

DIRECT AND INDIRECT POLICY INFLUENCES ON LOCAL EFFORTS TO
IMPROVE TEACHER QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

It is well known that policies such as state certification and the federal “highly qualified” requirements are direct efforts to improve teacher quality at the school and district level. It is also possible that growing accountability pressures on schools to raise student test scores have indirect effects on schools’ efforts to alter their teacher quality. Drawing from interviews of district officials and 30 principals over a two-year period in a mid-sized district, we examine the degree to which principals implement or “bridge” these external demands and how this is reflected in their hiring preferences. As expected, principals who generally bridge external demands give less weight to characteristics such as strong teaching skills and knowledge of subject matter whose importance is emphasized in the current policy environment. We also identify and discuss various conflicts among local, state, and federal policies regarding teacher quality and how principals address these conflicts in their decision-making.

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INTRODUCTION

It is widely recognized that teacher quality is one of the most important influences on student learning (e.g., Rivkin, Hanushek & Kain, 2005; Sanders & Horn, 1998) and therefore represents a potentially promising path to school improvement. This has led to a wide variety of governmental efforts to improve both the quantity and quality of teachers. Building on a long history of state-level certification requirements, the recent re-authorization of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, commonly known as *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB), requires that all public school teachers hold a bachelor’s degree and demonstrated subject matter knowledge. Other efforts to improve teacher quality include increasing the supply of teachers, providing alternative routes with different educational requirements, and reforming colleges of education.

But these direct efforts are not the only ones influencing local teacher quality efforts. NCLB’s larger focus on accountability based on student standardized tests is intended to influence the basic orientation of schooling, defining expected student outcomes but leaving it to school personnel to determine how those outcomes can best be achieved. Research on high stakes accountability has identified “a more capable and committed faculty” as an important component of the theory of action underlying the reform effort (Malen, Croninger, Muncey, & Redmond-Jones, 2002). Efforts to improve teacher quality are therefore among the areas where accountability might influence local policies and practices.

In this study, we consider the effects of both direct and indirect policy influences on the hiring process and principals’ preferences for teachers. Teacher hiring has been widely criticized for being “bureaucratic” and “inefficient” (DeArmond & Goldhaber, 2005). There is also evidence that hiring is “late, rushed, and information poor (Liu &

Johnson, 2006), that principals are most concerned about personality characteristics rather than content and pedagogical knowledge (Authors), and more generally that the hiring process as a whole may not lead to the selection of the “best” teachers, as indicated by high test scores on assessments such as the SAT, college competitiveness and years of experience (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Ballou, 1996). While some have questioned the meaning of “best applicants” (Authors), there is wide agreement that hiring policies and practices could be improved.

There is little or no research on how either direct teacher quality policies, such as the Highly Qualified Teacher provision of NCLB, or indirect policies, such as high stakes assessment, have redirected the hiring practices of school administrators.¹ Some existing studies recognize that hiring occurs in a complex policy environment in which district and school administrators address federal and state policies while also attending to local hiring conditions such as low demand, out-of field teaching and racial diversity (Strauss, Bowes, Marks and Plesko, 2000). Studies have also found that the organization of hiring varies across districts and schools, with districts often playing the role of overseeing the screening of applicants while setting expectations and sending messages to school administrators and teachers about their definition of quality applicants (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Liu & Johnson, 2006). No studies on hiring, however, have examined how principals negotiate their own preferred characteristics and organizational needs within this federal, state and district context, sometimes pursuing policies that may run counter to other policy efforts. How districts and principals implement policies aimed at improving teacher quality has important implications on who is getting hired.

Implementation studies have recognized that school actors respond differently to policy with some accommodating and others resisting policy demands (Odden, 1991; Spillane, 1999; Wong, 1990). At the implementation stage, members of organizations engage in individual and collective sensemaking in which they negotiate external goals with their prior knowledge, values and beliefs, helping to explain why implementation differs across sites (Louis, Febey & Schroeder, 2005; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002). Here, we discuss first how district and school administrators respond to policies aimed at improving teacher quality. In our quantitative analysis, we turn to Honig and Hatch’s conceptualization of bridging and buffering. In this model, schools are understood as organizations in which members engage in a process of interpretation and negotiation of external demands, such as policies, with their own internal goals and strategies, such as creating a creative and supportive learning environment. School administrators and teachers bridge and buffer themselves from external demands by shaping “the terms of compliance,” a process that can include direct implementation, selective or symbolic implementation, or outright resistance (2004, p. 23). This framework, which we discuss in more detail later, provides a way to link principals’ understanding of their school’s response to external policy with the characteristics they prefer in applicants.

In this study, we draw from interviews with 30 principals and district officials over a two-year period to examine how direct and indirect policy efforts to improve teacher quality were implemented in one mid-sized school district.² We identify and describe three different ways that hiring preferences are influenced by policy demands. First, districts and principals assimilate direct policy *messages* about hiring when they implement structures that favor teachers with professional qualities such as experience

and strong subject matter knowledge. Second, districts and principals adhere to or circumvent direct *mandates* aimed at improving teacher quality. Finally, school leaders respond to indirect policy efforts, such as high stakes accountability and the related pressure to improve student test scores. While we would certainly expect principals to respond to direct mandates, it is less clear whether the assimilation of policy messages of these mandates or the more indirect policy influences would affect hiring preferences and decisions.

In what follows, we first discuss the research on hiring. We then turn to a description of the policy context of our case study district and our data collection and methods. The study then turns to an examination of the different ways that districts and principals implement policy demands. The analysis is based on qualitative and quantitative analysis of principal responses. This includes a detailed discussion of our qualitative data and a factor analysis of principals' tendencies towards bridging and buffering and subsequent multivariate correlational analysis of the bridging measure with principal preferences for teacher characteristics. We conclude with implications of policy on the authority of principals to select the best teachers for their schools. Because this study is based on a small and non-random sample of principals in one district, we also consider how these exploratory results may guide future research.

EVIDENCE ON HIRING PRACTICES

Studies on hiring have tended to focus on three different areas: the process of hiring, the characteristics preferred in candidates, and the demographic and labor market

factors shaping hiring. While several of the studies have examined these factors in combination, they have focused on one of the three aspects separately.

Process and Practice of Hiring

The first set of studies we review focus on the process of hiring and the related implications on teacher quality. These studies find that district and school processes differ across sites such that the larger the district and its fiscal capacity, the more involved the hiring process, particularly with regard to screening and selection (Balter & Duncombe, 2005; Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000).³ While there is variation in the organization of the hiring process, the principal has been found to be involved approximately seventy percent of the time (Liu, 2002; Strauss, Bowes, Marks & Plesko, 2000) compared with 34 percent and 11 percent for teachers and school board members, respectively (Strauss, Bowes, Marks, & Plesko, 2000).

Liu and Johnson (2006) identify three approaches to hiring: a highly decentralized, highly centralized, and a moderately-centralized/moderately decentralized process. In highly decentralized hiring, applicants apply to and are hired directly by a school. In highly centralized hiring, the district oversees the screening, selection and assignment process. In the moderate category, districts screen applicants and schools select them. In New Jersey, Liu (2002) finds an equal representation of the three approaches, but in a later study of four states (California, Florida, Massachusetts, and Michigan) finds that a majority of new teachers were hired through a decentralized, school-based process (Liu & Johnson, 2006). Liu and Johnson also find that one-third of

new teachers in the states of California and Florida hired after the school year has already started.

Liu and Johnson (2006) argue that the hiring process is “information poor” (p. 324), allowing for only a moderate-to-good fit between new teacher skills, interests, and values with their teaching positions and schools. Relatively few new teachers in their study reported interviews with teachers, department chairs, students, or parents at the school. The hiring process was characterized by a reliance on paper credentials and interviews, with little use of observational data such as demonstration lessons or videos of instruction. Further, many teachers were hired in the summer at a time in which it is more difficult to involve teachers in the hiring process, leaving much to the discretion of the school principal.

These studies raise important questions about how effective school systems are at making the best match between new teachers and schools. While principals are the primarily gatekeepers, these studies suggest that the hiring process is constrained by factors often outside of the control of the principal such as the timing of hiring and the fiscal capacity of the district.

Characteristics Preferred

With principals playing a central role in the hiring process, studies have looked at both the reported and demonstrated characteristics preferred by administrators when hiring. The first set of studies we discuss examine principals’ reported preferences. These studies find that principals prefer characteristics beyond what has been identified in the teacher quality research as being associated with effectiveness: strong subject

matter knowledge, experience and cognitive ability. Principals look for teachers who display strong communication skills (Braun et al., 1987; Cain-Caston, 1999; Dunton, 2001; Ralph et al., 1998) and enthusiasm (Broberg, 1987; Dunton, 2001).

Administrators also express a preference for teachers who are caring, have strong teaching skills, subject matter knowledge, and an ability to work well with others (Authors; Broberg, 1987; Dunton, 2001; Ralph et al., 1998). Not surprisingly, they prefer teachers who have a variety of characteristics, such as caring and strong teaching skills. They also look to create gender and racial diversity in the school as a whole (Authors). Finally, principals consider organizational factors in the hiring process. They look to match hires with the personality dispositions of faculty already present at the school to create a good “match” and coherent organizational culture (Authors). While all of these qualities might be associated with the factors being emphasized in the current policy environment (e.g., strong teaching skills), the nature of these relationships is still vague and unclear.

Two recent studies find that district administrators are attending to applicants’ academic credentials. Strauss, Bowes, Marks and Plesko (2000) find that the most influential factors used for vetting the paper applicant pool for interviews were a major in area of teaching, overall grade point average, grade point average in major, past performance in teaching, and references or recommendations. They also find that performance on test scores was weighted as heavily as willingness to engage in extracurricular activities. Similarly, Balter and Duncombe (2005) find that superintendents prioritized certification, references/recommendations, subject knowledge demonstrated in the interviews, and having a major in the subject to be taught.

Two large-scale quantitative studies have examined the question of who gets hired. These studies find that principals do not necessarily hire teachers with the strongest academic credentials. Using a nationally representative sample of recent college graduates, Ballou (1996) finds that applicants from more selective undergraduate institutions were no more likely to be hired than graduates of other institutions, although applicants with higher grade point averages were given some preference. Baker and Cooper (2005) find that principals tend to hire people like themselves, with principals from more selective colleges and universities twice as likely to hire teachers from those same types of institutions. Both sets of authors speculate that principals “felt more comfortable with teachers of similar backgrounds” (Ballou, 1996, p.126).

Demographic and Labor Market Factors

Largely absent from the above sets of studies are discussions of how administrators’ hiring preferences are shaped by factors outside of the purview of the school. The exceptions are studies that look at the effect of demographic and labor market factors on hiring. These studies find that, while many districts have difficulty recruiting teachers in hard to staff subjects such as mathematics, science, foreign language, vocational education, and ESL, low-enrollment districts report greater difficulty recruiting in these subjects than high enrollment districts (Balter and Duncombe, 2005). Studies in Pennsylvania have found that low enrollment districts, as well as those with higher unemployment rates, also have lower teacher test scores (Strauss et al., 2000).

These studies also look at the propensity of schools to hire teachers who have weak academic credentials or who graduated high school in the same district—what the authors call the district’s level of “insularity.” Strauss et al. find that if 40 percent of a district’s teachers previously attended as students and the higher the unemployment rate in a district, the more likely it will hire its former students to teach.⁴ Schools located in communities with high levels of education are more likely to hire teachers with stronger academic backgrounds and less likely to hire their own graduates.⁵

Overall, these studies depict a hiring process that is largely overseen by school principals, but varies in terms of teacher and district involvement. They find that hiring teachers is shaped by demographic factors, supply and demand at the local level, and personal preferences of administrators as to the characteristics of candidates they believe are the best teachers. Yet very little is understood about how the policy environment is shaping hiring. Here, we explore how federal and state policies aimed at improving teacher hiring are shaping district and school-level hiring processes.

To understand policy implementation in our case study district, we first describe federal and state policies aimed at improving teacher quality in Florida. After a discussion of our methods, we turn to our findings of how district administrators and principals responded to both direct and indirect policies. In addition to the other direct teacher quality policies, such as teacher certification, we also discuss a policy aimed at racial diversity in the district and its implementation. We then move to a framework developed by Honig and Hatch (2004) to examine if principals’ bridging and buffering of high stakes accountability and efforts to improve student achievement scores shape their preferences in teacher candidates. This allows us to examine the direct and indirect ways

that principals implement policies directed at improving hiring and teacher quality as well as how buffering and bridging to high stakes accountability affects the characteristics principals prefer in applicants.

FEDERAL AND STATE POLICIES RELATED TO TEACHER QUALITY

What are the direct and indirect policy efforts aimed at improving teacher quality in Florida public schools? Direct policies are efforts to set higher standards for teachers as well as facilitate the screening process. High stakes accountability policies indirectly shift conditions for school leaders, potentially changing the characteristics they seek in candidates. Both impact the hiring of teachers.

At the federal level, the *No Child Left Behind Act* has two main components that affect hiring. The Highly Qualified provision is a direct policy effort to improve teacher quality. It calls for “highly qualified teachers”—defined by teachers who have state certification and have passed a subject matter assessment—in core academic classes in Title I schools by 2003 and in all classrooms by 2007 (Smith, Desimone, & Ueno, 2005). States lose federal funds if they do not meet federal expectations. To date, no state has met federal expectations for the Highly Qualified Teacher provision (Keller, 2006).⁶

The Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) provision of NCLB is an indirect policy effort aimed at improving teacher quality. As part of the provision, states establish a beginning percentage of students to make “adequate yearly progress” for the 2002-03 school year. Each subsequent year, the baseline level must be increased by equal increments so that by the 2013-14 school year, 100 percent of students score at proficient or above in language arts and math. The law also requires that each of four student

subpopulations (students identified by racial or ethnic identity, students living in poverty, students with limited English proficiency, and students with disabilities) achieve AYP. If any one of these subpopulations in a school fails to make AYP, the whole school is identified as needing improvement. Schools face the loss of enrollment and the loss of federal funds if they do not meet AYP. States face the withholding of Title I funding if they do not comply. By holding schools to student performance measures on standardized assessment, the provision directs administrators and teachers towards improving student achievement.

Like the federal policy, state level policies in Florida also place direct and indirect pressure on improving teacher quality. As in all states, Florida oversees the certification of teachers to provide a minimum level of quality. Certification in the state requires a temporary or a professional certificate as well as a passing score on the Florida Subject Area Exam (SAE) for each certificate area of assignment (Florida Department of Education, 2002).⁷

Florida's school accountability system, arguably one of the most rigorous in the nation (Harris, Herrington, & Albee, forthcoming), is the main indirect effort to shape teacher quality. Like AYP, the policy focuses schools on student outcomes, thus emphasizing teachers' instructional practices and the qualities associated with strong teaching skills. In Florida, all public schools receive a grade (A through F) based on the performance of their students on the Florida Comprehensive Assessments Tests (FCATs) in reading, math and writing.⁸ In the event a school receives two F grades in a four-year period, students are offered the opportunity to attend better performing public school or vouchers that can be used to attend private schools.

Florida’s district administrators, school administrators, and teachers, therefore, face multiple policy efforts aimed at improving teacher quality. From the perspective of teacher quality, the federal and state policies are directly setting expectations for the screening of applicants whereas high stakes accountability, and its related expectations for levels of student achievement as measured by standardized tests, changes the conditions for schools, setting, thus redirecting attention on the characteristics of teachers that will improve student achievement.⁹

DATA SOURCES AND METHOD

To understand the influence of direct and indirect efforts to improve teacher quality on teacher hiring decisions, we designed a case study that allowed us to explore the policy context of principals’ decisions in hiring in one school district. We included both qualitative and quantitative components in the design through an interview protocol and ranking exercise based on a review of the literature on teacher hiring and teacher effectiveness. This mixed-methods approach allowed us to collect complementary sources of data and to identify and analyze principals’ preferred choices while also exploring the connotation and context of these choices (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). While not generalizable to all hiring, our findings offer important insight into the complex nature of the interplay between federal, state, and local policies on hiring.

Sample and Data Collection

The subjects of this study are 30 principals, drawn from a mid-sized Florida school district, who are responsible for screening and selection of teachers at their school,

as well as three district officials involved in hiring.¹⁰ Below, we summarize the relevant characteristics of the district and these principals, though some details are omitted to protect their identities.

The district was chosen purposefully because the organization of hiring reflected the approximately 70 percent of districts where the principal is at the center of the hiring process—what Liu and Johnson (2006) call “decentralized or moderately decentralized hiring.”¹¹ Applicants submitted their materials to an online database overseen by the district. Principals used the database to screen completed applications and select candidates for interviews.¹² Principals had considerable discretion over the selection process, choosing the organization of school-level hiring such as the extent to which they included teachers and other stakeholders, the number of interviews to conduct, and, ultimately, which teachers were hired.

The district includes institutions of higher learning that provide a larger-than-average supply of qualified teacher candidates. Principals, therefore, had a substantial number of candidates to choose from for most positions and were therefore less likely to have their stated preferences influenced by compromises they would have to make if there were fewer candidates. The district also has a diverse population of students, teachers, and principals making it a good location for studying principal hiring preferences.

We interviewed principals from 17 elementary (or K-8) schools, six middle schools, four high schools, and three special population schools, representing more than half of the principals in the district.¹³ While the racial distribution of principals is almost identical to the national average (sample district: 78 percent White; nation: 82 percent

White), there are differences regarding gender and education. The percentage female is somewhat larger (sample district: 63 percent; nation: 44 percent) and the percentage with at least a master's degree is substantially larger (sample district: 100 percent; nation: 54 percent).¹⁴

We conducted the primary interviews, lasting 1.5-2 hours each, during the summer of 2005. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. There are four sections of the interview that are most relevant to the present study: a set of questions in which we asked principals to describe their students, their vision and goals for the school (see Table 1), a ranking activity about principals' preferred characteristics, a follow-up question clarifying the responses to the ranking, and direct questions about how different policies affected their hiring.¹⁵ We also conducted a follow up interview during the summer of 2006 in which 21 of the original 30 principals participated.¹⁶ Except where noted, the discussion of the results refers only to the first interview.

[Table 1]

Table 2 provides demographic information about our case study schools. Free/reduced lunch participation in sample schools ranged from as low as five percent to as high as 90 percent. Of the 30 schools represented in the sample, nine were eligible for Federal Title I funds in the 2004-2005 academic year (eight elementary schools and one middle school).

In addition to demographic information, Table 2 describes the grade levels, Title I status, and school grades assigned through Florida's accountability system. These

grades—from a high of “A” to a low of “F”—are based primarily on student scores on math, reading, and writing on the state’s standardized test, the Florida Comprehensive Assessments Test (FCAT). In addition to providing information to parents and voters, the grades are used as the basis for a formal structure of punishments and rewards administered by the state government. As we will show, there is some evidence that both the school grades and the larger climate of accountability influence principals’ hiring preferences.

[Table 2]

We piloted the interview protocol with four principals outside the sample and made minor adjustments based on the results. The pilot interviews supported the validity of the initial list of teacher characteristics in that the open-ended responses given by principals closely matched those we listed. We also interviewed district administrators as part of the piloting process to learn about both the school and district roles in the hiring process.¹⁷ The authors attended the hiring fairs during the summers of 2005 and 2006 (in advance of the respective interviews) and observed the initial interview process and, in some cases, actual hiring decisions. We also spoke to applicants, principals and teachers involved in the hiring process, and district personnel organizing the event. Our analysis, however, is based almost entirely on the formal interviews with school principals.

Qualitative Coding and Data Analysis

We used the qualitative software program N*Vivo in our coding process. We developed 208 codes drawing from the research on hiring (e.g. Liu & Johnson, 2006), teacher effectiveness (e.g. King-Rice, 2003), school-level policy response (i.e. Honig & Hatch, 2004), as well as our own iterative and inductive process in which themes emerged. We used an iterative memo writing process. From the codes, we identified topics for memo writing and wrote 26 memos focusing on principals' explanation of the different characteristics and tools, including certification, gender and race, intelligence, and a mixture of qualities. We also wrote memos on the context and process of hiring, including memos on supply and demand in the district, the role of the hiring fair, the policy context and the philosophy of the school. As a group, we met to discuss the content of the memos and whether further analysis was needed. Often, these memos were written several times until we had achieved theoretical and empirical saturation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998).

IMPLEMENTATION OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT POLICIES

As discussed earlier, we identify three ways district and school administrators respond to policy approaches aimed at improving teacher quality. First, district administrators and principals assimilate policy messages aimed at improving teacher quality by implementing structures favorable to candidates with strong professional characteristics emphasized in the teacher quality research (Wayne & Youngs, 2003; Wilson & Floden, 2003; Wilson, Floden, & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001). Second, they respond to direct mandates, such as NCLB's Highly Qualified provision, state certification and local efforts towards racial diversity in schools. Finally, they implement indirect policy

efforts, specifically high stakes accountability and the related call to improve student achievement scores, which in turn, has implications on the characteristics they prefer in a candidate. We discuss these findings below in turn.

Assimilating Policy Messages about Teacher Quality

Throughout our interviews, district officials described an ongoing effort to improve the quality of teachers. Both the organization of hiring as well as responses by district officials we interviewed indicated that hiring quality teachers had been an ongoing concern of the district made only more urgent by *No Child Left Behind*. In this way, district officials we interviewed had assimilated policy messages about teacher quality, “simplifying” them for principals (Honig & Hatch, 2004).

The organization of hiring at the district level reflected efforts to address and control the quality of teachers. The district managed the posting and advertising of positions. It also supervised the screening process through an online program in which candidates were required to complete an electronic application before being considered by principals for the interview phase. As part of this application, candidates provided their employment history, a curriculum vita and recommendations from two previous employers. They were also required to take the online Gallup assessment, Teacher Insight. In addition, applicants had to provide evidence of certification as well as scores on the Florida Teachers Certification Exam (FTCE). While the application process served the purpose of standardizing materials for all applicants, the district did not control who applied, or was selected, for specific positions.

In addition to overseeing the screening process, the district also organized an annual hiring day at which, according to a district administrator, approximately 60 percent of the district’s teachers were hired. The hiring fair was held in a large ballroom where each school conducted interviews at specially marked tables. Unlike the rest of the year when principals managed the hiring process, on the hiring day, the district provided the organization of the interview process. Each school brought one or multiple hiring teams—usually a combination of principals, administrators, counselors and teachers—who interviewed applicants in twenty-minute intervals. The district distributed Gallup’s Teacher Perceiver protocol to principals to use during interviews. Members of each hiring team were expected to score applicants based on their responses.

While screening and the hiring fair represented the district’s formal participation in hiring, district officials also discussed with us ongoing monitoring of principals’ hiring choices. They felt confident that their online process provided principals with the resources to make strong selection decisions, although they complained that some principals still made poor hiring decisions.

Based on their preferred characteristics in a teacher candidate on an open-ended prompt in the interview, we categorized twelve of our principals as “personality-focused,” eight as “professional-focused” and ten as “personality/professional.”¹⁸ Personality-focused principals looked for characteristics such as caring, enthusiastic, and motivated. Professional-focused principals listed characteristics consistent with those in the teacher quality research (King-Rice, 2003; Wayne & Youngs, 2003; Wilson & Floden, 2003) such as academic background, strong teaching skills, and experience. Personality/professional principals mentioned both types of characteristics.

These findings suggest that district administrators and many principals reported preferring characteristics consistent with policy messages about teacher quality. District officials were particularly clear in preferring professional characteristics. While the district did not force principals to hire certain candidates, they did initiate several responses to direct efforts to address teacher quality. We discuss these next.

Bridging and Direct Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality

To address the distribution of highly qualified teachers in the district, Hillyer County School District implemented a policy designed to address NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher provision as well as to try to increase qualified applicants to lower performing schools. In addition, the district aimed to address the racial distribution of teachers in the district.

To address NCLB’s Highly Qualified Teacher provisions, the district implemented a 10-day hiring window that gave preferential hiring to Title I schools and “critical shortage areas” of non-Title I middle and high schools. An applicant who interviewed with a non-Title I school at the fair could not be hired until after the hiring window for Title I schools had closed. In that time, if an applicant interviewed with a Title I school and turned down a contract offer, they were barred from teaching in the district for a year. District officials explained that the goal of the policy was to give Title I schools first access to the applicant pool and thus hire the best teachers. As Principal N described it, “It allows those schools that have historically or traditionally had very hard times recruiting and keeping highly qualified teachers in their schools, and it gives them that kind of first dibs.”¹⁹

We found that the policy was supported by most principals. Title I principals appreciated being able to hire quickly while non-Title I principals did not feel that it negatively affected their applicant pool. “We have such a large pool of strong teachers available to us out there that I don’t think the ten-days inhibits me in any way from still getting very strong highly qualified teachers at this school,” explained one non-Title I principal (C). Another non-Title I principal (D) expressed concerns that the policy was not working well for her Title I counterparts explaining:

I tend to think there’s something wrong somewhere because I was able to hire every single teacher that ranked really high with me. The teachers I hired are dynamic—and magna cum laude graduates. The applicants have learned to play the game, and they don’t go to Title I schools to interview, so therefore, the Title I school doesn’t know who they are and that they’re out there. I truly believe Title I schools need to have a chance to hire those teachers first. That’s how I feel. But it hasn’t been problematic for me...[Applicants] didn’t go interview with any of those schools, and I sat right there interviewing five teachers every five minutes; quality people for the most part, and Title I schools sat right across the aisle from me interviewing nobody.

We found that this policy did not work as expected and had several unintended consequences. First, as suggested in the above quote, the preferential hiring to Title I schools created two pools of teachers: those willing to interview and teach in Title I schools and those who were not. Applicants at the hiring fair knew of the policy and many chose not to interview with Title I schools if they hoped to be hired by a non-Title I school. They understood that if they did not want to teach in a high-poverty school, they should not apply. As a consequence, many applicants chose to interview only with the more affluent schools in the district. While this entailed a 10-day waiting period, some candidates were willing to take this risk and defer employment. Title I principals in the study described this as a natural self-selection of teachers who they would not want in

their schools if they did not want to work there. Yet this also undermined district efforts to control the distribution of teachers.

We also found that principals' implementation of this policy was inconsistent. While the majority of principals reported adhering to the policy, six principals reported informing applicants at the hiring fair that they would call them immediately after the 10-day period, making verbal commitments in advance of official offers. One principal described a hire:

The one young man that I hired said 'if you're really interested in hiring me, when will you call me?' I said I will call you at 12:01 if that's what you want me to do. And I called him at 12:05 on Saturday night. He was waiting on the call. I mean, you know, you can't tell him you're going to hire him, but, you know, he knew from my -- what I was expressing to him that certainly, we were interested in hiring him. And the other candidates I called, and I had made the same comments that let them know yes, we're very interested, and I'll be expecting a phone call.

We also observed several cases during the hiring fair where the district granted waivers to principals to hire a particular applicant. Also, one principal in the study was unaware of the application of the policy to critical shortage areas, suggesting that the policy had not been relayed uniformly to principals.

One unintended consequence of the district policy, therefore, was to encourage principals of non-Title I schools to hire internal transfers. By hiring these experienced teachers before the new teacher hiring fair, the schools filled many of their vacant positions with more experienced teachers. Three non-Title I principals discussed the utility of taking quality intra-district transfers due to the fact there was a ready supply who wanted to transfer to their schools and there was no barriers to hiring transfers at the hiring fair because the 10-day rule did not apply.

Regardless of Title I status, principals in the study discussed the importance of certification and the impact of NCLB’s highly qualified provision. Principals at both types of schools were concerned with adhering to state requirements for certification. Principal Z stated, “We typically want someone who is already certified, because if they’re not certified, you can’t hire them. Don’t waste your time.” In our rating exercise, Principal V rated certification in the lower half explaining that “you’re tied to that wherever you are, so that’s a given. I mean, if they’re not certified, then they’re out of the picture.” Non-Title I Elementary Principal F said, “Certification has to be important because they have to have it, but it doesn’t always mean a great teacher.” When asked what he was looking for in an applicant’s application materials, Principal J of a non-Title I middle school acknowledged, “Well, you look at everything, but first you look at whether they are certified and qualified.” Likewise, Principal P of a non-Title I elementary stated, “I look for areas of certification first...”

In addition to the federal and state efforts to affect teacher quality and hiring, a district level policy also affected hiring in our case study district. In addition to the efforts to improve teacher quality described earlier, Hillyer County strongly encouraged principals to hire faculty that achieved a racial balance between white and African American teachers. The district initiated the policy in the era of desegregation but continued to informally monitor principals’ hires. So in addition to expectations that they meet federal and state policies, the district set voluntary targets for racial distribution of teachers in the schools. District administrators explained that they monitored racial distribution of teachers across schools, however took no direct action beyond addressing discrepancies verbally with individual principals.

From the district’s perspective, principals faced a constant challenge to meet this goal. District officials attributed it to an issue of supply, with one explaining, “You know, there’s just not a whole lot of minority applicants out there.” One district administrator explained that while the district had some success acquiring “a larger number of minority teachers than other districts are getting,” he complained, “they’re all being concentrated on high-minority schools, and as a result, some of the majority schools have very few minority teachers.”

In our first interview many of the principals explained the need to complement faculty already present at the school and often this was understood in terms of racial and gender diversity. One principal (BB) explained that he had the department chair screen candidates based on applicant’s demographics, “And what we will say is we give preference to veterans, minorities and males because we’re very short in males... Bring me more males. I need more African-American or minorities.”

For their part, principals embraced the value for diversity and described it as a goal. As a principal of an overwhelmingly white/high socio-economic status school put it:

I’ve got about [under 30%] black kids in this school and they are ...outnumbered. I’ve got to make sure that I have some people on this campus that they can go to. You would think that when I say racially balanced, you would think I was talking about a Title I school where there is 70% African-American but really, I feel for those [kids] because they need to have role models—male and female all throughout the subject areas. I am sensitive to that and that is why I feel that way. Plus the Superintendent wants it that way too. I do all I can to hire minorities into my faculty.

Another principal described her screening process, “I look to make sure I had male and female, and which it’s just very hard to get male at the elementary level; at the secondary level it’s not as hard. And then I made sure that I had teachers that represented different

ethnicities and make sure I have some Hispanic, white, black, whatever I could find that would represent the range of people in my school.”

For the most part, principals did not discuss efforts to hire minorities and males as compromising their ideas of teacher quality. As one principal (P) explained:

If I had one candidate versus another candidate, and they had equal strengths, then if one were a minority, I would -- and I needed a minority at the school, I would certainly hire them. And same with a male and female problem, that if they had -- if they were equal, and I didn't have all my faculty (inaudible) males -- I think it's real important to have some --try to get more male role models and more minority role models to try to go along with the diversity of my school. Like if I have an Asian candidate that was as equal as to the others, then I really feel that to the large number of Asians here at the school, that I need to have that representation on my faculty and staff to be able to have a better feel about their needs and cultures and things that that person could do to help our staff with. Just like the male and female (inaudible). Yes, I do have to look at that and balance -- try to -- not balance so much, but make sure I have representation, and I think its been real important, and I've tried to do that.

Yet several principals described a tension between hiring the most qualified candidate and the priority for minorities and males. Principal (CC) explained, “I'm always looking for minorities and men. What I have to do is not lean in that direction and take a candidate who isn't as good as maybe a white female simply because I'm leaning in that direction...We don't have enough male role models and enough minority role models in this school.” Another principal (I) said that she was more concerned with racial balance than the years of experience or age of a candidate. Principal R said, “Anytime we can find a quality minority candidate that jumps out and -- we want to hire those individuals. And I don't -- you know, I don't want to say giving them preference, but certainly you're looking hard.”

As a result of these findings, we explored these issues of race and gender through open-ended questions in the second interview with principals. When asked directly, 23

of the 30 principals indicated that they did consider race when hiring, including three who indicated that race was more important than quality. One of these three principals explained, “I would hire a minority candidate because I know I need to—because right now the racial percentage of my school does not match my school population.” A more typical response, however, was that “I just see a person, and if the candidate is hireable and happens to be minority, then that’s just gravy.” Consistent with this, 16 of the 30 principals in the second interview indicated that they weighed quality greater than teacher demographics (race and gender). The remaining 11 did not indicate whether they weigh race more heavily than quality

Principals in our study, therefore, sought to balance racial and gender diversity with efforts to hire the most qualified candidate. We find that principals sought racial and gender representation in their school, regardless of the district policy. In certain cases, however, principals expressed a tension between the most qualified candidate and racial and gender diversity suggesting a tension between ideas of quality.

In summary, Hillyer County principals were influenced by a mix of inter-related district, state, and federal policies. In response to federal policy, the district had implemented the 10-day hiring window. To meet federal and state expectations, principals only hired teachers who were certified. The district’s effort to comply with the Highly Qualified provision had redirected the hiring process. However, with both candidates and principals sidestepping the intention of the rule, it is questionable whether district efforts to influence the distribution of teachers met the desired goal of stronger teachers in Title I schools. Finally, principals clearly preferred a faculty diverse in race and gender, though it is unclear to what degree this is due to the district messages, as

opposed to the personal views of the principals. Most principals saw no conflict between the desire for demographic diversity and teacher quality, though some principals did see a tension between them.

Indirect Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality

Direct measures were not the only efforts to improve teacher quality. As mentioned earlier researchers have identified “a more capable and committed faculty” as a goal of high stakes accountability (Malen, Croninger, Muncney, & Redmond-Jones, 2002). Central to high stakes accountability is the idea that in order to improve student outcomes, principals and teachers need to attend to improving instructional quality. One important way to improve instructional quality is through hiring.

As discussed earlier, the Florida schools in our study faced high stakes accountability pressure from two sources: Adequate Yearly Progress and Florida’s A+ accountability policy. However, not all principals in our study described hiring in the context of the high stakes pressure facing their school. Here, we first discuss principals’ perceptions of how high stakes pressures had affected hiring.²⁰ We then turn to an analysis of whether principals who bridged high stakes accountability pressures preferred different characteristics than those principals who buffered.²¹

Principals in the study identified feeling pressures from both AYP and Florida’s A+ Policy. But while AYP was on many of the principals’ minds, not all principals mentioned it as a major policy initiative. Most acutely affected were those principals at the three schools in the district that had not made AYP as well as those schools that had received reassigned students.²²

All of the principals in our study, however, discussed the pressures they felt from the state A+ policy in which schools were graded based on student performance on the FCAT. Principal J described the policy environment in Florida with its central role on high stakes assessments:

Testing is driving [school improvement]. Anybody that says it's not, I mean, they're just not being truthful. I mean, it is driving everything. That train is going down the track and you are not going to stop it....You know what the rules are. Just go out and do it...I don't care what school you are in and what your demographics are, you can contact DOE and they will show you a school with the same demographics and they are doing an unbelievable job.

Principals were asked directly how state and federal pressures to improve test scores had affected the hiring process with nineteen responding that it had affected how they hire and ten reporting that it had not.²³ Principals in the former category explained that they tried to hire teachers who were effective and, in turn, would improve student achievement. Emblematic of their response was that of Principal S of a high school who explained “I'm looking for really good people, and we don't have the luxury of having people in the classroom who aren't. I mean, there's pressure.” Another alluded to thinking strategically on teacher placement due to FCAT considerations, stating:

Well, certain grade levels get a greater weight in the [school accountability] formula. Fourth grade makes up fifty percent of your data that goes into the grade. You want to make sure you have a fourth-grade teacher that perhaps has experience and knows what they're doing and is, you know, well versed in fourth grade skills that are going to be tested.

Despite knowing and looking at the student test scores of teachers already in the school, though, few principals discussed looking at candidates' FCAT scores when hiring. Of course, new teachers fresh out of college have no test scores. However, teachers with experience in the State of Florida or within the district do have experience and test scores.

Yet only one principal discussed an applicant who was hired that discussed testing experience and student test score gains:

[She] started telling us about the great gains her students made and was able to show us evidence of that and really had a high rating on her knowledge of how to do that...So we look for teachers with those strong teaching skills... we look for experience and differentiated instruction, if they're able to talk about that, and we talk about course work they've had, and that's very important to me.

Of the principals who reported that the pressures from high stakes accountability had not influenced their hiring, some felt that a good candidate would naturally lead to students who scored well. Others believed that teachers were trainable. Principal V, for example, explained:

I don't see the pressure—now, the pressures are there, but the Hiring—regardless of pressures or no pressures, you're trying to get the best person to work with the kids and to fit with the team.

Principals' response to high stakes testing reveals that they felt pressure to address accountability demands, but it remains to be seen how these pressures translate into hiring preferences or decisions. Next we turn to questions of whether there is a relationship between the ways that principals described their school goals and the characteristics they preferred in candidates.

Quantitative Analysis of Principal Bridging/Buffering and Preferences for Teachers

The degree to which any principal changes hiring practices as a result of direct and indirect policy influences is partly related to whether he or she supports the objectives and approaches that these policies embody and, consequently, adjust their school leadership to be consistent with these objectives and approaches. Therefore, in

this section, we turn to the conceptual framework developed by Honig and Hatch (2004) that provides a model for understanding how schools as organizations manage multiple policy demands and in the context of hiring, negotiate the policy environment in their decisions and preferences regarding teacher selection.

Predicated on ideas that members of organizations engage in individual and collective sensemaking in which they negotiate policy goals with their own prior knowledge, beliefs and values, Honig and Hatch present a model of policy implementation in which schools negotiate internal and external demands, strategically bridging or buffering themselves in varying degrees to further their own goals. Bridging, on one end of a continuum, consists of activities in which schools respond to policy demands by instituting programs and initiatives to achieve policy goals. On the other end of the continuum are buffering activities in which schools choose not to enact policy demands but rather orient themselves around their own priorities and goals. Here, buffering is “not the blind dismissal of external demands but strategically deciding to engage external demands in limited ways” (p. 23). In between, schools exhibit behavior including bridging by adding peripheral structures such as committees and programs to target specific external demands and buffering by symbolically adopting external demands, such as aligning the mission statement or using reform language without changing practice (Honig & Hatch, 2004). In this process, districts often serve as important policy mediators, simplifying policy messages by setting their own specific policy-aligned goals for schools.

In the context of high stakes accountability, we would expect to see specific activities related to bridging and to buffering. In schools that bridge to high stakes

accountability, for example, we would expect to see activities in which school administrators and teachers direct instructional resources towards improving student achievement on the high stakes assessment, such as using test taking materials in tested subjects or computer labs in which students are practicing the specific skills assessed on the exam. In schools that buffer, in contrast, we would expect to see members either outright reject policy goals, or more likely, provide alternative interpretations of how to improve student achievement, such as the implementation of small learning communities, portfolio-based evaluation, and interdisciplinary teaching. In most schools, members engage in a negotiation in which bridging and buffering activities coexist, sometimes leading to confusion and conflict.²⁴

With regard to hiring specifically, Honig and Hatch contend that, "enabling the entry of new staff with backgrounds and values consistent with the overall direction of the goals and strategies appears essential to infusing schools with new resources for their implementation as well as new ideas for further developing them" (p. 21). This is the hypothesis we test in the quantitative section of our study, namely, that school leaders will gravitate toward applicant characteristics that are more consistent with their overall goals for their school. In the context of Florida's high stakes accountability climate and Adequate Yearly Progress, we hypothesize principals who bridge to policy demands will prefer applicants who have the professional characteristics encouraged by accountability policies as more likely to produce higher achievement such education, knowledge of subject matter and experience. Conversely, principals who buffer policy demands will be more inclined toward personality characteristics independent of high stakes accountability messages such as creative and thoughtful.

To understand whether principals were engaging in bridging or buffering activities, we focused on principals' responses to five specific questions about students, the school and their goals for the school. For each question, shown in Table 1, we coded the principal response into one of four categories where 0 indicates that principals bridge their schools to the policy demands and 3 indicates that they were buffering their schools from the demands. In response to the question "What are your goals for your school?" an example of a bridging response comes from Principal D, who stated, "To be an A school...Because when you're an A school, your children are performing at a high academic level." An example of a buffering response to the same question would be that of Principal F, who stated, "My goal for the school is to have a very positive team-work type atmosphere where every position is valued, whether it's a custodian or a lunchroom worker or a teacher; that we all are valued."

If the principals' responses indicated that they placed more emphasis on bridging activities, but that they also included some buffering activities, we coded those responses as 1. However, if their responses indicated that they were more concerned with buffering their schools from the demands but were also doing some bridging activities, we coded those responses as 2.

The coded variables have high validity and inter-rater reliability. After the researchers collectively discussed responses to a small sample of responses to each question, a larger sample was coded by multiple individual researchers, yielding inter-rater reliability above 0.9. The resulting variables were positively correlated with one another. Table 3 shows that the correlations range from 0.074 to 0.635 and a majority are statistically different from zero despite the small sample size.

[Table 3]

A confirmatory factor analysis suggests that there is only one common factor (using Kaiser’s eigenvalue rule). We therefore used the factor loadings from this analysis, shown in Table 4, to create a single composite measure of buffering and bridging for each principal. Various factor analytic strategies were used and yielded similar factor loadings. Therefore, only those from a simple principal factor analysis are shown in Table 4. These loadings are used to create the composite “buffering” measure for each principal that is used in the remainder of the analysis.

[Table 4]

As a group, the principals in Hillyer tend toward bridging over buffering, suggesting that they are generally accepting the objectives and approaches promoted by both hiring and high stakes accountability policies. As shown in Table 5, the unweighted mean response was 1.11 with 1.50 being an equal balance between bridging and buffering. There is also considerable variation across principals with some tending heavily toward one side or the other.²⁵

[Table 5]

Principal preferences for teachers. For the ranking activity, the interviewer placed twelve main characteristics on separate index cards (caring, etc.).²⁶ Those that the principal placed in the most important category were coded as four, those in the next group as three, and so on. Principals went through this exercise twice. Elementary principals ranked the characteristics and tools to reflect their choices for a grade one position; then ranked a second time for a grade four position. This was done due to the fact that grade four is one that is assessed by FCAT while grade one is not. Middle and high school teachers ranked the characteristics and tools first for an English teacher then for a mathematics teacher. The results of the other grade/subject ranking are extremely similar to the results of the first ranking and, in fact, many principals simply said that their rankings were the same for both positions. As a result, we report only the first responses.

Bridging, accountability, and preferences for teachers. We use both simple correlations and partial correlations from ordered probit analysis to identify the relationships between principals' composite bridging tendency and their preferences for teachers. The simple correlations in Table 6 suggest that principals who buffer give greater weight to enthusiasm and not to organization skills. The rankings of the other teacher traits are uncorrelated with principal buffering.

[Table 6]

Because principal preferences for teachers may vary for reasons other than buffering tendencies, and because these other factors may be correlated with the

buffering measure, we also estimate the correlations controlling for an additional set of principal and school characteristics, including principal race, gender, highest degree earned, and selectivity of undergraduate institution, and years as principal in the specific school. School characteristics in the regressions include school level (elementary, middle, high), average student socio-economic status (average of percent minority and percent free or reduced price lunch), and school accountability grade.

The signs of the relationships are generally unchanged, though the statistical significance increases. In addition to giving more weight to enthusiasm, buffering principals also now appear to give more weight to creativity and cooperative, and less weight to organization and knowledge of subject—this last characteristic is one that policymakers are now emphasizing. In these respects, principals who generally buffer are also buffering in their teacher quality efforts. While these results are consistent with our theory, others are less so. For example, buffering principals also give less weight to caring and more weight to cooperativeness.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

It is perhaps self-evident that principals who accept the objectives and approaches of educational policy are most likely to adopt those objectives and approaches themselves in their own school-level leadership activities. There is also evidence that principals may not accept these policies and instead buffer their schools from the outside pressures. In this study, we provide additional evidence on the degree to which principals buffer in general and, particularly, how their buffering affects what is arguably one of the most important school leadership activities: teacher hiring.

We find that while principals have clearly accepted policies aimed directly at teacher quality—teacher certification and credentials—they have been less consistently responsive in hiring to the indirect pressures from high stakes accountability policies. On one level, this is unsurprising; one would expect direct pressures, especially those such as the federal Highly Qualified Teacher provision that are quite explicit, to have greater observed influence than policies such as accountability, which lay out almost no requirements and only establish general educational objectives. Buffering accountability is much easier than buffering teacher certification requirements.

Yet, principals' preferences are in many ways consistent with the goals of accountability. Principals described the value of hiring teachers who understood accountability demands. The majority of principals reported looking for professional characteristics consistent with accountability goals. While not all framed school goals in terms of high stakes goals and assessments, we found a relationship between types of characteristics principals preferred and their overall policy focus. This suggests that efforts to improve teacher quality by constraining the applicant pool and sending messages about improving school performance are reaching practitioners. Administrators are selecting from a pool of candidates who have already met minimum requirements. Districts are intervening to meet both state and federal goals. Policy messages about teacher quality and school improvement are reorienting principals' hiring preferences and priorities.

We also found that most of the principals in our study had assimilated the district's policy of a racially diverse faculty. However, some principals expressed a tension between the longstanding district policy aimed at a racially diverse faculty and

hiring the most qualified candidate. These findings raise important questions of how these two somewhat different ideas of quality are reconciled by district and school administrators.

Our findings raise additional concerns. Policies that allocate teachers based on academic and test score performance run the risk of further reducing the applicant pool, eliminating teachers who have a steep learning curve or have important other qualities with students. The research on teacher quality has potential particularly to identify quantifiable characteristics that affect student achievement but it also has important limitations. Still more needs to be understood, for example, about how affective qualities, such as motivation, enthusiasm and caring, contribute to teacher quality. Both the Highly Qualified Teacher provision and high stakes accountability policies underscore teachers' abilities to raise student achievement and principals appear to look for the characteristics they believe, and the policies collectively suggest, will make that happen.

Whether or not these teacher characteristics are associated with learning gains, the apparent importance of school-level coherence to school success (Newmann, Smith, Allensworth & Bryk, 2001) means that a narrow focus on individual qualities could have some detrimental impacts. Realistically, coherence is negotiated between the principal, as the primary gatekeeper, and other stakeholders in the hiring process, taking into account the existing faculty characteristics, the candidates available, and the jointly established goals of the school. In addition to lost coherence, a narrow focus could also result in more poor matches between teachers and schools and thus raise turnover in the most vulnerable schools (Liu & Johnson, 2006).

Districts have an important role in mediating federal and state policies. They not only manage compliance with external policies, but they also set rules and regulations to meet local conditions. We find in our case study district that the Highly Qualified provision led to two pools of teachers as it sought to direct teachers towards Title I schools. Improving the quality of teachers to schools serving low income students led to unanticipated consequences as administrators and teacher candidates gamed the system without achieving the goal of higher quality teachers in Title I schools.

If one of the goals of the current accountability movement is to give more local control at the site level, this study finds that in the area of hiring, principals may retain the ultimate hiring discretion, but increasingly they are performing teacher selection in a context in which hiring choices are restricted by federal, state and district efforts. Efforts to improve student achievement scores are extending beyond attention to classroom instructional alignment into personnel practices. This may be an irony of accountability. Instead of giving more discretion at the school site, there are additional layers of regulation as districts intervene in the hiring process.

This study raises several directions for further research on how policies aimed at improving teacher quality shape hiring practices and teacher quality. First, if districts play an important role in shaping teacher quality, how can they direct the highest quality applicants to the neediest schools? In turn, how does this affect the match between schools and teachers? Second, district and school administrators' conceptions of teacher quality go beyond characteristics identified in the teacher quality research and extend to personality and demographic characteristics. More needs to be understood about these different characteristics and any potential tensions between them. Finally, in the context

of multiple policy pressures, are principals selecting the best teachers for their school? This an important question to answer. This article suggests that policy efforts aimed at redefining ideas of teacher quality, both in terms of demographic and professional characteristics, are successful in permeating hiring practices. In our study, principals continued to maintain a degree of discretion over the process, however, if the district continues to be concerned about school performance, principals risk losing discretion as policy encroaches on their decision making processes, raising important questions about whether policies that focus on the individual teacher candidate come at a cost to school-level identity and values.

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Table 1: Questions used for Determining Buffering Measures

<i>Bridging Measure</i>	<i>Question</i>
<i>Q14</i>	How would you describe the needs of the students?
<i>Q15</i>	What are your goals for the school?
<i>Q16</i>	What are the challenges the school faces in reaching these goals? What changes have you made that address these challenges?
<i>Q17</i>	What are the most important initiatives that have you undertaken in the last two years? What specific goals were you trying to achieve with each initiative?
<i>Q18</i>	What are the most important changes you've made in the areas of instruction and curriculum?

Table 2: Sample School and Principal Characteristics

<i>Level</i>	<i>Student and School Characteristics</i>				<i>Principal Characteristics</i>		
	<i>% Minority</i>	<i>% Free/Reduced Lunch</i>	<i>Title I Status</i>	<i>School Grade</i>	<i>Race</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Years as Principal</i>
Elementary	75	65	Y	A	W	M	13
Elementary	70	65	Y	A	W	F	5
Elementary	20	10	N	A	W	M	12
Elementary	25	30	N	A	W	F	7.5
Elementary	40	40	N	A	W	F	4
Elementary	25	20	N	A	W	F	5
Elementary	80	85	Y	C	W	F	3
Elementary	40	60	Y	B	W	M	6
Elementary	30	20	N	A	W	M	1
Elementary	85	70	Y	B	W	F	1
Elementary	25	10	N	A	W	F	10
Elementary	95	90	Y	D	B	F	3
Elementary	50	40	N	A	W	M	3
Elementary	95	90	Y	C	B	F	2
Elementary	50	40	N	A	B	F	2.5
Elementary	95	80	Y	B	B	F	8
Elementary	10	50	N	B	W	M	12
Middle	20	5	N	A	W	M	6
Middle	70	55	N	B	B	F	5
Middle	75	50	Y	B	W	M	5
Middle	55	40	N	A	W	F	9
Middle	40	30	N	A	W	F	.5
Middle	30	20	N	A	W	F	10
High	15	5	N	B	W	M	3
High	30	10	N	B	W	F	5
High	40	15	N	B	W	F	9
High	80	40	N	D	B	M	4
Special	50	55	N	N/A	W	F	9
Special	85	65	N	F	W	M	4
Special	65	75	N	N/A	W	F	7
	Mean=52	Mean=44	Yes=9 No=21		White=24 Black=6	Male=11 Female=19	Mean=6

Notes: Race and free and reduced price lunch percentages rounded to the nearest five to help maintain school and district confidentiality.

Table 3: Simple Correlations of Five Separate Buffering Measures

<i>Bridging Measure</i>	<i>Q14</i>	<i>Q15</i>	<i>Q16</i>	<i>Q17</i>	<i>Q18</i>
<i>Q14</i>	1				
<i>Q15</i>	0.384**	1			
<i>Q16</i>	0.518*	0.635***	1		
<i>Q17</i>	0.252	0.073	0.194	1	
<i>Q18</i>	0.376	0.473**	0.416**	0.367*	1

Notes: Statistical significance indicated by *** = 0.01, ** = 0.05, * = 0.10. Principals response for each question coded as Bridging = 0 and Buffering = 3.

Table 4: Factor Loadings for Composite Buffering Measure

<i>Bridging Measure</i>	<i>Factor Loadings</i>
<i>Q14</i>	+0.604
<i>Q15</i>	+0.706
<i>Q16</i>	+0.755
<i>Q17</i>	+0.330
<i>Q18</i>	+0.629

Notes: Factor loadings from principal factors analysis in Stata; communalities are unrestricted.

Table 5: Mean Buffering Tendencies of Principals

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
<i>Q14</i>	1.74	0	3.00
<i>Q15</i>	1.18	0	3.00
<i>Q16</i>	1.33	0	3.00
<i>Q17</i>	0.81	0	3.00
<i>Q18</i>	0.48	0	3.00
Unweighted princ. Buffering score	1.11	0	2.80
Factor weighted princ. Buffering score	1.22	0	3.00

Table 6: Multivariate Analysis of Relationship between Composite Buffering Measure and Hiring Preferences

<i>Teacher Characteristic (Dependent var.)</i>	<i>Simple Correlation w/ Composite Buffering</i>	<i>Partial Correlation w/ Composite Buffering</i>
Caring	- 0.231	- 1.164***
Strong Teaching Skills	- 0.312	- 0.267
Knows Subject	- 0.141	- 0.794**
Enthusiastic	+0.401**	+0.747**
Motivated	+0.223	+0.419
Communication Skills	- 0.030	- 0.228
Works Well With Others	+0.171	+0.350
Creative	+0.107	+0.764*
Intelligent	+0.211	- 0.079
Thoughtful	-0.093	+0.059
Organized	-0.482**	- 1.342***
Cooperative	+0.180	+0.558*

Notes: Statistical significance indicated by *** = 0.01, ** = 0.05, * = 0.10. The partial correlations in the last column are estimated using ordered probit. Other variables in regression include principal race, gender, highest degree earned, and selectivity of undergraduate institution, and years as principal in the specific school. School characteristics in the regressions include school level (elem.=0, middle=1, high=2), average student socio-economic status (average of % minority and % free or reduced price lunch), and school accountability grade.

NOTES

¹ Over the last fifteen years, there have been a number of studies looking at the effects of high stakes testing on school and classroom practices (Author; Booher-Jennings, 2005; Firestone, Schorr & Monfils, 2004; Smith, 1991; Spillane, Diamond, Burch, Hallett, Jita, & Zoltners, 2002.) Here, we go in a new direction by looking at how high stakes assessments are shaping an important non-instructional activity.

² We define a mid-sized as having between 30 and 70 schools.

³ In the personnel research, hiring is understood as having four components: recruitment, screening, selection and the job offer (Kogan, Wolff & Russell, 1995). Screening is the process of narrowing the pool of candidates and selection entails choosing from a smaller subset of screened applicants.

⁴ Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff (2005) also find that teachers tend to return to the schools and school districts where they attended school themselves.

⁵ Strauss et al. also find that the greater the fraction of former students in the district's teacher force, the lower the student achievement. However, it is unclear whether the lower quality teachers cause lower student achievement or whether lower achievement makes it more difficult to attract quality teachers other than within-district graduates. In addition, it is possible that within-district graduates are of lower quality because the schools did a poor job of educating them.

⁶ The US Department of Education reviewed Florida's efforts to meet the highly qualified teacher requirement determined that while Florida documented "a good faith effort" it did not fully meet the 100% highly qualified goal by June 30, 2006. As such, Florida must submit a revised state plan outlining the steps being taken to reach the goal of all core academic classes being taught by a highly qualified teacher by the end of the 2006-07 school year. As part of the revised plan, school districts must ensure that poor or minority children are not taught by inexperienced, unqualified, or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than are other children, and must conduct a final review of veteran teachers hired before the 2006-07 school year who must complete the HOUSSSE process (Florida Department of Education, 2006).

⁷ One is eligible for a temporary certificate in the state of Florida if he or she has completed the application process, holds at least a bachelor's degree, has demonstrated mastery of subject area knowledge or meets subject specialization with at least a 2.5 GPA in a requested subject. As the temporary certificate is only valid for three academic years, alternative certification programs in Florida have been designed to prepare newly hired teachers who qualify for a temporary certificate and who must complete training in education to qualify for a professional certificate. Each Florida school district must offer a competency-based, on-the-job alternative certification program using either a district-developed program approved by the FDOE or use the Florida's Alternative Certification Program developed by the FDOE (Milton, Nilles, Hodgins, & Flood, 2004).

⁸ Science will be added in 2006-7 year.

⁹ While their underlying policy messages are similar, the expectations for AYP and the Florida A+ policy were not aligned. In 2003, 87% of Florida schools were not making AYP (Education Week, 2003). Yet in that same year, 1,809 schools of 2,518 (72% of Florida's schools) had either an A or a B grade (Florida Department of Education, 2005).

¹⁰ One principal from this sample of 30 was officially an assistant principal, but was given full authority to put forth hiring recommendations as an onsite school administrator.

¹¹ In their study of hiring in four states, Liu and Johnson (2006) find that 45.9 percent of teachers are hired directly by the school principal, another 23.2 percent are hired directly by the district and rest are hired through a hybrid process in which the district oversees the organization of materials and principals oversee the selection of teachers. While our sample district collected applicants' materials through a website, principals oversaw the screening and selection of teachers.

¹² All applicants were required to complete a common form including experience and education, Gallup's Teacher Insight assessment, Florida's teacher certification assessment. They were also expected to provide their university transcripts.

¹³ A number of the schools in our sample are also designated magnet schools and programs.

¹⁴ The national data on principals comes from the 1999-2000 Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) as reported in the Digest of Education Statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Also, part of the reason that this sample of principals has higher levels of educational attainment is that Florida law makes it difficult to become a principal without a master's degree.

¹⁵ These questions included: What specific steps have you made at the school to meet state and federal pressure to improve test scores? In what ways does this affect your hiring process? Do you know whether students learn more from particular teachers, as measured by the FCAT? What do you do with this information?

¹⁶ There were 30 principals in the second interview. In some cases, we discuss the results for the 21 who participated in both interviews and in other cases we used the full sample. We indicate which sample is used in the text.

¹⁷ All of the principals in the study reported including teachers in the hiring process as members of the hiring team and as interviewers. Principals also all reported that while they considered the recommendations of teachers in the hiring decision, they were responsible for the final decision.

¹⁸ Principals were asked to list the characteristics they look for in a teacher candidate in an open ended prompt. We categorized principals based on their top five characteristics. Personality-focused principals listed characteristics such as caring, enthusiastic, and positive. Professional-focused principals listed characteristics such as high GPA, strong teaching skills, and experience. Balanced principals mentioned both.

¹⁹ We identify principals by letter to show the range of responses, however, we do not link principals to schools to preserve the anonymity of the participants in the study.

²⁰ Principals in our study discussed policy pressure in four contexts. First, they were directly asked about how policies affected their hiring and certain administrative practices related to teacher quality. Second, they were asked to rank their use of certification as a tool when selecting teachers. Third, they referred to policy in a series of questions about their goals for their school and students. Finally, they discussed policy in the context of selection processes and practices.

²¹ As we found no direct involvement or pressure from the district to meet AYP or the A+ policy beyond what we have already discussed, we focus here on principals' responses.

²² Two schools in the district had received the 300 students who had moved schools due to their own schools not making Adequate Yearly Progress for two years in a row.

²³ One principal was inadvertently not asked if high stakes accountability affected his or her hiring practices.

²⁴ Honig and Hatch are particularly interested in how schools “craft coherence” with policy goals. They view this as a dynamic process rather than as an objective alignment of external requirements. In this process, school actors identify and negotiate school-wide goals and strategies toward these goals or, put differently, the extent to which the school will bridge or buffer from policy demands. In this view, districts play an important role in lending support to these school-level processes.

²⁵ It would be interesting to know whether this sample of principals was similar to the national average in its tendency toward buffering. However, even without knowing that, we can still accomplish the main purpose of this part of the analysis: determining the relationship between buffering tendencies and hiring preferences.

²⁶ The specific interview prompt was: “Now I’m going to give you note cards with 12 possible characteristics of teacher candidates. Please rank the characteristics by putting the cards into four groups of three with the first pile being the most important to you, the second pile the next most important to you to the fourth pile being the least important. Here are the note cards.”