



Self-Efficacy of Catholic School Principals  
and their Professional Learning Implications



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## **Executive Summary**

This capstone project aimed to assess the leadership self-efficacy of elementary, middle and high school principals in the Diocese of Savannah. The purpose of this study was to not only analyze perceived competencies with respect to various roles and responsibilities but also to address the key issues and findings for future formation. Using Bandura's framework of perceived self-efficacy will help the organization in the future formation of Catholic school leaders. The goal is to provide an outcome that yields a positive learning environment through the development of skills and areas of core competencies. Proper formation of Catholic school principals is an essential prerequisite to withstanding the already troubled vitality of Catholic school leadership. Studies done by Canavan (2001), Durow & Brock (2004) and Fraser & Brock (2006) have all discerned a common problem. Attracting and retaining Catholic principals is a systemic nationwide problem of epic proportions. This study used a mixed methods approach to address the following questions:

- What are the levels of self-efficacy regarding Catholic school principal's roles and responsibilities?
- Is there a relationship between Catholic school principals' self-efficacy with respect to roles and responsibilities and variables including leadership preparation and/or experience?
- What factors do Catholic school principals' contribute to their success?
- What factors in the area(s) of preparation and/or experience do Catholic school principals' report as inhibiting their success and effectiveness?

Quantitative data (N=15) were collected using an on-line survey measuring self-efficacy on nine dimensions. The nine dimensions are instructional leadership and staff development, school climate, community collaboration, data-based decision making aligned with legal and ethical principles, resource

and facility management, use of community resources, communication in a diverse environment, development of school vision and supporting the Catholic identity of schools.

A Likert 5 point scale was used with a range of *Not Very Confident* – *Very Confident* as indicators of self-efficacy. Qualitative data was collected using phone interviews (N=3) with respondents ranging in professional experience. One respondent was a new Catholic school principal, one had more than five years' experience and one had over twenty years of experience.

Highest means were reported in *Communication in a Diverse Environment* (M=4.73) and *Supporting the Catholic Identity of Schools* (M=4.49), while lowest were in *Community Collaboration* (M=3.71) and *Use of Community Resources* (M=3.97). Interviews identified perceived strengths in curriculum and instruction. Interviews also identified strengths in Catholic identity. There were identified weaknesses in student data with respect to building a comprehensive professional development program. There was also a need identified for support and geographical partnerships to aid and support facility management, curriculum and instruction and overall school improvement efforts. Recommendations include providing differentiated professional development to increase principal efficacy and competencies in the areas of community collaboration but also provide job-embedded mentorship for new principals. This was an area of weakness identified by all interviewed respondents.

### **Introduction**

In 1894, during a national meeting in Baltimore, Catholic bishops from across the United States decided that a need existed to ensure faith was a component of the academic. By 1920, more than 8,000 parish schools had formed from each urban diocese nationwide enrolling approximately two million students (Polka et al., 2016). Catholic school enrollment peaked in the 1960s with 5.2 million students enrolled in almost thirteen thousand schools. These schools were staffed primarily by priests and nuns whose living expenses are funded through church offerings; therefore, school operating costs were

minimal. In the mid-60s changes began to negatively impact thriving Catholic schools. *The Civil Rights Act of 1964* and *The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965* resulted in a gap between public school funding and their Catholic counterparts (Polka et al., 2016). During this same time, The Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) released significant changes to the roles and responsibilities of priests and nuns which consequently led to a decrease in future religious vocations compounded with many choosing to leave the religious life (Polka et al., 2016). These changes involved a call to go into the modern world. These nuns and priests once lived in convents in the schools and parishes and worked only in the school. This call to go into the modern world changed that. They could now wear regular clothes, live independently and pick a calling or direction that did not involve schools or teaching. This meant Catholic schools had to hire more lay teachers and leaders.

During this same period came the shift of middle class Americans leaving to the suburbs. This exodus negatively impacted enrollment as students who previously attended Catholic schools now enrolled in public suburban schools. From 1960 until 2010, the number of Catholic schools declined by almost 45% and enrollment in Catholic schools decreased by 60% with the numbers continuing to decline today (Polka et al., 2016).

As a Catholic school leader with 19 years of experience, I know firsthand that leading a Catholic school in 2021 is a demanding vocation. Catholic schools nationwide have been impacted by declining enrollment and constant closures. Diocesan leaders continue to struggle with how to successfully stem the tide of dwindling enrollments, school closings, and depleting financial resources in an era of increased accountability and increased diversity (Polka et al., 2016).

Catholic school principals face unique responsibilities and challenges. Boyle et al., (2016) wrote in a study about the challenges of preparation and development of school leaders, "in Catholic and other

faith-based schools, the challenge of finding qualified principals is compounded by the simultaneous responsibility of the principal as spiritual leader and as educational instructional and managerial leader” (p.293). As the leaders of their schools, they are faced with the responsibility of ensuring that teachers and students are provided with leadership and direction. They are also charged with ensuring sustained growth in the area of student achievement. This must all be done with diminished resources and maintaining enrollment goals. They must also keep the cost to educate as low as possible while providing a high quality education that exceeds their public and private counterparts. The professional responsibilities of Catholic school leaders include budgeting, human resources, grant writing, curriculum, instruction, maintenance, enrollment management, marketing and communications.

Traditional school leadership preparation programs do not cover the full range of responsibilities and demands placed upon Catholic school leaders. In recent years several universities have customized programs to better suit the needs of future Catholic school leaders. Still, a need exists to best support the current principals and their professional needs. The lack of formal preparation in needed areas means many leaders must either learn on the job or by seeking out additional supports and resources. The absence of training also means many leaders may doubt their own ability to carry out the demanding responsibilities of their work. The lack of adequate preparation results in constant turn over. Research by Levin and Bradley (2019), states that the national average tenure of principals in their schools was four years as of 2016–17. This number masks considerable variation, with 35 percent of principals being at their school for less than two years, and only 11 percent of principals being at their school for 10 years or more (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Quality school leadership is essential to improve student achievement and maintain operational vitality. That being said, effective leadership is a key component in any change effort that focuses on improvement in student achievement. It is therefore of critical importance to identify and address the myriad

of skills needed to ensure that Catholic school principals can meet the demands of current and future students. Extensive research done in the area of leadership and instruction has found that high quality pedagogical practices found throughout a school are only found when there is an effective principal leading the organization (Boyle et. al, 2016). That being said, a leaders ability to impact student achievement is contingent on sound academic preparation. In a study done by Waters et al. (2003), leadership was significantly linked to positive student achievement. That same study also found that a lack of strong instructional leadership can negatively impact the school climate and academics. Catholic school leaders face incredibly difficult challenges. To ensure operational vitality, schools need visionary leaders that can make data-informed decisions to meet and overcome the challenges presented (Holter & Frabutt, 2012).

The Diocese of Savannah Catholic Schools, which includes eleven elementary schools and five high schools, is particularly concerned about the leadership self-efficacy of its principals. The purpose of this Capstone project is to assess principals' perceived competencies with respect to their daily roles and responsibilities. The Diocese plans to utilize its findings to guide future professional development. The purpose of this study is to inform the Catholic Schools office of the areas of need and to recommend a personalized professional development plan. This plan will inform the Catholic schools office of the areas of need and will recommend a personalized professional development plan that will support current leaders and aid in the long-term retention of leaders and operational vitality of institutions. The primary stakeholders for this capstone project include the diocesan leadership, the principals of their schools and their teachers.

### **Organizational Context**

The Diocese of Savannah is a geographical region spanning the southern half state of Georgia. The diocese has a broad geographical reach from the western state border of Alabama to the eastern coast of Jekyll Island. The diocesan office is made up of 27 offices all governed by the Bishop. The Catholic



Schools office falls under one of the 27 offices governed by the Bishop under the direction of the Superintendent and Associate Superintendent.



The office of Catholic schools within the Diocese of Savannah serves to fulfill the Bishop's vision for the catechesis of children. The office is responsible for five areas that commit to support and service those who live the mission of the Catholic Church by preparing the hearts, educating the minds and revealing Christ to cultivate the Roman Catholic tradition. The focus of this capstone will be on the 13 schools that are directly under the purview of the Diocese of Savannah. The Diocese of Savannah has recently been impacted by school closures, mergers and a high number of principal turn-over.

The 13 schools that will be studied are located in 7 deaneries. A deanery by definition is a smaller geographical group put under the management of the dean by the bishop. The sole purpose of a deanery is to assist the bishop in the administration of the diocese. In the case of the Diocese of Savannah, there are a total of 79 parishes or missions, over 77,000 members of the Catholic faith and is geographically spread over 37,038 square miles.

The office of Catholic schools serves approximately 4,743 students according to their 2020 annual report. The demographics are broken up into 3,180 elementary and middle school students and 1,563 high school students. All 13 schools are accredited through SACS / Advanced. The students of this diocese are

high achieving with 48% of students in grades 1-8 outperforming their national peers on the NWEA Map test. The same holds true for the high school with students from the Diocese of Savannah outperforming the SAT national average by 14% in reading and mathematics.

The office of Catholic schools works to ensure that schools are efficiently managed through monthly fiscal oversight, curriculum and instruction initiatives as well as guidance with physical plant, personnel and resources. Each of the schools operates under one of the 6 Diocesan Models of Catholic Education.

Those models are:

Parish – Principal reports directly to the pastor. The role of the Catholic Schools office is advisory in nature.

Diocesan – Principal reports directly to the superintendent. The role of the Catholic Schools office is supervisory.

Independent – Principal reports directly to the Board of Directors. The role of the Catholic Schools office is advisory in nature.

Religious Order – Principal reports directly to the leader of the religious order. The role of the Catholic Schools office is advisory in nature.

Special Designation – (Special Education Programs) Principal reports directly to the pastor or superintendent. The role of the Catholic Schools office is advisory in nature. Directives must be followed by local public school county officials.

Stewardship Model – Principal reports directly to the pastor. The role of the Catholic Schools office is advisory in nature.

Although the Diocese of Savannah provides oversight, the varying forms of governance combined by the geographical limitations creates a true organizational problem. Each model has a different chain of command which impacts how and to what degree of fidelity initiatives and directives are implemented. To provide unity and direction for 13 schools at different stages of leadership development, experience and self-efficacy, each under a different governance structure has proven to be difficult. This came through in conversation with the superintendent as a limitation of the organization.

### **Problem of Practice**

The formation and professional development of Catholic school principals are critical aspects to the operational vitality of Catholic education in the United States. A decrease in clergy in Catholic schools has resulted in increasing operational costs. Competition from charter and private schools also adds to the importance of properly prepared leaders. To further complicate the situation the pathway to leadership in Catholic education varies from site to site. While some schools have leaders with advanced degrees in school administration others do not. Catholic principal preparation has been impacted by the *No Child Left Behind* legislation. Most states adopted new standards. These standards had a learning-centered leadership focus however many of the other facets of the job remained the same (Swoboda, 2015).

The job of the Catholic school principal in many ways mirrors the job description of a public school superintendent with duties that include budgeting, human resources, grant writing, curriculum and instruction, maintenance, enrollment management, marketing and communications just to name a few. Fraser and Brock (2006) analyzed the factors that aided in the retention of Catholic school principals and found a common thread of financial security, a strong commitment to Catholic education and a vision for the future direction of the school. They also analyzed reasons for attrition which includes a lack of support

with legal situations, special education, a lack of pay and benefits compared to their public school counterparts and relationships with parents and faculty.

The Diocese of Savannah seeks to aid in the retention of its current principals by effectively supporting these professionals with the understanding that they have varying levels of preparation compounded with decreased financial resources therefore support is critically important. The statement in their annual report from the Diocese of Savannah regarding their school leaders is that all school principals are Catholic and serve as the model of faith and are highly-qualified and supported in their work. Some leaders come from a long career in Catholic education, while others vary from settings such as public schools, private schools and others have little to no teaching experience at all (Jacobs, 1996).

The role of the principal has also evolved with time becoming more complex and demanding. Ciriello (1998) refers to the Catholic school principal as the “jack of all trades”. This description can best be attributed to the economic stress which many Catholic schools face resulting in staff reduction. This leaves highly specialized tasks to be carried out by the principal (Ciriello, 1998). These “three realities – competition in the marketplace, multiple pathways to school leadership and increasing complexities of the role requirements – combine to create a looming leadership crisis in Catholic Schools” (Swoboda, 2015, p.3) .

The Diocese of Savannah has identified a need to better support principals given the extensive research surrounding the complexities of the position. The problem is also evidenced within the organization by internal data collected from exit interviews of previous principals and several school closures resulting from poor financial decisions compounded with academic concerns and enrollment issues. There is an understanding and desire to better support existing principals but a lack of understanding regarding what this support should look like. The evidence of a need for better support for

leaders exists across Catholic schools – enrollment is down, principal attrition is high, schools are closing and academic achievement is inconsistent with national norms at certain sites. These problems are not site specific but rather long-term systemic problems that have plagued Catholic schools since the 60s.

The Diocese like many others want to address the problem from a research based, site specific, data driven intentional plan. The organization realizes that a change is needed to stop the national trends that have personally impacted the organization in recent years. The organization has approached professional development in previous years from a one size fits all approach. They have addressed curriculum through audits and implementation initiatives. They have addressed marketing and communications with guest speakers. They have addressed curriculum and instruction through data digs with NWEA professionals. They have done book studies on visible learning to address best teaching practices. All powerful interventions but none specifically addressing the actual needs of the principals on hand. These interventions were all sited by the superintendent as an attempt to meet the varying needs. These practices were mentioned by all respondents as useful but for some not relevant to their immediate needs. One respondent mentioned that the book study completed was already something that had been conducted at the respondent's school over a year ago. The problem at hand must be addressed at the risk of additional school closures, poor student achievement and increased principal turnover.

This capstone will analyze principal's perceived competencies with respect to their daily roles and responsibilities. It will provide insight and guide future professional development. The professional development will be aligned with the findings of both the qualitative and quantitative data. A prescriptive plan is what is being requested by the organization to best address the problem of principal recruitment and retention. To effectively do this, this capstone will also provide a literature review to ensure that recommendations align with existing literature on principal preparation and ongoing professional development to ensure effective recruitment and retention of Catholic school leaders. As previously

mentioned, the organization has been impacted by school closures, mergers and a high number of principal turn-over. The goal of this study is to inform and provide next steps to the Catholic Schools Office and to recommend a personalized professional development plan that will support current leaders and aid in the long-term retention of Catholic school leaders as well as support the overall effort of operational vitality.

### **Literature Review**

In reviewing the literature, my focus will be on the varied roles and responsibilities of school leaders, effective professional development through the framework of andragogy and self-efficacy and the role it plays within leadership abilities. There is limited literature on Catholic school leadership so some of the literature I draw on is from the larger school leadership research field. Self-efficacy is directly related to a leader's self-confidence to carry out the roles and responsibilities of the profession regardless of training. The theory of andragogy provides the tools to successfully prepare leaders through professional development. It is important when looking at the literature to begin with an understanding of the differences of Catholic school leaders' roles and responsibilities and their public school counterparts. The variance between the roles and responsibilities leads to the next area of research, that of leadership preparation. Is there a problem in the approach of leadership formation and is it specific to Catholic school leaders. Once that area has been investigated the next area is to analyze how principals would best benefit from training grounded on the theory of experiential learning, specifically the theory of andragogy (Davis & Leon, 2011). The last area to be investigated is the lens of self-efficacy and the role it has with existing principals.

### **Roles and Responsibilities**

There are multiple sources of literature that identify the role of the principal in a Catholic school setting as being complicated because the responsibilities include enrollment and maintaining the Catholic identity of the organization (Byrk, Lee & Holland, 1994). Ciriello (1998) further affirms that a Catholic school

leader's expectations and responsibilities differ greatly from their public school counterparts. These differences result in a need to educate current as well as future Catholic school principals. This education focuses on the competencies needed in a unique Catholic school setting found within the NCEA's multi-volume preparation guide books. The purpose is intended to supplement the principal's educational degree with the skills needed to successfully lead a Catholic school (Ciriello, 1998).

Leaders come with a vast range of backgrounds prior to their roles as principals (Cattaro, 2007). The job of a Catholic school leader more resembles that of a public school superintendent because of the overwhelming responsibilities which includes accounting, human resources, grant writing, curriculum, instruction, facilities and enrollment management just to name a few (Cook, 2008). Fraser and Brock (2006) discuss some of the reasons that promote the retention of Catholic school principals. These reasons involve financial sustainability, a dedication to Catholic education, and a belief in the vision and mission of the organization. They also discuss the issues that current Catholic school principal's face which includes an absence of guidance in legal situations, students with disabilities, disparity in compensation and benefits and conflicts with various community constituents. Durow and Brock (2004) further analyze the reasons for principals leaving which includes conflicts with governing authorities and career advancement.

### **Andragogy and Leadership**

The concept that great schools require exceptional leaders and teachers goes without saying. The importance of principal preparation programs focusing their efforts on producing school leaders that possess not only a strong range of leadership but also instructional and management abilities is critical to fostering the development of a great school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) The variance in principal preparation programs aligned with the varying levels of experiences that candidates bring to the position has provided limited research on the overall effectiveness of such programs. There is however a focus on

the need to examine how principals are being trained with the theory of andragogy being placed at the center. Researchers have studied and illuminated the principles of adult learning for decades, but for a myriad of reasons programs that prepare school principals have been notoriously tepid about using them (Davis & Leon, 2011). Both Hale & Moorman and McCarthy have analyzed the typical principal preparation programs which adhere to principles of pedagogy focused on professor-centered vs. student centered instruction and groups of individual learners vs. cohorts of professional learning communities (Hale & Moorman, 2003; McCarthy, 2002). The findings point to a need for a different instructional approach to better appeal to the way adult learners actually learn.

The research circles back to the theory of andragogy, first coined by a German elementary school professor Alexander Kapp that preparation programs need to redirect their focus to a more self-directed learning with real-world problem solving and life-centered experiences (Davis & Leon, 2011). Knowles (2005) expands on this idea of andragogy by providing empirical rationale based on six assumptions about the professional development of adult learners. The research suggests that programs shift from traditional pedagogy to the following guiding principles:

- 1) **Knowing Why.** Adults need to know why something should be learned before attempting to learn it.
- 2) **Self-actualized self-concept.** Adults need to feel responsible for their own lives, decisions and learning. They do not learn as well when learning is imposed on them by others.
- 3) **Accumulated life experiences.** Adult learners possess a vast reservoir of life experiences that shapes their motivations, perspectives, needs, abilities, and styles. Adults define themselves by the experiences they have had.
- 4) **Readiness to learn.** Adults learn best when moving from one developmental stage to the next and within real-world contexts. The timing of learning activities is especially important.
- 5) **Orientation to learning.** Adults learn best when learning activities are problem-based and geared toward the development of practical skills.
- 6) **Internal motivation.** Although adults are responsive to certain types of external reinforcements, the most potent motivators are internal (i.e. desire to improve, learn, grow, etc.) (Davis & Leon, 2011).



The theory of andragogy and the above mentioned research provides the foundation for the professional development recommendations and implementation methods. In the process of preparing school leaders it is important to know what not to do but equally important to provide a well-designed research based implementation guide focused on how to best approach the concept of adult learning.

### **Self-Efficacy and Leadership**

In looking at Bandura's framework of self-efficacy with Catholic school principals, McCollum & Kaj (2009) cite that it is vital in the formation of school leaders. This is because of the correlation to success in both learning and work. Both suggest that the measurement of the self-efficacy of principals in connection to the roles and responsibilities they carry out will help establish their needs professionally. Despite the attempts to address Catholic school leadership preparation over years, the variation in the proficiencies, and experience located in the offices of principals in Catholic schools throughout the United States (Swoboda, 2015). There are obvious challenges to attracting and retaining Catholic school leaders. Leaders come with varied backgrounds (Cattaro, 2007). "The job requires principals to walk on water, yet most time they can barely tread water" (Cook, 2008, p.13).

The literature solidified the importance of skilled leadership to ensure operational vitality of Catholic schools. The job of the Catholic school leader comes with varying levels of experience and although principal preparation programs are the typical track for leaders, the actual framework is less than ideal at preparing principals with a job that most closely mirrors that of a district superintendent. This finding in the literature mirrors the responses and findings of the qualitative data of this capstone. The respondents identified a true gap in the training they received and the actual requirements of the job. They relied on self-efficacy to get the job done. The literature also validated the findings of the organization with respect to the professional development they have received vs. the learning they need. Professional learning must be

prescriptive and individuals must understand the why prior to the what. Those findings will be proposed in the recommendation section of this capstone.

### Conceptual Framework

The research and recommendations in this project will be guided and formed by the *self-efficacy* framework. Bandura (1994) first developed this framework from his work with social cognitive theory which focused on observational learning and social experience in the development of personality. Bandura (1994) defines self-efficacy as,

“people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes. A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and personal well-being in many ways. People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (p.2).

For Bandura (1994) this “efficacious outlook fosters intrinsic interest and deep engrossment in activities” (p.3). Leaders set demanding goals and have a strong dedication to meet them. Leaders intensify and maintain their endeavors in the face of failure. They are able to quickly recuperate their feelings of efficacy after disappointments or letdowns. They equate failure to a lacking of effort. They also equate failure to a deficiency in knowledge and skills that can be acquired. This type of person approaches difficult situations with assurance that they will be overcome. It is this type of outlook on personal accomplishments that not only results in a reduction in stress but also reduces vulnerability to depression (Bandura, 1994).

For Bandura (1994), people in contrast who doubt their capabilities will not approach tasks that are perceived as difficult because they are viewed as personal threats. These same people will exhibit low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue. When they are faced with difficult

tasks, their response is to dwell on their personal deficiencies as well as the adverse outcomes instead of how to execute the task successfully. Minimal effort is given and defeat in the face of difficulty with a slow recovery from the failure. Their perception of the situation is insufficient performance as deficient aptitude. These same people will fall easy victim to stress and depression (Bandura, 1994, p. 2).

Bandura (2006) identified three determinants with respect to self-efficacy. They are behavior, internal personal factors and the external environment. All three of these determinants work together to create an outcome in any social condition which implies that a person has substantial influence in situations that are social in nature since outcomes are not predetermined. This would warrant decision-making. Self-efficacy according to Bandura has four essential components. Intentionality is the first to be discussed. It can best be described as a person's ability to set goals and achieve them. The second is forethought. This is defined as the ability for an individual to see a specific future as a result of carrying out goals. The third is self-reactiveness. This is the degree to which an individual can self-motivate to take a definitive course of action. That action will move the individual closer to achieving the goal. The fourth is self-reflectiveness. This is when an individual audits his/her performance by questioning their thoughts and actions to redirect as applicable to the situation. This self-reflectiveness for Bandura (2006), is the most distinctly human core property of self-efficacy. "People who develop their competencies, self-regulatory skills and enabling beliefs in their efficacy can generate a wider array of options that expand their freedom of action, and are more successful in realizing desired futures, than those with less developed agentic resources" (Bandura, 2006, p.165)

"It takes a strong sense of efficacy to deploy ones cognitive resources" (Bandura, 1997, p.452). It is for this very reason that Bandura further emphasizes that "people who believe strongly in their problem-solving capabilities remain highly efficient in the analytic thinking in complex decision-making situations" which will foster accomplishments (p.452). This concept is incredibly important as we look at competence in

the workplace. An individual's ability to concentrate on their self-knowledge will help cultivate skills and proficiencies through self-efficacy that aligns with constructive personal and organizational functioning (Bandura, 1997).

In looking at Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a framework, if there is a high level of self-efficacy, the principal is expected to be unrelenting in roles related with the wide scope of leadership roles that must be performed (Eberhard, 2013). A study found that "principals with a strong sense of efficacy have been found to be persistent in pursuing their goals, but also more flexible and willing to adapt their strategies based on contextual conditions" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2007, p.5). The same was found about the opposite situation; those with a small degree of self-efficacy are inclined to endure rigidly in their same actions without identifying strategies to solve the problem at hand. The low self-efficacy principals will usually resort to blaming others for failure because their environment is fixed and uncontrollable.

The ability to find and retain skilled principals is imperative to the mission of Catholic schools. By studying the self-efficacy of the principals in the Diocese of Savannah with respect to their work capacity, new insights have surfaced that point to the importance of planning and professional development routes for current and future principals (McCollum & Kajs, 2009). The results of this study will be used to establish not only on the job embedded Catholic school professional development but will also fortify the current leadership and attract aspiring principals.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions that will guide this capstone project will be:

1. What are the levels of self-efficacy regarding their leadership roles and responsibilities among the Diocese of Savannah Catholic school principals?

2. Is there a relationship between Catholic school principals' self-efficacy regarding their leadership roles and responsibilities and identified specific leadership preparation/academic experience variables?
  - a. Level of education
  - b. Completion of program in school administration
  - c. State certification in administrative leadership
  - d. Overall years of teaching
  - e. Overall years of administrative experience
  - f. Overall years of principal experience
  - g. Number of years as an administrator (other than a principal in current setting)
  - h. Number of years as a principal in current setting
  
3. What do Diocese of Savannah Catholic principals perceive to contribute to their success as administrators in a Catholic school setting? What roadblocks to success and effectiveness do they report in terms of their overall preparation and experience relating to work?

### **Data Collection**

To address the first study question about principal self-efficacy, a questionnaire was emailed to all Diocesan school principals to measure self-efficacy regarding their major roles and responsibilities. The survey was based off an adaptation of the School Administrator Efficacy Scale (SAES) that was based on the Educational Leadership Constituent Council (ELCC) national standards that were published in 2002. They were created by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration to address the great number of roles and responsibilities executed daily by school administrators (McCollum et. al., 2005). The SAES has nine dimensions of efficacy for school administrators according to the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration, 2007:

1. Instructional Leadership and Staff Development
2. School Climate Development
3. Community Collaboration
4. Data-based Decision Making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles
5. Resource and Facility Management
6. Use of Community Resources
7. Communication in a Diverse Environment
8. Development of a School Vision
9. Supporting the Catholic Identity of Schools

The current ELCC Standards outline seven (7) standards, with one through six (1-6) focusing on key elements of school administration (e.g., community collaboration, resource management). The seventh (7th) standard spotlights the effective application and synthesis of knowledge and skills learned in standards (1-6) in an extended, capstone, internship experience, the equivalent of six months with nine to twelve (9-12) hours a week. The ELCC Standards are as follows (NPBEA, 2002-b, pp. 1-18):

ELCC Standard	Definition
Instructional Leadership and Staff Development	Educational leaders have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a school or district vision of learning supported by the school community.
School Climate Development	Educational leaders have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by promoting a positive school culture, providing an effective instructional program, applying best practice to student learning, and designing comprehensive professional growth plans for staff.
Community Collaboration	Educational leaders who have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by collaborating with families and other community members, responding to diverse community

	interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.
Data-based Decision Making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles	Educational leaders have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by acting with integrity, fairly, and in an ethical manner.
Resource and Facility Management	Educational leaders use problem-solving skills and knowledge of strategic, long-range, and operational planning (including applications of technology) in the effective, legal, and equitable use of fiscal, human, and material resource allocation and alignment that focuses on teaching and learning. They creatively seek new resources to facilitate learning. They apply and assess current technologies for school management, business procedures, and scheduling
Communication in a Diverse Environment	Educational leaders have the knowledge and ability to promote the success of all students by understanding, responding to, and influencing the larger political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.
Development of a School Vision	Educational leaders develop a vision of learning for a school that promotes the success of all students. Educational leaders base this vision on relevant knowledge and theories, including but not limited to an understanding of learning goals in a pluralistic society, the diversity of learners and learners' needs, schools as interactive social and cultural systems, and social and organizational change.

The original instrument contained 56 items written in a fashion that displayed confidence as well as beliefs about knowledge and abilities on a Likert scale with a range of 5 points. Additional dimensions were added with the permission of the author of the SAES to include the aspect of Catholic identity. Swoboda (2015) included five statements. These statements were written and field-tested with the intent of collecting data on the additional element. The instrument was approved by Swoboda for use via email.

The second research question captured respondents' demographic information with respect to leadership experience and/or preparation. The respondents were asked a series of 10 demographic questions. These questions were asked in multiple choice format. The purpose of capturing the background

information was to see if a relationship existed between leadership experience and self-efficacy with respect to roles and responsibilities.

The survey was sent to all 23 Catholic school principals employed in the Diocese of Savannah. The questionnaire was sent via email on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2020 and a reminder was sent on October 20<sup>th</sup>, 2020. The email explained the purpose of the research and appealed for maximum participation as a way to advise Diocesan leadership of the needs of Catholic school leaders and inform future professional development. Participation increased after the reminder with many school principals not onsite and conducting school virtually, they were apologetic at forgetting and thankful for the reminder. School organizations vary from site to site with some schools having more than one principal depending on their structure and enrollment. An elementary and middle school can be one school with two principals. The total responses collected were (N=15).

To address the third study question, I conducted phone interviews in which participants were asked to share their perceptions of their success as administrators in a Catholic school setting. They also were asked to discuss the dimensions of their role that are most difficult for them to address.

Interviews were requested of a purposeful sample of survey respondents varying in levels of experience (N=3). The willingness to participate was difficult given the obstacles of school leadership during a pandemic. The original design of this study was intended to be done with focus groups however not possible. The sessions were scheduled via phone at a time that was convenient for participants over a two day window.

In looking at the responses of the survey and deeply looking at the research done by Ciriello (1998) on the formation and development of Catholic school leaders, an interview protocol was designed to better understand the success factors of the principals in the diocese as well as the roadblocks to success or



effectiveness within the areas of their work. The protocol began by explaining the purpose of the research being conducted. The questions focused on the concepts of motivation and experience. The respondents were asked to think back to their first year(s) as principal and reflect on the roles which were most difficult. A follow up question was asked to understand if this was an area that was explicitly taught in their training prior to the job or if they sought out training during the assignment. The respondents were then asked to look over the 9 dimensions and reflect on the one that was most challenging. The survey findings were then shared with the respondents to best understand what that facet means to them and their roles and responsibilities. The final questions allowed the respondents to reflect and provide insight into recommendations for the future. The protocol can be found in the appendix.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis began by looking at the descriptive results of the survey. The first was through categories looking at the nine areas that were surveyed to better understand how they ranked overall in category. Then the data was analyzed within each category looking at each individual response to look at answers within each category. The data was then analyzed by individual respondent to see if there were correlations between levels of education and overall responses. Individual responses were then analyzed to see if there was a correlation between formal training and/or certification and self-efficacy. The lens of teaching experience was also analyzed to see if there was a correlation between prior years of teaching and/or experience in a Catholic school. The final lens through which the data was analyzed was the years of experience as a principal with respect to self-efficacy. The 10 demographic questions were all analyzed to see if a trend emerged within each category. The analysis was done first by each demographic question as a collective group to see if there were any trends with respect to a particular demographic and responses in any particular area. Then responses were analyzed by individual respondent to see if perhaps individually looking at responses a trend could be noted.

The data analysis for the interview data consisted first of transcribing the interviews. The text was then color coded using web-based transcription software to include the following themes: emotion, perception, support, principal identified need, on the job skill, challenges, self-motivation, time, mentorship, and needs based assessment. These themes emerged as a result of words frequently mentioned that could be categorized under a specific theme. These themes were then coded to understand the level of frequency they appear within the three transcripts. Those numbers were recorded then analyzed to see if a pattern was seen between the three transcripts and to what degree.

Codes	Definition	Key Words
<b>Emotion</b>	<i>A state of mind derived from circumstance, mood or relationship with others</i>	Love, Faith, Calling, Strength, Sacrifice, Endurance
<b>Support Perception vs. Support Reality</b>	<i>Assistance or help provided with the objective of being successful</i>	Needs Assessment, Support, Feedback, Relevance, Solutions
<b>A Distanced Community</b>	<i>Insight but without skills or time to properly address the needs of the population</i>	Lack of Connection, Space, Distance, Time, Priority
<b>Mentorship</b>	<i>Guidance provided by someone with more experience to gain competence and understanding</i>	Bubble, Alone, Isolation, Desire,

## Findings

In this section, I will report out on findings from the survey and interviews by research question.

### Principal Self-Efficacy

My first study question is, what are the levels of self-efficacy regarding their leadership roles and responsibilities among the Diocese of Savannah Catholic school principals? As mentioned earlier, the

survey items were designed to capture underlying dimensions related to principal self-efficacy. The table below reports on the nine dimensions from lowest to highest.

Dimension	# of Questions	Mean
Community Collaboration	7	3.71
Use of Community Resources	3	3.97
Instructional Leadership & Staff Development	13	4.14
School Climate & Development	6	4.23
Resource and Facility Management	5	4.30
Development of School Vision	4	4.41
Data-based Decision Making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles	8	4.44
Supporting the Catholic Identity of the School	5	4.49
Communications in a Diverse Environment	5	4.73

The lowest reported self-efficacy mean was in the area of community collaboration. Community collaboration captured principals' understanding of creating partnerships with businesses within the community. The lowest scoring question was about using marketing strategies and processes to create partnerships with businesses, community members, and institutions of higher education. The other low scoring areas were in the realm of resolving issues related to budgeting and creating partnerships with community agencies to provide resources for the school.

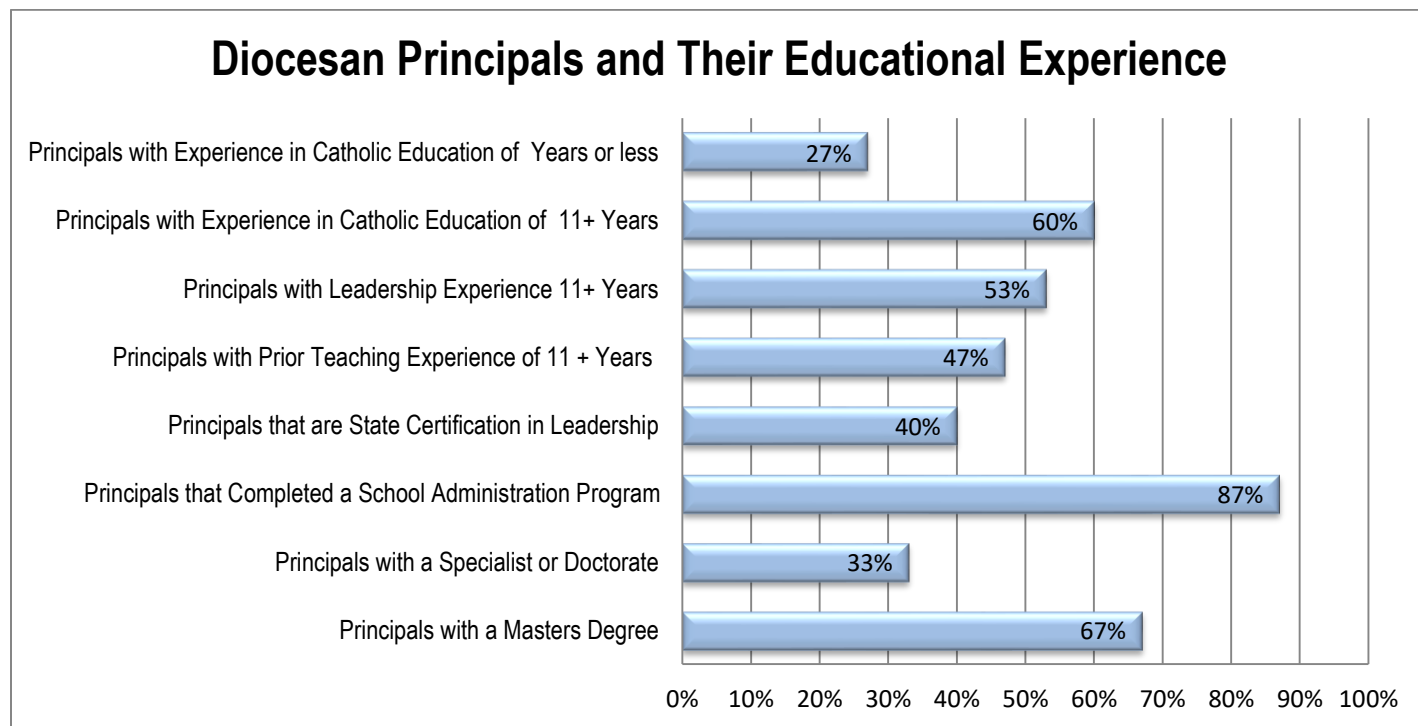
The self-efficacy mean that was highest was in the area of communications in a diverse environment with a mean of 4.73. The finding of this quantitative portion illustrates community resources and collaboration as being the two lowest scoring areas with a means ranging from 3.71 to 3.97. All other areas had means above 4.1.

The qualitative data collected further substantiated the principal's perspectives with respect to self-efficacy. The purpose of the interviews was to capture in detail the perceived strengths and weaknesses of

the 9 dimensions. Details such as the ways their strengths developed and an understanding of how to support and grow areas of weakness were captured through the interviews.

### Educational Experience

Before discussing the relationship between principal self-efficacy and principal education and experience, I first detail the education and experience of the survey participations. With respect to education, 67% of the respondents indicated they hold a master’s degree with 33% having a specialist degree or doctorate. Interestingly 87% reported to have completed a formal school administration program with 40% holding state certification in leadership. With respect to experience 47% of the respondents reported that they had worked as a teacher for 11 years or more and 53% reported they had worked as a school/district administrator for 11 or more years. The longevity of Catholic education was evident with 60% reporting 11 years or more, 27% reported 5 years or less.



### Principal Successes and Roadblocks

To better understand the data collected, interviews via phone were conducted. Participants were asked their level of experience to gain a better understanding if a relationship exists between experience as a principal and self-efficacy. All participants were given the nine dimensions of the survey at least one day prior to the call. They were told they could use it as a reference if needed. All interviews were transcribed and coded with the following themes emerging: emotion, perception of support, principal identified needs, on the job skill, challenges, self-motivation, time, mentorship and a need for needs based assessment. The factors respondents attributed to their success included emotions such as a passion for the mission, love of the children and a calling to something greater. They identified peer support as the only factor given geographical limitations. Other contributing factors for success were the nature of the position that requires skills to be learned on the job. The roadblocks included lack of support in areas of need, time limitations and the need for mentorship.

All the principals reported a love of their school and the calling of the profession. The aspect of being a Catholic school and integrating faith into the curriculum drives their desire to perform the aspects of their job with confidence. All reported having gone to Catholic school, being raised Catholic which in turn becomes part of who they identify with as a leader of their faith and the future of the church. One principal said, *"This is who I am – I am unapologetically Catholic. I love my faith and being able to share it with the future of the church makes me want to be the best version of myself. This job is a calling and certainly not for the weak but it makes me who I am. I believe God gives me the strength to see me through it. The saying goes, if He sees you to it, he will see you through it. This is because of Him."*

Failure not being an option was echoed by another principal that said, *"You don't quit. How can I tell my kids that they can't quit and I hit a fork in the road and say I can't? That's not an option for me. My parents sacrificed to send me to Catholic school. It was a gift. My faith is my backbone. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. I love my school. I make mistakes. Crap, I make them daily but I'm not*

*a quitter. I owe it to the kids. Their parents are sacrificing the same way mine did. They deserve someone who gives 100% all the time.*” This passion and never quit attitude came through in multiple statements throughout the three interviews. There is a desire to not fail the children associated with the calling of the faith and vocation that is remarkable. There is also a belief that God will give the individuals the strength needed to overcome the adversity and thrive.

The issue of faith and strong emotions continued with another principal sharing that, *“When you lose everything and you realize faith is all you had, you don’t stop and push forward. It took hitting rock bottom to realize, God never left me – he made me stronger. I wouldn’t have been put into this situation to fail. There are no accidents with God.”* The personal connection here is striking. As the respondent shared about the drive to be successful, there was a sentiment of paying God back for His constant presence during times that were difficult personally. The parallel of God being ever present, forgiving and merciful drives these leaders beyond the calling and profession but rather to a will not quit attitude that is simply indescribable.

In the area of supports needed all three respondents cited a need for identified support that was prescriptive. The unanimous use of that word was particularly striking given the different contexts it was used. These leaders knew their needs and wanted a level of customization that would best help them. Whether the area is curriculum, instruction, assessments, technology or just basic leadership –one size fits all does not fit anyone accurately. There is *“plenty of information that is disseminated but most of it is not an identified need and does not pertain to skills needed to do the job”*.

One principal further elaborated by saying, *“Time is so incredibly valuable in this job. There is never enough time. When you ask for my time, make it count. I realize that sounds incredibly rude but we tell our teachers you have to teach to all of your students with the understanding that they are all at different*

levels. How is this any different? My needs are not your needs. There is a perception of support that is false but nobody asks what is needed, it is just disseminated. Ask me my weaknesses, I know them. That's where I need help. A book study on a book I have already read isn't helping me, its modeling a bad practice I wouldn't allow for my teachers to do." The leaders have an expectation that best practices must be modeled. They hold themselves accountable to the teachers to model this expectation. They expect the teachers to do the same for the students. They therefore expect the same for their needs. This need for support that is individualized continued with the other two respondents saying, "I think they try to provide support but you don't know what you don't know. We are all so far away from each other. Geographically providing cohesiveness is impossible. I heard the saying once and I think it fits this perfectly, spray and pray. You spray the water everywhere and pray something grows. Thankfully this year because of the pandemic we have not received any professional development and the outcome is the same. I need help in areas that I feel confident they can provide support but feedback isn't asked. So what do you do? You comply. You sit and listen and hope something is relevant. The result is on the job skills are developed that might be wrong, might be less efficient or might be plain ineffective but you do it and you do it to the best of your ability and ask for forgiveness later."

Geographical needs surfaced repeatedly with this respondent who drew an interesting parallel to a patient and doctor. This principal said, "It's hard to understand anyone's needs from far away. Imagine going to the doctor and not really engaging in dialogue about my symptoms – would you be quick to provide a diagnosis or treatment plan? No. That's obvious and the same holds true. In this position you figure it out or surround yourself with people that make you complete. If you're the smartest person in the room, you need to change rooms. That has been my method of survival. I didn't know finance. I didn't know human resource laws. I know teaching and learning. The problem is we have so many facets of our job that aren't teaching and learning. The solution for me was surrounding myself with people that complete me."

The ability to problem solve was striking. These leaders have developed an almost coping mechanism to dealing with adversity. Whether it's through self-help, partnerships with seasoned professionals or simply acting with the greatest of intentions and hoping the solution will be favorable – one thing is for sure, none will be defeated on the grounds of ignorance.

The theme of community resurfaced in the interviews with a need to connect but a lack of understanding as far as how to do it effectively. The principals know they need to engage their stakeholders but the confidence is not there. Whether the community was parish and school or local district and school, there is a disconnect between expectation and reality. One respondent described it as *"foggy glasses – the way your lenses fog with a mask on, that is how the community aspect feels. I can sort of see it. I know it's there. I just don't know how to connect the two"*. The geographical boundaries came up repeatedly as both a resource and limitation. Knowing the need to connect, seeing it but with so many other issues more pressing, the priority is simply not there. All respondents know that connecting within the community is important and did not discredit the value but shared how urgent surpasses important in their everyday lives. Community is important but for the immediate needs of these leaders, it is not urgent.

Another responded shared frustrations by saying, *"There are some schools that know how to go out there and get what they need. Whether it means getting big donors to build a new gym or the parish to provide additional support for tuition assistance, some know how to tap into the community, yet we are so far away we cannot learn from each other. Yeah, I could say what are you doing or how did you do that? But I need a community within my network. The closest school to me is hours away. The truth is I don't even know what they are doing and I'm so wrapped up in the day to day, I can't get to it."* Frustrations and underqualified sentiments resonated with another respondent that said, *"I know I need to get out there and get the community engaged with the school but how do I do it? Heck, I never learned that. I have had to figure out federal funding but the truth is we are spread so thin, collaboration would be awesome but how*



*when we are not close by.” This question brought to the surface frustration in all three respondents of being stretched thin. It is never about a lack of desire but rather as one respondent shared, “You get on campus and your day just starts for you. You had plans to do X, Y and Z and then something happens and your attention is drawn away. That’s how I feel with the community pieces. It would be great to have it figured out but it’s not bleeding. We wear a dozen hats all day long. One minute you are relieving the secretary in the office, then you’re mopping a spill, then you’re covering a class because the sub didn’t show and the next thing you know your day is over. So, what I am saying is there isn’t a lack of motivation to figure out that piece as much as there is a lack of time and focus on it. Yesterday I was the cafeteria lady... who knows what tomorrow will bring. One head, lots of hats.”*

Another consistent theme that emerged was the need for mentorship. Programs do not prepare principals for the job. There are days when even the most seasoned leaders addressed a need for a mentor. One principal said something very powerful, “*you don’t know what you don’t know*”. That is especially true of a job that requires so many areas which can make the overall job extremely difficult. One principal that has served for many years said, “*I came from public school where they give you a mentor if you change grade levels, here I thought surely someone will be my person but the truth is you just have to figure it out. That is less than ideal.*”

Another respondent said, “*...we are all alone in our little bubble, no school is around to help and everyone is just trying to survive. I really wish I had been provided with a mentor. Maybe even if that person didn’t know the answer, they were my person for support or just to hear me cry it out.*” The geographical limitations continued to surface with principals wanting to see other schools, other classrooms, other budgets but lacking the ability. One respondent went on to say, “*...plumbing, electrical, roofing – that’s not part of the job, unless you’re a Catholic school principal. I wish someone would have been my go to because it’s simply impossible to do this job alone without the support of a veteran principal*”. The desire to

be supported was consistent in all respondents. They all identified challenges with the position but the self-motivation was there to push through and get the job done.

### Findings Summary

The survey data demonstrated that the respondents varied in terms of education, certification, preparation and experience. The demographics solidified what the literature is consistently stating – the pathway to Catholic principalship is not universal. With respect to the relationship of the demographics to efficacy, there was only one area of difference and not terribly significant and that was the area of community relations. The recommendation will be that this portion be addressed in the accreditation school improvement goal as the universal improvement goal of school leaders.

The data collected via this capstone project provided understanding into the overall self-efficacy findings that were reported on the 9 dimensions of the survey. By analyzing the transcripts through coding, four themes emerged that would speak to the supports and obstructions that principals identify as impacting their work. The strong emotional and faith based drive is what all respondents identified as critical to their success and high levels of self-efficacy. Each identified their faith as critical to the success of the mission of the school. They also linked that emotion and drive to their success in the domain of Catholic identity. All three respondents identified life/professional experiences that contribute to their confidence in their schools. Two of the three leaders felt well-prepared for their role as principal because of their public school background. The one leader that did not have public school experience did state that her preparation did not “*remotely prepare her for the daily ins and outs of this job*”.

It is interesting to note that the two respondents coming from different public school districts both attribute their success and self-efficacy to their time and support provided in their previous setting. It was not their preparation programs or college degrees. All three participants identified a want to better

understand how to tap into the community for partnerships. They provided examples of other Diocesan schools that have had success but are unclear as to how to approach the situation or is it success based on being in an affluent community. All three principals identified as receiving support but not in the areas needed or wanted with respect to their professional growth and needs. The interviews provided evidence that there is an overwhelmingly sense of frustration and dissatisfaction with the support provided at the Catholic Schools Office. Examples included the lack of support on how to safely open schools during a pandemic but rather a focus on religious certification of paraprofessionals. There is a feeling of frustration and being “*out of touch*” that all three respondents identified.

In looking at the qualitative findings and comparing it to the quantitative findings the trends in Catholic identity and community findings were similar. No significant results were found with respect to the demographic attributes and levels of perceived self-efficacy. The varying levels of experience and training makes it impossible to draw a significant conclusion with respect to how to improve self-efficacy with respect to the dimensions questioned and their responsibilities. The data with respect to the quantitative data showed overall strength in all dimensions with most falling in the areas of confident or very confident range. That being said, individual scores varied greatly within many of the questions asked.

The approach to this study was a mixed methods approach. It was interesting to compare the high levels of self-efficacy being reported on the quantitative portion with the qualitative data obtained. Respondents were not as confident in speaking about the dimensions as they reported on their survey. It is perhaps from a place of humility and speaking as educators seeking support. If I had strictly done the quantitative portion of this capstone, the overall findings would have shown that the principals surveyed are confident in their abilities to do their job. The themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews do not support the findings to the degree that was recorded. I am thankful to have approached this study using mixed methods to be able to present more substantial findings and recommendations.

## Recommendations

This study sought to identify the needs of Catholic school principals and will contribute to the research and practice by examining the perceived competencies in relation to various aspects and responsibilities of Catholic school principals as outlined in professional standards. It also will provide insight into principal preparation and professional development of Catholic school leaders. The proper formation and development of Catholic school principals are vital aspects of the health and well-being of Catholic education in the United States. The outcome of this Capstone project has been presented to the superintendent of schools for implementation as part of the district improvement plan that includes professional learning and development. Another presentation will be provided to the Bishop to share findings that will aid in the recruitment of a new superintendent of schools.

As a result of both the interviews and survey data collected the following recommendations are being provided:

- 1. The questionnaire used for this study should be used as an initial and ongoing assessment of self-efficacy of Catholic school leaders.**

The survey should also be used for new hires prior to beginning their role to best provide professional development that is customized to that leaders need. That leader can then be placed on a learning track with other leaders to ensure efforts of professional development are retaining principals based on their professional needs being met. This recommendation rooted in the framework of andragogy would account for the understanding that each person comes to the table with a different life experience that defines the learner; therefore approaching the learning through learning activities geared toward practical skills will prove most impactful (Holter & Frabutt, 2012).

This approach would also be rooted in the leaders needs and would model the best practice of obtaining formative data and directing prescriptive instruction that is rooted in data and a needs assessment. The learning track would allow for similar learners to be grouped to share in a collaborative experience their progress. This track would address the lack of community which surfaced in the interviews. Leaders would be working together sharing in similar struggles towards a common goal.

**2. A mentorship program should be established for new principals to ensure that the nine dimensions in the study are being addressed by a seasoned administrator.**

This mentor – mentee relationship will help foster the growth and skills of these new leaders. There are schools that are similar in size and structure within the diocese. This recommendation is rooted in the findings of the interviews. All respondents identified a need to have a more seasoned, experienced point of contact that could provide assistance with the more unconventional aspects of Catholic leadership. Creating a partnership between leaders that are similarly structured will provide current and future leaders provides a level of support that is so desperately desired. Given the geographical limitations, leaders are not aware of similarities until years into their leadership. Having a successful connection that can understand similar structured organizations is priceless and desired (Darling-Hammond, 2009). Diocesan leaders can easily create these partnerships given their system understanding of the organization (Cook, 2008).

**3. The areas of support identified during the interviews in this study include areas that are best left to the experts in the field.**

As part of a sustainable professional development plan, the diocese should look at allocating a portion of their Title IIA funding to providing support in the areas of recruitment, advancement, enrollment services,

facilities and grant writing. The use of the train the trainer model is not effective and resources and support is often not shared. Although sharing of skills in the trade has occurred, a more long-term sustainable model is what the organization needs to ensure that efforts are more than a onetime session at a principal's meeting. Contracting services will provide ongoing support with reputable services that will provide a network of support to current principals (Hale & Moorman, 2003).

#### **4. Consider establishing a leadership development program for new principals.**

Leadership development from within is critical to leadership recruitment. There needs to be opportunities of growth from within. A Diocesan Leadership Development Program will aid in the recruitment efforts of the diocese. Aspiring leaders should be given the opportunity to know and understand the job through an internship experience. If well-suited for a future leadership role, these aspiring leaders should be nurtured and developed in the skills necessary prior to taking the job. This recommendation would help ensure that as leader's transition, the skills which are unique to the position have already been addressed with some level of exposure.

Respondents in the interviews all shared that the job they signed up for and the job they encountered varied immensely. One principal went as far to say, *"It felt like a bait and switch; I signed up to lead curriculum and instruction and advancement initiatives are on the forefront instead"*. When a leader has an understanding of the job and has experienced it through a program similar to an internship, they are more likely to feel job satisfaction and experience longevity of the profession. They know what to expect and how to best respond. The unknown and feeling of failure is a cause for principals leaving the profession (Levin & Bradley, 2019). This will help tame that unknown feeling with an understanding of not only what to expect but how to best respond (Canavan, 2001).

**5. The Diocesan structure and model needs to be reevaluated with the recommendation that the job be split into 2 regions.**

This will allow for more regular support and intervention which was shared consistently throughout all 3 interviews. It will also allow for more developed advancement opportunities based on geographical areas and resources (Cook, 2011). Having a regional superintendent will allow for a greater understanding of the needs of school leaders (Holter & Frabutt, 2012).

**6. The Diocesan structure and model should also consider a partnership with the Atlanta Archdiocese.**

This will allow for a greater network of support that is geographically closer to most schools than schools within their own diocese (Cook, 2011). The need for support and connection between similar organizational structures was a finding of this study. All respondents shared a feeling of disconnect that would best be addressed with a collaboration between the Savannah and Atlanta. Geographically some schools are much closer to Atlanta and would benefit from a geographical connection that is closer and more similar in structure and governance.

**7. Committees at the Diocesan level need to be restructured.**

The current model serves as a support to the Catholic schools office. The committees need to be structured to provide assistance to the principals. Two of the principals shared frustrations in being asked to write curriculum or plan professional learning – *“this isn’t helping, it’s hurting my already spread thin day”*. The committees can certainly help but the heavy lift should not be the *“burden of the principals”*. Principals need a network of support. This will shift will strengthen the network and provide a collective that can aid in problem solving within their identified areas of strengths based on skills and knowledge (Fraser & Brock, 2006).

Implementations of these findings come at the perfect time to have a positive change agent. A new bishop was installed in the Diocese of Savannah in 2020. The previous bishop was moved to the Archdiocese of Atlanta which borders the diocese. The retirement of the current superintendent in June of 2021 will also provide the landscape to bring about structural changes needed. These changes although not traditional in nature for the diocese does mirror the practices implemented in the public school setting. Superintendents have region chiefs or directors that work directly with those in their geographical area. The idea of support groups and networks is a best practice in most business settings. A need to provide support where support is needed is also a powerful practice that should not be ignored. The importance of the implementing these changes is the difference between operational vitality and stability or more of the same.

These implementations fit within all diocesan policies with a need to restructure organizational responsibilities. Based on the findings of the qualitative research these recommendations will be well received and will validate to the diocese that their needs are being addressed. The respondent with longevity identified that needs often fall on deaf ears – *“they ask, give you surveys and do nothing or better yet the exact opposite of what makes logical sense”*. To ensure that these recommendations do not fall on deaf ears there needs to accountability beyond the superintendent. Results of surveys need to be shared with stakeholders including the bishop.

The recommendations with respect to adult learning go back to the theory of andragogy. To provide a blanket professional learning opportunity for the purposes of diocesan accreditation is understood since there is data to support the need. Any other professional development should be approached with adult learning best practices at the forefront. The adults need to know and understand the why and it should be connected to their lives. Learning that is imposed is never well-received. Those responsible for providing the learning must know and understand their audience. Each person



comes to the table with a different life experience that defines the learner; therefore approaching the learning through learning activities geared toward practical skills will prove most impactful. To approach these recommendations with the power of best practices rooted in the literature will provide the changes needed to get the outcomes desired.

### **Conclusion**

The intent of this research was to measure the leadership self-efficacy of principals in the Diocese of Savannah. It intended to analyze the perceived competencies with the various aspects of their responsibilities as principal with respect to professional standards. Quantitative survey data was collected and analyzed. Qualitative interviews were conducted to better understand the respondents perceived competencies and the factors that contributed to their success as well as roadblocks in their roles as Catholic school principals.

The findings of the survey showed little correlation to educational preparation and experience to self-efficacy. The more revealing aspect came through on the qualitative component that helped shed some light on experience specifically in the public school setting and the levels of self-efficacy with the roles and responsibilities to the job. The qualitative findings proved more significant with four emerging themes throughout all three interviews. The self-efficacy and competency lies in the call to the mission, the faith component. The need for a prescriptive support network also surfaced as being something that would alleviate much of the frustration and aid in getting the job done more effectively and efficiently. The need for mentorship and development of leaders also was a substantial finding that is rooted in the literature and would help with the issue identified by the organization of recruitment and retention of leaders.

Skilled leadership is needed to keep the mission of the church sustained. The future of our church is in the desks of the classrooms today. The results of this study will provide the Diocese of Savannah with the supports needed to help its current leaders, prepare its future leaders and strengthen the overall leadership infrastructure of the diocese to ensure vitality for years to come.

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## Appendix A

### Self-Efficacy of Principals of Catholic Elementary/Middle Schools in Terms of Roles and Responsibilities

#### Demographic Information

\* 1. Highest level of education completed:

- BA/BS
- MA/MS/M.A.T
- Ed.S.
- Ph.D./Ed.D

\* 2. Have you completed a formal program in school administration?

- Yes
- No

\* 3. Do you hold state certification in administrative leadership?

- Yes
- No

\* 4. Overall years of teaching (not including administration):

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 +        |

\* 5. Overall years of experience as a school/district administrator:

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 +        |

\* 6. Overall years of experience as principal:

- |                                    |                                      |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years | <input type="checkbox"/> 21 +        |

\* 7. How many total years of working experience do you have in Catholic education?

<input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 +

\* 8. Number of years as a teacher in current school setting

<input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 +

\* 9. Number of years as an administrator (other than principal) in current setting:

<input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 +

\* 10. Number of years as a principal in current setting:

<input type="checkbox"/> 0 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 6-10 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 1-2 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 11-20 Years
<input type="checkbox"/> 3-5 Years	<input type="checkbox"/> 21 +

Instructional Leadership & Staff Development

\* 11. The balance of the survey items asks you to rate your confidence level in terms of nine dimensions of school leadership roles and responsibilities. For each statement, please rate your confidence on a scale from not very confident to very confident

	Not very confident		Neutral		Very confident
I understand all of the instructional programs at my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand the process of curriculum design, implementation and evaluation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have knowledge of best-practice research related to instructional practices	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can develop a systematic process for mentoring teachers at my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not very confident		Neutral		Very confident	
I can demonstrate the effective use of technology to my teachers	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand and can communicate to the staff the complex instructional and motivational issues that are presented by a diverse student population	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can lead staff to understand and respect the diversity of our student population	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can lead staff to appreciate the kinds of knowledge and skills students and their families can add to the learning process	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I understand the development of a professional growth plan	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know my own personal development needs and the resources I can access to address those needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can assess the staff development needs of a school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I possess the skills needed to implement the effective use of resources so that priority is given to supporting student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can engage staff in the development of effective school improvement plans that result in improved student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



* 12. School Climate Development					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I can engage students in the assessment of our school climate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can assess school climate using multiple methods	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can engage staff in the assessment of our school climate	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know how to use data about our school climate to improve the school culture in ways that promote staff and student morale	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know how to use data about school climate to encourage appropriate student behavior	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I know how to use data about our school climate to support a positive learning environment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 13. Community Collaboration					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I understand community relations models that are needed to create partnerships with business, community, and institutions of higher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use marketing strategies and processes to create partnerships with business, community, and institutions of higher education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can identify and describe the service of community agencies that provide resources for the families of children in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can involve families and community stakeholders in the decision-making process at our school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can resolve issues related to budgeting	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can supplement school resources by attaining resources in the community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can solicit community resources to resolve school issues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 14. Data-based Decision Making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles

	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I can make sound decisions and am able to explain them based on professional, ethical and legal principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can understand and evaluate educational research that is related to programs and issues in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can apply appropriate research methods in the school context	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can explain to staff and parents the decision-making process of my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can explain to staff and parents how the decisions in my school are related to diocesan and church policies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can examine student performance data to extract the information necessary for school improvement planning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can make decisions within the boundaries of ethical and legal principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can explain the role of law and politics in shaping the school community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 15. Resource and Facility Management					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I have knowledge of legal principles that promote educational equity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can provide safe facilities (building, playground) according to legal principles	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
In accordance with legal principles, I can find information to address problems with facilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to find the appropriate personnel to resolve facility related problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can identify additional resources to assist all of the individuals in my school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 16. Use of Community Resources					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I can use community resources to support student achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use community resources to solve school problems	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use community resources to achieve student goals	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

* 17. Communications in a Diverse Environment					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I can interact positively with the different groups that make up my school community	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
My students and colleagues can trust me to be ethical in handling sensitive information	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can lead my staff in involving families in the education of their children	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can communicate and lead in a variety of educational settings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am sensitive to student diversity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
* 18. Development of School Vision					
	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I possess the skills to lead a school community in the development of a clear vision	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can develop a vision that will help ensure the success of all students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can use strategic planning processes to develop the vision of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can establish two-way communication with stakeholders (staff, parents, students, community) in order to obtain the commitment necessary for implementing the vision of our school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

\* 19. Supporting the Catholic Identity of the School

	Not very confident		Neutral	Very confident	
I can ensure that the school's curriculum aligns with Catholic values and teachings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I have knowledge and skills that allow me to create and or sustain a truly Catholic school culture for students, staff and families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can clearly express the uniquely Catholic aspects of the school's mission to all constituencies	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I am able to collaborate with parish and/or diocesan personnel in planning for the religious education and formation of the students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I can provide ongoing catechesis for faculty members that encourage them to deepen their faith and commitment to the mission of the school	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

## Appendix B

### Interview Protocol

Thank you for speaking with me today. I certainly appreciate your help with this Capstone. Today I will be asking some clarifying questions to better understand the role self-efficacy plays in the Diocese of Savannah.

1. Tell me a little about what motivates you in your role as a Catholic school principal?
2. Thinking back to your first year(s), what roles and responsibilities did you find to be most difficult?
  - a. Did you receive training in this area prior to the job?
  - b. Did you receive training during the assignment?
3. Thinking about your ability to do the job, what concerns did/do you have?
4. Looking at the 9 Dimensions – which (if any) have you found to be most challenging? Why?
5. In looking at the overall findings, community collaboration proved to be the lowest ranked area. What does it look like for you? What training have you received in this area? What would best support your needs in this area? Other area(s)
6. What types of supports and professional development would best help you carry out the roles and responsibilities?
7. What recommendations would you have to best approach the various dimensions of the position?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Thank you so much for your time. I know breaking away from your building is difficult and I certainly appreciate your dedication to Catholic education.

## Appendix C

Dimension	# of Questions	Mean
Instructional Leadership & Staff Development	13	4.14
School Climate & Development	6	4.23
Community Collaboration	7	3.71
Data-based Decision Making Aligned with Legal and Ethical Principles	8	4.44
Resource and Facility Management	5	4.30
Use of Community Resources	3	3.97
Communications in a Diverse Environment	5	4.73
Development of School Vision	4	4.41
Supporting the Catholic Identity of the School	5	4.49

Level of Education	Frequency	Percentage
B.A./B.S.	0	0%
M.A./M.S./M.A.T.	10	66.67%
Ed.S.	4	26.67%
Ph. D. / Ed. D.	1	6.67%



Have you completed a formal program in school administration?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	13	86.67%
No	2	13.33%

Do you hold state certification in administrative leadership?	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	6	40.00%
No	9	60.00%

Overall years of teaching (not including administration):	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	1	6.67%
1-2 Years	0	0.00%
3-5 Years	2	13.33%
6-10 Years	5	33.33%
11-20 Years	3	20.00%
21 +	4	26.67%

Overall years of experience as a school/district administrator:	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	1	6.67%
1-2 Years	1	6.67%
3-5 Years	3	20.00%
6-10 Years	2	13.33%
11-20 Years	4	26.67%
21 +	4	26.67%

Overall years of experience as principal:	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	5	33.33%
1-2 Years	2	13.33%
3-5 Years	1	6.67%
6-10 Years	3	20.00%
11-20 Years	2	13.33%
21 +	2	13.33%

How many total years of working experience do you have in Catholic education?	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	0	0.00%
1-2 Years	1	6.67%
3-5 Years	3	20.00%
6-10 Years	2	13.33%
11-20 Years	4	26.67%
21 +	5	33.33%

Number of years as a teacher in current school setting	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	6	40.00%
1-2 Years	2	13.33%
3-5 Years	2	13.33%
6-10 Years	3	20.00%
11-20 Years	1	6.67%
21 +	1	6.67%

Number of years as an administrator (other than principal) in current setting:	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	7	46.67%
1-2 Years	1	6.67%
3-5 Years	3	20.00%
6-10 Years	2	13.33%
11-20 Years	2	13.33%
21 +	0	0.00%

Number of years as a principal in current setting:	Frequency	Percentage
0 Years	6	40.00%
1-2 Years	1	6.67%
3-5 Years	2	13.33%
6-10 Years	4	26.67%
11-20 Years	1	6.67%
21 +	1	6.67%