y	Y
Observations	882	857
R ²	0.16	0.15
Adjusted R ²	0.15	0.14
F	23.09	22.09

Note: Standard errors in parentheses. Analytic survey weights applied. School, AP-P relational, and professional covariates from Table 3 are included in the model (but not in the table reported).

+ p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001

Appendix A. Survey Items Used to Build Composite Measures of Teachers' Perceptions of their Schools and School Leadership Climate and APs' Job Satisfaction

	N	Mean (SD)	Factor Loading
Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements... (1 – Strongly disagree, 2 – Disagree, 3 – Agree, 4 – Strongly agree)			
<u><i>Teachers' Perceptions of their Schools and School Leadership Climate</i></u>			
There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within this school	36,010	3.15 (0.77)	0.88
Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles	35,950	3.17 (0.73)	0.79
I am generally satisfied with being a teacher in this school	35,935	3.30 (0.73)	0.87
I would recommend this school to parents seeking a place for their child.	35,863	3.30 (0.77)	0.81
Our school staff is a learning community in which ideas and suggestions for improvement are encouraged.	35,910	3.21 (0.76)	0.87
School leadership communicates a clear vision for this school	35,871	3.18 (0.79)	0.86
The staff feels comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them with school leaders	35,864	3.06 (0.87)	0.87
I like the way things are run at this school	35,762	3.03 (0.84)	0.90
<u><i>APs' Job Satisfaction</i></u>			
I am generally satisfied with being an administrator in this school	1,216	3.54 (0.61)	0.86
I feel appreciated for the job that I am doing	1,216	3.37 (0.69)	0.87
I like the way things are run in this district	1,204	3.14 (0.72)	0.71

Note: School and school leadership climate factor was calculated using teachers with complete responses to these items (n=35,330). We use individual teachers' perceptions of their schools and school leadership to create this measure. We then use weighted averages to create a school-level measure for each school. AP job satisfaction factor was calculated using all APs who took the survey (n=1,271).

Appendix B. Survey Items Related to Leadership Tasks

	N	Mean (SD)
<u><i>Instructional Leadership</i></u>		
Tasks related to teacher evaluation (e.g., formal observations, post-conferences)	1,160	11.49 (7.60)
Completing instructional walk throughs	1,158	7.32 (6.06)
Teacher instructional support/planning and preparation	1,157	6.94 (5.78)
Other instructional leadership (e.g., data analysis or data meetings, curriculum)	1,158	7.57 (6.02)
<u><i>Student Affairs</i></u>		
Student discipline	1,161	22.24 (16.41)
Other student-related meetings (e.g., IEP meetings, RTI2 meetings)	1,159	11.57 (9.65)
Supervisory roles (e.g., lunch/hall/bus duty, extracurricular events)	1,160	10.60 (8.09)
Parent and community interactions (e.g., parent conferences, meetings)	1,158	6.17 (4.44)
<u><i>School Management</i></u>		
General school management duties (e.g., scheduling, budgeting)	1,159	9.16 (10.06)
Personnel matters (e.g., hiring)	1,159	2.87 (3.26)
Interacting with district leaders/central office	1,160	2.99 (3.13)
Other	1,154	1.27 (4.08)

Note. Exact wording of survey items related to leadership roles. Standard deviations in parentheses. Data from the 2024 Tennessee Educator Survey (includes all APs who completed the items).