

TITLE: Perceived Effectiveness of Middle School Principals and Preparation for the Principalship

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OBJECTIVE: The purpose of this study was to examine the perceptions of middle school principals of their leadership practice as school administrators, and to describe the elements of principal preparation, if any, that correlate with those perceptions.

METHODOLOGY: Leadership Practice Inventory surveys were sent to 512 middle school principals in Maryland and Virginia, with 282 returned (53% response rate). The typical respondent was over 50 years old (56%), and 63% were male. About one third had been a middle school principal for less than three years, 27% three to five years, 21% six to ten years, and 20% more than ten years. Twenty-three percent served in urban schools, 49% in suburban schools, and 23% in rural schools; principals in small schools accounted for 24% of the respondents, 50% in medium size schools, and 26% in large schools.

KEY FINDINGS: The rank order for the leadership practices, from most frequent to least frequent, was Modeling, Enabling, Encouraging, Challenging, and Inspiring. Females reported significantly greater frequency on every leadership practice but Modeling. There was a significant correlation between formal education and Challenging and Inspiring. There were also significant correlations between the five leadership practices and principals' coursework in adolescent development and in middle school curriculum, as well as field-based experience in middle level education. Overall, demographic characteristics of years of experience, school size and school location did not generally distinguish between individual groups.