Comparing organizational configurations of principal autonomy in Finland and New York

Harry Leonardatos
University at Albany, State University of New York, hleonardatos@gmail.com

The University at Albany community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/legacy-etd

Part of the Educational Administration and Supervision Commons, Educational Leadership Commons, and the Education Policy Commons

Recommended Citation

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the The Graduate School at Scholars Archive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Legacy Theses & Dissertations (2009 - 2024) by an authorized administrator of Scholars Archive. Please see Terms of Use. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@albany.edu.
Comparing Organizational Configurations of
Principal Autonomy in Finland and New York

by

Harry Leonardatos

COPYRIGHT 2015
This exploratory study compares organizational configurations of principal autonomy in Finland and New York State. Evidence from Finnish school site visits and surveys distributed to principals in New York State and Finland is utilized to compare principal autonomy in two distinct educational settings.

The distinguishing feature of the U.S. school system is local control by school boards, which dates back to the colonial era (Wong & Langevin, 2005). This organizational setting contrasts from the educational system in Finland where the central government still holds statutory responsibility for education, but has decided to delegate decisions affecting the daily processes of a school to the principal and staff of each individual schools (Caldwell & Harris, 2006; Sabel, Saxenian, Miettinen, Kristensen, & Hautamäki, 2010). Finland was chosen for this study because of its recent success on PISA and the attention Finland has received from U.S. policymakers, reformers, professors, and the media. If the Finnish school system is a “miracle” as some proclaim (Darling-Hammond, 2010), then what can we learn from this organizational setting?

The hypothesis of this study is that principals in devolved and radically decentralized settings (e.g. New York State) possess less autonomy compared to principals in settings with a distinct educational center that allows decentralized decision-making at the local level (e.g. Finland). The research questions this study proposes to consider are: 1) To what extent do principals in devolved school systems (such as New York State) exercise autonomy when making decisions compared to principals in an educational system where authority is delegated by the central government (such as Finland)? 2) Is there a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of
decentralization? 3) How does the type of decentralization affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously in making decisions?

To examine the validity of the hypothesis and to answer these research questions, principals from New York State and Finland were selected to answer an electronically administered survey similar to the *School and Staffing Survey* distributed by the U.S. Department of Education. An analysis of the survey results was utilized to help understand if a relationship exists between different organizational configurations and principal autonomy. I also went to visit schools in Finland and had the opportunity to meet with school principals and representatives of the OAJ (Trade Union of Education).

Principals were asked about their autonomy in making decisions related to personnel and instruction. My findings indicate that in almost all instances, principals in Finland enjoy a higher degree of autonomy than their counterparts in New York State. Principals in New York State, which operate in an educational atmosphere where different levels of government and bureaucratic entities ratify laws, pass policies, and make decisions that affect instruction and personnel, experience a lower degree of autonomy. In contrast, principals that work in a system, such as Finland’s, where the central government delegates authority to local educational agencies and allows the administration and staff of each school to make decisions indicate a higher degree of autonomy.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The journey towards completing this dissertation could only be possible with the assistance of colleagues, family, and friends. As a high school principal it was a challenge to leave school right after dismissal and drive either to New Paltz or Albany from Nyack. Thankfully, I had a supportive Superintendent, Dr. Margaret Keller-Cogan, who valued the importance of continuous learning and personal fulfillment. Allowing me the flexibility to leave school early or visit nations, such as Finland, Japan, Germany, and China, during the school year was instrumental in my studies. Without Dr. Keller-Cogan’s generosity, my program of study could not be possible.

Beginning my course work at New Paltz, I was fortunate enough to have Dr. Rose Rudnitski as my professor. Her approach to education and its purpose matched mine as she concentrated on critical social theory to explain the sociology and politics of education. As a result of Dr. Rudnitski’s course, I was re-acclimated in the discourse of critical pedagogy and helped me refine my understanding of abstract concepts, such as autonomy, local control, and authority.

After completing the course work at New Paltz, I was officially accepted to the doctoral program at the University at Albany. Dr. Alan Wagner was not only the Chair of the Department at the time, but also my professor for statistics. His approach to parsing abstract concepts into measurable units of study helped me decide to conduct a quantitative study. His experience with the OECD and PISA presented me with an opportunity to examine education on an international comparative basis.

When I first met Dr. Heinz-Dieter Meyer, I knew we would be able to work well together, especially since I have not met many people in education who are familiar with
critical social theorists, such as Habermas. Dr. Meyer first presented me with the idea of investigating principal autonomy and conducting a comparative study with principals in Germany. Dr. Meyer was a kind host and allowed me to stay at his parent’s house in Germany as we visited schools and met with education officials at the Ministry of Education at North-Rhine Westphalia. After many interviews and note-taking while visiting schools in Germany, I began the process of comparing principals in their organizational settings until Dr. Meyer put a halt on this project. Instead of Germany, Dr. Meyer suggested that a comparison with Finnish principals would be more pertinent to the field, especially since Finland had recently captured the media’s attention with films, such as *The Finland Phenomenon*, and books, such as *Finnish Lessons*. So, I refocused my attention to Finland and started familiarizing myself with the Finnish educational system. Soon, Dr. Meyer and I, along with a team of researchers headed off to Finland to visit schools and the Ministry of Education.

Dr. Eija Rougle arranged the trip for us, and we had access to a variety of schools in Helsinki as well as Turku. Listening to principals, observing classrooms, meeting government officials and representatives from the educator’s union (OAJ), and having discussions with parents and students, presented an opportunity that could not be captured while reading books or articles. Visiting Finland first-hand allowed me to observe the daily routine of my counterparts in Finland and examine the issues and concerns with which they dealt. While in Finland, I met Ari Pokka, who is now the President of International Confederation of Principals, and Jukka Kuittinen, who was on the board of the OAJ. Both Mr. Pokka and Mr. Kuittinen were instrumental in sending
my survey to the high school principals in Finland. Without their assistance, I would not
have received responses from Finnish principals.

When our research team returned to the United States, we started presenting panel
discussions on our observations of the Finnish school system. Each member of the team
concentrated on a different topic, relating to his/her study of interest. These discussions
helped me develop a better understanding of the Finnish school system. During this time,
Dr. Meyer challenged me not to accept things at face value and to challenge the
orthodoxy of the status quo. Thus, the validity of PISA scores, the concept of local
control in the U.S., and the role of the federal government were all topics that Dr. Meyer
had me reconsider and critically assess.

During this time, the support of my ex-wife, Debbra Stolarik, was crucial. While
I visited schools in Germany, Japan, Finland, and China, Debbra managed our affairs at
home. She always supported my studies and encouraged me while taking classes and
writing most of this dissertation.

However, going through a divorce during this process presented its own
challenges and without the encouragement of friends, I would not been on the path to
completing this journey I started almost seven years. Dr. Karynn Jensen Zahedi was not
only my reader during the dissertation proposal; she is also a friend with the utmost
optimism and believed in me when I was ready to abandon this project.

Finally, Dr. Amy Cruzan Flannery’s simple ultimatum of “finish it already” rang
ture. Her suggestion of getting lost and escaping work for a few days where no one could
find me proved to be the impetus I needed to complete this dissertation. Her support
during this time of transition will forever be appreciated.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ......................................................................................................................... Error! Bookmark not defined.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS ........................................................................................................ v

TABLE OF CONTENTS ......................................................................................................... viii

FIGURES ............................................................................................................................. xi

TABLES ............................................................................................................................... xii

CHAPTER 1: Background, Purpose, Research Questions, and Significance ....................... 1
1. The purpose of the study ..................................................................................................... 1
2. The problem addressed in this study ................................................................................ 2
   A. Organizational configuration of schools ........................................................................ 2
   B. Principal accountability and autonomy .......................................................................... 4
   C. Functional domains of education .................................................................................. 10
   D. Two cases: The United States and Finland ................................................................. 12
3. Research questions ........................................................................................................... 14
4. Significance ....................................................................................................................... 15
5. Summary .......................................................................................................................... 18

CHAPTER 2: Literature Review .......................................................................................... 21
1. Introduction ....................................................................................................................... 21
2. Justification for studying the organizational configuration of schools ......................... 22
3. (De)centralization: at which level are decisions made? .................................................. 24
   A. Defining decentralization ............................................................................................ 26
   B. Measuring decentralization ......................................................................................... 29
4. The functions of education: what decisions are made? .................................................. 30
5. Two cases of decentralization ........................................................................................ 33
   A. The United States: a case of devolution ...................................................................... 33
      1. Organizational configuration ..................................................................................... 33
      2. Type of decentralization: devolution ....................................................................... 37
      3. Personnel management ............................................................................................ 39
      4. Organization of instruction ....................................................................................... 41
      5. Summary .................................................................................................................. 42
   B. Finland: a case of delegation ....................................................................................... 43
      1. Organizational configuration ..................................................................................... 43
      2. Type of decentralization: delegation ....................................................................... 46
      3. Personnel management ............................................................................................ 52
      4. Organization of instruction ....................................................................................... 55
      5. Summary .................................................................................................................. 56
6. The relevance of studying principal autonomy ............................................................... 57
7. Studying principal autonomy within the institutional context ....................................... 59
   A. Defining principal autonomy ...................................................................................... 60
   B. Principal autonomy and the functions of education .................................................. 65
   C. Summary .................................................................................................................... 67
8. Reasons for studying high schools among different nations .......................................... 68
   A. Why study high schools? ............................................................................................. 68
   B. Importance of studying principal autonomy using a cross-national approach .......... 69
9. Summary .......................................................................................................................... 70
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion ..................................................................................................................... 160
APPENDIX ........................................................................................................................................ 165
REFERENCES ................................................................................................................................... 176
FIGURES

FIGURE 1.1: FIVE BASIC PARTS OF AN ORGANIZATION .................................................................7
FIGURE 1.2: ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATION IMPACT ON PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY AND DECISION-
MAKING ......................................................................................................................................12
FIGURE 2.1: PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURES ON COMPENSATION OF TEACHERS & STAFF .31
FIGURE 3.1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATION, PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY,
AND DECISION-MAKING ............................................................................................................76
FIGURE 3.2: FUNDS BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSFERS AMONG LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT FOR
FINLAND AND THE U.S. ................................................................................................................80
FIGURE 3.3: RELATIVE COMPARISON OF BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSFER OF FUNDS AMONG FINLAND
AND THE U.S. ................................................................................................................................81
FIGURE 4.1: GROUPS WITH GREATEST AUTONOMY COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW
YORK ..................................................................................................................................................99
FIGURE 4.2: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER
PERSONNEL MATTERS IN FINLAND ............................................................................................103
FIGURE 4.3: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER
PERSONNEL MATTERS IN NEW YORK ........................................................................................104
FIGURE 4.4: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER INSTRUCTIONAL
MATTERS IN FINLAND ...................................................................................................................106
FIGURE 4.5: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER INSTRUCTIONAL
MATTERS IN NEW YORK .............................................................................................................107
FIGURE 4.6: WHO MAKES DECISIONS IN A SCHOOL?
COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW YORK ....................................................................109
FIGURE 4.7: PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTION ON AUTONOMY IN MAKING DECISIONS.........................110
FIGURE 4.8: AUTONOMY GAP IN PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT
COMPARISON BETWEEN NEW YORK AND FINNISH PRINCIPALS ..............................................114
FIGURE 4.9: AUTONOMY GAP IN ORGANIZATION OF INSTRUCTION
COMPARISON BETWEEN NEW YORK AND FINNISH PRINCIPALS ..............................................116
FIGURE 4.10: BARRIERS TO DISMISSING POOR PERFORMING TEACHERS
COMPARISON BETWEEN FINNISH AND NEW YORK PRINCIPALS ............................................118
# TABLES

**TABLE 1.1**: TWO CASES STUDIES OF TYPE OF DECENTRALIZATION AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING ................................................................. 14

**TABLE 2.1**: TYPES OF PERSONNEL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE UNITED STATES ................................................................. 40

**TABLE 2.2**: TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE UNITED STATES ................................................................. 41

**TABLE 2.3**: TYPES OF PERSONNEL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN FINLAND ................................................................. 53

**TABLE 2.4**: TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN FINLAND ................................................................. 55

**TABLE 3.1**: FIVE BASIC PARTS OF AN ORGANIZATION BY COUNTRY ................................................................. 78

**TABLE 3.2**: TYPES OF PERSONNEL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING-COMPARISON OF U.S. AND FINLAND ................................................................. 82

**TABLE 3.3**: TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING-COMPARISON OF U.S. AND FINLAND ................................................................. 83

**TABLE 4.1**: GROUPS WITH GREATEST AMOUNT OF AUTONOMY COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW YORK ................................................................. 100

**TABLE 4.2**: PRINCIPALS’ ACTUAL AND IDEAL RESPONSIBILITY OVER EDUCATIONAL FUNCTIONS ................................................................. 112
CHAPTER 1: Background, Purpose, Research Questions, and Significance

1. The purpose of the study

The purpose of this exploratory study is to examine how organizational configurations affect principal autonomy. My dissertation addresses the following question: *How do organizational configurations affect principal autonomy?* Both researchers and policymakers recognize the importance of principal leadership on school performance. Michael Fullan, a well-known researcher, states “principals are often the key agents of school success” (2001, p. 512). A report conducted by the policy group, Public Agenda, notes that virtually all school superintendents agree with the statement “behind every great school is a great principal.” One principal in this study stated: “The principalship is a hard and demanding job, but it is the key to success of schools. A good principal can make the difference” (Farkas, Johnson, Duffett, & Foleno, 2001, p. 7).

Still, principals operate within bureaucratic structures that limit their ability to act autonomously. Hierarchical and formalized structures limit a principal’s ability to purchase instructional materials, implement curriculum frameworks, hire highly qualified and effective teachers, dismiss ineffective teachers, and allocate funds to attract good teachers. This study examines the intrinsic conflict between principal autonomy and how the bureaucratic context is often designed to limit it. In order to assess how an organizational configuration affects a principal’s ability to make decisions, two distinct educational settings are examined: the U.S. (local governance) and Finland (unitary governance). Comparing how principals operate in these two different cases affords the opportunity to assess how organizational configurations affect principal autonomy.
2. The problem addressed in this study

A. Organizational configuration of schools

Schools are institutions that are characterized by certain common bureaucratic elements. No matter what type of school (public or private), its setting (urban, suburban, or rural), or its location (the U.S. or another nation) school bureaucracies, possess similar characteristics. Whether the school is a public high school in New York State or an upper secondary school (lukio) in Finland, all schools are organized into classrooms, operate during a set time of day, divide the school day into distinct periods, group students by age-based grades or ability levels.

Although the general operation of the schools appears similar, what does differ, between these schools is the organizational configuration in which they operate. The differences can be seen in the educational governance of schools. For example, the almost 14,000 school districts in the U.S. and the 700 school districts in New York State (Education, 2009) are essentially configured in the same manner, with local school districts organizing and funding education. Local governance is not the organizational configuration of schools in other nations. Educational governance in other nations is the responsibility of the state or a region while in others that responsibility belongs to a centralized authority.

Generally, there has been a trend away from centralized modes of decision-making toward more decentralized approaches. In recognition of the bureaucratic limitations, there has been a world-wide trend to move decision-making from centralized structures directly to the schools themselves (OECD, 2008, p. 483). This allows those closest to the delivery of educational service the ability to make decisions that are best for student learning. The concept of decentralization is an important one to consider as it
ultimately affects school effectiveness. Centralization refers to the condition whereby the administrative authority for education is vested, not in a local community, but in a central body (W. R. Scott, Meyer, & Associates, 1994). This central body has control over resources: funding, personnel, policies, educational goals, and curricula. It determines curriculum content, controls budgets, certifies and employs teachers, allocates facility resources, devises policies and regulations, and so on.

Decentralization lies at the other end of the spectrum. Decentralization refers to the extent to which authority has been passed to an individual school. Site-based management is an example of decentralization in which individual schools make their own finance and curriculum decisions (H.-D. Meyer, 2009). However, even in a decentralized system, the locus of power remains with a central body, i.e. a local school district office or the board of education. Advocates of decentralization believe it will result in higher student performance, more efficient use of resources, increased skills and satisfaction for school administrators and teachers, and greater community and business involvement in and support for schools (Hansen, Roza, & Rand Education, 2005).

For this reason, a recent trend in educational governance has been to move the locus of decision-making to the local level, where school leaders operate. National and international management theories, such as New Public Management, propose that transferring the locus of decision-making from centralized structures to sub-units, such as schools, will result in increased efficiency and performance (Hansen et al., 2005; Wittmann, 2006). Decentralized management, which is implemented in practice and by law, sets the parameters a principal must meet. District administrators both determine annual target goals on standardized tests and allocate the resources available to principals
for meeting these somewhat subjective and continuously changing goals. Bureaucratic structures with formal rules exist to provide a system of checks and balances so that the power and authority of a supervisor, such as a school principal, is not absolute. After all, principals that exercise uncurtailed authority may not have the best interests of the students or the teachers in mind. Yet, the degree of relative autonomy in relation to the organizational setting does matter if accountability is now moved from the district to the school leader. This inherent conflict between principal autonomy and institutional constraints serves as the basis of this exploratory study that examines under which organizational structures a principal can exercise the most autonomy while also most effectively leading a school.

**B. Principal accountability and autonomy**

Decentralization places accountability for the success or failure of a school directly on the shoulders of a principal. A principal is the “leader” of a school building. Empirical evidence shows that principals have the largest indirect aggregate effect on school performance and student achievement (Leithwood & Levin, 2005, p. 410). Research on successful schools recognizes that the principal’s decision-making role is of paramount importance (Cotton, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). As government officials, policymakers, school board members, and district leaders increase school accountability for student achievement, they inevitably focus on the principal as an agent of success or failure (Kafka, 2009).

Whether such changes were necessary or viable, however, ignores the fact that bureaucratic demands on today’s principals are vastly different from those just 30 years ago. Goodwin, Cunningham, and Eagle state that as principals have been asked to
assume more responsibilities, their role has become an “accumulation of expectations that have increased the complexity of the position” (2005, pp. 2-3).

The institutional landscape for principals has also drastically changed since 2001, with the passage of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Testing gained more prominence since students had to pass certain exams to graduate from high school, and schools would now be graded on those results. NCLB also set increasing school performance targets, culminating in the ultimate goal of 100 percent of students demonstrating proficiency in both English and Mathematics by 2014. If a school does not meet its Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) targets as dictated by NCLB, the district or school is severely sanctioned, resulting in loss of Title I funds, dismissal of teachers and administration, and/or the restructuring of the school itself (Spring, 2010, pp. 181-183). In 2009, Race to the Top (RTTT) further extended the importance placed on standardized tests so much so that teachers and principals can be dismissed for students’ poor performance on state exams (Santos & Hu, 2012).

The enactment of NCLB and RTTT represents an increase in federal involvement and federal mandates to schools. In less than a decade, the federal government increased its role in the educational arena, which was previously almost exclusively reserved to the states (DeBoer, 2012). By offering funding dependent on the implementation of certain standards, the federal government has compelled cash-strapped school districts to adopt policies that may run counter to the interests of the local school board and community. This type of coerced centralization has created a tug of war between local control of education and federal mandates (DeBoer, 2012). Thus, news headlines, such as, “School Boards Want Federal Government to Butt Out,” have increasingly become more
commonplace (Karlin, 2015).

While the organizational landscape and demands on principals are changing, the institutions themselves have not. Principals’ position within district bureaucracies have remained relatively stable (Kaftka, 2009). They are neither at the top of the educational hierarchy nor at the entry level, but somewhere in the middle, answering to district officials, board of education members, policymakers, parents, students, teachers, and community members. Local school boards set policies, and district offices control budgetary, personnel, and other key factors affecting a principal’s ability to perform optimally. Since principals will be held accountable for their students’ performance, the issue of principal autonomy has become a real and present concern.

Few studies on school leadership have concentrated on school principals, instead, focusing primarily on district-level leaders. Kate Rousmaniere, a school historian, notes that the “principalship is missing from both the political history of school administration and the social history of schools. It’s as if the principal did not exist at all” (2007, p. 4). Even fewer studies have conceptualized or empirically examined the amount of autonomy principals have in their daily activities. School principals have always worked within an organizational structure, usually under the authority of a superintendent. Their work is directly connected to, and influenced by, the organized settings in which they function. Principals occupy the classic “middle management” position referred to in organizational theory, yet, at the same time, they are “in charge” of their schools.

Principals, however, do not operate as many middle managers do, alongside their supervisor in the same physical setting. Instead, principals are heads of discrete and isolated units, schools with distinct names and identities. According to New York State
Education Law, the only administrative position a school must employ is a principal. The law singles out and specifically identifies the principal as the head of the school. As heads of such visible units, principals have greater public exposure than most middle managers. Within the school, principals are most able to shape culture, set tone, and define standards of behavior and quality; yet, their autonomy is confined by the organizational structure in which they operate.

The basic structure of a school is illustrated by the five elements of an organization identified by Mintzberg in Figure 1.1 below (1979, p. 20). The need to carry out managerial prerogatives from the strategic apex to the schools has led to the emergence of a district office staff: superintendents, deputy and assistant superintendents, program evaluators, and/or curriculum specialists (i.e. the school’s techno-structure).

**FIGURE 1.1: FIVE BASIC PARTS OF AN ORGANIZATION**

*Five Basic Parts of Organization*

![Diagram showing the five basic parts of an organization: Strategic Apex, Superintendent & District Office Staff, Facilities, Payroll, Cafeteria, Principal, Operating Core, Technostructure, Directors, Curriculum Specialists, Program Evaluators, Teachers, Counselors, Teaching Assistants, Clerical.]*

Although a principal does not directly report to various actors that compose the techno-structure, and vice versa, measurable goals, curriculum alignment, and personnel decisions determined by those in the techno-structure affect principal autonomy. Thus, accountability also runs “sideways.” Key decisions made by the techno-structure that will affect student performance on exams are made outside the realm of a principal’s authority. Additionally, the principal has little control over the school support staff, transportation of students, and physical state of the facility.

Principals also face challenges from within (the operating core). According to Weick (2001), internal relationships within schools can be described as “loosely coupled.” Schools are discrete units, but so are individual classrooms. The principal may be in charge of the school, but the teacher is in charge of the classroom. Influencing teachers in the classroom is a persistent challenge for principals. Principals enforce contractual arrangements, which define, among other working conditions, class size, grievance procedures, and length of the school day. The principal must also deal with tenured subordinates who are financially compensated by seniority and the number of college credits earned, as compared to merit. Although there are some circumstances in which tenured teachers can be dismissed, such occasions are rare. Sanctions are seldom used in school management, since dismissal is not generally a feasible option (Hess, 2009).

Principals stand at the middle of the intersection between district and school realities, coping with the formal constraints of district policy and the loosely coupled relations of the operating core (the school and the classroom). School organizations, then, are characterized by a combination of central control and subunit autonomy. As such, principals are an important part of the public education system.
However, the recent average performance of U.S. students on the Program for International Student Assessments (PISA) has been so far below expectations that the effectiveness of educational practices and public schooling in the U.S. has been questioned. This mediocre performance has caught the attention of President Obama, who has made stepping-up the rigor of education a centerpiece of his administrative agenda. The theme of education in crisis is reflected in the popularity of two films recent films, *Waiting for Superman* and *Race to Nowhere*, both of which criticize the present condition of public schooling in the U.S.

For this reason, Finland, whose scores ranked the highest, caught the attention of journalists and educational reformers in the U.S. (Anderson, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010). Newspaper articles, films, and studies focusing on Finland’s ability to deliver quality education have recently been produced and published (Faust, 2011; Sahlberg, 2011b). Finland’s success has been noticed by other nations, and teams of government officials and educators visit Finnish schools to discover the secret to educational success. Finland’s success story has led to the proliferation of a private consultants that offer professional visits to Finnish schools for foreign visitors.

The term “successful” suggests that a certain set of criteria must have been achieved and that there is a type of ranking of performance compared to other participants. Performance on the PISA exams necessitates a certain degree of standardization and uniformity. The exam itself is standardized and nations are treated as equal units of study. Schools are examined as educational actors devoid of non-educational factors that may affect performance on the PISA exams (H.-D. Meyer & Benavot, 2013). A ranking system, such as the one utilized by PISA, requires
standardization in order to rank nations using similar criteria even though the institutional and cultural contexts of the schools vary greatly (H.-D. Meyer & Schiller, 2013).

The average performance of U.S. students on PISA and the recent educational reform agenda, which focuses on producing effective teachers, place a spotlight directly on the principal as never been seen before. The importance of principal leadership is reflected in New York State’s revamping of its principal annual evaluation system, which links the rating of principal performance to standardized test scores (Department, 2012). The most recent iteration of this performance evaluation system (Education Law 3012-d) weighs exams as high as 50 percent in determining a score towards a principal’s final rating (Legislature, 2015). This accountability system places responsibility of student and teacher performance directly on the principal’s shoulders. Accountability for data, obtained from standardized scores, has been decentralized by moving this burden away from the central district office right to the principal’s office as evidenced by district office staff being exempt from the new accountability system.

Decentralization has shifted more responsibility to the principal and away from district administrators and local boards of education. Yet, accountability presupposes a concomitant autonomy that would allow a school principal to manage the school in ways that meet pre-determined goals. The limitations that principals face present an important issue to study since autonomy from bureaucratic pressures is the most powerful determinant of school performance (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

## C. Functional domains of education

This study focuses on principal autonomy in relation to two functional domains of education: the organization of instruction and personnel management. The organization
of instruction is becoming more important and has received more scrutiny from policymakers (Tucker, 2011). Whether the issue is increasing educational standards, devising more rigorous standardized tests, or developing a common curriculum between states, what is being taught and how it is being taught has received more attention (Board, 2008; Fleming, 2011). In the study, *The Autonomy Gap*, principals identify lacking control over the organization of instruction (e.g. standards, curriculum objectives, instructional time, grouping students, and choice of instructional materials) as one barrier to autonomy (Adamowski, Therriault, & Cavanna, 2007). Thus, the organization of instruction is one functional domain that is considered in this study.

Personnel management is the second functional domain that is examined. The quality of teachers is widely considered to be the most direct classroom determinant of student performance. Studies conducted nationally and internationally recognize the importance of good teachers on student performance (Rice, 2003). Also, international data show that nations spend an average of 80 percent of all public educational funds on teachers and staff (OECD, 2010, pp. 263-266). Given the importance of quality teachers on student achievement, and the amount of public funds spent on teacher and other personnel costs, my study focuses on personnel management as a key function of principal autonomy. Since principals will now be accountable for student performance on standardized exams, the ability to hire talented teachers, dismiss poor performing teachers, attract good teachers through economic incentives, and make decisions about the conditions of teaching in schools are all paramount to the present study.

My study analyzes how organizational configurations, characterized by the two distinct types of decentralization, impact a principal’s autonomy to make decisions in
school. As Figure 1.1 (page 7) indicates, organizational settings contain structures from the apex to the operating core. The principal is located in the middle. As a middle manager, the principal is affected by how the organization is configured to allow him/her to make decisions that will impact the operating core. Figure 1.2 below illustrates the topic my study proposes to analyze: How organizational configurations affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously to make decisions.

**FIGURE 1.2: ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATION IMPACT ON PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY AND DECISION-MAKING**

---

**D. Two cases: The United States and Finland**

In order to assess how varying levels of decentralization affect principal autonomy, this study uses a cross-national comparative approach. Most school districts in the U.S. are organizationally comprised of school boards, a central office apparatus, and a techno-structure and support staff consisting of similar elements. Comparing
school districts from one county to the next, or from one state to the next will not yield
the necessary variation to examine differing organizational configurations of schools.
However, by utilizing a cross-national approach, more varied data can be compared and
analyzed. The question of how organizations affect principal autonomy cannot be
answered by looking at the U.S. alone since all schools basically operate in a local
decentralized environment and are configured in the same manner with similar
bureaucratic elements and constraints. The answer to how organizations affect principal
autonomy can only be answered by taking a more global approach and considering
different cases, which are characterized by various types of decentralization.

Globally, not all bureaucracies are the same. My study analyzes whether
principals in other nations, such as Finland, face constraints similar to their counterparts in
the U.S. A cross-national comparison allows the concept of principal autonomy to be
studied in diverse institutional contexts: local governance (U.S.) and a unitary system of
governance (Finland). A comparative approach between two distinct school systems also
permits a comparison of the traditional public high school system in the U.S. to
traditional public high school systems in other nations (such as Finland). This cultural
and national variance affords the opportunity to examine traditional school bureaucratic
structures in different environments.

The nations in this study also possess varied institutional characteristics that
permit a comparison between a federal system that: (i) permits highly decentralized units
(school districts) that allow for local governance (the U.S. system) to (ii) other
educational systems, Finland, where educational goals and standards are more centrally
defined. Educational governance in Finland is characterized by a unitary system. The
central government is supreme, and the administrative divisions exercise only those powers that the central government has delegated to them. The variations across these two organizational settings allow the concept of principal autonomy to be compared among educational systems that are characterized by decentralized, local control (such as New York State) and more centralized systems (such as Finland) that permit the creation of sub-units (municipalities) to deliver and administer educational services.

These nations also differ according to the type of decentralization under which they operate. Paqueo and Lammert (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000) identify three different types of centralization: deconcentration, delegation, and devolution. Since sub-units at the local level control education, the U.S. educational system is characterized by a devolved structure. In Finland, the central government delegates educational authority to the municipalities. A cross-national approach allows the necessary variance to analyze the decentralized structures of schools in three distinct cases as summarized by Table 1.1 below.

**TABLE 1.1: TWO CASES STUDIES OF TYPE OF DECENTRALIZATION AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NATION</th>
<th>TYPE OF DECENTRALIZATION</th>
<th>LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U.S.</td>
<td>Devolution</td>
<td>Individual schools districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINLAND</td>
<td>Delegation</td>
<td>Unitary government gives authority to municipalities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Research questions

To examine how organizational settings affect principal autonomy in decision-making, this cross-national study addresses the following questions:

1) To what extent do principals in devolved school systems (such as the U.S.) exercise autonomy when making decisions compared to principals in more centrally controlled
educational systems (such as Finland)?

2) Is there a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of decentralization?

3) How does the type of decentralization affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously in making decisions?

4. Significance

This study is relevant in the current educational climate of principal accountability. As a result of President Obama’s RTTT legislation, which was recently adopted by New York State, principals are now evaluated by their students’ scores, i.e. Education Law 3012-c (Department, 2012). This law is being phased out and being replaced a new evaluation system (Education Law 3012-d) that emphasizes student performance, as measured by growth scores on standardized tests, even more in determining a principal’s overall rating (Legislature, 2015). This method of principal evaluation has already led to the removal of principals in states that have accepted federal funds. Given the organizational structure of school districts, the question of how much autonomy a principal possesses to make the RTTT required gains is a critical one.

Accountability implies control over that which is being measured. Yet, the current organizational structure of schools poses barriers to such control and the theoretically associated improved test scores. In a recent article, Dr. Zahedi and I examine how RTTT has impacted public education in New York State (2014). We argue that requirements related to an increase in student testing and the coupling of teacher evaluations to students’ scores on state tests are deteriorating the quality of public education in New York State. Additionally, we claim that imposed political directives are shown to have a role in creating confusion through untested policies, engendering a
culture of distrust, and diverting money from sound educational practice that are dismantling public schools in favor of market models (Leonardatos & Zahedi, 2014). As a result, principals in New York State have protested the decision to evaluate educators using test scores (Winerip, 2011).

My study is important in the current climate of accountability since this type of system presumes that principals have the necessary autonomy to make instructional and personnel decisions that will make a difference between a failing or a successful school. If principals are to be accountable, then they need to act autonomously in their decision-making without many of the existing bureaucratic constraints in the current organizational configuration of the school district structure. Chester Finn posits in a recent article in The Atlantic, “Why School Principals Need More Authority,” what the role of the principal should be in an organization: “A venerable maxim of successful organizational management declares that an executive’s authority should be commensurate with his or her responsibility. In plain English, if you are held to account for producing certain results, you need to be in charge of the essential means of production” (2012, p. 1). Identifying those organizational elements that impede a principal’s ability to make improvements is important for policymakers if their intent is continuous school improvement as measured by student performance on standardized tests.

Additionally, very few studies have examined the concept of principal autonomy in a comparative perspective. Compared to their counterparts in Finland, principals in the U.S. are restricted by a decentralized, local environment characterized by a high degree of bureaucratic structures including: local school board policies; directives set by district
office administration; union contracts; the hiring and dismissal of teachers and staff; and funding, which is dependent on the wealth of a community and its willingness to spend on education by approving local school district budgets.

Since educational structures in other countries have different bureaucracies at their apex and techno-structure, it is worth studying whether the type of decentralization makes a difference in the degree of principal autonomy. For example, the local, decentralized control evidenced by both the district office structure and school boards, which is characteristic of the U.S. educational system, is absent from both the Finnish educational systems. Although there are municipal school boards in Finland, these have a more limited function compared to those found in the U.S. The impact of these varied organizational settings on principal autonomy is rarely considered when examining the effectiveness of principals.

My study examines whether U.S. principals who fail to meet externally set accountability levels may do so because of autonomy-limiting organizational structures, and not personal deficiency in some regard as the literature generally claims. If the former is true and organizations do limit principal autonomy, then policy makers who intend to improve student performance and raise standards may find it useful to consider eliminating those existing organizational elements that constrain principal autonomy and learn lessons from nations with different organizational structures.

Finally, even previously successful and established principals are subject to career-threatenng sanctions if students do not meet measurable targets. This issue has generated a great amount of discussion among principals in New York State as evidenced by the weekly seminars offered by the largest administrative union in New York State,
the School Administrators Association of New York State (SAANYS), across the state on the new APPR. Research indicates that more experienced principals enjoy a greater degree of autonomy from supervisors since they have proven to be established and proficient school leaders over many years (Gawlik, 2008). As these more experienced principals attempt to improve their schools’ test scores, is such a school’s failure to meet annual targets a factor of poor principal leadership or organizational elements over which the principal has little control? Current research claims the former (Cotton, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005), but very few studies have examined the relationship between organizational structures and principal autonomy. The traditional adherence to school structures give preference to a command-control system, similar to Mintzberg’s organizational structure, with clearly defined bureaucratic roles and Weber’s description of a bureaucracy where each person in the organization has a specialized role with certain defined functions (Weber, 1947).

Since principals are now accountable for their students’ performance on exams, should the organizational structure be transitioned from a hierarchical system to one where a principal is given more autonomy in exchange for accountability? Given that policy makers in New York State have linked a principal’s effectiveness to student test scores, the question of whether the organizational configuration of schools, characterized by the type of decentralization, affects principal autonomy is one worth examining further.

5. Summary

My exploratory study examines how the configuration of an organization affects principal autonomy in making decisions. Since there has been a trend, both nationally
and internationally, to move decision-making away from centralized structures to local sub-units, such as the school itself, examining the extent to which a principal can operate as an autonomous agent is worth studying. Along with decentralization, accountability for student’s performance in the U.S. has also been transferred from a central entity, such as a district office, to the principal. The focus on the principal as an effective school leader can be seen in New York State’s recent passage of laws that associate the effectiveness of principal performance with standardized test scores.

The functional domains that are considered in this study include the organization of instruction and personnel management. The latter is important since effective teaching accounts for the largest gains in student achievement. Staffing also accounts for the largest educational expenditure. The former, organization of instruction, is also significant since there is a perception that education in the U.S. is falling behind other nations. For this reason, autonomy is examined in relation to a principal’s ability to effectuate instructional and personnel decisions, while functioning according to formal rules and bureaucratic constraints.

Analyzing the degree of principal autonomy when making decisions related to personnel management within the confines of institutional constraints requires the examination of varying organizational structures. Since most school districts in the U.S. are organized in similar fashion, using a cross-national comparison allows for the necessary variation to analyze how different institutional structures affect principal autonomy. By studying organizational structures of different nations (such as Finland) and interviewing principals that operate in these institutional settings, this study analyzes
how varying types of decentralization affect principal autonomy. The next chapter provides a study of the literature, examining decentralization and principal autonomy.
CHAPTER 2: Literature Review

1. Introduction

This literature review explores and analyzes previous studies related to my dissertation question: *How do organizational configurations affect principal autonomy?*

It is possible to take a parochial perspective, to look primarily through the lens of a principal in the U.S.; however, a comparative approach provides more variety in terms of different institutional structures and their effects on principal autonomy. Methodologically, a cross-national comparison increases the variance in both the dependent and independent variables, principal and educational institutions, respectively. Much research has been conducted in the U.S. and internationally on what qualities successful principals possess (Cotton, 2003; Johnson, Moller, Jacobson, & Wong, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005). These studies often treat the school principal as the independent variable that influences dependent variables, such as school performance or student achievement. My study examines the principal within the institutional context he/she operates. To make sense of a principal’s ability to act autonomously to make relevant decisions, the principal cannot be treated as an isolated unit of analysis. Instead, the organizational configuration under which a principal operates also needs to be examined.

The objectives of this literature review are to: 1) address the reasons for studying the organizational configuration of schools; 2) examine at which level decisions are made; 3) identify what types of decisions are made; 4) examine two cases of different types of decentralization; 5) explain the relevance of principal autonomy; 6) study the role of the principal within an institutional context; and 7) provide a rationale for
studying the proposed topic on a high school level, and in a cross-national, comparative fashion.

2. Justification for studying the organizational configuration of schools

Organizational analysis is important because it shows us how schools are configured and what kinds of forces influence the school environment. An organizational analysis could also help us understand why schools do not work as well as they might. Schools are bureaucracies that are characterized by “arrangements developed to perform particular sets of tasks or to regulate particular activities by limiting the number of ways these tasks and activities are accomplished” (Brint, 2006, p. 23). Bureaucracies reduce uncertainty by encouraging uniformity across a variety of schools that perform similar tasks (Brint, 2006, p. 23).

Another reason for studying the configuration of educational organizations is that the organizational structure may influence student achievement. Research suggests that highly bureaucratic structures may have negative effects on student achievement and innovation (Hall, 2002; MacKinnon & Brown, 1994). For this reason, examining within which type of organizational configuration a principal can autonomously function to make decisions that promote student achievement is worthy of discussion.

Principals represent one set of actors that operate in a bureaucracy with well-defined functions, policies, regulations, and structures. To a large extent, schools exemplify the bureaucratic structures and features analyzed by Max Weber (1947). School bureaucracies possess the following characteristics: 1) Formalization of rules and roles (federal and state laws and board of education policies) which ensure uniformity; 2) Rationalization of these rules and roles that are bounded by a logical purpose and justify
the role of each actor in the bureaucracy; 3) *Specialization* based on level (elementary or secondary) and subject (math, science, reading, and others); 4) *Efficiency* since specialization in a bureaucracy produces experts that make technically correct, rational decisions based on facts; and 5) *Levels of authority* reflected by a hierarchical structure reflected by an organizational chart with the superintendent at the top.

Schools are configured into bureaucracies to meet educational goals and to organize instruction on a mass level. Schools are not isolated bureaucratic units, however. They are situated in a larger social environment from which they cannot be fully insulated (Burch, 2007). Depending on the organizational configuration of schools, the decisions related to the functions of education (such as instruction of organization and personnel management) are made at different levels. For example, in the U.S. educational decisions are made at the local school district level. In every system, there are centers of power where decisions are made. The key question is at what level are these decisions made according to the organizational configuration of the educational system. Most models place decision-making within two spheres: centralized and decentralized (Ingersoll, 1994; Paqueo & Lammert, 2000).

As school leaders, accountable for the success or failures of their respective schools, principals operate within the organizational configuration of a school including its rules, procedures, sanctions, and hierarchical structure. Regardless of the school’s organizational configuration, principals do not have unbounded autonomy since they operate within the confines of an institutionalized bureaucracy. Principals are also affected by what decisions are made and by which level within the organizational structure these are made. For purposes of this study, then, the focus of organizational
analysis is the level of decision-making at which decisions pertinent to education are made. Which governing body has the legal authority to make decisions related to education and at which level are these decisions executed are important to the concept of centralization (OECD, 2004).

3. (De)centralization: at which level are decisions made?

In educational research and policy, there are two viewpoints on organizational configurations of schools. The first is that schools are highly decentralized institutions in which principals have workplace autonomy. The second is that schools are top-down bureaucracies in which principals have little autonomy over school operations (Ingersoll, 1994). Although these two viewpoints are at ends on a continuum, schools can be decentralized and still possess the features of a centralized bureaucracy. In other words, schools possess both centralized and decentralized characteristics. This apparent contradiction in the organizational configuration of schools can best be explained by reviewing the literature on the continuum between centralization and decentralization since schools do not fall at either extreme, but rather somewhere in the middle.

In organizational structures that create a hierarchy of responsible behavior in which responsibility is streamlined toward a center of control, ultimate accountability is usually in the hands of one decision maker. Many countries have a distinct and recognizable center, a National Ministry of Education, which designs teacher certification programs, administers national teacher exams, approves budgets, and sets national standards (Brint, 2006, p. 25).

Decentralization, on the other hand, allows for greater shared responsibility among actors within an organization, potentially creating opportunities or greater
responsiveness to issues, but can also diffuse responsibility to the point that individuals do not exhibit responsibility for the actions of the organization (A. Allen & Mintrom, 2010, p. 441). Decentralized efforts, such as New York State Education Commissioner’s Regulation 100.11 dictating that each school have a site-based management committee, attempt to increase the participation of individuals in school decision making (H.-D. Meyer, 2009). Hansen and Roza claim that there is a global interest in decentralizing education since bureaucratic discouragement of creativity and forced compliance with rules is “problematic” (2005, p. 2). Advocates of decentralization claim that it results in increased efficiency and more effective means of reaching performance goals (Hansen et al., 2005; Lips, Feinberg, & Marshall, 2006).

Decentralization, however, creates challenges of oversight, as it becomes much more difficult to know who is in control and what those in control are doing when governance is shared among many different individuals and groups. According to Meyer, decentralized public schools get so overburdened by interest group politics (parents, teachers, unions, and community members), and the cacophony of these voices so consumes time and resources, that attention is drawn away from key elements of pedagogy and the fostering of effective learning environments (H.-D. Meyer, 2009, p. 467).

One solution to the type of organizational discord produced by decentralization is to grant more autonomy to individual actors. For example, one recent reform to address the problem of school governance is to allow principals to make decisions within their schools in terms of hiring teachers, allocating budgets, and designing and implementing curricula (Kafka, 2009, p. 452). These types of reform efforts are occurring in many
nations, including those examined in this study. A drawback to this type of reform, however, is that bureaucratic constraints still exist, even though one individual may be afforded autonomy to do his/her job. For instance, a principal may be able to decide how to spend money and which teachers to hire and how to use them in a school building, but when budgets are reduced by a district the principal no longer has the same type of autonomy (Santos, 2011). He/she is still constrained by the bureaucracy that ultimately makes decisions that are beyond his/her control.

In the educational system, order is maintained through a tightly knit bureaucratic structure: federal and state statutes, court cases, regulations, board of education policies, union contracts, and district regulations. When autonomy is highly constrained like this, even in decentralized structures, the controlling aspects of these structures become salient in the mind of principals. The need to follow orders given by others and to be accountable for actions taken can create a highly constraining environment (Etzioni, 1996). Thus, although the trend has been a trend towards decentralization, there is no system that is absolutely decentralized. The next section examines research that has considered the concept of decentralization.

A. Defining decentralization

Decentralization of decision-making, increasing local authority, and enhanced autonomy of schools has been a common feature of recent changes in the organization of public education in the U.S. and many OECD nations: (Hansen et al., 2005; Moos, Moller, & Johansson, 2004; Wittmann, 2006). In spite of the political ideology of a nation, the last three decades have seen substantial changes in administrative, funding and supervisory relationships between central education authorities and individual schools.
The common belief underlying the movement towards decentralization is that the quality, effectiveness, and responsiveness of schools will be enhanced (Hansen et al., 2005).

Arriving at a working definition of centralization can be challenging. In their review on decentralization, Walberg et al. identified 22 different definitions of this term: principals collegially share power with teachers, restructuring government to satisfy citizens’ needs and interests, and school-based decision making, among other definitions (2000). In its literal sense, the term *decentralization* implies moving away from the center. However, this does not necessarily imply less central government control. Instead, it may only mean spreading national control across sub-national levels, thereby, increasing the reach and power of central authorities (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000, p. 139).

Another view is that decentralization implies the weakening of central government and concomitant strengthening of local or sub-national levels of government (Wittmann, 2006).

In general, *decentralization* may be defined as “the transfer of decision-making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations” (Hanson, 1998, p. 112). In their study of decentralization, Paqueo and Lammert identify three types of decentralization: deconcentration, devolution, and delegation (2000). 1. *Deconcentration* is the process through which a central authority establishes branch offices, staffing them with its own officers. Thus, personnel of the ministry of education may all work in the same central building or some of them may be posted out to provinces and districts. 2. *Delegation* implies a stronger degree of decision making at the local level. Nevertheless, powers in a delegated system still basically rest with the central authority, which has chosen to ‘lend’ them to the local one. The powers
can be withdrawn without resort to legislation. 3. *Devolution* is the most extreme of these three forms of decentralization. Powers are formally held at sub-national levels, the officers of which do not need to seek higher-level approval for their actions. The sub-national officers may choose to inform the center of their decisions, but the role of the center is chiefly confined to collection and exchange of information (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000).

Decentralization is not a one-dimensional concept. Instead, the level of (de)centralization of nation’s educational system operates along a spectrum from more to less centralization. Most countries apply a type of continuum in the form of checks and balances spread over central and regional levels and concerning a range of management functions and tasks. For example, in Finland, schools could simultaneously be experiencing less autonomy in financial matters and more autonomy in developing curriculum frameworks. Behind the overall similarity in the international trend to decentralization in schools there remain substantial differences in the areas of decision-making transferred from the center to the school (Ainley & McKenzie, 2000). Bottani (2000) notes that an increase in decentralization to schools in some areas of management has been accompanied by an increase in control by the center in areas such as curriculum through national frameworks and standards.

Meyer and Scott (1994) make an important distinction between bureaucratization and centralization. The difference between centralization and bureaucratization is important in understanding a central paradox of this study: highly bureaucratic structures can exist in decentralized systems and, conversely, a weaker bureaucratic apparatus may characterize centralized systems. This paradox explains the educational systems that will
be analyzed in this study. The K-12 U.S. educational system is characterized by the existence of 13,924 school districts (Education, 2009), each with its own superintendent and school board. Although this indicates a highly decentralized system, each district has its own formalized and highly structured bureaucratic apparatus. As Meyer and Scott (1994) point out, the U.S. educational system lacks a “center” that prescribes a singular curriculum, national exams, a uniform, teacher and principal evaluation system, and teacher and school administration education and certification programs. This can be compared to the Finnish system, which contains an identifiable center, i.e. a National Ministry of Education, but less bureaucratic structures than are present in the U.S. educational system. In Part 5 of the literature review, I will examine the institutional settings of the nations used in this study.

B. Measuring decentralization

The measurement of centralization or decentralization is difficult. Economists measure decentralization to lower levels of government by looking at the percent of educational revenues that come from local, regional, or central sources. However, these measures may be misleading when central governments mandate educational programs or policies that require local governments to allocate their revenues in a certain way. In the U.S., for example, federal and state governments influence local education resource allocation both through unfunded mandates and through the use of conditional grants, which require school districts to match federal or state funding for certain purposes (Lips et al., 2006).

An alternative means of measuring education decentralization is more subjective and entails identifying the major decisions made regarding finance and provision of
education and answer the question of who makes each decision. The OECD developed a methodology for measuring the degree of decentralization. This methodology divides the function of education into four groups: the organization of instruction, personnel management, planning and structures, and resources. In terms of who makes each decision in this framework, the OECD identifies six levels of governmental authority: school, school board, or committee; local authority or government; sub-regional or inter-municipal authority or government; provincial or regional authority or government; state government; and central government (OECD, 2008, pp. 483-484).

4. The functions of education: what decisions are made?

Measuring decentralization according to the level of authority at which a decision is made does not, however, provide an evaluation about the kinds of decisions made. Within the realm of those decisions that affect education, the possibilities for analysis are endless. For purposes of my study, I limit my exploration to those decisions that impact personnel management and the organization of instruction since not all decisions are equally important. Generally, the organization of instruction and personnel management are the only domains of education where schools have some control over decisions made (OECD, 2008). However, the patterns of decision-making and the organizational configurations in which these decisions are made vary among countries.

Personnel management is an important function of education since teachers and other school staff represent about 80 percent of total recurrent education spending in developed countries (OECD, 2008, p. 297). Figure 2.1 on the next page demonstrates that the nations in my proposed study spend 65 to 81 percent (Finland and the U.S., respectively) of their total expenditures for education on the compensation of teachers.
and staff. Research on learning also demonstrates that teacher effectiveness is the single most direct school factor that affects student performance (Rice, 2003). Thus, this study examines the level of decentralization by comparing countries’ policies in personnel management. Educational systems that allow principals to hire, recruit, and dismiss teachers have achieved a significant degree of decentralization even though school finance may still be highly centralized and teachers paid according to a national scale.

**FIGURE 2.1: PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURES ON COMPENSATION OF TEACHERS AND STAFF**

![Percentage of Public Expenditures on Compensation of Teachers and Staff](source)(OECD, 2010)
The function of personnel management is paramount since teachers directly influence student learning through instructional practices and activities. Based on her review of the literature, Rice (2003) asserts the quality of the teachers matters: “In fact, it is the most important school related factor influencing student achievement” (Rice, 2003, p. v). Heck (2000) provides empirical support that substantiates Rice’s claims. Heck found that schools with higher-than-expected achievement are staffed by teachers who emphasize academics and set high expectations for student learning. These findings suggest that effective teachers are the most critical element for attaining substantial gains in student performance (Hanushek, 2005).

The other important function of education is the organization of instruction. This function includes decisions such as educational standards, curriculum objectives, standardized testing, instructional time, choice of textbooks, teaching methods, grouping pupils, and assessment of students’ regular work (OECD, 2004). How instruction is organized and by whom is important since this represents the essence of the operational core in education. Teaching and learning take place at this level in the organizational structure. Since research shows that principals do have a great affect on student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Heck, 2000; Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2007), who makes the decisions impacting the organization of instruction is an important topic to consider.

In the section below, I will examine the institutional settings of the two nations used in this study by reviewing what decisions are made and at what level.
5. Two cases of decentralization

A. The United States: a case of devolution

1. Organizational configuration

The U.S. political tradition of local school governance is a remnant of colonial times and predates the formation of the U.S. republic. By law, education is a state property right and schooling is a local matter (Wong & Langevin, 2005, p. 3). States delegate responsibility for operating of schools to the local level, i.e. the school board. The local school board is charged with collectively making decisions, such as hiring or dismissing a superintendent, granting tenure to teachers and principals, establishing school budgets, and setting school policies. This structure of local control developed out of the belief that local citizens would be best able to make decisions related to the needs and interests of the community’s schools (H.-D. Meyer, 2010).

Tocqueville confirms this concept of radical decentralization in his visit to the U.S. He keenly observes the distinct nature of U.S. decentralization that can be applied in this study’s analysis of the organizational configuration of the public school system. When analyzing the New England township, Tocqueville distinguishes between two levels of decentralization: decentralization at the policy level and decentralization at the administrative level (1988). At the administrative level, the implementation of policy is distributed to many different people. Tocqueville states that: “There is nothing centralized or hierarchic in the constitution of American administrative power, and that is the reason why one is not at all conscious of it” (1988, p. 72). In terms of decentralized policy-making, Tocqueville notices the absence of a centralized authority and comments how “unstable” American government can be as evidenced by laws changing annually as a result of members of Congress, who are elected every two years. This inherent
instability is a result of the concept of popular sovereignty and accepted by citizens as a by-product of democratic rule (Tocqueville, 1988, pp. 246-276). Decentralization at both the policy and administrative levels represents the unique nature of the U.S. political system.

Almost 200 years have passed since Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* was published. Today, Tocqueville would notice that at the policy level, the federal government is attempting to enact standards to be uniformly followed by all 50 states. The passage of recent legislation, such as No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top (2009) exemplify the two most recent attempts to set educational policy goals. The federal government attempts to influence educational policy by allocating funds to states in exchange for states enacting statutes that effectuate certain, defined educational reforms. In fact, the availability of federal dollars is one of the most influential determinants of educational policy innovation (M. D. Allen, Pettus, & Haider-Markel, 2004). However, the effectiveness of these educational reforms are hotly debated and contested. The Commission on No Child Left Behind concluded that NCLB has achieved little success (*Beyond NCLB: Fulfilling the promise to our nation's children*, 2007). A more recent report released by the National Research Council goes even further, and concludes that student performance has declined since NCLB was enacted (Council, 2011).

The recent focus by the U.S. Department of Education to centralize standards, set high school graduation targets, teacher and principal accountability, and the relevance of standardized tests has been met with criticism. Some critics claim that the government’s engagement in education, which is the realm of state and local authorities, is too intrusive
This involvement in education occurs without any mention of education in the Constitution (Haubenreich, 2012). In a recent article printed in the *Journal of Law & Education*, Barnes posits that Race to the Top “is a violation of our civil liberties” (Barnes, 2011, p. 395). Her argument stems from the belief that education and schooling is local, and RTTT is overreaching in scope by dictating how states and localities should manage their educational programs (2011, p. 395). Other opponents of federal involvement in education warn that “[S]chool districts will become branch offices of the U.S. Department of Education. Locally elected school boards will, essentially, be bureaucracies working for the federal government, without being paid by it” (Zhao, 2012, p. 18). Presidential candidates and congressional representatives have threatened to abolish the U.S. Department of education, a cabinet level position that was unheard of 50 years ago (DeBoer, 2012). Threats like these represent a concern over federal infringement on a locally controlled educational system.

These recent controversies regarding the span of federal government involvement in education are a reflection of the increasing centralization of education (DeBoer, 2012; Haubenreich, 2012; Meyers, 2012; Zhao, 2012). Since NCLB, the U.S. public educational system has experienced a strong trend toward formalization and standardization (Spring, 2010). Critics of increased federal involvement obscure the difference between centralization and bureaucratization. Just because the U.S. Department of Education has attempted to engage each state in developing its own standards and graduation outcomes, does not necessarily mean that school districts or state boards of education function and operate uniformly. Instead, the opposite is true. Exams required to earn a high school diploma vary from state to state (Plany, Provasnik,
Additionally, the type of programs offered by neighboring high schools may vary. The range of courses may vary from basic courses required for graduation to a high school that possesses a full gamut of courses, including Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate classes (Planty et al., 2007). While one school district may have been forced to eliminate the arts and/or sports, another district may continue to offer high quality arts and sports programs. Some school districts pass bond projects to build new or refurbish existing infrastructures, while other school districts invest little money in capital improvements (Rowley & Wright, 2011). All these decisions are still made at the local level, and many of these decisions are based on the economic capacity or depravity of the school community (Berliner, 2013).

Despite the attempts made by the federal government to influence educational policy, local governance and community control still factor into decision-making. One example of local influence in education is the test refusal movement in New York State. The rate of students refusing to take standardized tests in New York State varied from district to district. Generally, the “opt-out” movement was largely led by white, middle-class suburban school districts. In lower income neighborhoods, the test refusal rate was low (Harris, 2015). In another instance, high schools in Colorado refused to implement the new Advanced Placement U.S. History curriculum because critics believed it was “anti-American” (Levy, 2014). Although the trend in the U.S. is towards increased centralization, local school district governance still impacts what is taught, how it’s taught, and how it’s assessed. The push and pull between federal policies and local control sometimes leads to chaos. DeBoer points out that at times “policies at each level may contradict one another” (2012, p. 512). The trend towards increased centralization is
not without resistance; it is dynamic, messy, and noisy. Tyack and Cuban (1997) describe this as “tinkering with utopia.”

Each school district possesses a distinct apex that consists of school board members (usually 5 or 7 school board members) and a superintendent of schools. At the most basic level, this structure serves to delineate the organizational responsibility of public schools in the U.S. (A. Allen & Mintrom, 2010). School board members are charged to act collectively; yet, they are also beholden to their constituents who elected them individuals. Some school board members are even parents of students that attend the school system. Operationally, school districts are local. They develop their own strategic goals, hire leaders based on locally determined criteria, maintain physical plants, and raise funds.

2. **Type of decentralization: devolution**

Since records have first been kept on the number of school districts in the U.S., the number of school districts has declined from 117,108 in 1939 to 13,924 in 2008 (Education, 2009). The number of school districts indicates that school governance in the U.S. has *devolved* to the local level. Using the definitions developed by Paqueo and Lammert, the U.S. can best be described as a *devolved* educational system since final authority over educational decisions belong to the states and local school districts (2000). Unlike other nations with highly centralized and unified ministries of education, the U.S. system still functions locally with elected school boards and district office administration following the regulations and laws of the state and setting policies in schools to ensure that these are followed (W. R. Scott et al., 1994, pp. 199-200). In the absence of a national organizational center, the U.S. is characterized by state educational
bureaucracies whose laws, regulations, and procedures are enacted locally by school boards (Brint, 2006; Spring, 2010). The organizational configuration of public schools in the U.S. is a classic example of Tocqueville’s concept of radical decentralization at both the policy and administrative levels (1988). Absent from this configuration is a distinct centralized authority that makes decisions as identified by organizational theorist Henri Fayol, who stated that principles of management include “unity of command” and “centralization” (Rodrigues, 2001). Instead, policy-making and the administration of these policies are diffusely decided and implemented (Weiss, 1982).

Local concerns are still accepted as the legitimate sphere of locally elected school board officials. Issues, such as banning controversial books, whether to include or expunge Thomas Jefferson from history books, and teaching creationism, are all issues recently propagated by local groups and discussed at local school board meetings. The extent to which a school district’s budget should be increased (if at all) provides voters with direct local influence over decisions that will directly impact them. In the current environment where voters favor reduced taxes and greater governmental services, the decentralization and localism of school governance can clearly be seen (H.-D. Meyer, 2010). Thus, local interests are well positioned to maintain current governance arrangements and policy jurisdiction. School districts still function as laboratories of democracy and are a paradigm of democratic localism (Wong & Langevin, 2005). Carol Weiss uses the term “diffuse” to describe the decision-making process in U.S. public schools (1982).

Although the U.S. system of education has become more formalized and standardized, reflecting the expansion of general national standards, school accountability,
and testing from third grade through high school, the emergence of a controlling organizational center, from which policies emanate and are enforced, has not appeared. Unlike other nations with a distinct central ministry of education (such as Finland), the U.S. system still functions locally with elected school boards, and district office administration following the regulations and laws of the state and setting policies to ensure that these are followed (McDermott, 1999).

3. Personnel management

In the U.S., 81 percent of education spending is allocated for teachers and staff (see Figure 2.1 on page 31). Because of the importance of effective teaching on student performance along with the amount of money spent, personnel management represents the single most important factor in educational decision-making. The OECD framework encompasses the following framework as it relates to issues of personnel management: credentialing of teachers, recruiting teachers, hiring teachers, dismissing teachers, fixing of salary scales, duties and conditions of service, and influence over the careers of staff (OECD, 2008, pp. 483-484). Table 2.1 on the next page summarizes the level of decision-making, as it relates to personnel management, in the U.S.

As Table 2.1 on page 40 indicates, issues related to personnel management are generally made at the school-district level. Teachers receive states certification by general grade levels and content areas. School districts recruit teachers by advertising, and teachers are free to apply to the school district of their choice within the state from which they received their certification. Principals and/or school committees typically select which teachers to interview and make recommendations as to which teacher to hire
TABLE 2.1: TYPES OF PERSONNEL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN THE UNITED STATES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of decisions</th>
<th>Level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credentialing of teachers</td>
<td>Individual states</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting teachers</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring teachers</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing teachers</td>
<td>School district in conjunction with state agencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixing of salary scales</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties and conditions of service</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence over the careers of staff</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

for an open position. A principal can recommend dismissal of a teacher, but the amount of documentation, observance of procedural rights as defined by locally negotiated collective bargaining agreements, and teacher union involvement, make this type of sanction unfeasible (Ballou, 2000; Lieberman, 2000). Principals are not able to transfer teachers since this is also regulated by collective bargaining agreements. Typically, the authority to transfer teachers lies with the authority of the District Office (Ballou, 2000). A principal can recommend a teacher for tenure, but the ultimate authority to award teacher belongs with the local school board as prescribed by state laws. In terms of salary scale and conditions of service for teachers, these decisions are beyond the purview of the principal and are negotiated between the local teachers’ union and the district office and its legal apparatus. Regarding influence over careers of staff, a principal cannot give or withhold raises, promote or demote teachers, award tenure, issue teacher bonuses, or dismiss teachers (Hess, 1999).
4. Organization of instruction

The political tradition of local governance in the U.S. allows school districts to make most decisions related to the organization of instruction. As Table 2.2 below indicates, school districts set curriculum objectives and content, define the number of hours a student must attend school during the day, adopt textbooks to be used by teachers in the classroom, and group pupils according to age or another standard. It is, for example, possible that a high school student attends school four days a week in some school districts, while in other districts, their peers go to school five days a week (Layton, 2011). The grouping of students also varies from one school district to the next. Most schools organize students according to age. Other schools have multi-age groupings. In the U.S., many schools track students into honors and advanced programs, while some

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of decisions</th>
<th>Level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized testing</td>
<td>State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum objectives</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional time</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of textbooks</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping pupils</td>
<td>School district</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of pupils’ work</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
are philosophically opposed to this practice. No matter the case, the decision of grouping students is the domain of the local school district. School districts are free to adopt textbooks from a list of state approved textbooks (Spring, 2010, pp. 229-232).

As Table 2.2 on the previous page shows, teachers are allowed to choose how to teach the material and evaluate student work. However, since teacher evaluation is based on student performance on state-designed or state-approved exams, teachers teach within the confines of board-approved textbooks, state standards, and district-approved curricula.

5. Summary

The U.S. has attempted to reform education in two ways: 1) more centralization involving the introduction of state-defined standards and new accountability systems for students, teachers, and principals, and 2) decentralization at the local level allowing principals more autonomy to make decisions for their school free from bureaucratic constraints.

There is an inherent problem with this arrangement. Simultaneously, increasing both centralization and decentralization leads to some confusion by obfuscating the principal’s responsibility. On the one hand, the principal must ensure that centralized, state-level regulations (creation of state-standards, mandated exams for graduation, and meeting AYP targets) are met, while, on the other, they must manage schools by responding to the dictates of the local district office and board of education as well as ensuring that decision-making is distributive through a shared decision-making team. The push-and-pull from the top, the side, and the bottom makes a principal responsible for, and responsive to, a variety of actors in the educational system. In this organizational...
structure, the principal is tasked with the responsibility meeting pre-determined goals despite limited autonomy.

As the landscape has changed for principals, school bureaucracy has not. Principals now have more responsibilities and are held accountable for student performance, but the structure of the school district apparatus remains the same. Educational policies are locally controlled, and issues concerning personnel are still controlled by school boards and district offices. A principal’s position in the organizational structure also remains the same.

In sum, a principal in the U.S. operates in a decentralized school system characterized by individual local governmental units, i.e. school districts. Although education is local and decentralized in the U.S., a strong bureaucratic apparatus with formalized rules, standardization of practices, and levels of authority characterize school districts. Thus, a principal’s autonomy is bounded by a rational-legal structure, i.e. a school district apparatus that defines the parameters of operation for him/her.

B. Finland: a case of delegation

1. Organizational configuration

Since Finland finished first among all OECD nations on the PISA, there has been keen interest from policymakers, educational experts, school administrators, and teachers about the Finnish miracle (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011a). A recent film by Robert Compton, The Finland Phenomenon (2011), highlights the Finnish success story, and hundreds have visited to find out the secret of success. In general, the Finnish educational system is recognized for its academic success and relative equity among a variety of students. The rising achievement and good quality of education is acclaimed
by Finnish students’ impressive performance on PISA. Additionally, 94.5 percent of students complete upper secondary school (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 27), and 66 percent of these graduates enroll in universities or polytechnic schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 32).

Especially noteworthy is that after the nine-year basic school, education is not compulsory for Finnish students. Instead of making upper secondary education (grade levels 10-12) compulsory, the Finnish educational system has relied on creating equal opportunities for all students to participate in their secondary education of their choice (Sahlberg, 2009, p. 13). Another key characteristic of upper secondary school (lukio) in Finland is that age cohort grouping (which exists in the U.S.) has been replaced by a non-graded organizational system. This non-graded feature of upper secondary schools in Finland brings more choice to students in choosing the content they would like to study and time sequencing (Sahlberg, 2009, p. 17). While students receive education for the first nine years at local schools, they are free to attend the academic or vocational upper secondary school of their choice. This allows students to attend those schools that specialize in a certain academic subject or vocational program. At the upper secondary level, schools are not defined by age groups or classes; instead, students have individualized learning plans and are allowed to take more time to complete their studies if needed (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 29).

According to Sahlberg, “General secondary school can be characterized by having a strong focus on learning, creativity and various methods of studying rather than concentrating on passing tests and exams” (2009, p. 18). The only standardized assessment is the Matriculation Examination at the end of general upper secondary school.
The Ministry and National Board of Education design this exam. Students are also required to sit for examinations in three elective subjects: their primary language (typically Finnish or Swedish), a second language, and mathematics (Caldwell & Harris, 2006, p. 17).

A second point of interest is that teachers in Finland enjoy more prestige, higher salary, and greater professional autonomy than in most western nations. Teachers experience the trust of the general public and also of the political and economic elite, which is rare in many countries (Simola, 2008, p. 9). Teaching is one of the most sought after professions among Finnish students (Simola, 2005, p. 459). The Finnish teaching profession is on par with other professionals (Sahlberg, 2011a). Teachers can diagnose problems in their classrooms, apply evidence-based solutions to solve them, and analyze the impact of these procedures. Continuous upgrading of teachers’ pedagogical professionalism has become a right rather than an obligation (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 155).

This respect for and trust in teachers has allowed teachers to experience more freedom in curriculum planning. Different teaching methods are employed without fear of failure. New innovations are readily accepted and tried by teachers as long as these new strategies promote student learning (Sahlberg, 2007, p. 155). The absence of a testing accountability system also helps teachers experiment with new teaching strategies. Accountability systems in Finland are based on relative success rather than on competitive achievement. Unlike the U.S., the ranking of schools and students, the printing of a school’s scores in the local newspaper, and the official report card a school receives from the state or a city are features missing from the Finnish educational system (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Policymakers as well as the public do not support
accountability practices, such as producing lists ranking schools or making schools transparent in competition by comparing them in terms of test scores or other performance indicators (Simola, Rinne, Varjo, Pitkanen, & Kauko, 2009). Instead of taking tests from the third through twelfth grades, Finnish students need to demonstrate sufficient knowledge and skills in a broad range of academic and aesthetic subjects (Simola et al., 2009, p. 164).

2. **Type of decentralization: delegation**

Unlike the U.S., which operates under a federalist system of governance, the Finnish structure is indicative of a unitary governmental system whereby the central government is the supreme authority, and the municipalities exercise only powers that the central government has delegated to them. Using Paqueo and Lammert’s identification of different types of decentralization (2000), Finland’s decentralization can best be described as delegation since the central government has the authority to create or abolish municipalities, and the powers of the municipalities may be broadened or narrowed by the central government. In the Finnish case, the organizational configuration of the public school system indicates that decentralization exists at the administrative level, but not at the policy level where goals, standards, and curricula are centrally determined.

In Finland, there is a distinct, recognizable educational center, the National Ministry of Education, which possesses the authority to enact policy on all educational matters along the early childhood through university spectrum. The Ministry is responsible for preparing educational legislation, all necessary decisions, and its share of the budget for the government. A division of the Ministry, the National Board of Education (Lips et al., 2006), which works with the Ministry to develop educational goals
and design the core curriculum, implements educational policies (Lips et al., 2006). The Finnish NBE works in close cooperation with the Ministry of Education (Lips et al., 2006). It is a development body responsible for primary and secondary education as well as for adult education and training. The NBE develops educational objectives, content, and methods in conjunction with the Ministry of Education. The NBE writes and approves national core curricula, sets requirements of teacher qualifications, and carries out evaluations of learning results (Sabel et al., 2010, p. 12). In addition, it assists the Ministry of Education in the preparation of education policy decisions (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 23-24).

Like other OECD nations, there has been a trend in Finland towards allowing schools more control over the daily operations of educational matters. Although the Ministry and the NBE are responsible for basic value statements, core standards and educational goals, and national curricula, the daily matters of managing schools are delegated to the local agencies. Most educational matters are decided by municipal governments and local school agencies (Caldwell & Harris, 2006, p. 12). The NBE sets national standards and produces a national curriculum. In essence, the NBE functions as a steering unit. It sets the goals for education and the principles of resource distribution. The job of the local schools is to decide how to meet these goals with the given resources. The National Ministry and the NBE state the goals, but schools themselves are free to pursue the practices for achieving the objectives (Sabel et al., 2010, p. 12).

Local administration is mainly managed by the municipalities, which have self-government and the right to impose taxes. In Finland, there are 342 municipalities, 108 of which are urban (Eurydice, 2009/2010, p. 25). These municipalities are responsible
for organizing basic education at a local level, and are partly responsible for financing it as well. The task of the local authorities is to offer all children of compulsory school age an opportunity to learn according to their abilities. Local authorities maintain almost all schools providing basic education. There is no statutory obligation for local authorities to organize general upper secondary education and vocational education and training, but they are obligated to assist in financing them. The National Ministry transfers money to the municipalities through bloc grants. The number of students and the unit price per student determines the total amount. The Ministry subsidizes approximately 57 percent of this amount, while the municipality funds the remaining costs through the collection of taxes (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 34-35).

The strategic apex of the Finnish schools contains a director of education employed by the municipal government. This director is chosen by the municipal school board (Jahnukainen, 2011). Unlike school boards in the U.S. that require to hold distinct elections for candidates that specifically run as school board representatives, the local school board in Finland is comprised of representatives from the municipal government who choose to function on this committee. In this setting, local school boards in Finland are more like the various sub-committees found in the House of Representatives or State Assemblies. Absent from the Finnish school system are transportation directors, athletic directors and coaches, security guards, directors of public relations, directors of facilities and buildings and grounds, and business managers. Support staff, such as full-time psychologists and counselors and part-time nurses and doctors, do exist (Jahnukainen, 2011), but the number of staff is much less than can be found in the U.S. organizational structure. Most of the support functions are fulfilled by the home, outside athletic
leagues, or the municipality. A large techno-structure is also absent in the school structure. Since teachers create their own exams, choose their own teaching methodology, decide which instructional materials to use, and analyze how to best implement national frameworks, a well-staffed techno-structure is lacking from Finnish schools. The typical techno-structure is Finland consists of a human resource manager (Jahnukainen, 2011).

The operating core remains the same as in the U.S. However, unlike the U.S., there is only one teachers’ union to which all teachers belong. This national union negotiates with central authorities about establishing fixed salaries. Grievances, as experienced by U.S. principals, are not present in the Finnish educational system. Principals never evaluate teachers in the Finnish system and do not conduct formal classrooms observations for purposes of granting or continuing tenure (Jahnukainen, 2011).

In Finland, school leadership consists of professional and competent educators who have teaching experience. This means that school principals must be able to teach in the school they lead. The main function of a school principal is to demonstrate pedagogical leadership. Principals in Finland teach a few classes each week. Sahlberg highlights the importance of pedagogical leadership since “teachers rely on their leader’s vision and the principal understands teachers’ work” (2011b, p. 92).

The curriculum in Finland provides schools and teachers with considerable flexibility within a framework designed by the NBE. Schools are able to apply for permission to deviate from this national curriculum if they choose to specialize in particular subject areas (Caldwell & Harris, 2006, p. 25). Also, previous national means
of control such as teacher and school inspections, were replaced by a local school self-evaluation system (Simola et al., 2009).

Unlike the U.S. system of educational evaluation, which is characterized by individual principal performance linked to student scores on standardized exams, in Finland, school self-evaluation is the major component of the review process for educational institutions. Schools are required by law to conduct self-evaluations and to have a plan for development. The aims of the evaluation are written into the annual plan, and the professionals working in the school have the autonomy to decide on the school’s objectives. The administrative and teaching staffs of each school generally take part in the development of the evaluation. There are no national directives regarding the method of self-evaluation (Webb, Vulliamy, Sarja, & Hämäläinen, 2006). The aim of these self-evaluations is to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the school and to develop a plan to improve its quality and educational outcomes. The results of the evaluations are reported back to the administrative and teaching staffs of the schools and the local bodies in charge of education. Self-evaluation is viewed as a learning tool to help develop the management of Finnish schools and increase “efficiency, effectiveness and financial accountability” (quoted in Caldwell and Harris 2006, 20).

Unlike the U.S., evaluation also occurs at the national level. The NBE is responsible for conducting national assessments of learning outcomes across all education (Sabel et al., 2010, p. 12). The purpose of these evaluations is to provide information on how well the objectives set forth in the national curriculum and framework have been met. The results are used to modify national core curricula and planning for continual training of teachers (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 180-181).
Self-governing and self-managing schools, however, does not mean that the central government through the National Ministry of Education has abdicated its authority. Municipalities that deliver educational services and schools all operate within a nationally determined policy and curriculum framework as well as government issued services and funds. In this type of organizational structure, central bureaucracies do exist and do have the legal and fiduciary authority to make decisions, negotiate salaries, fund education, and shape teacher education programs, but responsibility for educational matters is left to either municipalities or schools themselves. Although administration of upper secondary schools is the responsibility of the municipal governments, local authorities do not have complete autonomy. Curricula, teacher certification requirements, educational standards and goals are unified and uniform throughout Finland in large part due to the presence of a National Ministry of Education and the NBE (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 29).

The governance of the Finnish educational system can be characterized as a centralized system that has delegated most of the functions of schooling to municipalities. The Finnish educational system possesses a weak bureaucratic structure. Ultimate authority for educational policy belongs to a central core (the National Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education), but the absence of elected local school boards and district office staff, which are at the apex of the U.S. educational structure, allows local schools to have a higher degree of control and autonomy. According to Sahlberg, “[T]he objective of educational management in Finland has been to have decisions made by the people who have the best knowledge and skills. The education
management system is not only less hierarchical than many other education systems, but decidedly antihierarchical” (2011b, p. 120).

3. Personnel management

In Finland, “the central government has only limited influence on budgetary decisions made by municipalities or schools” (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 87). Yet, like the U.S., most funds are spent on teachers and staff. Sixty-five percent of education spending is allocated for teachers and staff (see Figure 2.1 on page 31). Using the OECD framework as it relates to issues of personnel management (OECD, 2008, pp. 483-484), Table 2.3 on the next page summarizes the level of decision-making as it relates to personnel management.

The type of decentralization that can be seen in Table 2.3 on the next page is one of delegation. Although the central government does not make direct budgetary decisions, it sets parameters to follow, and the municipal administrative bodies are expected to make decisions within these boundaries. In Finland, teachers receive certification through universities. Teacher qualification requirements are set by the Ministry and the NBE (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 162-169). The Ministry recommends teaching requirements, courses of study, and the quantity and quality of internships. These recommendations are, then, adopted by the education departments of universities (Jahnikainen, 2011; Sabel et al., 2010, pp. 27-28).

Besides fixed salary scales which are set at the national level along with general duties and conditions, the recruiting, hiring, and dismissal of teachers occurs at the municipal level (Sabel et al., 2010, p. 31). Specific duties for teachers are set locally, and
the principal and the director of education can assess whether a teacher should receive additional funds based on his/her performance. Although collective agreements regarding salary levels are reached at the central government level, Finnish teachers are able to negotiate conditions of employment at the local municipal level (Eurydice, 2009/2010, p. 170). The principal does determine the types and numbers of positions needed, while the education committee, municipal board, or school board appoints a teacher (Jahnukainen, 2011). When selecting teachers, the principal can set the criteria to be observed as part of each selection procedure. There are no requirements to follow from the Ministry or the NBE with the exception that the teacher is qualified to teach the particular subject (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 162-169).

Unlike the U.S., teachers are not evaluated through classroom observation. In fact, principals in Finland never conduct classroom observations (Jahnukainen, 2011). The basic assumption in the Finnish educational system is that teachers are highly educated
and trained professionals who do their best. Thus, the issue of teacher effectiveness or ineffectiveness that has been a central element of school reform in the U.S. is not a relevant one in Finland (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 91). Instead, most schools have an annual appraisal process in place wherein the teacher sets goals for the year, and the principal and teacher meet to discuss these goals at the beginning of the year and assess how successfully these goals have been met by the end of the school year (Webb et al., 2006, p. 421). Also, different from the U.S. system, the Finnish teacher does not have an opportunity for promotion. Since the Finnish system lacks a local and regional bureaucratic structure (i.e. department heads, curriculum coordinators, staff developers, directors, assistant superintendents, superintendents, and regional coordinators), the only way for a teacher to advance is to apply for a principal position. Teachers are free to apply for all teaching posts and are allowed to transfer from municipality to municipality as long as they hold the appropriate credentials. On the other hand, teachers may also be transferred to other schools within a municipality since they are civil servants and employees of the municipality. A teacher may be dismissed for economic reasons, such as a reduced workload. A teacher may also be dismissed if unable to carry out his/her duties, if duties are continuously neglected, or for another legitimate reason (Eurydice, 2009/2010, pp. 162-169).

Unlike the U.S., there is no differentiation between probationary and tenured teachers. In Finland, once a position is open, the aim is fill it with a tenured teacher as soon as possible. A teacher who just completed his/her studies at a university may get tenure immediately without any teacher experience (except for practicums) and without any formal classroom observations (Jahnukainen, 2011).
4. Organization of instruction

In Finland, decisions involving instruction are shared between the government and school level. Table 2.4 below represents this type of shared governance in terms of decisions affecting the organization of instruction. The Finnish National Board of Education (Lips et al., 2006) decides on the standards, objectives, and core contents of the different subjects that make up the national core curriculum for students in the upper secondary school. In order to arrange the schoolwork in each school year, there is an overall school schedule, which is based on the curriculum (Eurydice, 2009/2010, p. 81).

**TABLE 2.4: TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING IN FINLAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of decisions</th>
<th>Level of decision-making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized testing</td>
<td>(not applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum objectives</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional time</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of textbooks</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping pupils</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of pupils’ work</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Methods and materials of teaching are driven by the conception of learning that emphasizes students’ own active knowledge construction process. Thus, in the absence of standardized exams, upper secondary schools in Finland create learning environments, which enable students to set their own objectives, within the national core framework,
and work independently in different groups and networks. In this manner, students work with teachers to find their own methods suitable for their own learning styles. Due to students’ individuality, the forms of teaching and learning need to be diversified. Thus, the operating core in Finnish upper secondary schools (i.e. principal, teachers, and students) have more say in selecting materials, utilizing differentiated pedagogical approaches, and assessing student work (Eurydice, 2009/2010).

5. Summary

Unlike the U.S. educational system, the Finnish educational structure is characterized by one distinct center at the core, i.e. the National Ministry of Education. As such, the type of decentralization found in Finland can be best described as delegation since the National Ministry has the ultimate responsibility over educational outcomes and practices in Finland. The National Ministry together with the NBE set priority goals and standards and establish a national curriculum for all subjects along the primary and secondary levels. However, the Finnish educational system has been characterized by a pattern of decentralization in the form of delegating the management of educational services from the national to the municipal districts. This framework leaves much to the professional discretion of teachers, is characterized by an absence of standardized tests, and promotes high esteem for the teaching profession. In the day-to-day life of the school, it is the teachers who carry out the work. However, the principal is responsible for both this work and the overall direction and accountability of the school.

The principal in the Finnish system is considered the leader of his/her school, just like his/her counterpart in the U.S. In contrast, Finnish principals are not evaluated by student performance on standardized exams. Completely absent from the Finnish system
is the concept of a local school district (present in the U.S. system). Although the statutory responsibility for education in Finland is centralized, local bureaucracies are delegated the authority over educational decisions such as personnel matters. Additionally, the Finnish principal does not face similar pressures from the apex, techno-structure, and support staff that the U.S. principal does, but he/she may encounter conflict with the operational core since in Finland teachers enjoy a higher level of autonomy.

The absence of test accountability systems, state laws, local board policies, district regulations, and standardized exams provide an opportunity to compare principal autonomy in a different institutional setting.

6. The relevance of studying principal autonomy

In the sections above, I showed how the organizational structures of schools do affect the operating core of teaching and learning. The type of decentralization can have an impact on important functions of decision-making. Yet, in all organizational configurations, there is one common element from school to school—the principal. There is no direct line from the apex of an organization to its operating core. As Figure 1.1 (page 7) and Figure 1.2 (page 12) show, the principal is the link in the middle that helps drive and implement the goals and objectives. The principal is the person that makes the system work. For this reason, the role of the principal within the institutional setting of a school needs to be examined.

Principal autonomy is an important aspect in enhancing school wide achievement since research shows that principal leadership has a direct effect on student achievement. The leadership capacity of a school principal is a focus of study in many nations, including the ones analyzed in this study, the U.S. and Finland (Adamowski et al., 2007;
Caldwell & Harris, 2006; Eck & Goodwin, 2010; Hess, 2009; Huber & Gordel, 2006; Moos et al., 2004; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007; Sahlberg, 2011a; Schaefers & Terhart, 2006; Schratz, 2003; Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 2002; Simola et al., 2009; Webb et al., 2006). A principal’s actions have long been, and continue to be seen as an important aspect of enhancing school wide achievement (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Marsh, Hamilton, & Gill, 2008; Marzano et al., 2005; Papa & Baxter, 2008; Purkey & Smith, 1985).

An almost universal criteria of OECD nations in examining school effectiveness is principal leadership (OECD, 2004). However, studies are not uniform in concluding the degree to which that leadership impacts success. Some researchers believe the link between principals and student achievement is indirect. Hallinger (1998) and Heck (2000) found that principal leadership has a measurable influence on student achievement, but the effects are indirect and only occur when principals manipulate internal school structures and processes that are directly connected to student learning. In a wide-ranging review and analysis of the literature, Leithwood and Riehl (2005) conclude that leadership is second to classroom teaching.

Other researchers conclude that principals have a “dramatic” effect on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005, p. 10). After examining 69 studies involving 2,802 schools, approximately 1.4 million students, and 14,000 teachers, Marzano, Waters, and McNulty computed the correlation between the leadership behavior of the principal in the school and the average academic achievement of students to be .25 (Marzano et al., 2005). This means that if a principal with average leadership abilities (50th percentile) increases his/her leadership qualities by one standard deviation to the 84th percentile, the
correlation of .25 indicates that over time the average achievement of the school will rise from the 50th to the 60th percentile (Marzano et al., 2005). Marzano, Waters, and McNulty state their findings to be “compelling” and conclude, “A highly effective leader can have a dramatic influence on the overall achievement of students” (2005, p. 10).

Additional studies demonstrate that the quality of the principal does result in higher student achievement. Kathleen Cotton (2003) conducted a review of 81 post-1985 studies of principal leadership looking for patterns and trends. Fifty-six of those reports (69 percent) dealt with the influence of principal leadership on student achievement. Cotton identifies 25 characteristics and qualities of principal behavior that positively affect the dependent variables of student achievement compared to Marzano, Waters, and McNulty’s 21. In a 2007 study involving 2,714 school districts, Waters and Marzano find a strong correlation (.28) between principal leadership and student achievement (Waters & Marzano, 2007, p. 10).

My study focuses on the role of the principal in the organizational setting, since empirical studies all indicate a positive correlation between principal autonomy and student achievement.

7. Studying principal autonomy within the institutional context

Though the studies analyzed above consistently report the indirect or direct effects a principal has on a school, the researchers de-contextualize the principal from his/her institutional setting, ignoring daily operational pressures. Whether direct or indirect effects, all studies show that a principal has a positive impact on school and student performance. Yet, the studies mentioned so far, analyze the principal separate from the institutional context in which he/she has to operate on a daily basis. As such,
these studies overemphasize the principal’s leadership without considering any other factors, (e.g., state mandates, collective bargaining agreements, the influence of school boards, directives from the district office, school budgets, and many others) either within or beyond the control of the principal that may have mediating effects on school and student performance.

Although the importance of the principal to the school is well-researched and documented, what these studies fail to consider is the impact institutional context can have on principal effectiveness. My study narrows its scope to one key characteristic identified by Eck and Goodwin (2010) in their analysis of Water and Marzano’s 2007 study, i.e. principal autonomy. Waters and Marzano (2007) posit that principal autonomy is positively correlated with student achievement (.28). Given this correlation and impact on student achievement, principal autonomy is the focal point for my dissertation.

Principal autonomy is considered within the institutional context that principals operate. Thus, my dissertation examines whether institutional constraints have an effect on principal autonomy. That is, do organizational configurations affect principal autonomy in making decisions? These findings are relevant for educators, policymakers, and school improvement efforts, since greater principal autonomy leads to greater impact on student and school performance.

A. Defining principal autonomy

There is a lack of consensus regarding how to define the concept of principal autonomy. Throughout my analysis of the literature, researchers used the term autonomy interchangeably with the following terms in their articles or books: authority (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 10); influence (Gawlik, 2008, p. 787); power (Adamowski et
al., 2007, p. 12; Farkas et al., 2001, p. 33; Gawlik, 2008, p. 785); responsibility (Eck & Goodwin, 2010, p. 25); control (Eden, 2001, p. 97; Gawlik, 2008, p. 785); freedom (Farkas et al., 2001, p. 12; Triant, 2001, p. 1); empowerment (Reed, McDonough, Ross, & Robichaux, 2001, p. 5); decision-making (Wildy, Forster, Louden, & Wallace, 2004, p. 419); discretion (Lortie, 2009, p. 70); self-determination and independence (Wohlstetter, Wenning, & Briggs, 1995, p. 338); and activism (L. L. Wright, 2009, p. 269).

When the definition of autonomy is inherently biased by the researcher’s own conception of the meaning of the term, this calls into question the validity of some of the results and conclusions proposed. For example, one researcher, Gawlik, admits that a term she had been using to operationalize autonomy, influence, “is a rather soft word compared with autonomy, which implies complete discretion” (2008, p. 801). The literature I examined is replete with instances like Gawlik’s, which use other terms interchangeably to define and explain abstract concepts.

Some researchers define autonomy as freedom from bureaucratic pressures and constraints (Adamowski & Petrilli, 2007; Adamowski et al., 2007; Chubb & Moe, 1990; Farkas et al., 2001; Marsh et al., 2008; Weinles, 2001). Principals operate in a bureaucracy with well-defined functions, policies, regulations, and structures. To a large extent, schools exemplify the bureaucratic structures analyzed by Max Weber (1947) and possess the five basic parts of an organization identified by Henry Minztberg: strategic apex, techno-structure, support staff, middle management, and operating core (1979, p. 20). Principals are middle managers in the school bureaucracy (Weinles, 2001, p. 6) exerting formal and legal authority (Weber, 1947) as provided by district procedures and state laws. Principals are bounded from the top by the apex of the organization (board of
education and district office staff), influenced from each side by the techno-structure (curriculum specialists and directors) and support staff (transportation, custodial, and cafeteria personnel), and are given statutory and traditional authority to lead the operating core (teachers and students). In this study, principals are deemed the je jure and de facto school leaders.

Theoretically, the principal should function as the school’s gatekeeper (Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2001), with leeway to manage the daily operations of the school: the ability to hire/fire staff, accept/reject transfers, and hire teachers (Papa & Baxter, 2008) as well as control budgets, the school’s organizational design, curriculum and instruction, and school procedures, such as school discipline (Adamowski et al., 2007; Farkas et al., 2001; Triant, 2001; Ylimaki, Jacobson, & Drysdale, 2007). In practice, however, the principal faces both internal and external institutional limitations that constrain the ability to lead.

Another concern lies in administrative school reform of the past decade. An assumption made by proponents of this type of school administration is that schools and students are better served if school decisions are made locally. This reform shifts moving decision-making authority from distant bureaucratic structures to local school buildings. School principals, then, have more authority to make decisions that affect their school. Mayor Bloomberg’s initiatives to move decision making away from a central office to the school building is an example of this reform (Santos, 2011).

The nations examined for this study (Finland and the U.S.) all have instituted school administrative reforms related to New Public Management (Hansen et al., 2005; Moos et al., 2004; Wittmann, 2006). In theory, these reforms, which are referred to as
“decentralization,” should work since those closest to the operating core of a school, i.e. principals and teachers, know what decisions are best for the school. In practice, however, this type of increased local autonomy is obscured by policy changes. Principals are not free to define the goals or ends of education. In the U.S., these standards are defined by the individual 50 states, and in Finland, the standards are defined by the National Ministry of Education. The principal, thus, has no control over the goals of education, and only some autonomy in how to meet these goals.

Within this process, principals submit to a state of “governmentality” whereby they are expected to follow and conform to a set of externally-developed goals (Foucault, 1991). The narrow objectives of schooling, as evidenced in the U.S. by the proliferation of standardized exams that hold students, teachers, and principals accountable, have become the new educational norm and the teleological elements of education are unchallenged. Foucault (1991) claims that in institutional structures, such as schools, a process of “normalization” occurs where, for example, principals force themselves to meet these goals so that external authorities (district officials, board of education members, or state inspectors) have no reason to interfere and intervene. Critics of reducing a principal’s function to managing narrowly-defined goals, a central tenet of New Public Management, argue that administrative activity in education is “degenerative” (quoted in Wittmann, 2006, p. 114). Wright’s criticism goes further and calls this reduction in principal’s leadership an exercise in “bastard leadership” (N. Wright, 2003).

This perspective recognizes that principal autonomy is constrained by the very nature of the organization in which the principal operates. At the same time, no one suggests that the principal possess unfettered autonomy without any checks and balances.
The tricky goal for a principal is to balance autonomous leadership and bureaucratic regulations.

Is principal autonomy an individual trait or a function of the school bureaucracy? Most studies place principal autonomy in either of two categories: (i) as an individual trait that a principal utilizes to his/her advantage despite institutional constraints. This treatment of principal autonomy describes the principal as able to buck the system and remove ineffective teachers (Hess, 2009), by being creatively insubordinate (Weinles, 2001), and resisting bureaucratic pressure (Weinles, 2001) or (ii) as being “handcuffed” by institutional constraints (Chubb & Moe, 1990). This theory posits that if bureaucratic constraints were limited or reduced, the principal would be better able to run his/her school to effectuate the change he/she determines necessary to improve the school and increase student achievement (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

Based on a review of the literature, principal autonomy cannot be conceptualized as an “either/or” proposition. Principal autonomy is not either an individual characteristic or a function of a bureaucracy. Instead, “Autonomy must be defined as the property of an organized system, reflecting the relations between a complex organization and its changing environment” (Meyer 2011). When examined through this lens, autonomy encompasses the ability of a principal to make decisions that affect his/her school, given certain boundaries determined by the institutional apparatus. It is evident from the research examined that a principal does not operate autonomously in an absolute sense. Instead, autonomy is exercised by making decisions and acting within an institutional setting determined by defined procedures. Thus, a principal exercises autonomy within bureaucratic constraints.
Bureaucracies delineate principal autonomy. The principal must operate within the parameters set forth by the school community (Papa & Baxter, 2008). Crawford (2001) places principal autonomy on a continuum from absolute to relative autonomy. Absolute autonomy allows a principal to use methods such as the carrot or stick approach (Farkas et al., 2001, p. 33). On the other hand, allowing a principal absolute autonomy is not an option either since not all principals are effective and successful leaders. As in any business or industry, bad employees and managers exist. Tom Vander Ark, former executive director of the Gates Foundation believes, “…[G]iving a failing school autonomy is a bad idea” (quoted in Eck & Goodwin, 2010, p. 25). Eck and Goodwin propose a “defined autonomy” for school principals, based on clear, non-negotiable goals and the authority to effectuate those goals (2010).

B. Principal autonomy and the functions of education

Rather than treating principal autonomy as either an individual’s ability to work within the system or a function of bureaucratically defined roles, I study principal autonomy within the context his/her role in the operating core: a principal’s ability to make decisions relating to the functions of personnel management and organization of instruction.

Since quality teachers have the highest effect on improving student outcomes, one function of education that is considered in my study focuses on principal autonomy as it relates to personnel decisions. A principal’s decision in selecting teachers and staff for his/her school, rewarding those high performing teachers, and dismissing or transferring those teachers that are not as effective will be examined. In one of the key studies that examines the concept of principal autonomy, The Autonomy Gap (Adamowski et al.,
2007), researchers find that four of the top five factors cited by principals as inhibiting their autonomy, and therefore their effective leadership, are related to personnel issues. They are, in order of relevance from high to low: 1) Transferring unsuitable teachers or staff; 2) Determining the number and type of faculty and staff positions within the school budget; 3) Discharging unsuitable teachers or support staff, and; 4) Determining teacher pay or bonuses (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 21).

Another function of the principal is to organize the school to ensure that teaching and learning take place. What role a principal plays in determining how the school day is organized, what teaching methods are effective, what materials promote student engagement, and how students should be assessed are all important in a principal’s ability to lead and improve a school. In their analysis of the literature, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) conclude that leadership is second to classroom teaching in contributing what students learn in schools. They cite three ways that school leaders make a difference in improving student learning: 1) setting direction by envisioning clear goals and high expectations, 2) developing teachers by providing needed support and training, and 3) making sure the school organization works to ensure that conditions support teaching and learning (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Thus, the principal’s ability to impact the organization of instruction in a school is crucial. According to the findings in the study The Autonomy Gap, the second most important function besides personnel management is the organization of instruction. Out of the top nine most important tasks, four functions cited by principals as inhibiting their autonomy, and therefore their effective leadership, are related to instruction. They are, in order of rank from high to low: 1) controlling key features of the school calendar, 2)
pacing and sequencing decisions about the curriculum, 3) making program adoption
decisions, and 4) determining methods and materials (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 21).

Since out of the four educational functions identified by the OECD, the two
domains that directly affect the operating core are personnel management and the
organization of instruction, this study concentrates on only on these.

C. Summary

The impact of a principal on a school is indisputable. What researchers debate is
the degree of a principal’s impact. Studies show that principals have the largest indirect
aggregate effect on student achievement. Other studies go further and claim that a
principal has a “dramatic” effect on the performance of a school. In trying to explain the
difference between successful and unsuccessful schools, some researchers analyze certain
individual characteristics that make a principal successful, while other studies focus on
the bureaucracy that constrains principals. The importance of principal leadership is
accepted as a relevant topic of study by many researchers since the principal is the
appointed leader of a school. Thus, a principal’s ability to act within the organization for
which he/she is responsible is important in the current discourse of accountability. While
some researchers characterize principal autonomy as an individual trait, others define
autonomy as freedom from institutional constraints. I study principal autonomy within
the context of the institutional setting in which he/she operates. To examine the principal
in his/her organizational context, I analyze the decisions that a principal makes in terms
of two domains: personnel management and organization of instruction.
8. Reasons for studying high schools among different nations

A. Why study high schools?

Studies of principal autonomy primarily focus on either the entire K-12 spectrum or elementary schools. There is not one study that focuses exclusively on secondary school principals. Studies that focus solely on elementary school principal’s include: Lortie (2009), Marzano, McNulty, and Walters (2005), Good (2008), Marsh, Hamilton, and Gill (2008), Weinles (2001), and Adamowski, Therriault, and Cavanna (2007). The remaining studies focus on principals within the entire K-12 educational system. The most widely cited study on principal autonomy, *The Autonomy Gap* (Adamowski et al., 2007), focuses solely on elementary school principals.

Although the distinction between elementary and secondary school principals may seem inconsequential, the institutional constraints under which elementary and secondary school administrators operate are markedly different. There are, of course, some commonalities: hiring and removing teachers, administering budgets, following district procedures, and state regulations. However, there are actual, bureaucratically defined differences between the two levels. For instance, high school principals more frequently consult legal counsel since older students present more issues involving free speech, drugs and alcohol, searches and seizures, student suspensions, and cyber bullying, (H.-D. Meyer & Bratge, 2011). High school principals also manage larger staffs, including department chairs, deans, and assistant principals. The State educational bureaucracy also places an additional responsibility on high schools by requiring every student to pass mandated exit exams, typically in English and Mathematics, to graduate from high school.
Besides different bureaucratic functions, there are inherent differences between elementary and high school principals. High school principals receive more public scrutiny than their elementary counterparts. A controversial play or book, college acceptance rates, comparative ratings to other high schools, the performance of athletic teams, teacher and staff interactions with students, students’ online and actions off school grounds, tragedies such as suicide and automobile deaths, fights in school, and other unpredictable events are all scrutinized by the larger community, the local media (online, print, and television) by parents, the Board of Education, and District Office (Goodwin et al., 2005). These institutional and inherent differences between elementary and secondary education are not a subject for analysis in any of the studies examined in this literature review.

B. Importance of studying principal autonomy using a cross-national approach

The most important reason for examining school bureaucracies across nations is that it allows for the comparison of more varied data. It is difficult to study the institutional constraints affecting schools if an analysis is limited to one country where only a particular set of forces are at work. Public schools and districts in the U.S. have similar organizational characteristics with formalized hierarchies, rules and procedures, and standardization of curriculum, standards, and teacher certification. In order to examine how organizational settings affect principal autonomy, a cross-national comparative approach is utilized since this method provides examination among differing school bureaucracies.

From a global perspective, not all bureaucracies are the same. By examining the experiences of principals in institutional settings outside the U.S., my study analyzes
whether principals in other nations, such as Finland, face similar constraints. Findings from the research show that the way schools are organized varies. As a result, institutional settings affect the type of and degree of autonomy a principal exercises in school. My study examines whether educational bureaucracies in different nations affect principal autonomy in making decisions within the institutional context in which the principal works. Since school systems have varying degrees of centralization, I study the effect of varying levels of centralization on principal autonomy.

A cross-national comparison also permits me to compare the traditional public high school system in the U.S. to public high school systems in other nations (Finland), which also possess traditional public high school systems. The institutional variance from nation to nation affords the opportunity to examine traditional school bureaucratic structures in different settings. These variances help me compare whether principals in different school systems face similar or different institutional constraints.

9. Summary

A review of the literature points to commonalities among researchers. First, principals have either an effect, whether strong and direct, or indirect, on school performance. Second, principals (either by tradition, law or both) are the accepted and recognized leaders of a school. Third, principals are accountable for their school’s performance.

Where the research differs is the reason for the variance in school performance. Some researchers attribute the success of a school to individual leadership traits, while others posit that institutions hamper a principal’s ability to lead. Some researchers examine the institutional constraints relative to a principal’s ability to act autonomously.
However, these studies are limited since they only examine principal autonomy within one organizational context. Assessing whether principals in other institutional settings possess more or less autonomy is only peripherally examined by the literature. Cross-national studies tend to focus on individual leadership traits and comparing these characteristics among principals across nations.

Utilizing a cross-national approach to examine principal autonomy in different nations allows the opportunity to investigate whether the institutional context of an educational organization (i.e. centralization and bureaucracy) affects the level of principal autonomy. By doing so, the following questions are considered in this study:

1) To what extent do principals in devolved school systems (such as the U.S.) exercise autonomy when making decisions compared to principals in more centrally controlled educational systems (such as Finland)?

2) Is there a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of decentralization?

3) How does the type of decentralization affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously in making decisions?
CHAPTER 3: Study Plan

1. Research rationale

This study uses an organizational analysis to examine how schools are configured. An organizational analysis is important for a few reasons: 1) Few studies have conceptualized or empirically examined how organizational configurations affect a principal’s ability to autonomously make decisions using a cross-national approach. 2) Analyzing organizations is important because it shows how schools are bureaucratically designed and to what environmental forces principals respond. 3) An organizational analysis can also help us understand what configuration allows for more principal autonomy. The current direction of federal (RTTT) and state policy (using test scores to evaluate principal effectiveness) presumes that a school leader has the concomitant autonomy to make those decisions for which he/she is responsible. An organizational analysis examines which configuration prompts the greatest level of principal autonomy in making educational decisions.

The institutional analysis conducted in my study is divided into two parts: 1) analysis of the organizational structures through which decisions are made and 2) analysis of the role of the principal, as the de facto leader of the school, in making decisions.

A. Analyzing organizational configurations

To analyze an organizational structure (such as an educational system, with formal rules, standardization of procedures, and levels of authority), it is also meaningful to analyze different institutional settings to examine whether variations in these settings can afford the principal more autonomy. If the current system of principal evaluation
demands that principals be held accountable, and autonomy leads to better results, then it is important to examine which institutional setting provides principals the most autonomy. This can be achieved most effectively by employing a cross-national comparative approach.

Organizational configurations vary from nation to nation depending on the governmental level decisions are made. To examine how varying organizational configurations affect principal autonomy in making decisions, two cases are considered: 1) the U.S., which is characterized by a devolved type of decentralization and highly developed local bureaucratic structures and 2) Finland, which is characterized by a delegated type of decentralization through which local schools are granted autonomy by the central government and bureaucratic structures are weak. These two cases were chosen since each represents a different type of organizational configuration. In the U.S., providing education is a legal function of local school districts, while in Finland this function belongs to the central government. The variances among these organizational configurations, especially as they relate to the type of decentralization under which schools operate, are paramount to this study.

B. Analyzing principal autonomy

In the U.S., principals work in an organizational setting that is characterized by a strong local bureaucracy with a school district apparatus that consists of a local school board and an entire cadre of district office administrators. The American tradition of federalism historically assigned education management to state governments (A. Allen & Mintrom, 2010; H.-D. Meyer, 2010; W. R. Scott et al., 1994), thus there is minimal centralization. Jurisdictional authority is the domain of each state’s local school boards,
totaling approximately 14,000 local U.S. school districts (A. Allen & Mintrom, 2010; Spring, 2010). On the other hand, principals in Finland work in an educational system that is even more centralized. Responsibility for educating students lies with the National Ministry of Education, but is characterized by still weaker local bureaucracies, yet ultimately more empowered, individual schools. In the Finnish system, the National Ministry and the National Board of Education set outcomes, but the means of achieving them are left to the individual schools (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011a; Simola, 2008). Studying principals in these two diametrically opposed settings helps assess which organizational configuration allows for a higher degree of principal autonomy. The sources of information for this case study are public high school principals in New York State and Finland.

High school principals in New York State were chosen because New York is the largest state to have adopted the RTTT reforms (Crowe, 2011). As such, principals in New York State were among the first to consider and implement these changes. Since principals in New York State are now being evaluated by student scores on standardized assessments and held accountable as “ineffective” leaders by low scores (G. A. Scott, 2011; Sustaining the race to the top reforms. Race to the top: Accelerating college and career readiness in states, 2010), the issue of principal autonomy is a relevant one to study.

Finland was chosen for this study primarily because of its students’ performances on PISA, which have been referenced by U.S. policymakers as the driving factor for current educational reforms (Compton, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011a). In Finland, principals from upper secondary schools are studied. Compulsory basic
education concludes at 15-years-old (completion of the ninth grade). Students, then, decide whether to enroll in vocational schools or upper secondary schools, i.e. lukio (Sahlberg, 2009). For the purpose of this study, upper secondary schools (lukio) are the most similar to the U.S. They serve students from the tenth through the twelfth grades, and these students typically attend college after successfully passing the National Matriculation Exam (Caldwell & Harris, 2006).

2. Research questions

To examine the relationship between organizational constraints and principal autonomy, this comparative study addresses the following questions:

1) To what extent do principals in devolved school systems (such as New York State’s) exercise autonomy when making decisions compared to principals in more centrally controlled educational systems (such as Finland’s)?

2) Is there a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of decentralization?

3) How does the type of decentralization affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously in making decisions?

3. Hypothesis

In general, this study posits that principals in less centralized settings (such as New York State) possess less autonomy, while principals in more centralized systems (such as Finland) have more autonomy. This study tests for the following hypotheses:

- In an organizational configuration characterized by a devolved system of governance (such as New York State’s), principals have less autonomy in making decisions.
• In an organizational configuration characterized by a delegated system of governance (such as Finland’s), principals have more autonomy in making decisions.

4. Conceptual framework

FIGURE 3.1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONAL CONFIGURATION, PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY, AND DECISION-MAKING

The model (Figure 3.1) above illustrates how organizational configurations affect principal autonomy in making decisions. The relationship between organizational configurations and decision-making is not a direct one. A direct connection between an organization and decisions cannot exist without an actor making these decisions. The principal links the apex and the operational core. Figure 3.1 above shows that the principal implements the demands of the organizational structure within the actual the school and classroom setting.
Figure 3.1 on the previous page indicates that the type of organizational configuration affects a principal’s function in an institution, which in turn impacts that principal’s ability to autonomously make decisions. The different types of decentralization (devolved and delegated) will be used to identify and describe the independent variable, organizational configuration (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000). The two cases used in this study represent different types of decentralization: the U.S. (devolved) and Finland (delegated). When evaluating decision-making, this study is limited to the two most important domains of education and the two domains over which principals have direct responsibility: personnel management and organization of instruction. High school principals in New York State and Finland are interviewed to study the intervening variable, principal autonomy.

5. Research Design

A. Identifying organizational configurations

Each educational system has an organizational structure. No matter how decentralized, each institution has a center where the locus of control can be found. Each one is characterized by a hierarchy, formalized rules, standardized roles, specialization of these roles, and a well-developed rationale for each of these roles. Applying Mintzberg’s (1979) identification of five basic parts of an organization to the educational systems of the U.S. and Finland, I summarize the variation among these organizational structures in Table 3.1 on the next page.

The one common organizational feature of these educational systems is that the principal is at the center of the organizational structure. However, the other four elements of the organization differ in some way. For example, teachers are considered
district employees in New York State, while in Finland teachers negotiate on a central level and are considered employees of the municipality. The techno-structure in Finland is missing certain bureaucratic apparatuses that are characteristic of the New York State educational system (see Table 3.1 below). The strategic apex is also different among the three nations. The principal in New York State reports to a superintendent chosen by a local school board. In Finland, the principal reports to a director of education, which is selected by the municipal board of education. The operating core is also dissimilar between New York State and Finland. In New York State, school boards and local unions locally negotiate teacher contracts and conditions, whereas in Finland the central government determines teachers’ salaries.

**TABLE 3.1: FIVE BASIC PARTS OF AN ORGANIZATION BY COUNTRY**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NEW YORK</th>
<th>FINLAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>APEX</strong></td>
<td>Superintendent District Office; Local Boards of Education</td>
<td>Director of Education (municipal level)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TECHNOSTRUCTURE</strong></td>
<td>Curriculum Coordinators, Program Evaluators, Directors, Staff Developers</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PRINCIPAL</strong></td>
<td>Head of School</td>
<td>Head of School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUPPORT STAFF</strong></td>
<td>Athletics, Food Services, Psychologists, Counselors, Transportation</td>
<td>Social Workers, psychologists, counselors, nurses, and doctors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>OPERATING CORE</strong></td>
<td>Teachers—98% represented by collective bargaining units</td>
<td>Teachers—1 national union (centralized negotiations)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 indicates that, in general, New York State’s educational system is more bureaucratic when compared to Finland. The local nature of the educational system in New York State both at the strategic apex (superintendent and school district apparatus)
and at the operating core (local teachers’ union) makes the principal more responsive to bureaucracies that are in close proximity on a daily basis.

Organizational configurations can be elusive to measure. For purposes of this study, organizational configuration is analyzed according to the type of decentralization each case study represents. The various meanings and uses of decentralization do not mean that there is no framework to utilize in the present analysis. A useful starting point is Hanson’s general definition of decentralization as “the transfer of decision making authority, responsibility, and tasks from higher to lower organizational levels or between organizations” (1998, p. 112). Using this definition, Paqueo and Lammert developed different categories of decentralization: devolution, deconcentration, and delegation (2000). These depictions of decentralization focus on which governing body allocates, distributes, or surrenders authority over educational matters. The OECD recognizes the different levels of government and includes four general fields of educational decisions in its framework (OECD, 2008, pp. 483-484). Thus, questions can be asked as to what decisions are made and who makes them.

Taking into account the three different types of decentralization identified by Paqueo and Lammert (2000) and the OECD framework (OECD, 2008, pp. 483-484), variances can be seen in the different types of decentralization. As stated earlier, the U.S. educational system can be described as devolved. By contrast, in Finland, a delegation of authority takes place from the centralized government to the municipalities. The variation between the different levels of government can be seen in Figure 3.2 below. The data indicate that most funds for schooling in Finland come from a combination of
central and local sources. In both Finland and the U.S., the local units receive most of the funding once it is transferred.

**FIGURE 3.2: FUNDS BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSFERS AMONG LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT FOR FINLAND AND THE U.S.**

![Graph showing funds before and after transfers among levels of government for Finland and the U.S.](image)

Source: (OECD, 2010)

Figure 3.3 on the following page organizes the data in another fashion to compare the relative differences among Finland and the U.S. Looking at the data in this manner, Finland raises 83 percent of educational revenue on the central level when compared to the U.S. (17 percent). The U.S. raises the most funds at the state level (100 percent) when compared to Finland (0 percent) where the concept of a *state* as a sub-unit of government does not exist. On the other end of the continuum, the U.S. and Finland raise
an equal amount of funds for educational purposes on the local level. After these funds are transferred between levels of government (see Figure 3.3), the central government in Finland receives a larger share (95 percent) when compared to the U.S. (5 percent). When compared to Finland, on a relative level 100 percent of funds are transferred to the state level. In both the U.S. and Finland, funds are transferred to the local level on an almost equal basis.

**FIGURE 3.3: RELATIVE COMPARISON OF BEFORE AND AFTER TRANSFER OF FUNDS AMONG FINLAND AND THE U.S.**

Thus, when taking into account the levels of government responsible for the initial funding of education and final transfer of funds to levels of government, it can be
posited that the cases in this study each represent a different type of decentralized organization setting: the U.S. (*devolved*) and Finland (*delegated*).

The functional domains of the two cases also provide insight as to the type of decentralization of each organizational configuration. According to Table 3.2 below, the central government has a larger function in personnel decisions in Finland compared to the U.S. where the local school district has the ultimate authority over personnel issues. For example, in the U.S. local school districts determine teacher salary, the number of classes a teacher must teach every day, the duration of the school day, and the number of faculty and department meetings a teacher must attend. In Finland, these conditions are determined by the central government.

**TABLE 3.2: TYPES OF PERSONNEL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING-COMPARISON OF U.S. AND FINLAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personnel Management</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>FINLAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Credentialing of teachers</td>
<td>States</td>
<td>Central government through universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting teachers</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Central government in conjunction with municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring teachers</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>School in conjunction with municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing teachers</td>
<td>School district in conjunction with state agencies</td>
<td>Municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fixing of salary scales</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duties and conditions of service</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Central government in conjunction with municipality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence over careers of staff</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>School in conjunction with municipality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In general, instructional and personnel decisions follow a similar pattern. Table 3.3 below indicates that most instructional decisions are made at the local school district.
level in the U.S., which further designates the U.S. as an example of a devolved organizational setting. Finland, on the other hand, represents an organizational structure where there is delegated governance. While the central government retains certain instructional control, such as setting standards and goals, it delegates the implementation of these general educational objectives directly to the schools.

**TABLE 3.3: TYPES OF INSTRUCTIONAL DECISIONS AND LEVEL OF DECISION-MAKING - COMPARISON OF U.S. AND FINLAND**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organization of Instruction</th>
<th>U.S.</th>
<th>FINLAND</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standardized testing</td>
<td>State</td>
<td>(not applicable)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum objectives</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional time</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>Central government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choice of textbooks</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping pupils</td>
<td>School district</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, when taking into account: 1) The levels of government responsible for the initial funding of education and final transfer of funds to levels of government and 2) The two domains of education in which decisions are made (personnel management and organization of instruction), a continuum of the level of centralization can be seen:

- The U.S. educational system is a *devolved* structure where funding education as well as decisions over personnel matters and instruction occur within a *local school district*;
- The Finnish educational system is one of *delegation* where the *central government* levies taxes and has authority over some personnel and instructional decisions, but also delegates authority to the *municipalities* to determine how to
use funds as well as make certain personnel and instructional decisions for schools. In Finland, the central government delegates some decisions to the municipalities, but still retains ultimate authority over the educational system.

Thus, on a continuum from least to most centralized, the U.S. falls into the former category, and Finland falls into the latter category.

B. Identifying principal autonomy

The sources of data and the unit of analysis for this study are high school principals. High school principals are chosen for their unique position in the organizational structure as described by Mintzberg (1979). Although high school principals are middle-level managers, due to the nature of their job, they are situated in a position that involves more regulation and oversight, mandates more accountability according to No Child Left Behind (NCLB), includes more public scrutiny, and is evaluated by an overall large number of standardized tests due to the number of students and teachers in the high school.

All of these aspects related to the principal’s job are magnified at the high school level. For this reason, the high school principal presents a unique perspective to the organizational structure of a school, not only for his/her status as a middle-level manager, but also for the increased involvement at the high school level with the public, media, parents, Board of Education members, the State Education Department, accrediting agencies, district office apparatus, and teachers’ unions.

Given the inimitable position of the high school principal in the organizational structure of the school and his/her interactions within a highly centralized system along with relationships in loosely coupled structures, the study proposes to focus on the high
school principal as the unit of analysis. Principals will be interviewed to ascertain their perspectives on the degree of autonomy they possess in their job, and to identify those institutional constraints that may impede their school improvement goals. In order to ascertain how the organizational structure affects a principal’s ability to make decisions within a school, a comparative study is conducted.

C. Survey method

In order to assess the level of principal autonomy, a questionnaire was distributed to principals in New York State and Finland. This questionnaire was adopted from: 1) the national survey School and Staffing Survey Principal Questionnaire (Education, 2007), which is periodically distributed to principals by the U.S. Department of Education and 2) Items from a questionnaire developed and used by two researchers: A) Robert Vitteneg in his 1984 dissertation (“The Iowa School Principal: A Sociological Perspective”) at Iowa State University (Lortie, 2009, pp. 229-235), and B) Dan Lortie in his recent book, School Principal: Managing in Public (2009, 214-228).

This questionnaire was used to ascertain principals’ responses to a series of inquires about their working conditions, as well as their perception on autonomy and control. The responses were tabulated to formulate a description of the type and degree of principal autonomy these principals possess in the particular settings. The study was limited to public high school principals since private school principals, especially in New York State, do not face the same type of local bureaucracy and state and federal mandates that their public school counterparts do.

A survey design administered through a service was purposely chosen since the electronic distribution of a survey has certain advantages over other methods of
administration, such as telephone interviews, direct group administration, mail, and personal interviews; it costs less to administer; data-collection time is relatively short; it allows for a random sampling; no facilities are needed; and it permits the standardization of responses (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 393). There are two primary disadvantages of administering research through electronic means; 1) Not all principals have work-issued email addresses or email addresses may not be listed, so good prospective survey candidates may be left out of the sample, and 2) Electronically administered surveys have a lower response rate than those administered to a group or through a personal interview (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, p. 394). Nevertheless, the two disadvantages are outweighed by the advantages when conducting cross-national research with limited financial means and restricted time to travel to two different nations when schools are in session.

Therefore, my decision to use an electronically administered questionnaire was shaped by practical considerations. An email survey allows for a simple way to contact principals chosen for the sample and tallying the responses. Financially and logistically, the use of an electronically administered survey through email is the best method available to implement this research design.

D. Survey design

A quantitative research design accommodates responses from participants who are time-pressed and who work and live across long distances. Additionally, there are more variation in responses using a quantitative rather than a qualitative method with fewer participants. Finally, a quantitative research design allows the collection of data to obtain responses to targeted questions in order to discover if there is any relationship between principal autonomy and the institutional structures in which they work. The
questionnaire was electronically sent to principals through Survey Monkey to allow principals the opportunity to respond to the questions without having to take time to send the questionnaire by postal mail.

The questionnaire (see Appendix) is divided into the following categories: principal experience and training (Part I); school characteristics (Part II); decision-making (Part III); teacher and school performance (Part IV); and principal autonomy (Part V). The questionnaire is designed to capture responses through the perspective of the high school principal. The principal is uniquely situated in the organizational structure to mediate the general goals set forth by the apex and the execution of these objectives in the operational core. The survey was created to allow the principal to assess how the organizational configuration affects educational decisions.

The first two parts of the questionnaire are intended to collect demographic data about the principal’s experience and information about the school itself. The third part of the survey asks the principal to identify the amount of influence organizational structures have on the two domains of education: personnel management and organization of instruction. The following question is designed to record the principal’s perception of how much influence governing bodies have over decisions: “How much actual influence do you think each group or person has on the decisions concerning the following activities?” The same question also asks the principal to include the degree of influence he/she has over these same decisions. The second question in Part III measures the gap between a principal’s perceptions over the amount of responsibility he/she currently possesses compared to the amount of responsibility he/she would ideally like to possess.
The fourth part of the questionnaire is designed to examine a principal’s assessment of those decisions impacting the functions of education specifically related to personnel management and instruction. One question asks principals to identify the barriers to the dismissal of poor-performing teachers; the other asks principals how test and classroom data are used and; and the third asks how teachers’ educational methods are monitored.

Open-ended questions in the last part are selected to allow the principal to identify organizational characteristics that the survey does not capture though closed-ended questions. The last section permits the respondent to add information, relating to principal autonomy, that he/she believes is relevant to the survey. These questions are purposely designed to be open-ended, since the institutional structure of a public high school in New York State varies from an upper secondary school (lukio) in Finland. To capture a principal’s perception of the amount of autonomy he/she has in a school, open-ended questions are asked, such as: “In your situation, in which area would you most like to have greater autonomy? Why?” These questions are included in the survey design in order to capture the depth of those institutional constraints that principals identify as affecting their jobs.

E. Sampling method

The unit of analysis in this study is high school principals. Principals are a relatively homogenous group. They have graduated from teacher education programs, taught in schools, and moved through the ranks of teaching by enrolling in leadership programs to obtain the appropriate credentials to serve as a school principal (Eacott, 2010, p. 273). The variance in this study lies in the different organizational configurations of
the two institutional settings: New York State (e.g. devolved) and Finland (e.g. delegated). This study examines whether the level of centralization affects the degree of principal autonomy. In order to obtain a random sampling of the different types of institutions, principals in New York State were randomly selected from a directory of public high school principals.

Since the Finnish system is more centralized, I contacted the Trade Union of Education (OAJ) in Finland to obtain a list of urban and rural upper secondary schools and their corresponding principals since all principals in Finland belong to this trade union. The vice-president of the OAJ, Jukka Kuittinen, assisted with the distribution of electronic survey to principals. Principals of upper secondary schools (lukio) in Finland were used for this study, since they are the most similar to public high schools in the U.S. These schools contain 11th and 12th grades and are college preparatory in nature. In order to select a random sample of upper secondary school principals, Mr. Kuittinen distributed the survey to all upper secondary school principals in Finland.

In total, 35 Finnish principals of upper secondary schools and 65 New York high school principals responded to the survey. Overall, the respondents are a representative sample of the actual population of upper secondary school principals. The average age of the New York respondents was 49.9 years of age. Nationally, the average age of a high school principal is 49.6 years (Bitterman, Goldring, & Gray, 2013). The gender distribution of the respondents is very similar to the national group. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents from New York are male. The national average of male to female distribution for high school principals is 70 percent male and 30 percent female (Bitterman et al., 2013). Even the total years of experience as a principal in the current
school are similar. The vast majority of respondents had 10 years or less of experience as a principal at the current school. Only 11.4 percent had more than 11 years of experience. At the national level, only 11.2 percent had 11 years or more of experience at their current school (Bitterman et al., 2013). The only area where the respondents did not exactly match up to general population of principals was the years of teaching experience. At the national level, 62.9 percent of principals had more than 10 years of teaching experience (Bitterman et al., 2013). The New York principals had 43.2 percent of teaching experience for more than 10 years. This 19.7 percent difference could be explained by the presence of principals in New York City where there are many multiple pathways to becoming a school administrator besides the traditional professional diploma offered by credentialed colleges and universities.

The respondents from Finland are also comparable to the general population of principals. The average age for a Finnish upper secondary school principal responding to the survey is 54.2 years. The average age of upper secondary schools nationally is 51.2 years (2014). The gender distribution between the Finnish respondents and the overall population is also strikingly similar. 50 percent of these respondents were female, whereas at the national level 48 percent of upper secondary school principals are female (2014). On the whole, upper secondary school principals in Finland had an average of 12 years experience as a principal at their current school (2014). Sixty-one percent of the Finnish respondents indicated they had between 6 and 15 years of experience at their current school. Similarly, 60 percent of the Finnish principals reported that they had at least 11 years of teaching experience, which is very close to the national average of 14 years of teaching experience (2014).
Overall, the New York and Finnish principals that responded to this survey are a representative sample of the general population of secondary school principals with regards to average age, gender, years of teaching experience, and years of experience as a principal at their current school.

F. Research validity and reliability

Data was collected from 100 principals using questions from the School and Staffing Survey Principal Questionnaire (Education, 2007). This questionnaire has been in use since 1988, and its longstanding use allows for both reliability and validity. The questionnaire has been administered throughout the U.S. in different organizational settings (public, private, magnet, charter, federally-controlled, religious, and independent schools) and yields consistent measures from one use to the next.

The survey design is valid since the questions accurately measure the variables they are supposed to measure. To analyze the extent of autonomy principals have in relation to making decisions in their school, principals are asked to rate their current levels of responsibility and also their ideal level of responsibility. Identifying the level of centralization is captured by the question of how much actual influence bureaucratic structures have in school decision-making. To examine the constraints principals face from dismissing low-performing teachers, a principal is asked to identify whether any of ten of the factors listed in the survey impede the ability to dismiss such a teacher by checking off a “yes” or “no” response.

The survey also contains items from a questionnaire developed and used by two researchers: 1) Robert Vittengl in his 1984 dissertation (“The Iowa School Principal: A Sociological Perspective”) at Iowa State University (Lortie, 2009, pp. 229-235), and 2)
Dan Lortie in his recent book, *School Principal: Managing in Public* (2009, 214-228). Vittengl’s study included responses from 451 principals in the state of Iowa, and Lortie’s study involved interviews from 113 principals. This questionnaire was distributed in two geographic regions (one state and one city) by 564 principals. The consistent results from one distribution to the next indicate the reliability of this questionnaire.

To ensure the validity of the questions, a pilot study was conducted in New York State through the Rockland County High School Principals Association. I asked this group to review the questionnaire, answer the questions, and provide me with feedback and suggestions. Based on the responses and feedback I received, revisions were made to the survey. I decided to eliminate certain open-ended questions, which yielded one-word responses, and add other questions, which were more narrowly tailored to the concepts of autonomy, personnel management, and centralization.

To check the validity of the questions being asked of principals in Finland, I asked officials knowledgeable with the Finnish educational system to review the questionnaire. Jukka Kuittinen and Sevi Retiva, both Finnish principals and members of the executive board of the OAJ, reviewed the questionnaire adopted for Finnish principals. I asked for assistance with: 1) the accuracy of translation from English to Finnish; 2) removing those organizational structures that do not apply to the Finnish educational system and replacing them with their corresponding Finnish equivalents; and 3) revising the survey to consider the organizational norms and culture specific to the Finnish educational system. Finally, the accuracy of the translation from English to Finnish was certified by a professional translation service.
The reliability of the survey instrument is maintained since the questionnaire contains a comparable way of measuring responses (a Likert-scale) and includes questions on principal influence as well as principal perspectives on organizational structures that may influence autonomy.

**G. Data analysis**

Survey responses were collected electronically through Survey Monkey and then exported to SPSS. I analyze the survey results to explain the organizational configurations that allow for or inhibit a principal’s authority to make decisions related to personnel and instructional matters. Statistics, such as frequency distribution, cross tabulations, and means (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009, pp. 184-213), are utilized to determine the degree of principal autonomy in making personnel and instructional decisions as well as identifying those institutional barriers, which mostly affect a principal’s decision-making as it relates to personnel management and instructional issues. By analyzing principals’ responses to the survey questions, I compare the percentage of principals in New York State and Finland, who respond that they have a greater or lesser degree of autonomy over personnel and instructional decisions.

Before any analysis and interpretation of findings can be made it is necessary to indicate and understand the assumptions, delimitations, and limitations of this proposed study.
6. Assumptions, delimitations, and limitations

A. Assumptions

The underlying assumption of this study is that concepts of principal autonomy are understood and experienced by participants among two different settings, New York State and Finland. The concept of “autonomy” and “freedom” may not have the same meaning in New York State and Finland since these settings have a varied historical underpinning that shaped concepts such as “freedom” and “autonomy.” Nevertheless, the study assumes that the concept of principal autonomy can be understood in relative terms since the principal is considered the leader of the school in New York State and Finland, and the principal in each of these three settings does operate within an organizational context that is bounded by laws and regulations. Although principal autonomy cannot be studied as a universal concept, this study assumes it can be examined in a relative and specific fashion given each principal’s experience.

This study also assumes that an abstract concept, organizational configuration, can be accurately described, measured, and operationalized. In order to frame this abstract concept and be able to measure it, the type of decentralization is treated as an aspect of organizational configuration. As the OECD points out in its reports, all OECD member nations have undertaken measures to decentralize educational decision-making. In order to observe the type of decentralization in educational decision-making, I use the framework developed by the OECD on determining which decisions are made in schools and who makes them are also used to operationalize the concept of centralization (OECD, 2008). In order to distinguish between different types of decentralization efforts, this study utilizes varying types of decentralization identified by Paqueo and Lammert (2000).
Additionally, the concept of decentralization has been made more manageable by focusing on only two areas of decision-making, i.e. personnel management and organization of instruction.

A third assumption of this study is that principals have the necessary leadership skills and abilities to act as autonomous agents to positively impact a school. In other words, this study assumes that a principal can make a difference in a school. The research shows that school leadership accounts for 25 percent in the overall effect on student achievement (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003). Yet, not all principals are effective, and a poor performing school may be affected by a principal’s poor performance. On the other hand, a school may not perform well, not due to the principal, but other factors that are beyond his/her control, e.g. ineffective teachers, budget limitations, high poverty, poor parental involvement, and other factors. Analyzing whether it is the principal’s personal attributes or other factors that contribute to poor performing schools is beyond the scope of this study. Instead, this study assumes that the principals who participate in this study are qualified school administrators who have been appointed as school leaders based on their abilities and skills as identified by their supervisors.

B. Delimitations

A central reason for this study, the implementation of RTTT in New York State, is itself a delimiting factor. Some participants in this study, principals in New York State, are in the midst of dealing with new policy initiatives as a result of RTTT. Their perception of the degree of autonomy they possess under this new landscape of accountability will likely differ from those principals in states that are not dependent on RTTT funding. Additionally, the concept of principal accountability as linked to
principal impact on student standardized test scores is a delimiting factor since these accountability systems are absent from the Finnish educational system.

C. Limitations

This study has three limiting factors. First, although the survey instrument asks a series of questions seeking to identify in which areas of school administration principals perceive to have more or less autonomy, a questionnaire is ultimately exhaustive and cannot include all facets daily operations. The list of a principal’s duties and responsibilities is endless and may even vary from one school district to the next. Thus, the questionnaire only asks about administrative functions that are most important to school administrators: personnel management and organization of instruction. There may be other functions, like those identified by the OECD (2008) and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation (Adamowski et al., 2007), that affect a principal’s ability to operate freely in a school: resource allocation, budget management, student management, facilities planning and management, fundraising, parental pressure, and community involvement. Whether some principals are more concerned with the amount of autonomy they have over these functions is not considered by this study.

The second limiting factor is the small sample size of principals. The international scope of the study precludes a large sample size. Communicating with principals in Finland primarily through electronic means and asking these principals to complete a questionnaire electronically presented a challenge to response rate. Thus, responses from approximately 35 principals in Finland and 65 in New York is a small sample size.
The third limiting factor is the different structure of secondary schools among various nations. Although the varying institutional structures do provide an important variable to consider, especially in terms of principal autonomy, these same structures also impose a limit on this study. In New York State, secondary schools are almost uniformly schools that contain grade levels 9-12. In Finland, however, compulsory schooling ends after the 10th grade. Although the vast majority of students extend their academic career beyond the 10th grade, students may choose between vocational schools and upper secondary schools (lukio). Thus, my study limits its range to principals of upper secondary schools in Finland. Principals of vocational schools in Finland are not subjects of this study.

7. Summary

I chose to analyze how the type of centralization affects principal autonomy using a cross-national perspective. Examining the level of centralization across different educational systems allows me to explore the variability of organizational configurations in these different institutional settings on principal autonomy. In order to narrow the range of principal autonomy, I chose to examine principal’s decision-making in terms of personnel management and organization of instruction. In terms of the former, effective teaching has the largest classroom effect on student achievement and most public funds allocated to education are spent on staffing. As to the latter, the organization of instruction directly impacts the operating core, and this is the arena where principals and teachers have the most immediate effect.

Measuring organizational configuration can be elusive. In order to make this concept workable in this survey, I chose to use the two different types of decentralization
to characterize the organizational configuration of each nation. I also analyzed the five basic parts of each organization as identified by Mintzberg and assessed the dominant mode by which each level of government is involved in educational decision-making. Additionally, I examined at from what government level funds for educational spending are procured and the level of government to which these funds were ultimately transferred. From this examination, I was able to develop a relative continuum of less to more centralized educational settings, with the U.S. educational system ranking less centralized and Finland ranking more centralized.

My study tests the hypothesis that principals in less centralized settings have less autonomy, while principals in more centralized settings enjoy greater autonomy. To test my hypothesis, the survey was sent by email to all high school principals in New York State and Finland. Survey monkey was used to distribute the questionnaire. Ultimately, 35 Finnish principals and 65 principals from New York State responded to the survey. The questionnaire is comprised of questions that have been field-tested and used. The next chapter will contain the findings of the results.
CHAPTER 4: Results of Comparative Survey Analysis

1. Organizational configurations: levels of authority

In order to identify the extent of autonomy each level of government and various educational stakeholders possess, principals in New York State and Finland were given a list of constituents influencing educational matters and asked: “Which individual or group in your school or school district has greater autonomy or freedom?” Respondents were asked to rank these groups from greatest autonomy (1) to least autonomy (7). A seven-point autonomy scale was developed to rank the amount of autonomy each group held within a school. The two charts below present the findings of these results.

FIGURE 4.1: GROUPS WITH GREATEST AUTONOMY COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW YORK

Percentages of groups with greatest autonomy were determined by combining ratings of one and two, which fell at the highest end of the seven-point autonomy scale. Based on these findings (Figure 4.1 above), principals in Finland indicate that the National Education Authority has the greatest autonomy (61.1 percent) followed by
principals (52 percent) and teachers (34.6 percent). New York State principals, on the other hand, do not even rank among the top three groups on this autonomy scale. Instead, the superintendent has the greatest autonomy (65.8 percent) followed by the State Education Department (62 percent) and the local board of education (47.4 percent). Principals in New York State rank fifth on this autonomy scale. This percentage stands in stark contrast to their Finnish counterparts who rank second on this autonomy scale and enjoy more than double the amount of authority than New York State principals do (52 and 20.5 percent, respectively). Table 4.1 below compares in ascending order those groups with the greatest degree of autonomy in Finland and New York State. Based on these findings, those groups closest to the operating core have more autonomy in Finland than New York State. Whereas teachers rank third in Finland, in terms of autonomy, they rank next to last in New York State. While principals possess the second highest degree of autonomy in Finland, their New York State counterparts rank five out of seven in the same category. It is evident from Table 4.1 below that the organizational structure in New York State is top heavy with bureaucratic entities that are far removed from the classroom and the operating core where teaching and learning is done.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RANK</th>
<th>FINLAND</th>
<th>NEW YORK</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>National Educational Authority</td>
<td>Superintendent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>State Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Local Authority/Board of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Director of Schools</td>
<td>National Educational Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Local Authority/Board of Education</td>
<td>Principal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Regional Authority</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>Parents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Both Figure 4.1 (page 99) and Table 4.1 (previous page) represent the type of organizational configuration that can be found in Finland and New York State. In Finland, the national government has the greatest autonomy since it retains the ultimate authority and responsibility over schooling. Although the Finnish government delegates the day-to-day administration and delivery of schooling to principals and teachers, the national government still keeps hold of its institutional responsibility of providing education. The high percentage of Finnish principals indicating that the national government has the greatest autonomy in a school is representative of the unitary government in Finland whereby educational responsibility resides at the national level and is delegated to the local schools.

In New York State, the superintendent holds the greatest autonomy in conjunction with the state government and the local board of education. This organizational configuration is congruent with the devolved nature of public schooling in the U.S. where the state government is the agency with the authority and responsibility over education. The superintendent is the figure delegated with administering state educational directives in conjunction with the elected local school board. Whereas in Finland, the organizational configuration allows for a clear flow of delegated powers from the national government to the local schools, in New York State the flow of educational responsibilities goes through many filters and bureaucracies before they reach the individual school, which may explain why New York State principals rate themselves fifth (out of seven) on the autonomy scale.
The data above demonstrates that the organizational configuration of Finland’s educational system is one of delegation, whereas New York State’s system is devolved since every individual state is responsible for providing a public education to its students.

2. Organizational configurations and influence on decision-making

A. Personnel management

In this section, I will analyze the type of influence each level of government or group has on the functions of education regarding personnel management and the organization of instruction. Principals in Finland and New York State were asked to identify the level of influence of various groups on the functions of education: “How much actual influence do you think each group or person has on decisions concerning __________?” Respondents were asked to distinguish the level of influence according to a Likert-scale ranging from no influence to major influence. Principals were asked to consider the level of influence of seven groups and fourteen functions of education.

The figure on the next page (Figure 4.2) shows those groups Finnish principals identify as having a major influence on personnel matters. Figure 4.2 only includes the percentages of those groups that have been identified as having a “major influence” on personnel management by Finnish principals. Functions of personnel management include the hiring, recruitment, dismissal, and evaluation of teachers, as well as the setting of salaries and defining conditions of employment for teachers. According to the figure below, principals play an important role in personnel matters. With the exception of setting salaries for teachers, Finnish principals state they have the most influence in the hiring (96.6 percent), recruitment (86.7 percent), dismissal (70 percent), and evaluation (73.3 percent) of teachers. Principals in Finland also play a large role in defining the
duties and conditions of work for teachers (73.3 percent). The setting of salaries is a function of the national government since, in Finland, teachers are considered national employees and civil servants. Thus, salaries are defined at the national level.

Although New York State principals also state that they have major influence over personnel matters, these principals find themselves sharing responsibility with other groups more often than their Finnish counterparts. Principals in New York State do have a major influence in hiring (79.5 percent), recruiting (54.8 percent), dismissing (76.7 percent), and evaluating (83.7 percent) teachers. These principals also play a major role in defining the work conditions of teachers (67.4 percent). Principals in New York State have little influence over teacher salaries when compared to their Finnish colleagues (4.8 and 23.3 percent, respectively).

FIGURE 4.2: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER PERSONNEL MATTERS IN FINLAND
While both groups of principals state that they have a major influence over personnel matters, there is a main difference between the two. Based on Figure 4.2 on the previous page, Finnish principals are undoubtedly the central and many times only actors when making decisions related to personnel matters. With the exception of determining teachers’ salaries, the highest percentage of a group having a major influence is school district staff with respect to the dismissal of teachers (37.9 percent). There is no sharing of authority in Finnish schools. The roles of principals in Finland are clearly delineated. They have sole autonomy with respect to managing teachers in their schools. Interference from other bureaucratic sectors (national, state, local, and district entities) is virtually absent. There is no question in Finland who leads the school—the principal.
Principals in New York State operate in a more obfuscated educational environment. Although these principals, too, have a major influence over personnel matters, they must share these responsibilities with other entities of the educational bureaucracy. For example, as Figure 4.3 on the previous page indicates, the distribution of percentages among those groups identified as having a major influence over defining work conditions for teachers include: principals (67.4 percent), school district staff (40.5 percent), state education department (40.5 percent), local school board (37.2 percent), and teachers (37.2 percent). The same diffuse distribution occurs regarding the recruitment, dismissal, and evaluation of teachers. Though principals in New York State are the de jure leaders of their respective schools, they are not the de facto leaders of their school buildings since their authority and influence is more dispersed and shared with other entities. As such, principals in New York State that operate in a devolved environment must deal with and negotiate with other groups before a decision can be reached.

B. Organization of instruction

When analyzing which groups have a major influence over the organization of instruction, similar patterns emerge. The Finnish organizational structure provides for a clearer delineation of decision-making while the educational structure in New York State is more dispersed. Both sets of principals, in Finland and New York State, were asked to identify which groups have a major influence over instructional matters. The percentages in Figures 4.4 and 4.5 show the percentages of those groups that have a major influence over instructional matters. Instructional matters include: curriculum, teaching methods, instructional time, instructional material, grouping pupils, educational standards, professional development, and assessment of student work.
As Figure 4.4 above demonstrates, in Finland a clear demarcation exists regarding which bureaucratic entity is responsible for a specific instructional matter. For instance, teachers have a major influence in determining the methods they will use to teach in the classroom (96.6 percent), choosing instructional material (96.7 percent), and assessing student work (93.3 percent). The National Board of Education in Finland has a major influence over the development of the curriculum (73.3 percent). Both teachers and the National Board of Education have a major influence over setting educational standards (48.3 and 48.3 percent, respectively). Principals have a major influence in terms of determining how to group students in classrooms (69 percent), while both teachers and principals determine professional development needs (66.7 and 70 percent, respectively). The only instance where influence over an instructional matter is diffused occurs over
instructional time. In this matter, the municipality (51.7 percent), principals (37.9 percent), and the district staff (37 percent) all have a major role in determining instructional time. Figure 4.4 on the previous page illustrates that certain defined groups in Finland have clear, assigned responsibilities over specific instructional matters. The National Board of Education develops the general curriculum and both principals and teachers have the specific task of deciding how to deliver this curriculum to their students.

**FIGURE 4.5: PERCENTAGE OF GROUPS HAVING A MAJOR INFLUENCE OVER INSTRUCTIONAL MATTERS IN NEW YORK**

Comparable to personnel management, the roles and responsibilities involving instructional matters are also obfuscated in New York State. According to Figure 4.5 above, the only clear delineation involves the grouping of pupils where both principals and teachers have a major role (60.5 and 41.9 percent, respectively) and deciding which instructional methods to use in the classroom (teachers-76.2 percent and principals 66.7 percent).
percent). Otherwise, duties and responsibilities involving all other instructional tasks are dispersed between different entities. For example, the task of selecting instructional materials is shared between teachers (84.1 percent), principals (54.5 percent), and school district staff (46.3 percent). A similar example involves planning for professional development where three groups have a major role: principals (72.1 percent), school district staff (48.8 percent), and teachers (45.5 percent). Similar dispersal patterns also occur regarding developing curriculum, determining instructional time, setting educational standards, and assessing student work.

Unlike Finland, where a specific group plays a major influence over a defined instructional task, the educational environment in New York State is murkier since varying arrays of groups have a major influence over instructional matters. Given the U.S. governmental tradition of checks and balances, it is not surprising to find a diffuse system of governance in New York State’s educational sector. Whereas in Finland, principals enjoy being the undisputed leaders of their schools with ultimate decision-making authority over most personnel matters, principals in New York State must discuss and negotiate with other bureaucratic entities before arriving at decisions. Although the data indicates that principals in New York State share in decision-making over personnel and instructional matters with other entities, the data does not demonstrate whether or not principals have the necessary autonomy in making decisions even if this process involves sharing with other groups. The next section will address the gap between principals’ actual and ideal autonomy when making decisions.
3. Principal autonomy

A. Organizational configurations and principal autonomy

The section above demonstrated that principals in New York State work in a more dispersed organizational configuration, whereas Finnish principals operate in an environment with a relatively clear delineation of roles and responsibilities. Although the organizational structures in which these two sets of principals operate may be different perhaps these principals believe they have enough autonomy to perform their tasks and make decisions.

Principals were asked two questions to ascertain how the organizational configuration in which they operate affects their autonomy. One question asks, “How would you describe your school? In general, are decisions generally made by your supervisor(s) or are you allowed to make decisions?” Principals were asked to choose

FIGURE 4.6: WHO MAKES DECISIONS IN A SCHOOL?
COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW YORK

![Chart showing the comparison between Finland and New York for who makes decisions in a school.](chart.png)
from three choices. Figure 4.6 on the previous page indicates principals’ responses in both Finland and New York State. As the data demonstrate, more Finnish principals state that they are allowed to make decisions without their supervisor when compared to their New York State counterparts (65.5 and 45.5 percent, respectively). Almost fifty-five percent of principals in New York State indicate that their supervisor makes some decisions pertaining to their school while they make some decisions.

The other question asks principals the following: “In some environments, a principal is not given enough autonomy over how he/she does things. In other school settings, the principal is given considerable autonomy over how he/she does things. Which best describes your situation?” As Figure 4.7 shows below, the vast majority of Finnish principals (82.8 percent) state that they have considerable autonomy in making decisions. New York State principals report that they have considerable autonomy at a lower rate (59.1 percent). Responses to both questions indicate that Finnish principals are trusted to

**FIGURE 4.7: PRINCIPALS’ PERCEPTION ON AUTONOMY IN MAKING DECISIONS A COMPARISON BETWEEN FINLAND AND NEW YORK**

![autonomy comparison graph](image-url)
make more decisions on their own as compared to their New York State colleagues. Compared to New York State principals, Finnish principals are given the concomitant authority to make decisions without much supervisory interference and, as such, are allowed to make decisions for their school. As I argued in the previous section, principals in New York State operate in a more diffuse environment where they must negotiate and compromise when making decisions. This type of educational environment characterized by shared authority among different groups limits a principal’s ability to make autonomous decisions for his/her school.

In order to assess the degree of autonomy, principals were asked to respond to the following question: “To what extent do you presently have responsibility for the following at your school?” Principals were asked to consider various educational functions pertaining to personnel management and the organization of instruction. Responses for this question included four choices along a Likert-scale ranging from “I have no responsibility for this task” to “I am fully responsible for this task.” Principals responses to this question were contrasted with the next question, which asked principals about their ideal situation regarding educational matters: “Ideally, at your school, to what extent would you like to have responsibility for the following at your school?” Principals were asked to consider the same educational functions pertaining to personnel management and the organization of instruction and identify their ideal level of responsibility. Responses for this question also included four choices along a Likert-scale ranging from “I would not like to be responsible for this task” to “I would like to be fully responsible for this task.” Table 4.2 on the next page summarizes the responses to both these questions.
According to the data in Table 4.2 above, New York State principals indicate that they presently have and ideally would like more responsibility than Finnish principals.

Principals in New York State have more responsibility, as compared to their Finnish
counterparts, in the following educational tasks: evaluation and selection of instructional materials, assignment of teaching duties and tasks, evaluation of teachers, professional development for teachers, assignment of students to classes or programs, and setting educational goals. Finnish principals identify that they have more responsibility in the following three functions: transferring teachers, setting salaries for teachers, and rewarding teachers.

The data also indicate that principals in New York State would ideally like more responsibility over all educational functions with the exception of rewarding teachers. To gauge the gap between ideal and actual responsibility, an autonomy gap was calculated. This gap was determined by subtracting the percentage of actual responsibility from the percentage of ideal responsibility. The remaining difference is called the autonomy gap between ideal and actual responsibility over educational functions.

Figure 4.8 on the next page compares the autonomy gap between Finnish and New York State principals in matters involving personnel management. With the exception of one function, the assignment of teaching tasks and duties, the autonomy gap for New York State principals is higher than that of Finnish principals. The largest differences between New York State and Finnish principals occur in the following areas of personnel management: transferring teachers (51.4 and 9.4 percent, respectively), dismissing teachers (26.2 and -0.2 percent, respectively), setting salaries for teachers (40.5 and 12.7 percent, respectively), and rewarding teachers (23.5 and 7.1 percent, respectively).
transferring teachers (51.4 and 9.4 percent, respectively), dismissing teachers (26.2 and -0.2 percent, respectively), setting salaries for teachers (40.5 and 12.7 percent, respectively), and rewarding teachers (23.5 and 7.1 percent, respectively).

In general, the smaller gap between ideal and actual responsibility over personnel matters indicates that Finnish principals have more autonomy in making decisions involving personnel matters, such as dismissing and transferring bad teachers and rewarding good teachers. In the very important and central area of teacher performance, the data show that principals in Finland have more autonomy in making staff decisions involving poor performing teachers, while also having the ability to reward good teachers. Interestingly, the gap between ideal and actual responsibility runs in the opposite direction when recruiting and hiring teachers and evaluating teachers is involved. A clear
delineation of expectations could explain why there is a negative autonomy gap regarding these two tasks. Principals in Finland do not spend time evaluating teachers. Teachers go through a competitive educational program where only 10 percent of applicants are accepted into teacher education programs. Teacher training includes not only methodology, but also research. Thus, teachers are considered highly trained professionals, one once they pass their program and receive the necessary certification, there is no need to evaluate their performance on a systemic basis as is the practice in the U.S. and in New York State. The same reasoning applies to recruiting and hiring teachers. Since teachers are employees of the government, not a particular school district as in the U.S., teachers in Finland apply regionally or to a particular municipality. Principals choose from this general pool. Thus, principals are less involved in the recruitment process since their particular university and the appropriate governmental entities have already vetted these teachers.

The autonomy gap for instructional matters is also considered. Figure 4.9 on the next page shows the autonomy gap for New York State principals is larger than it is for Finnish principals. With the exception of setting educational goals, the gap between ideal and actual responsibility is greater for New York State principals, when compared to their Finnish colleagues in the following instructional areas: assigning students to classes or educational programs (6.7 and -5.5 percent, respectively), curriculum (16.1 and -13.1 percent, respectively), professional development of teachers (9.4 and 6.9 percent, respectively), and evaluation and selection of instructional material (30.2 and -7.2 percent, respectively). Similar to personnel management, the autonomy gap regarding
instructional matters goes in the opposite direction for Finnish principals: selection of instructional materials, curriculum, and assignment of students to classes or programs.

Analogous to personnel functions, the negative direction of the autonomy gap for Finnish principals can be attributed to a clear delineation of roles and expectations. In Finland, the National Board of Education is responsible for the curriculum. Teachers play the most important role in the selection of instructional material and assignment of students.

Of all the functions considered by principals in identifying for what they actually have responsibility and for what ideally they would like to have responsibility, the largest gap for New York State principals can be found in functions of personnel management.
Of the five largest gaps between ideal and actual responsibility, four fall into the category of personnel management. In ascending order the largest gaps for New York State principals are: 1. Transferring teachers (51.4 percent), 2. Setting salaries for teachers (40.5 percent), 3. Evaluation and selection of instructional material (30.2 percent), 4. Dismissing teachers (26.2 percent), and 5. Rewarding teachers (23.5 percent). Based on this comparison, Finnish principals demonstrate that they actually have the appropriate autonomy for making personnel decisions as compared to their New York State colleagues, which identify a need in having more autonomy in making staffing decisions for their school. Since a difference exists regarding New York State principals’ ability to make personnel decisions when compared to Finnish principals, the next section will consider obstacles to the decision-making process.

B. Obstacles principals encounter when making personnel decisions

In order to identify obstacles to the dismissal of poor performing teachers, principals were asked the following question: “In your opinion, are the following considered barriers to the dismissal of poor-performing or incompetent teachers in the school?” Principals were given ten different types of obstacles choices from which to consider as impediments to dismissing poor performing teachers. Principals responded whether or not the item listed was a barrier by indicating a “yes” or “no” response. Figure 4.10 below summarizes the percentage of affirmative responses for each barrier.
Compared to Finnish principals, the percentage of New York State principals responding in the affirmative is higher in each instance with the exception of two barriers: unable to find suitable replacements for teachers and dismissal is too stressful. Otherwise, New York State principals indicated that the impediment was higher in the remaining eight categories. To varying degrees, the top three barriers when attempting to dismiss poor performing teachers for both Finnish and New York State principals are the same: tenure 63.6 and 86.4 percent, respectively), teacher unions (70.8 and 81.8 percent, respectively), and length of time required for termination process (52.2 and 86.4 percent, respectively). Yet, the higher percentages for New York State principals indicates that they face the same impediments, but at a higher degree that their Finnish counterparts. This difference could explain the larger autonomy gap for New York State principals in terms of the responsibility they would ideally like to have in making personnel decisions involving the dismissal and transfer of poor performing teachers.
In order to better assess principals’ role in making autonomous decisions related to personnel management, the survey asked principals to respond to the following four questions:

1. As a principal, have you had the opportunity to influence any collective bargaining contracts that have been negotiated?
2. When you hire a teacher, can you count on getting the person you want or is it necessary to compromise?
3. How much freedom do you have in transferring or dismissing a poorly performing teacher?
4. Are you ever forced to accept a poorly performing teacher?

Principals’ responses to the questions above contrasted according to the organizational configuration in which they operate. Almost 46 percent of principals in New York State responded that they had no opportunity to influence any collective bargaining agreements, while only 21 percent of Finnish principals stated this was the case. In terms of hiring a teacher, almost seven percent of New York State principals indicated that they needed to compromise while none of the Finnish principals stated they had to compromise in hiring teachers. In terms of dismissing or transferring a poorly performing teacher, however, New York State principals indicated they had more freedom to do so (18.2 percent) than their Finnish counterparts (10.7 percent). This discrepancy can be explained by Finland’s teacher preparation system whereby graduate students must fulfill two to three years of a teaching practicum before they can be appointed to a classroom. Also, teachers in Finland are granted tenure immediately on their appointment to a school (Sahlberg, 2011a). Finally, New York State principals indicated that they were forced to accept a poorly performing teacher at a higher rate than Finnish principals (40.9 and 13.8 percent, respectively).
Differences in principals’ responses can be explained by the organizational configuration of the education system (delegated or devolved). In New York State, principals are not typically involved in the collective bargaining process. Most often, contracts are negotiated between teacher unions and the local school district, including the board of education. Thus, principals do not have a seat at the negotiating table even though they are more familiar with the work conditions that will benefit students. The diffuse nature of the devolved educational structure in New York State explains why principals need to compromise when making decisions related to hiring teachers. Often, a district office administrator also plays a role in hiring a teacher, which does generate a potential disconnect between the candidate of choice for the school principal and the district office administrator. In terms of transferring teachers, the school principal in New York State has little autonomy in blocking the decision since most contractual arrangements assign this responsibility to a district office. Finnish principals indicate that they have less freedom in transferring or dismissing a poorly performing teacher as compared to New York State principals. The educational system in Finland bestows tenure on teachers immediately after teachers complete all requirements of a teacher education program. Having immediate tenure presents Finnish principals with less options in dismissing a poorly performing teacher than New York State principals wherein principals have a three-year window (recently increased to four years) to recommend a teacher for tenure or discontinue him/her.
CHAPTER 5: Discussion

1. Overview

Although researchers and policymakers may debate how to measure principal effectiveness, both agree that the building principal has the most important indirect impact on a school and student achievement. The final chapter begins by highlighting the major findings of the three research questions that were the focus of this study. Based on these findings, I will discuss policies from other nations that I have visited (Finland, Germany, Japan, and China) that could be adopted to help bolster principal autonomy. The limitations of the present study while offering suggestions for further research will also be considered.

2. Major findings of this study

At the outset, I asked the following question: How do organizational configurations affect principal autonomy? As discussed in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), the principal has the most indirect impact on student achievement (Cotton, 2003; Leithwood & Levin, 2005; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Waters & Marzano, 2007). For this reason, it is paramount to ascertain under what conditions a principal’s autonomy is maximized. To do so, this study compared principals in New York State to principals in Finland since Finland’s success on the PISA has spurred politicians, researchers, and media to look towards this nation for answers to help improve student success in the U.S. The differing organizational configurations between Finnish and New York State schools were used as a variable to determine in what educational setting principals had more autonomy to operate. Since principals do make a
measurable difference in student outcomes, then the maximization of principal autonomy should be a goal of any educational policy.

To answer whether and how organizational configurations affect principal autonomy, the following questions were considered in this study:

1) To what extent do principals in devolved school systems (such as New York State) exercise autonomy when making decisions compared to principals in more centrally controlled educational systems (such as Finland)?

2) Is there a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of decentralization?

3) How does the type of decentralization affect a principal’s ability to act autonomously in making decisions?

A. **Principal autonomy: a comparison between New York and Finnish principals**

   Principals in New York State operate in a devolved educational setting in which the school district retains authority in providing funds for staffing and the delivery of instruction. In New York, the organizational configuration of schools is decentralized at both the policy and administrative levels. Additionally, there are more entities involved in decision-making, thus, diffusing a principal’s authority. Finnish principals, on the other hand, function in a delegated system where the central government still preserves official authority over public education, but authorizes municipalities and schools to organize education for students. In the Finnish configuration, education is centralized at the policy level, but decentralized at the administrative level. This allows the principal to be the one actor at the school level that has the statutory authority to make decisions.
In response to the first research question, my study shows that principals in a delegated system exercise greater autonomy than those that operate in a devolved system. Survey results show that Finnish principals exercise more autonomy than their counterparts in New York State do. In Finland, principals express that they have more autonomy in schools. While Finnish principals rank second on the autonomy scale in Finland, principals in New York State rank fifth on the same scale. The autonomy exercised by Finnish principals can be seen in both personnel and instructional matters.

Finnish principals are the main actors when making decisions related to personnel matters. Borrowing from the methodology used by Adamowski et al. in their study, *The Autonomy Gap* (2007), to identify and measure the degree of principal autonomy, it is observed that Finnish principals have a much lower autonomy gap than their New York State colleagues. The autonomy gap is defined as “the difference between the amount of authority that school district principals think they need in order to be effective leaders and the amount they actually have” (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 5). The smaller autonomy gap between ideal and actual functions of education indicates that Finnish principals have more autonomy in making decisions. These findings indicate that in Finnish schools there is a “unity of command” (Rodrigues, 2001) with the principal being the main actor who makes decisions. In sum, the buck starts and stops at the principal’s office.

On the other hand, the autonomy gap for New York State principals is much higher both in terms of personnel matters as well as the organization of instruction. For New York State principals, the average gap for personnel matters is 20.87 while the figure for Finnish principals is 3.7. The same pattern is demonstrated for functions that involve the organization of instruction. New York State principals indicate an autonomy
gap that is higher on the average (13.36) than Finnish principals (-2.84). Interestingly, for Finnish principals the autonomy gap is closer to zero indicating an appropriate balance between ideal and actual authority over educational functions.

Additionally, principals in Finland express that they have enough autonomy to perform the tasks and duties demanded of them. This is not the case in New York State where principals indicate that they would like to have more responsibility over both instructional and personnel matters. The correlation between autonomy and actual responsibility is consistently higher for Finnish principals. Whereas in New York State, the gap between actual and ideal responsibility is more pronounced; thus, indicating that New York State principals would like to ideally exercise more autonomy than they currently have in both instructional and personnel matters. Principals in New York State, for example, indicate they face more obstacles in dismissing poorly performing teachers as compared to their Finnish counterparts.

One reason for this higher autonomy gap in personnel matters found among New York principals, as compared to Finnish principals, may be explained by the quality of the teaching staff. In Finland, the teaching profession is highly regarded and is the most sought after profession in the nation (Sahlberg, 2015). Teaching is the number one rated profession in Finland ahead of others professions, such as engineer, physician, and architect (Rivera-Wilson, 2015). Since teaching is a highly desirable profession in Finland, entrance into teacher education programs is highly competitive. Sahlberg notes that in 2014 “[T]otal applications to primary school teacher education programs reached 8,400, with candidates competing for only 800 available positions in eight Finnish universities” (2015, p. 104). The acceptance rate for primary school applicants is less
than 10 percent. Additionally, only eight universities offer teacher education programs (Sahlberg, 2015), and the standards for becoming a teacher are centrally set by the Ministry of Education and the Finnish NBE (Sabel et al., 2010; Sahlberg, 2011a). Thus, the Finnish teaching workforce is able to attract the best among the best.

In this context, Finnish principals do not have much reason to deal with personnel matters, such as dismissing poor-performing teachers, since teachers in Finland already come to the classroom well-prepared and highly qualified as a result of the highly competitive nature of the applicant pool as well as the high quality and demanding teacher preparation programs (Sahlberg, 2007). The lower autonomy gap regarding personnel matters may be explained by an institutional setting in which principals do not have much reason to dismiss or discipline teachers since these teachers are already vetted by a competitive application process and spend approximately six years of training as educational researcher and practitioners before stepping into the classroom (Sahlberg, 2015). A Finnish principal does not need to observe, monitor, dismiss, and/or discipline a schoolteacher often since teachers are highly regarded and trained professionals.

This is not the case in the U.S. In the U.S., the teaching workforce is comprised of a variety of sources and teacher certification varies from state to state. There are more than 1,400 college and university teacher preparation programs in the U.S. (Rivera-Wilson, 2015). This number does not include alternative pathway programs, such as Teach for Tomorrow and Teach for America (Rivera-Wilson, 2015). As a result, the quality of the teaching workforce is inconsistent and variable since different institutions and states have dissimilar standards and requirements. Additionally, the average entrance requirements are not that competitive in the U.S. The typically required grade point
average for an undergraduate program is 2.5 and 3.0 for a master’s program (Rivera-Wilson, 2015). Thus, schools of education do not attract the best available candidates. Principals in New York have a pool of candidates that are not the best of the best graduating from college. Thus, dismissal of poor-performing teachers can be more of an issue for New York principals, which may explain the higher autonomy gap reported by these respondents.

However, the educational setting of the school as well as the organizational context in which teachers and principal operate must be considered when examining this large autonomy gap. The issue of teacher quality is compounded in poor urban centers. Less qualified teacher candidates seek positions in neighborhoods that are faced with child poverty, crime, and high rates of unemployment. Thus, there is even a deeper disparity in teacher quality between wealthy suburban and poor urban schools (Kozol, 1992). Principals in New York, then, do have more personnel issues since some of the teachers are ill-prepared to face difficult socio-economic issues of child poverty and crime. This school environment is part of the organizational configuration since educational governance in the U.S. allows for and even perpetuated socio-economic inequities to exist (Books, 2004; Kozol, 1992).

Additionally, the current configuration of schools has resulted in the proliferation of annual testing as a result of RTTT. Student performance on these exams is linked to the dismissal of teachers (Department, 2012). As a result of intentional policies, both teachers and principals experience stressful work environments that demand accountability and constant monitoring of performance. In a 2013 study conducted by MetLife, teacher satisfaction is at its lowest point in 25 years (Zahedi & Meyer, 2015).
Sahlberg believes that if Finnish teachers were transported to work in U.S. classrooms “…it is…probable that many…would already be doing something else other than teaching by the end of the 5th year—like their American counterparts” (2015, p. 137).

Principals in New York do not only have a weaker set of teaching candidates, they are also faced with a workforce that frequently leaves the profession because of difficult school environments or stressful mandates. A higher autonomy gap reported by New York principals may be explained in part by the institutional setting in which these principals operate. Observing, monitoring, and dismissing teachers consume more time and attention for principals in New York compared to their Finnish counterparts.

The higher autonomy gap for New York State school district principals that were surveyed in this study confirms the research findings of Adamowski et al. In particular, school district principals, even those that operate in decentralized settings, face barriers in the form of state policies and regulations, district procedures, and collective bargaining agreements (Adamowski et al., 2007). Gawlik reaches the same conclusion in her quantitative study, which examines data from the School and Staffing Survey (Gawlik, 2008). The educational environment in which New York principals operate does not allow for “unity of command” as in the Finnish configuration; instead, decision-making is more diffuse resulting in diminished autonomy for the school principal.

Given the new educational landscape in the U.S. with the advent of RTTT, which homogenizes standards and outcomes across states and within school types, it is even more important to examine educational configurations found in other nations. Thus, the organizational setting in which New York State and Finnish principals operate is an important one to consider and study since the organizational configuration of schooling
explains the differences between Finnish and New York State principals’ level of autonomy is the organizational structure within which these principals operate.

**B. Principal autonomy: devolved versus delegated structures**

The second research question asks whether there is a relationship between principal autonomy and the type of decentralization. The findings show that principals in delegated structures, e.g. the educational configuration in Finland, exercise more autonomy than those principals that operate in devolved structures, such as principals in New York State.

The results of my study show that Finnish principals exercise a higher degree of autonomy in decision-making authority for both personnel and instructional matters. The higher degree of autonomy as experienced by Finnish principals reflects what the literature claims about the Finnish educational system. That is, while the National Ministry and the National Board of Education set general standards, the schools themselves are free to pursue the practices for achieving these standards (Sabel et al., 2010). In collaboration with the school principal, teachers choose pedagogical practices that would best fulfill the national standards (Jahnukainen, 2011). The main function of a principal in Finland is to demonstrate pedagogical leadership. Thus, he/she must be allowed the necessary autonomy to lead his/her staff (Sahlberg, 2011a). The daily business of managing and operating schools belongs to the school principal. It is no surprise that on the autonomy scale the principal ranks second only behind the National Ministry of Education. The National Ministry and the National Board of Education function as steering units. They set the ultimate destination, but the principal and his/her
staff are free to choose the path and the means to reach the goal (Sabel et al., 2010; Sahlberg, 2011a; Sarjala, 2013).

The findings of my study also support what the research claims about the Finnish educational system. Principals in Finland have more autonomy when making decisions. As compared to their counterparts in New York State, Finnish principals indicate that they are allowed to make decisions without their supervisor. Additionally, the responses demonstrate that the vast majority of Finnish principals (almost 83 percent) state that they have considerable autonomy when making decisions.

The difference between Finnish in New York State principals in having the necessary autonomy to make decisions that are essential for the operation of the school can be explained by the different organizational configurations in which the two sets of principals operate. Since Finnish principals are statutorily delegated authority to make decisions by national authorities, it stands to reason that they actually do have more autonomy in practice. In a devolved system of education under which New York State principals operate, the statutory responsibility for education lies with the school board. Thus, literature examining principal autonomy in the U.S. is replete with references to bureaucratic constraints (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Farkas et al., 2001; Hess, 2009; Marsh et al., 2008; Weinles, 2001). Principals in New York State are described as handcuffed with procedures and regulations emanating from a variety of stakeholders (Chubb & Moe, 1990). Wright describes this reductionist role of the principal as “bastard leadership” (N. Wright, 2003).

The findings of my study justify the competing descriptions of the role of the principal. In Finland, a principal is seen as a pedagogical leader, collaborating with
his/her staff in utilizing instructional techniques and materials (Sahlberg, 2007), while in New York State, the principal is viewed as a middle manager that responds to dictates over which he/she has no control (Glanz, Shulman, & Sullivan, 2007; Papa & Baxter, 2008). If the role of the principal is paramount in effectuating school success, then the organizational configuration within which he/she operates generates the difference in terms of autonomously making decisions and requires further examination.

C. Principal autonomy: type of decentralization affecting principal autonomy

When examining both the results of the survey as well as the literature on principal autonomy, it is too simple to conclude that the differences between Finnish and New York State principals can be explained by individual traits. In each setting, principals are highly trained and highly educated individuals as well as successful at what they do. In visiting Finland, I observed that the business of being a principal is no different from New York State. The operations of a school are the same no matter the location of the school. There are teachers to manage and lead, parents to meet and respond, supplies to order, buildings and grounds to tend, students to address, and many other functions. The difference lies, not in the individuals, but in the organizational configuration in which a principal operates.

Findings of my study indicate that principals in New York State have less autonomy than their Finnish colleagues. An examination of the two varying organizational configurations can explain these differences. In New York State, the educational system is localized. That is, school boards still retain the ultimate responsibility for providing an education until a certain mandated minimum age. Education is a local enterprise. Referring back to Mintzberg’s analysis of the
composition of an organization (1979), principals in New York State are purposely situated at the middle of an organizational structure. Principals face pressures from the top (apex), bottom (the operating core), and sides (techno-structure and support staff).

The very organizational structure of the school system’s configuration relegates the principal to the role of middle manager. He/she cannot be and should not be expected to possess a high degree of autonomy within an structure organized this way.

The findings do bear out the role of the principal as a middle manager in a devolved organizational setting. The groups with the greatest amount of autonomy within the educational setting in New York State are: superintendent, state, board of education, federal government, principal, teachers, and parents. As Mintzberg’s analysis shows, the principal is situated right in the middle. The organizational configuration in New York State is top heavy with bureaucratic entities that are far removed from the operating core where reaching and learning take place. Additionally, principals in New York State operate in a structure by which they must share power with other stakeholders (Commissioner’s Regulation 100.11). Each public school must have a site-based management team, which must include participation by a variety of stakeholders (parents, teachers, students, support staff, and others). There is no specific direction in the regulation what issues these shared decision-making teams should or should not consider or whether these teams’ recommendations should simply be advisory or binding. In such a system of shared authority, the principal’s role is obfuscated, and his/her autonomy in making decisions is mitigated by the mere presence of competing interest groups. In his analysis on local control and school based management, Meyer states that: “[D]ecentralization is a concept that assumes a perplexing kaleidoscope of meanings
unless its multidimensional contingencies are understood and specified” (H.-D. Meyer, 2009, p. 459).

The findings of my study demonstrate that New York State principals have a higher tendency to share responsibilities with other educational bureaucracies. For both matters involving personnel and instruction, data show that principals in New York State operate in an educational environment where authority is dispersed among a wide scope of stakeholders. As such, principals in this type of devolved setting must deal with and negotiate with others before a decision can be reached. This type of shared authority dilutes the depth of the autonomy principals require to make decisions. On paper, principals in New York State are the undisputed leaders of the school building. However, in practice this authority is mitigated by the very place the principal occupies in the organizational structure as middle manager and by the very existence of shared governance teams.

In contradistinction, principals in Finland enjoy more autonomy. Operating under a delegated system of educational governance where the central government retains control over education through the National Ministry and allows municipalities to deliver education on a local level, principals work in an environment where shared authority is not legislated and within a system that contains less bureaucratic entities. In Finland, those with the greatest amount of autonomy are closest to the operating core (principal and teachers rate second and third, respectively). Finnish principals are undoubtedly the main actors when making decisions in schools. There is no question as to who leads the school in Finland. The organizational structure of the Finnish educational system explains why the principal possesses more autonomy in Finland. There is a clear
demarcation as to which entity is responsible for what function. The National Ministry and National Board of Education, for example, set national standards. However, instructional methodology, time, and materials all fall under the auspices of those closest to the operating core: the principal and teachers. Influence from other bureaucratic sectors (national, state, local, and district) is absent. There are no national mandates, such as Race to the Top. There are no national or municipal APPR guidelines. There are no school boards of education approving teachers, instructional materials, and school budgets. There is no such role as a school district superintendent. A director of schools does exist, but his/her relation with principals is much different than typical working relationships between principal and superintendent in New York State. During my visit to Finland in 2011, I asked principals how often their supervisor visits them or communicates with them. In general, the principals stated that they hardly see their supervisor, the director of schools. When they do see him/her it is because a team of educators form abroad is visiting their school. This is an example of non-interference, which allows principals in Finland to operate with their autonomy in tact.

Finnish principals are trusted to make more decisions on their own as compared to principals working in New York State. Finnish principals are given the concomitant authority to make decisions without much interference from other stakeholders and bureaucratic entities. Principals in New York State, on the other hand, operate in a more diffuse setting where decision-making and, thus, their autonomy is shared.

From the findings of my study, the organizational configuration does have an impact on principal autonomy as evidenced by the different levels of autonomy between Finnish and New York State principals. The organizational structure in which principals
operate does have an effect on a principal’s ability to make autonomous decisions regarding personnel and instructional matters.

3. Implications for further research

A. Limitations of the study

1. Number of nations in the study

Implications for further research emanate from the limitations of this study. The first limitation is the scope of the study itself. Only two nations were considered in this study: the U.S. and Finland. As discussed earlier, the U.S. is an example of a devolved system of centralization while Finland is representative of a delegated system. Tocqueville further describes this devolved system of governance as radical decentralization whereby decentralization exists at both the policy and administrative levels. Finland, on the other hand, purposely decentralized the administrative level, but kept policy within the auspices of a distinct and recognizable centralized authority.

There are other examples of organizational configurations not considered in this study. For instance, another type of decentralized system identified by Paqueo and Lammert (2000) is a deconcentrated system where authority rests with a regional or a state entity. Germany’s educational system is an example of a deconcentrated system. Like the U.S. and Finnish examples, educational administration is decentralization among individual regions or schools. However, Germany differs in terms of decentralized policy making. Germany is not as devolved as the U.S., but not as centralized in Finland. Educational policymaking in Germany rests with each individual state (Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007). Then, there are other educational settings where the central government fully controls and directs curriculum, such as Japan and China’s educational system. Bothe
these educational systems include a high level of centralization at both the policy and administrative levels. These organizational configurations represent the opposite of the devolved model found in the U.S. Including more organizational configurations in the study would result in more variances in principals’ responses about autonomy. These varying responses would better allow researchers to consider under which system a principal exercises the most autonomy. In terms of recent discussion regarding school reform on a global perspective, the role of the principal in exercising his/her autonomy in a school is a paramount feature to take into account. A more expansive study that would incorporate more varying organizational configurations would allow researchers to better identify under which system a principal exercises most autonomy.

2. The role of institutional factors

According to institutionalist researchers in education (H.-D. Meyer & Rowan, 2006; J. W. Meyer & Rowan, 1977) organizations operate in institutional contexts that can affect their processes and outcomes. In interpreting the findings presented in this study, it is useful to reflect on some institutional factors that may contribute to the higher degrees of autonomy of Finnish principals. I will focus on three factors: a) expanded social service mission of American schools, b) heterogeneous student body, and c) education as a "laboratory for democracy."

The social service mission of schools stems from an American ideology that has its basis in republicanism. At the inception of the American republic, it was believed as Thomas Jefferson stated in the Declaration of Independence “all men are created.” However, this does not mean equal outcomes. Instead, it means that the polity is given an equal chance to pursue wealth, a profession, or a social class. The real inequities of
Adam Smith’s Invisible Hand Theory could be seen in the inequity of wealth between classes in the Colonial as well as post-Revolutionary War eras. James Madison in Federalist Paper #10 warned of the dangers of the lower class, which he called the mob. His advocacy for the Constitution along with an electoral college system to elect the President would be the countervailing force against mob rule (Zinn, 1990). Similarly, in order maintain the new American republic and to prevent it from factionalism, Horace Mann believed that universal education is the essential institution to function as a “great-balance wheel” of society: “Education, then, beyond all other devices of human origin, is the great equalizer of the conditions of men…if this education should be universal and complete, it would do more than all things else to obliterate factitious distinctions in society” (Mann, 1848).

Schools in the U.S. are more than just institutions where the business of teaching and learning takes place. In the U.S., schools are seen as the way towards upward social mobility. Within this institutional context, schools are more than learning centers. They are the ticket out of poverty. Thus, when schools fail in this mission to deliver equal opportunities and instruction, schools are deemed failures. Jonathan Kozol highlights the plight of poor schools in his book *Savage Inequalities* (1992). Sue Books (2004) posits that poverty is an educational issue because it affects children’s emotional and cognitive development.

Schools in the U.S. have an expanded role besides learning the three R’s. Schools are also places where students can have free meals if they cannot afford them at home, seek help of a mental health expert if they have problems at home, get assistance from a social worker, and participate in after-school programs since their parent(s) may still be
working. Expanding the role of schools to include social, physical, and emotional needs may also explain the differences seen in this exploratory study between New York and Finnish principals. Principals in New York have more non-educational responsibilities than their Finnish colleagues. Principals in New York also deal with social welfare agencies as well as student support structure within the school. This expanded role of the school’s mission to serve students’ social and emotional needs may account for the diffuse governance of the American school. Decision-making may be diffuse because the school principal deals with a scattered set of issues that go beyond the realm of his/her expertise as an educator.

By comparison, in Finland, the school’s student support structure is much smaller. Since Finland is a socialist democracy, other institutions besides the school meet students’ emotional and social needs. The school as an institution in Finland does not function as a distinct, isolated sphere. Instead, it is tightly-coupled with other institutions: health, law, environment, technology, and business (Sahlberg, 2011b). A nationalized healthcare system provides for students psychological needs. Additionally, there is early intervention for students with learning difficulties. Health professionals diagnose students’ learning difficulties before they enter school (Saarivirta, 2009). Additionally, the level of child poverty is virtually non-existent in Finland as compared to the U.S., 3.4 and 21.7 percent respectively (Sahlberg, 2011b, p. 69). In Finland, the school is one among many institutions that comprise the social welfare state in order to deliver services to students. Sahlberg states that the Finnish education system has to be considered “in the context of other systems in society…[and as] part of a well-functioning democratic welfare state” (2011b, p. 115). As a result of other supportive
institutions, principals in Finland are allowed more time to devote to the practice of teaching and learning. With less non-educational concerns, Finnish principals are then able to exercise more autonomy within their schools.

A second factor New York principals must contend with is the diverse nature of the student body. In New York State, there are almost 200,000 English language learners, which represent 7.5 percent of the entire student population of New York State (Education, 2014). Most students in New York State are non-white (U. S. D. o. Education, 2015): American Indian (0.6 percent), Asian (9 percent), Black (18 percent), Hispanic (24.5 percent), multi-racial (1.5 percent), and White (46.4 percent). The New York City Department of Education translates its documents in Spanish, French, Urdu, Arabic, Russian, Chinese, Bengali, Haitian Creole, and Korean (N. Y. C. D. o. Education, 2015). The diverse nature of New York State’s public schools brings a network of regulations and policies that principals are required to meet. These mandates are both defined at the state and federal level, and even the city level in the case of New York City.

Teaching a racially, ethnically, and culturally diverse student body brings a set of challenges with which Finnish principals are unfamiliar. Finnish principals work in an environment that is relatively homogenous. The total foreign population in Finland is two percent of its student body (Gautschi, 2005). The most commonly spoken language other than Finnish is Swedish. Additionally, principals in Finland need not worry about translating documents in a variety of languages as defined by policies and regulations in New York. Given the lack of a heterogeneous student population in Finland, Finnish
principals are more able to focus on their profession as educators, which in turn, allow them to exercise more autonomy as school leaders.

Finally, another factor that must be considered in explaining the lower autonomy identified by New York principals is the democratic nature of the American public school system. Public schools in the U.S. were laboratories of democracy from the outset even during colonial times. The local school board was a manifestation of this democratic approach (Wong & Langevin, 2005). Education was a local enterprise and community control over education best describes the nature of educational authority in the U.S. Members of local school boards are directly held accountable by voters: “Voters have relatively easy access to information about the school board’s policies and how the schools are run on the basis of those policies” (Gutmann, 1999, p. 73). In essence, schools function as a microcosm of the larger representative system of government, which is based on a system of checks and balances. A superintendent checks the authority of the principal. A superintendent of schools is held in check by the local board of education, which is, ultimately, held in check by the voters themselves. The school board makes policies and passes budgets, and the superintendent is the one expected to implement and execute these policies.

As a result of the existence of local school districts, which are administered by local school boards, mass localism of schooling is expected. Voters have direct control over the budgets of two institutions: school districts and libraries. Voters are also often allowed to speak at local school board meetings that by law must be open to the public. State laws govern the way school boards conduct meetings as well as mandating that boards are transparent in their functions and decision-making. In New York, school
board meetings must now be captured and available by video. School board meetings are one place where voters can have a direct say and open access to those that represent them. As such, school boards meetings may be contentious and sometimes messy. School boards must decide whether to close schools, reduce the number of teachers, pass bonds to improve facilities, and censure books (Gutmann, 1999). Although school board meetings appear chaotic at times, they function as a democratic town meeting where the voters have an outlet to voice their concerns.

Local control of schools is an expectation accepted by the American populace. When the federal government tries to increase its role in a place that is considered local, the imposition is often met with opposition. For example, the Obama administration’s RTTT initiative is met with disdain and seen as intrusive and even violating people’s civil liberties (Barnes, 2011; Zhao, 2012). Education at the most devolved setting, i.e. the local school district, is as American as apple pie. Centralizing education policy and standards is an anathema to local control of education.

The institutional setting in Finland is quite different where a centralizing authority is expected. Finland’s history of governance lends itself to the acceptance of a centralizing authority. Finland was part of the Swedish Empire in the 17th century and a Russian Grand Duchy in the 19th century. Later in the 20th century, Finland was able to gain independence, but was involved in a civil war between communist and non-communist nations. Given Finland’s history, it was the Finnish government itself that had to organize education for its students. Thus, a centralizing education authority was not only needed, but also accepted (Sahlberg, 2009; Simola et al., 2002).
The U.S. and Finland had vastly different experiences in terms of the development and organization of schools. Whereas the U.S. system was characterized by local control from the beginning, the Finnish educational system was developed by the central government many years later. The experiential differences do account for the way education is administered in each nation: the U.S. characterized by a devolved system and Finland characterized by a delegated system. In a radically decentralized system where local control of education is a long-held tradition and even “right,” a principal will undoubtedly experience less autonomy.

The role of institutional contexts may also explain the decreased level of autonomy identified by principals in New York. Schools in the U.S. have a distinct mission to provide for students social needs. Even more so, these students are racially and ethnically diverse and often speak a language other than English. Finally, the perspective that the public school is a local entity that should be administered at the local level presents a unique challenge for principals. Principals must, at times, succumb to the will of the people even though the people’s representative body (i.e. the school board) may not make the most educationally sound decisions. This messiness is an accepted part of local school governance in the U.S.

3. The role of culture

Another limitation of this study is the examination of how culture influences, creates, and perpetuates organizational configurations. Schools, like religious institutions, are a product of a specific culture (Brint, 2006). As institutions, schools reflect the values and traditions of a nation or a dominant majority. This study does not explore how schools as institutions materialized within the context of a specific culture. In the U.S.,
for example, schools were organized to reflect modes of production prominent at the turn of the 20th century. Efficiency and accountability models adopted by U.S. manufacturing at the time also disseminated to the organizational structure of the school. Desks bolted down and organized into rows, the reliance on multiple-choice exams, and the appearance of school accountability systems for teachers and students are just some examples of how the concept of Taylorism affected public education in the U.S. (H.-D. Meyer, 2009). The ethos of rugged individualism and Horatio Alger’s rags to riches myth were all incorporated into the school system. Thus, the existence of social ills, such as poverty, unemployment, underemployment, and crime are all considered failing byproducts of the public school system (Spring, 2010).

On the other hand, in Finland, schools reflect the group ethos called *sisu*. When visiting Finland, one of the research members on our team Eija Rougle, a professor at SUNY Albany, told us that the concept of *sisu* has no equivalent meaning in English. In general, Dr. Rougle described this concept as determination, resilience, and perseverance. This communal ethos of *sisu* is more important than competition, winning, and individualism. Instead of efficiency coupled with measurable results, the Finnish educational system is focused on the process of education. Collaboration, instead of individualism, is the modus operandi of the principals, teachers, and students. Open-ended exams with multiple ways to answer questions are preferred over one-dimensional, single response multiple-choice questions.

The differences in the organizational configurations of the school system are not an intentional act of one person or a group of people. Instead, schools, as structures of education, have institutionalized the culture and zeitgeist of a particular nation, people, or
community (Siegrist, 2006). Any further research into how organizational configurations affect principal autonomy must: 1) take into account an exploration of how schools are shaped by the society in which they exist and 2) include an examination of more varying organizational configurations to consider which educational setting allows a principal the most autonomy.

B. Centralization and bureaucracy

Within the existing exploratory study, one issue that requires further analysis is the distinction between centralization and bureaucracy. The U.S. educational system is a paradox. While being highly decentralized and devolved, it contains a plethora of bureaucratic entities (H.-D. Meyer, 2009, 2010). Although there is no recognizable center, multiple bureaucracies exist on a variety of levels (W. R. Scott et al., 1994). Taking into consideration Mintzberg’s five basic elements of an organization (Mintzberg, 1979), school districts are littered with a variety of bureaucratic entities, each staking some claim in the educational process. A highly decentralized and devolved educational configuration does not necessarily result in less bureaucracy. Instead, in the case of the U.S., a devolved system is not also accompanied by many educational bureaucracies, but it also reduces the amount of autonomy principals possess. Under this devolved configuration, the whole is not larger than the sum of its parts. The absence of a center obfuscates who is in charge and who ultimately makes decisions. Is the superintendent or principal in charge? Is the school board in control? Is the teachers’ union exerting too much influence? Are the parents too vocal? When the responses to these questions are yes, no, and/or maybe, then there is a void in terms of leadership and authority. Without the necessary authority, a principal cannot function autonomously. Both at the policy and
administrative levels, educational governance is so diffuse (Weiss, 1982) that the principal is at most a middle manager instead of a true organizational leader.

In Finland, there is a recognizable center, i.e. the National Ministry and the National Board of Education, that delegates authority to schools. With the existence of a centralized authority that entrusts the principal to act autonomously, there is a “unity of command” (Rodrigues, 2001) that allows for succinct decision-making. Additionally, the amount of bureaucratic entities found in a school system is much less. The existence or absence of bureaucracies within an educational setting is also worth examining when considering principal autonomy.

The type of centralization or decentralization does not necessarily dictate the level of bureaucratic control. For example, in other cases with a recognizable educational center, such as China and Japan, high amounts and varying types of bureaucratic entities exist. For instance, during my visit to China (Hebei Province) in 2013, the principal’s office was situated next to the office of an appointed member from the Communist Party. The principal was more of a political figurehead than an instructional leader. The principal led the school in consultation with the representative of the Communist Party. The national government plays more of a direct role in China: all curricula materials are approved by the national government, a national high school exam (i.e. the gao kao) is taken by all students that wish to gain entry to post secondary education, teacher certification requirements are set by the national government, learning standards are imparted by the national government, and the school calendar is defined at the national level. Along with this highly centralized organizational structure, a bureaucratic apparatus set in place by the Communist Party affects the way schools are organized and
run. Under this system of educational governance, a principal is tethered to the Communist Party representative assigned to him/her. It would be interesting to study how autonomous a principal is under this highly centralized and bureaucratized educational setting.

Somewhere in the middle are deconcentrated educational systems, such as Germany (Paqueo & Lammert, 2000). This organizational configuration does have an identifiable center. In Germany, each of the 16 states (landers) has a ministry of education, the Bundeslander (Pietsch & Stubbe, 2007). Larger states are divided into regions, each with its own administrative bureaucracy led by a local ministerial deputy. There are administrators responsible for curriculum and instruction at the state level, but the number of these assistant deputies and the size of the bureaucracy are much less than can be found in the 14,000 school districts in the U.S. Although decentralized, the German system does possess a national educational organization (the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education and Cultural Affairs) wherein each of the ministers education from the 16 states do meet to discuss national standards and coordinate educational policies (Hausman & Boyd, 1998; Lykins Chad & Heyneman, 2008). Though not entirely devolved like the U.S. and without a recognizable center, such as Finland, Japan, and China, the German educational system lies somewhere in the middle. During my visit to Germany in June 2011, I asked one high school principal how often he sees his supervisor. The principal responded that it had been two years since he last saw the assistant deputy. Considering that Germany is not as devolved as the U.S. and not as nearly characterized by a large amount of bureaucratic entities, it would be interesting to examine the level of principal autonomy in a deconcentrated system of governance.
It is noticeable that if an organizational configuration leans to a certain extreme, the level of principal autonomy is reduced. For example, in a devolved system that is characterized by local control with high levels of bureaucracy, such as the U.S., principals express lower levels of autonomy. Similarly, in a highly centralized system that contains many bureaucratic structures, such as China and Japan, the level of principal autonomy is also expected to be low. Using Tocqueville’s terminology, the U.S. represents a system of radical decentralization, whereas Japan and China are examples of extreme centralization. Principals that work within organizational configurations that fall in the middle of the (de)centralization spectrum indicate they have a higher degree of autonomy. For this reason, studying the interplay between centralization and bureaucratization is important in understanding how an organization’s structure affects principal autonomy.

C. Policy implications

A highly devolved system of governance characterized by local control over education leads to a confusing situation as to what bureaucratic entity is responsible for a particular function. Considering that each school district also comes with its own bureaucratic apparatus, the educational landscape in U.S. contains many bureaucratic bodies at each local level (H.-D. Meyer, 2010). Within such a system, making decisions become slow and tedious as multiple groups with sometimes divergent goals attempt to influence this process (H.-D. Meyer, 2009).

In such a system, a school principal exercises minimal leverage over staffing, instruction, and finances. A principal is expected to follow regulations, statutes, policies, and procedures emanation from three different levels of government, none of which
coordinate with each other. Chester Finn, Jr. writes in an article for The Atlantic that public education is characterized by “a dysfunctional and archaic governance structure…that pays homage to ‘local control’ yet turns into bureaucratic management…of schools from burgeoning central offices” (2012). Finn concludes, “We give our school [principals] the responsibility of CEO’s but the authority of middle-level bureaucrats” (2012).

Critics of the educational status quo blame principals themselves for the situation in which they operate. Frederick Hess, for example, claims that principals operate from a “defensive mind-set” and follow established procedures. Moreover, Hess claims that principals are socialized into avoiding conflict and establishing consensus (Hess, 2009). The study, The Autonomy Gap (Adamowski et al., 2007), commissioned by school reform groups (American Institutes for Research and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute) also argues along the same lines as Hess. The authors of the study claim that since principals have risen from the ranks, educational leaders cannot imagine a different type of system. Like Finn, Jr., Adamowski et al. and Hess describe principals as middle managers, trying to do their best to survive within the organizational structure. These authors lament the fact that principals are “functionaries” and not “revolutionaries” or “mavericks” (Adamowski et al., 2007, pp. 32, 33).

According to certain reformers, advancing principal autonomy within the existing educational bureaucracy lies with the individual according to certain reformers. Hess proposes that principals should advocate second-order change by fighting teacher unions and misguided policies (Hess, 2009). The authors of The Autonomy Gap offer the idea that principals need to be “expert middle managers…[t]his means helping new leaders
build informal networks and relationships that are so critical” (Adamowski et al., 2007, p. 36). Instead of vague claims about improving principal autonomy, any policy suggestion should take into account the organizational context in which principals operate.

Organizational structures have defined bureaucracies. The nature of the bureaucracy may vary, but rules and regulations, nevertheless, exist. Bureaucracies exist, in theory and in practice, to make the organization more efficient and productive (Weber, 1947). Principals are functionaries within an organizational structure. Without a structure, the concept of providing education for the public cannot be actualized. The romantic notion of creating principals in the mold of “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington” is naïve and impractical. It is true that not all principals are great leaders, but at the same time, it is not the case that all principals need to be mavericks or those that buck the system. The U.S. system values a bounded system of autonomy with checks and balances. Public education has no room for the types of renegades, such as Bernie Madoff and Jamie Dimon, found in the business world. Principals are expected to and do operate within a bureaucracy with defined autonomy. Eck and Goodwin describe principal autonomy as a “balancing act” (Eck & Goodwin, 2010). That is, districts direct principals in certain general areas, such as expectations, while allowing the principal autonomy to find specific ways to actualize these goals.

The central concern to consider is what type of organizational configuration provides for the appropriate balance between setting goals and principal autonomy. There is no educational system that allows a principal full autonomy. Every organizational configuration has certain common aspects as Mintzberg (1979) indicates: a supervisor at the top (the apex), staff to manage (the operating core), experts and
specialists (the techno-structure), and non-instructional staff that helps the educational process (support staff). However, the types of bureaucratic structures existing within each part of the organization’s configuration vary. It is these variances that may provide some policy solutions to allowing a principal more autonomy within the boundaries of the organization.

My study shows that principals in Finland enjoy more autonomy than their counterparts in New York State. As such, these findings indicate certain policy implications to advance the notion of increased principal autonomy. A devolved and localized system of education, such as the one employed in the U.S., decreases a principal’s ability to make decisions. The most autonomy can be found when an organization configuration has an appropriate balance between centralization and bureaucracy. There are organizational configurations in the middle that are characterized by some centralization best described as delegated and deconcentrated systems (Finland and Germany, respectively). These two systems are distinguished by less bureaucratic entities within the organizational structure.

When discussing school performance and the positive and influential role of the school principal in student achievement, educational policy in the U.S. should consider the following:

_a. The role of the superintendent_

Principals operating in organizational settings that are not localized and devolved have more autonomy. Both Finnish and German principals indicate that those in the apex do not have daily, weekly, monthly, or even yearly direct contact with them. The principal is allowed to operate within the context set forth by those above in the apex. By
comparison, principals in New York State indicate that their supervisor has more autonomy in the school setting than they do. The direct role the supervisor plays in the U.S. educational system is absent from other nations with a more balanced approach. Thus, the concept of a district superintendent and the role he/she plays in the school setting requires further examination. How much influence and control should a superintendent exercise? How does a superintendent determine the appropriate amount of bounded autonomy, allowing the principal an appropriate balance in decision-making to run his/her school? Should performance goals and accountability standards based on student outcomes also apply to the superintendent? If so, what should the interplay between principal and superintendent be when determining the balance between accountability and autonomy? In general, the function and role of the superintendent during this era of accountability needs to be reevaluated. As Eck and Goodwin (2010) state, there must be a balance between defining a principal’s autonomy and allowing him/her to freely operate.

b. Abolishing local boards of education

Missing from the apex in both Finland, Germany, and every other nation is a particular bureaucratic entity that can only be found in the U.S., i.e. the local board of education. As Meyer points out, “Contemporary school boards are better known for being embroiled in debates over evolution versus creationism…than for curricular or administrative innovation” (2010, p. 832). This type of localism simply adds one more layer to the existing bureaucracy, for depending on how involved a school board member can be, the principal now has another person(s) at the apex to consider. It is no surprise that principals in New York State indicated that a school board has more autonomy in the
school setting than they do. Abolishing local boards of education should be considered in moving towards the direction of allowing principals more autonomy. Boards of education add one more layer to the already existing multiple layers of educational bureaucracy. This plethora of bureaucratic layers and entities reduce efficiency and further remove principals from the decision-making process for which they are purportedly responsible (Chubb & Moe, 1990).

c. Coordination between levels of government

The last decade has been characterized by increased federal involvement in local education (Meyers, 2012). Legislation, such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, has allowed the federal government to steer education in a certain direction (DeBoer, 2012; Groen, 2012). Even though the federal government lacks the statutory authority to do so, tying funding to the adoption of these educational goals has forced states and local school districts to implement changes suggested by the federal government. Local and state funding for education has been supplemented with federal funds (Haubenreich, 2012). The net effect is that these needed federal funds are allowed to supplant educational policy at the state and local level. The federal government has increasingly been influencing educational policy without the authority to do so. This type of “fragmented centralization” adds to existing bureaucracy with the net effect of having more, not less bureaucracy (H.-D. Meyer, 2010, p. 842).

The question of which governmental entity and at which level is educational policy produced can only be vaguely answered under the current organizational context. The federal government has been steering educational policy (represented by increased testing and measuring teacher performance) by giving states the option of adopting Race
to the Top education while at the same time states have been trying to redefine their own standards and curricula expectations. This lack of coordination and confusion among policymakers has led to the emergence of more bureaucratic entities while subtracting autonomy from the schools, and those responsible for them, i.e. the principal.

While other nations, such as Finland, have moved towards decentralization, the U.S. is moving towards the other end of the spectrum. This process of increased federal involvement in education is taking place while the bureaucratic entities, suitable for local governance, remain in effect. This top-down approach to enact educational initiatives runs counter to the educational systems of other nations that are placing the responsibility of educational reform in the hands of those who know pedagogy the best, teachers and administrators (Sahlberg, 2011b; Zhao, 2009). Federal policies, such as NCLB and RTTT, have produced a “fundamental realignment of power and authority within the educational system in the United States” (Fusarelli, 2005, p. 132). Federal intervention into a policy space that has traditionally been reserved to the states and administered by local school districts has led to a chaotic situation wherein the federal government gives money to the states, but the states lack the necessary legal and bureaucratic apparatus to enforce these policies. School district entities may not fully implement or, in some cases, defy federal mandates, thus, leaving state and federal authorities in a bind as to what sanctions should be taken against these school districts ("Causes, potential consequences of testing opt-out movement," 2015) This conflict between centralization and maintaining local control leads to chaos, confusion, and dissidence (DeBoer, 2012). When this happens, policies are doomed to fail from the start, possibly explaining the reason why almost no federal educational reform measure has been successful.
In other nations, there is no doubt which bureaucratic entity is responsible for creating and coordinating educational policy. In Finland, the National Ministry along with the National Board of Education creates or revises educational policy. In Germany, the State Ministry of Education is responsible for this function.

An organizational configuration that lacks coordination regarding the authority and direction of educational policy leads to confusion within the schools and the principals that are expected to execute these policies. Thus, the federal government must either assume more actual authority over the educational process (moving away from a devolved system) or must allow authority to be kept at the local level without placing many regulations when providing federal funds to schools. Applying the concept of federal bloc grants to states in return for policy compliance has not worked as well with education. Instead, this approach has balkanized the U.S. educational system even further, creating more bureaucracy and reducing autonomy at the operating core where it is needed the most. In both Finland and Germany, teachers and principals played a real and direct influence on the formation of educational policy. For example, in Finland administrators on the OAJ, Finland’s union that represents K-12 teachers, administrators, and professors, frequently meet with the Parliament member who heads the Education Committee. Together, educators and politicians discuss pertinent educational issues, possible reforms, and write policy to meet the defined and agreed upon goals. This type of collaboration and consensus-building removes the “top-down” orders from above concept that is currently perceived to be the modus operandi of reform legislation in the U.S. It does make sense that policymakers and those closest to the classroom collaborated to design educational policy. Perhaps, such a collaborative approach
between educators and policymakers would not only account for a clearer and more defined educational policy, but also provide educational leaders with autonomy over decisions for which they would be accountable.

d. Minimal rules

The lack of coordination between the different levels of government (local, state, and federal) has led to a plethora of rules and dictates, which confuses even the most attentive administrator. As New York State tries to implement the requirements of RTTT, rules and regulations quickly reach the offices of principals all over the state. Time is diverted from the learning process to the bureaucratic aspect of interpreting new directives and figuring out how to meet Annual Yearly Progress as measured by student performance on standardized tests. The conflagration of rules and directives from all levels of government chips away at a principal’s autonomy and creates a heteronomous structure wherein a principal is much less of an instructional leader and more of a compliance manager.

By contrast, better performing nations, such as Finland and Germany, have rules, but they are clearly defined and minimal. Rules are disseminated from a centralized structure, such as the National Ministry in Finland and the State Ministry in Germany, but decentralized in their application. The local school is allowed to decide how to implement and effectuate these rules. These types of organizations are simultaneously centralized and decentralized at the same time. Rules are general in nature and specifically implemented at the local level. For instance, principals in Finland collaborate on developing educational goals and, then, disseminate this information through a professional network, the OAJ. This symbiotic relationship between
policymakers and administrators allow both parties to accept and participate in a unified educational network containing various parts that all work towards the same goals.

A lesson can be learned from Finland here in the U.S. when developing educational goals. The National Board in Finland sets general standards, but the delivery of education through pedagogy and how these standards will be met are left to each local school agency (Eurydice, 2009/2010; Sarjala, 2013; Simola, 2008). Unlike Finland, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), adopted by 43 states, were developed by philanthropists and self-proclaimed educational reformers without any expertise in the field of education (Hodge & Benko, 2014; Tienken, 2011). Field studies indicate that instead of using their own expertise and knowledge, teachers are becoming dependent on curriculum materials developed by outside agencies, thus, in the process losing their professional autonomy (Ohler, 2013; Papola-Ellis, 2014). Other researchers report about the loss of student voice in the classroom as a result of a highly structured curriculum (Thomas, 2014). A common theme in all the critiques of the CCSS is the loss of educators’ professionalism and the standardization of curriculum developed by outside agencies (Tienken & Orlich, 2013).

The tension between external agencies and the operating core is another manifestation of the conflict between federal and local control of schools. The top-down approach to school reform results in an amalgam of rules, procedures, and initiatives that throw classroom instruction in disarray. It is no wonder that principals in New York State claim they would prefer to have more autonomy since the organizational configuration is so fragmented. The U.S., historically one of the most decentralized school systems, finds itself moving to the other end of the spectrum. In doing so, the U.S.
is going counter to what other nations find to be successful, i.e. allowing decisions about pedagogy and curriculum to be made at the school and classroom level (Sahlberg, 2011b). My research shows that the type of organizational configuration does influence principal autonomy. Why in New York State do principals report they have less autonomy when compared to their Finnish counterparts? One reason lies in the organizational structure of schooling. Finland’s structure delegates responsibility to the operating core. In no two schools are the curriculum, assessments, and pedagogy the same. Teachers and principals are allowed the flexibility to revise the curriculum as needed to meet their students’ skills and learning levels. In other words, the organizational structure in Finland entrusts decisions to be made at the operating core.

The U.S. can learn from this type of decentralization in Finland where rules are minimal. Perhaps, the U.S. system of educational governance needs to reclaim its original path of decentralization and devolve even further. Zhao describes this process as “mass localism.” Zhao argues, “[A] decentralized system with strong local control and professional autonomy is an effective way to cultivate the diversity of talents that will help keep a nation, a community, and an individual competitive” (2012, p. 20). A central authority does not prescribe the best solutions. Instead, as Bunt and Harris report, “[P]olicymakers should create more opportunities for communities to develop and deliver their own solutions and to learn from each other” (quoted in Zhao, 2012, p. 21). This ground-up approach goes against current educational policy reform that is delivered from the top-down. Yet, what we can learn from successful educational systems, such as Finland’s, and flourishing organizations, such as Skype and Wikipedia, show is that open systems tend to be more successful than coercive systems. In their book The Starfish and
the Spider: The Unstoppable Power of Leaderless Organizations, Brafman and Beckstrom (2008) posit that decentralized organizations give flexibility and power. Instead of knowledge being centered at the top, it is spread throughout the organization. The best hope for a centralized organization to succeed is to decentralize itself (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2008).

One lesson learned from Finnish principals is that the central authority and their direct supervisor, leaves them alone to do his/her job. Though curricula do exist and general standards are set, principals cooperate with teachers to discuss what pedagogy is best for their students. Principals and teachers assess the effectiveness of instruction, and revisions are constantly made to improve instruction. The teaching and learning process is fluid, dynamic, and flexible. This type of decentralized structure best describes a “starfish,” i.e. an organization that relies on peer relationships (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2008). It is no surprise that Finland is changing its high school curriculum again. Instead of the common method of teaching by subject, Finland’s teachers will be teaching by topic, taking a multi-disciplinary approach in meeting local and global challenges (Gardner, 2015). Because they are not structured and hierarchical, starfish organizations, such as the Finnish school system, are incubators for creative and innovative ideas.

Schools in the U.S. can also function as laboratories to try out and develop new ideas. The U.S. has a political tradition of trying innovations at the local and state level first. The social security program was one such innovation that was implemented at the state level first before becoming a federal program. By adopting “mass localism” schools can also function as laboratories of educational innovations. It is ironic that research-based educational pedagogy is driving reforms elsewhere (such as Finland and China),
but not in the place from where it originated, the U.S. When I visited the Department of Education in the Hebei Province in China, the director stated to a room full of educators and teachers that they were implementing methods suggested by U.S. researchers.

Ultimately, even in a “starfish” organization, someone or some group must make a decision. Even in these “leaderless” organizations, a balance must be found to find the “sweet spot,” i.e. the point along the centralized-decentralized continuum that yields the best results (Brafman & Beckstrom, 2008). Perhaps, the “sweet spot” can be found through a simultaneous existence of a centralized/tight organizational configuration with a decentralized/loose structure at the local level that allows the necessary flexibility and autonomy to implement general rules while trying new ideas. In this manner, the organization functions as a unified whole, while the individual parts of the organization work together to meet general goals. Referring to Mintzberg’s conception of the five basic parts of an organization, all parts must work together to accomplish unified goals.

It is no wonder that principals in New York State claim they would prefer to have more autonomy since the organizational configuration is so fragmented among three levels of government. An organizational setting, similar to Finland’s, with a structure that communicates clear goals and allows principals to operate in an environment that facilitates best teaching and learning practices along with the flexibility to make revisions will allow schools to be the incubators of innovative ideas. This allows principals to be aligned with the direction of the entire organization and have the necessary autonomy to meet developed goals. Only when school principals can lead by providing their staff with the opportunity to practice their professional judgment, unhindered by an assortment of sometimes contradicting policies from varying governmental levels, can principals in
New York State begin to capture some of what Finnish principals possess—principal autonomy.
CHAPTER 6: Conclusion

In the current discourse of school accountability, it is the principal who is considered responsible for the successes or failures of a school. In reality, the principal does not operate in an isolated environment. Education takes place within an organizational structure containing different parts and networks. When studying the concept of autonomy, then, principal autonomy can only be examined within the context of the organizational structure in which a principal operates. In practice, autonomy is a matter of degree, but this measure of less or more autonomy is dependent on the educational structure that allows for or restricts autonomy. For this reason, examining the varying types of organizational configurations is paramount to the discussion of autonomy.

As Foucault points out, institutions create a sense of “governmentality,” and there is no such concept as freedom or autonomy. Instead, principals, like other actors working within established institutions, internalize a set of rules and operate within the boundaries set for them. The important questions, however, are: Who sets these boundaries? and How many rules are there to follow? The degree of difference does matter since autonomy is not limitless and must have parameters. Principals are agents of governmental entities that are as Weber describes rational-legal bureaucracies with roles, rules, policies, and procedures.

The focus of this study is not individual actors or groups, such as principals, but rather the organizational configuration. The nuances found within the different educational contexts is important to analyze since an organizational configuration that best allows a principal to make autonomous decisions within rational-legal parameters is
worthy of analysis. Assessing how many bureaucratic layers are enough is a relevant question as schools are charged to deliver 21st century education to students. For how can education be innovative when the structural elements (such as local school boards) date back to the 17th century? The utility and existence of this anachronistic entity in the making and delivering of educational policy needs to be re-evaluated. All too often, schools and districts, as institutions, are largely left unexamined with the justification that things have always been done this way (Brint, 2006). Other questions, such as, how many layers of bureaucracy are enough and is too much bureaucracy detrimental to school and student performance must also be asked and answered if educational reform is to be a serious enterprise. Additionally, which actors are allowed to statutorily make decisions in schools regarding the functions of education need to be clearly identified. Currently, as the data show, there are too many cooks in the kitchen in the U.S., delivering a product that is confusing, diluted, and aimless.

Policies and regulations exist to maximize an organization’s efficiency. However, there are diminishing returns if bureaucratic layers overburden an organization, each with certain shared responsibilities. Once authority is diffused to the point of not being able to recognize which entity or person is responsible for making decisions, the efficiency, configuration, and purpose itself of an organization come into question. The existence of many local sub-units (local boards of education, district apparatus, parent groups, teachers unions) that vie for control with state and national governmental authorities negates the purpose of principal autonomy and accountability.

From this study, it can be seen that higher performing school systems are characterized by centrally organizational structures that delegate authority and place less
restrictions on principals. On the other hand, lower performing school systems are distinguished by devolved structures with many bureaucratic layers among different levels of government.

The one common bond between all these types and systems of education is the school leader, the principal. In each educational configuration type, principals operate within an institutional context that contains certain checks and balances. Autonomy is not inexhaustible and is limited by rules and regulations. A principal, who is fully autonomous and has no rules to follow, cannot be found in any existing educational configuration. Individual principals are not individually autonomous actors; instead, they function within a system that they are trained to operate. The central question, as this study poses, is which configuration is a principal allowed to operate more autonomously.

In the contemporary era of school and principal accountability, the concept of autonomy is relevant. For how could a principal be held responsible if he/she does not possess the concomitant authority? Accountability without autonomy propagates a misguided belief that a school principal is indeed the unquestionable leader of his/her school. As the data presented in this study demonstrate, this is not the case. For New York State principals, a large autonomy gap exists between their actual autonomy and the degree of autonomy these principals believe they need to make decisions to run their schools. For example, the school board regulations that I must follow as a principal are contained in a five-inch thick, three-ring binder that contains thousands of pages. In Finland, my colleagues find their policies in a relatively thin soft cover book containing less than 100 pages. The new common core curriculum in New York State, for instance, contains modules with a prescribed, scripted curriculum that amounts to thousands of pages when fully printed out.
for each subject area. The core curriculum including assessment for upper secondary schools in Finland is 229 pages long. Finland shows that less is more. By setting general standards and outcomes, teachers and principals are free to implement pedagogy that best meets the needs of their students. The National Ministry and Board have set the final expectations, but how a school and its students get there is left to the professionals closest to the classroom.

To make principals truly accountable, the organizational configuration of schools needs to be examined and even possibly changed. Looking to other educational paradigms, such as Finland’s, allows this paradox between accountability and autonomy to be critically assessed. If policymakers are truly serious about the impact a principal can have on a school, then they will remove unnecessary organizational constraints and allow a school leader to lead. Finland is one example where the principal autonomy gap is nonexistent. If the current policy of educational reform, which includes accountability, is serious about improving schools and student performance, then the next step is to consider how a system, such as Finland’s, can be implemented in the U.S. Without a serious examination of the organizational structures within which principals (who are responsible for the most indirect positive effect on school performance) operate, a false sense of accountability will continue to exist.

In each setting principals follow and implement the dictates that have been decided by rational-legal actors within the existing policy making process. However, the difference lies in the established culture of these configurations. In a more legalistic environment, such as the U.S., checks and balances are expected to hold people “honest.” Thus, a plethora of entities exist to hold the principal accountable to ensure that he/she is
following standards, policies, and is accountable to teacher and student performance. Federal and state APPR plans for principals, state report cards that are made public, performance results on a variety of exams (Regents, Advanced Placement, and International Baccalaureate), superintendent directives, local board actions on educational matters (homework, curriculum, field trips, and others), the technology and instructional materials to be used decided by the techno-structure in the district office, how much to charge students for lunch, and other matters which lie outside a principal’s direct control minimize a principal’s ability to lead. It is not enough for a principal to be the person in the middle of the educational organization, poked from so many different directions like the Pillsbury doughboy. The principal must exist near the top of the autonomy scale since he/she does have a great impact on school performance. Only then, can a principal be truly accountable.

Other nations with high performing school systems recognize the need to place the principal at the front and center of the school. Hopefully, policymakers at all levels will also discuss how to reform the organizational configuration and not just discuss research-based curricula, assessment tools, and accountability systems for teachers and principals. Without a discourse about the structure in which principal operates, the principal will continue to be the person in the middle, handling different emergencies and problems from different actors and, ultimately, relegated to his/her desk, managing without truly leading.
1. PRINCIPAL EXPERIENCE AND TRAINING

1. Are you male or female?
   - Male
   - Female

2. What is your year of birth?
   19_____

3. In what nation is your school located?
   - Finland
   - Germany
   - United States

4. PRIOR to this school year, how many years did you serve as the principal of THIS OR ANY OTHER school?
   - Count part of a year as 1 year
   - None  or  ____ ____ Year(s) as principal of this or any other school

5. PRIOR to this school year, how many years did you serve as the principal of THIS school?
   - Count part of a year as 1 year
   - None  or  ____ ____ Year(s) as principal of this school

6. Before you became a principal, how many years of elementary or secondary teaching experience did you have?
   - Count part of a year as 1 year
   - None  or  ____ ____ Year(s) teaching before becoming a principal
II. SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

7. What is the APPROXIMATE total school enrollment (number of students)?

___ ___ ___ ___

8. How would you describe the economic background of the students attending your school?

☐ High family income
☐ Middle family income
☐ Low family income

9. How would you describe the location of your school?

☐ Urban
☐ Suburban
☐ Rural

10. Which ONE below best describes your school?

(Apple) If “OTHER” please best describe your school

☐ Gymnasium (Grades 5-12)
☐ High School (Grades 9-12)
☐ Upper Secondary School (Grades 10-12)
☐ Other ________________________________________________
III. DECISION-MAKING

11. How much ACTUAL influence do you think each group or person has on decisions concerning the following activities?

   Use the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Influence</td>
<td>Minor Influence</td>
<td>Moderate Influence</td>
<td>Major Influence</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

   Please enter the appropriate code in EACH column and row

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>National Education Authority</th>
<th>State or Regional Authority</th>
<th>Local School Board</th>
<th>School District Staff</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hiring Teachers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing Teachers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruiting Teachers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluating Teachers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Defining duties and conditions of work for teachers</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting Salaries</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
<td>□</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### III. DECISION-MAKING

11. *CONTINUED*—How much ACTUAL influence do you think each group or person has on decisions concerning the following activities?

Use the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No Influence</td>
<td>Minor Influence</td>
<td>Moderate Influence</td>
<td>Major Influence</td>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please enter the appropriate code in EACH column and row:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>National Education Authority</th>
<th>State or Regional Authority</th>
<th>Local School Board</th>
<th>School District Staff</th>
<th>Principal</th>
<th>Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing salaries for teachers</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grouping pupils by age or ability</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting performance standards</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching methods used in the classroom</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting instructional time (school year, school day)</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selection of textbooks and instructional materials</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
12. This section addresses your tasks and responsibilities, and the perception you have of them.

(A) PRESENTLY, at your school, to what extent DO YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITY for the following at your school?

(B) IDEALLY, at your school, to what extent WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE RESPONSIBILITY for the following as principal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>A. PRESENTLY</th>
<th>B. IDEALLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and hiring of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation and selection of instructional materials</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignment of teaching tasks and duties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evaluation of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transferring teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dismissing of teachers with unsatisfactory performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Setting salaries for teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Designing and developing mandatory standardized tests</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ENTER THE APPROPRIATE CODE IN EACH COLUMN BELOW

- 1 – I am fully responsible for this task
- 2 – I play a major role in carrying out this task
- 3 – I play a minor role in carrying out this task
- 4 – I have no responsibility for this task
- 5 – Not applicable
12. **CONTINUED**—This section addresses your tasks and responsibilities, and the perception you have of them.

(A) **PRESENTLY**, at your school, to what extent **DO YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITY** for the following at your school?

(B) **IDEALLY**, at your school, to what extent **WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE RESPONSIBILITY** for the following as principal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>A. PRESENTLY</th>
<th>B. IDEALLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development of the school’s rules</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional development of teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation on management or school board committees</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting to appropriate authorities for accountability</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collection, processing, and analysis of school data and statistics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the school budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decisions for the allocation of the budget within the school</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
13. In your opinion, are the following considered barriers to the dismissal of poor-performing or incompetent teachers in this school?

   a. Personnel Policies
      - Yes
      - No

   b. Termination decisions not upheld
      - Yes
      - No

   c. Length of time required for termination process
      - Yes
      - No

   d. Effort required for documentation
      - Yes
      - No

   e. Tight deadlines for completing documentation
      - Yes
      - No

   f. Tenure
      - Yes
      - No

   g. Teacher associations or unions
      - Yes
      - No

   h. Dismissal is too stressful and/or uncomfortable for you
13. CONTINUED--In your opinion, are the following considered barriers to the dismissal of poor-performing or incompetent teachers in this school?

i. Difficulty in obtaining suitable replacements
   - Yes
   - No

j. Resistance from parents
   - Yes
   - No

14. In your school, are achievement data used in any of the following accountability measures?

a. Achievement data are posted publicly (for example, the media)
   - Yes
   - No

b. Achievement data are used in evaluation of the principal’s performance
   - Yes
   - No

c. Achievement data are used in evaluation of teachers’ performance
   - Yes
   - No

d. Achievement data are used in decisions about instructional resource allocation to the school
   - Yes
   - No

e. Achievement data are tracked over time by an administrative authority
   - Yes
15. During the last year, have any of the following methods been used to monitor the practice of teachers at your school?

a. Tests or assessments of student achievement

☐ Yes
☐ No

b. Teacher peer review (of lesson plans, assessment instruments, lessons)

☐ Yes
☐ No

c. Principal or school administrator staff observations of lessons

☐ Yes
☐ No

d. Observation of classes by inspectors or other persons external to the school

☐ Yes
☐ No

V. PRINCIPAL AUTONOMY

16. As a principal, have you had the opportunity to influence enough any collective bargaining contracts that have been negotiated?

☐ Yes, enough influence
☐ Yes, but not enough influence
☐ No influence

17. When you hire a teacher can you count on getting the person you want or is it necessary to compromise?

☐ Yes, I get who I want
☐ At times I get who I want, but at other times I compromise
☐ Need to compromise

18. How much freedom do you have in transferring or dismissing a poor performing teacher?
☐ Enough freedom in transferring or dismissing a poor performing teacher
☐ Not enough freedom in transferring or dismissing a poor performing teacher

19. Are you ever forced to accept a poor performing teacher?

☐ Yes
☐ Sometimes
☐ No

20. How would you describe your school? In general, are decisions generally made by the central office or are you allowed to make decisions?

☐ Decisions are made by the central office
☐ Some decisions are made by central office, and some decisions are made by me
☐ I am allowed to make decisions

21. In some school environments, a principal is not given enough autonomy over how he/she does things. In other school settings, the principal is given considerable autonomy over how he/she does things. What best describes your situation?

☐ I do not have considerable autonomy
☐ I have considerable autonomy

22. Which individuals or groups in your school or school district have greater autonomy or freedom? Can you please rank them from highest to lowest?

\[ \text{HIGHEST} \]

1. ____________________________________________
2. ____________________________________________
3. ____________________________________________
4. ____________________________________________
5. ____________________________________________

\[ \text{LOWEST} \]
23. In what area would you like to have greater autonomy? Why?
Please write comments below

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

24. Can you identify one major source of conflict you had with one of the following (the state education department, the school board, the superintendent, assistant superintendent, or teachers’ union) and explain how this conflict was resolved?
Please write comments below

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________

25. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:
Please write comments below

______________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________________
REFERENCES


http://www.naesp.org/ContentLoad.do?contentId=2418


http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0895904808330172


Caldwell, B. J., & Harris, J. (2006). *Comparative governance, administration and finance for elementary and secondary education in selected countries.* Retrieved from Washington, DC:


Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). They're number one. NEA Today(October/November 2010), 30-36.


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2012.705153


Education, U. S. D. o. (2014). *Number and percentage of public school students participating in programs for English language learners by state: Selected years,*


Fleming, N. (2011, October 26). Common core found to rank with respected standards. Education Week.


Jahnukainen, M. (2011, August 29). [Professor of special education at the university of Jyväskylä, Finland in communication with the author].


Education Law Article 61   EDN   Title 4   Article 61, § 3012-d (2015).


http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-5812.2008.00432.x


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0161956X.2012.705149


OECD. (2014). *New insights from TALIS 2013: Teaching and learning in primary and upper secondary education*: OECD.


http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb13/vol70/num05/The-Uncommon-Core.aspx


http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/eerj.2007.6.4.424


Sahlberg, P. (2011a). *Developing effective teachers and school leaders: The case of Finland.* Retrieved from Washington, DC and Stanford, CA:


http://www.aasa.org/jsp.aspx


