A Phenomenographic Study of Teachers’ Perceptions of a School Leader’s Role in Teacher Retention in a Failing Title I Elementary School

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A Phenomenographic Study of Teachers’ Perceptions of a School Leader’s Role in Teacher Retention in a Failing Title I Elementary School

A Dissertation Defense
Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements of
A Doctorate of Educational Leadership
Kennesaw State University

Dissertation Committee:
Dr. Sheryl J. Croft, Chair
Dr. Nicholas Clegorne, Committee Member
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by
Alex Davis
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Dedication

I give my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ all of the recognition. If it was not for Him, none of this would be possible. Having faith as small as a mustard seed brought me through this journey.

To my mother, Dianne, who believed in me, pushed me, supported me, and helped to finance some of this journey. Mom, your love and support of me does not go unnoticed. You have been a single mom since my eleventh-grade year, and you never complained or gave up. I love you and always will.

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To all of my readers, never give up, and know that you are the master of your fate. Reach for the stars, set goals, and never become complacent.
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ABSTRACT

This study examines teachers’ perceptions of their administrator’s role in retaining teachers in one failing Title I Elementary School. As attrition rates among teachers increase in the United States, more investigation is needed to fully understand what role, if any, school administrators play in teachers’ retention efforts. Through the use of phenomenography, this study explores various factors connected to school administrators that can contribute to teacher retention. Interviews and a focus group were used to gather data in this study to provide insight into teachers’ perceptions of their administrator's role in contributing to their decisions to leave or remain in their school setting. Findings from this study highlight the important role that school leaders play in decreasing teacher attrition and providing support for them to thrive in their profession.

*Keywords: qualitative research design, teachers’ perception on teacher retention*
A Phenomenographic Study of Teachers’ Perceptions of a School Leader’s Role in Teacher Retention in a Failing Title I Elementary School

Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017) have observed that “teacher attrition in the United States is about twice as high as in high-achieving jurisdictions like Finland, Singapore, and Ontario, Canada” (para. 1). National trends highlight that about “[one] in [six] teachers leave their schools annually, although attrition is generally more of an issue in low-performing schools” (Garza, 2017, para. 2). Garza (2017) further suggests that “consistently high rates of turnover are detrimental for schools and their students, leading to poor staff morale and negatively impact student outcomes” (para. 2). For example, one large suburban/urban school district found itself with three-hundred teaching positions to fill before the first day of school. In addition to teacher attrition, the recruitment of teachers is an issue as well (Eldridge & McGuire, 2018). In fact, Title I schools have a 50% greater turnover rate than non-Title I schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In this regard, Garza (2017) suggests that school leaders play a vital role in teacher retention, whether in regular or Title I schools. She further notes that “of these factors, school working conditions—such as quality of school leadership and staff cohesion—appear to matter most in whether a teacher decides to stay or leave a school” (2017, para. 3). Garza (2017) also notes that a teacher's perception of school leaders' leadership in the school is a significant factor in whether or not they remain in a school. In a recent study, Burkhauser (2017) found that teachers’ perceptions of their principal directly impacted how they viewed working conditions within the school, even though some aspects of the school’s environment were outside of the
principal’s control. Still, Burkhauser’s analysis implies that "the individual principal matters when it comes to a teacher's perception of his or her work environment" (2017, p. 137). Burkhauser’s analysis further suggests that "the school principal can play a key role in improving teachers' perceptions of their school environment, which have been shown to affect their leaving decisions" (2017, p. 140). Based on these findings, Garza (2017) “recommends that districts with high teacher turnover rates assess their teachers’ perceptions of their working environments” (para. 4). This underscores the importance of regularly speaking with teachers to assess what changes need to occur in the building.

**Research Questions**

This study analyzes teachers’ perceptions of the administrator’s role in teacher retention at a failing Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban school district. This study is guided by two overarching research questions:

1. What are teachers’ lived experiences of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district?

2. How can teachers’ lived experiences help administrators to understand the factors underlying their teachers’ decisions to leave the school and/or profession?

**Purpose and Significance of Study**

The purpose of this study was to understand teachers’ lived experiences of the role that principals play in either the retention or attrition of teachers in a Title I Elementary School. The teachers' lived experiences of the leaders' leadership style in Title I schools is a driving force behind teachers’ decisions to stay or leave the school. This study aims to determine the impact
that a principal in a Title I school in one large suburban/urban county school district has on teachers’ decisions to leave or stay in the school.

**Local Context**

The study was conducted to shed light on the reason that teachers are leaving Title I schools within one large suburban/urban school district. Teacher turnover in the metropolitan area of Southeastern states is an issue, with over two-thousand teachers leaving the classroom before the year was over (Walker, 2018b). Walker (2018b) notes that “the Georgia Professional Standards Commission reported in 2015 that half the state’s teachers leave the profession within the first five years of employment” (para. 7). Walker (2018b) further suggests that the turnover is high in the metropolitan area due to time spent preparing students for testing and completing paperwork, as well as low morale, pay, and benefits.

In an effort to offset teacher turnover and increase their retention within school districts, it is important to gain a better understanding of what it looks like to work in a suburban/urban school district with a high turnover rate. Some factors that contribute to the attrition rate of teachers are outside of a district’s control, such as testing and paperwork due to national and state mandates. However, the individual school can impact teacher morale. Evans (1997) suggests that there are three factors that drive teacher morale: “individual teacher characteristics, dispositions, and perspectives on schools and teaching and the professional culture of the school… [which] may be influenced by system policy, social community context of the school, and the leader’s ability to negotiate these two factors” (p. 832). As stated by Evans, the leader can have a significant impact on the morale of teachers and staff. Evans’s study (1997) highlighted the importance of the school leader’s role in teacher retention.
Review of Relevant Terms

Below, I have provided definitions of the terms used in this study:

*Elementary School* “A school that provides the first part of a child’s education, usually for children between five and eleven years old” (Cambridge, 2020a).

*Principal* “A principal is the person in charge of a school” (Cambridge, 2020b).

*Role* “A role is a position or purpose that someone or something has in a situation, organization, society, or relationship” (Cambridge, 2020c).

*School Administrator* “A person who oversees the day-to-day functions at a school” (Bruens, 2020).

*Suburban School District* "A school district located at “the outer edges of a metropolitan city” with “a large middle-class and white majority of students.” It is often populated by “families who have immigrated from the urban areas of the city,” and generally features “classrooms that are better furnished with the latest technology and newest equipment” (McGee, 2019).

*Urban School District* “A school district comprised of a large minority population coming from a low socio-economic area where truancy, lack of motivation, low test scores and behavior tends to be a concern” (Milner, 2012).

*Teacher Retention* Teacher retention is the rate at which teachers “stay in the same school from one year to the next” (Lochmiller, Sugimoto & Muller, 2016).

*Title I* “Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, as amended by every Student Succeeds Act (ESEA), provides financial assistance to local educational agencies (LEAs) and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children meet challenging state academic standards. Federal funds are currently
allocated through four statutory formulas that are based primarily on census poverty estimates and the cost of education in each state” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

**Organization of Study**

This study is comprised of five chapters. Chapter 1 comprises the introduction, which includes the statement of the problem, research questions, purpose, and significance of the study. Chapter 2 includes a comprehensive literature review, as well as an overview of the theoretical framework. Chapter 3 includes the methodology that will guide this study, as well as a review of the research questions, research design, setting of study, sample population, data collection, data analysis, and ethical considerations. Chapter 4 consists of the findings from this research, as well as the data analysis. Chapter 5 consists of the discussion of findings, the relationship of findings to previous literature, and implications for future practice, policy, and research. Chapter 2 will present the literature review that situates the context of the importance of this study. It will also discuss the study’s theoretical framework, Bandura’s (SCT), and will elaborate more thoroughly on the components of Bandura’s (SCT) and its relevance to this work.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

This study seeks to determine the influence that principals have on teacher retention in Title I schools in large suburban/urban school districts. The attrition of both new and experienced teachers presents a challenge for schools and school administrators. Garcia and Weiss (2019) argue that “a shortage of teachers harms students, teachers, and the public education system as a whole” (p. 1). This study builds on previous studies related to teacher attrition in Title I elementary schools by exploring a critical factor—the influence of principals on teacher retention in Title I schools. Jackson (2008) suggests that retention appears to be at least modestly related to the role of the principal with regard to whether or not the teacher plans to return to his/her current school. Aune (2013) argues that participants’ “willingness to continue teaching at their current schools included a combination of student conduct, teacher leadership, school leadership, and instructional practices and support” (p. 76). Coates (2015) argues that “principals have a great deal of influence over the experiences of new teachers, but the acknowledgement and intentionality of that influence varies from principal to principal” (p. 88). Although these three different studies explored teacher retention through the lens of principal support, this study specifically explores teachers’ perceptions of teacher retention in one failing Title I elementary school.

Title I Schools

This section discusses the origin and purpose of Title I schools in order to contextualize their impact on the recruitment and retention of teachers. Title I funding was established as a measure of education equality, “requir[ing] that schools receiving funds under Title I be comparable in services to schools that do not receive Title I funds” (McClure, 2008, p. 11).
Origin of Title I Schools

Title I was signed into law in 1965 as a result of Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). McClure (2008) suggests that two sociopolitical developments contributed to the signing of the Title I Act. These developments included the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and protocols for federal funding of religious schools. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 “prohibit[ed] recipients of federal financial assistance from discriminating on the basis of race, color, or national origin” (McClure, 2008, p. 11). Therefore, children residing in school attendance areas with high concentrations of low-income families would be “eligible for services whether they attended [a] public school or [a] church-affiliated school” (McClure, 2008, p. 11). Due to these new anti-discrimination mandates, the Title I Act signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson marked the first time that aid could be allocated to all of the nation’s elementary and secondary schools. McClure (2008) posits that the signing of the Title I Act ensured that federal financial aid was spent on primary and secondary education in addition to state and local funds. All public-school children would be entitled to these funds. “Title I was one of five titles in the legislation, which was introduced into Congress on January 12, 1965 and was passed by Congress on April 9, 1965” (McClure, 2008, p. 11).

Funding of Title I Schools

President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 “to provide additional resources for vulnerable students,” such as “grants to districts serving low-income students, federal grants for textbooks and library books, creat[ion of] special education centers, and creat[ion of] scholarships for low-income college students” (Brenchley, 2015, para. 2). Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act is the main contributor for the financing of elementary and secondary schools. The purpose of Title I is to
provide federal funds to schools with high concentrations of children living in low socio-economic areas. ESEA consists of four statutory formulas centered around types of funding: basic grants, concentration grants, targeted grants, and education finance, incentive grants (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2018), “basic grants provide funds to local educational agencies (LEAs),” “concentration grants provide funds to LEAs that are eligible for basic grants,” “targeted grants are based on the same data used for basic and concentration grants,” and “education finance incentive grants distribute funds to states based on factors that measure a state’s effort to provide financial support for education compared to its relative wealth as measured by its per capita income …” (para. 2). Typically, Title I funds provide “services to children who are failing, or most at risk of failing, to meet challenging State academic standards” (U.S. Department of Education, 2018, para. 4). In addition to serving students who typically fail, Title I also provides funding for schools with high populations of low socio-economic status students. With a high population of students from a low socio-economic area, the Title I funds help support the services needed for students to pass state assessments and to increase student achievement.

**Principals’ Roles in Recruitment and Hiring of Qualified Teachers**

To understand the role of the principal in the recruitment and hiring of qualified teachers, this section reviews the following topics: the district’s role in hiring, the principal’s role in recruitment, and a summary statement that summarizes the section.

**District’s Role in Hiring**

Principals do not always have total autonomy in the recruitment and retention of effective teachers. The National Council on Teacher Quality (2010) (NCTQ) states that principals have limited control over who teaches in their buildings:
In what may come as a surprise to many, principals have remarkably little control over who teaches in their schools. For the most part, the human resources (HR) department in a district's central office, not individual school principals, makes the final call about when to hire teachers, whom to hire and in which schools they are placed" (p. 1).

The article discusses five factors that prevent a district from giving principals full autonomy over staffing and teacher assignment. The factors include the following: a strong pull of centralized hiring and assignment, failure of school districts to properly evaluate teachers, the role that seniority plays in teacher excessing and teacher placement, and limitations imposed by states on districts seeking to nullify contractual obligations (NCTQ, 2010, pp. 2-9). Factor one focuses on the way that the district takes charge of the hiring of teachers for schools, including receiving applications, processing applications, and interviewing and hiring teacher candidates (NCTQ, 2010, p.2). Factor two focuses on the district’s lack of systems to hold principals accountable for evaluating teachers (NCTQ, 2010, p.4). Factor three focuses on the district’s emphasis on seniority rights in teacher contracts when it comes to teacher excessing (NCTQ, 2010, pp. 4-5). Factor four focuses on how the district mandates which teachers a principal can hire based on seniority (NCTQ, 2010, pp. 7-8). Lastly, factor five focuses on how the district forces principals to take teachers because of contractual obligations (NCTQ, 2010, pp. 8-9). The role that the principal plays in hiring differs in various districts (See Table 1) (NCTQ, 2010).

**Principals’ Role in Hiring Transfer Teachers**

The role that the principal plays in hiring transfer teachers varies in different districts across the country. Montgomery County Public Schools (2015) suggests a transfer teacher is variously defined as a teacher who moves from school to school to fill positions within their field of teaching endorsement. For example, in Clark, NV, the principals have the opportunity to
approve transfers—but not to select candidates—before June 30th. In Fort Bend, TX, the principals select transfer candidates, whereas in Jefferson, CO, and Jordan, UT, the principals interview and select transfer candidates (NCTQ, 2010, p. 3). Contrastingly, in Memphis, TN, the principals have until May 15th to hire candidates, but they must interview the five most senior candidates who apply. After May 15th, the Human Resources (HR) Department assigns teachers to available positions (NCTQ, 2010, p.3).

**Principals’ Role in Hiring Excessed Teachers**

The role that the principal plays in hiring excessed teachers also varies in different districts. The United Federation of Teachers (n.d.) defines excessing as “the process of reducing staff in a particular school when the number of available positions in a title or license area in that school is lower than the number of people in the school who require an assignment in that title or license area” (n.p.). For example, in Clark, NV, principals have no role in determining the placement of excessed teachers (NCTQ, 2010, p.3). Conversely, excessed teachers are allowed to select new positions based on their qualifications. Principals do not play a role in determining the placement of excessed teachers in Fort Bend, TX, either, but there, HR determines the assignments of excessed teachers (NCTQ, 2010, p. 3). In Jefferson, CO, principals interview and select excessed teachers, when in Jordan, UT, principals play a very limited role in determining the placement of excessed teachers (NCTQ, 2010, p.3). In Jordan, however, principals may interview and select candidates before June 1st. In Memphis, TN—much like in Fort Bend—principals do not play a role in determining the placement of excessed teachers. In fact, human resources give teachers a choice of three vacancies, and if they refuse, they are simply placed at a school (NCTQ, 2010, p.3).
As noted above, it is the case in some instances that the principal does not have a voice in who human resources assigns to their schools. For example, in Clark, NV, Fort Bend, TX, Jordan, UT and Memphis, TX, human resources can place any teacher in a school (NCTQ, 2010, p. 3). On the other hand, in places like Jefferson, CO, all hiring decisions are made through mutual consent between the principals and teachers (NCTQ, 2010, p.3).

Table 1 shows a comparison between the hiring practices and roles that principals play amongst different school districts in hiring teachers from the National Council on Teacher Quality.
## Table 1

**Select Examples of Roles of Principals in Hiring, National Council on Teacher Quality (2010)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>What is the role of principals in hiring teachers who are transferring voluntarily?</th>
<th>What is the role of principals in hiring excessed teachers?</th>
<th>Can human resources assign a teacher to a school without the principal’s consent?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clark, NV</td>
<td>Principals have the opportunity to “approve” transfers before June 30, though whether teachers are interviewed is not discussed. After June 30, HR assigns teachers to vacancies.</td>
<td>Principals have no role in determining the placement of excessed teachers. Excessed teachers select new positions based on their qualifications and seniority.</td>
<td>Yes, HR can forcibly place any teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Bend, TX</td>
<td>Principals may select transfer candidates.</td>
<td>Principals have no role in determining the placement of excessed teachers. HR determines assignments of excess teachers.</td>
<td>Yes, HR can forcibly place any teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jefferson, CO</td>
<td>Principals interview and select transfer candidates.</td>
<td>Principals interview and select excessed teachers.</td>
<td>No. All hiring decisions are made according to the mutual consent of teachers and principals. Teachers who do not find a position by mutual consent may accept a temporary assignment for one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jordan, UT</td>
<td>Principals interview and select transfer candidates.</td>
<td>Principals have limited role in determining the placement of excessed teachers. Before June 1, principals may interview and select candidates. After that date, HR assigns excessed teachers.</td>
<td>Yes, HR can forcibly place any teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memphis, TN</td>
<td>Principals have until May 15 to hire candidates. They must interview the five most senior candidates who apply. After May 15 HR assigns teachers to available positions.</td>
<td>Principals have no role in determining the placement of excessed teachers. HR gives teachers a choice of three vacancies. If teachers refuse assignments, then HR places teachers.</td>
<td>Yes, HR can forcibly place any teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DeKalb County, GA</td>
<td>Principals interview and select transfer candidates.</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Yes, HR can forcibly place any teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: Principals have varying degrees of autonomy in the hiring of teachers.*
**District and State Responsibilities**

District and state responsibilities are of vital importance in any school. For example, state and district policymakers must consider the needs of challenged schools when developing policies and allocating funding to provide students in these schools with the resources and skills needed for success. Without district investment, adequate funding, and the development of policies geared towards retaining teachers in hard-to-staff/challenging schools, the systemic cycle of low teacher morale, high turnover, student disciplinary issues, lack of professional development, and low student achievement will continually plague hard-to-staff/challenging schools.

**Roles of the Principal in Teacher Recruitment and Hiring**

Principals have three roles in hiring. The roles include the recruitment phase, hiring phase and retention phase.

**Three Roles of Principals in Hiring**

The principal’s role in hiring, recruiting, and retaining teachers varies by district. Eller and Eller (2018) argue that these three elements—recruitment, hiring, and retention—are crucial for principals aiming to attract and keep good teachers at their schools. During the recruitment phase, principals have to think of both the school’s reputation and their own: "The public reputation of the school can be a recruiting tool to attract teachers. In addition to the reputation of the school, teacher candidates may also look at your reputation [the principal] when making an application decision" (Eller & Eller, 2018, n.p.). During the hiring phase, the principal must set clear expectations for positions, require the teacher candidate to teach a lesson, and involve teachers in the interview process (Eller & Eller, 2018). During the retention phase, the principal must implement a structured induction/mentoring program, express an interest in teacher
success, provide professional development opportunities for teachers, and operate with a sense of purpose (Eller & Eller, 2018).

Hiring is an important aspect of a principal's contribution towards the creation of a quality staff. Eller and Eller (2018) suggest that the principal must set clear expectations for the position, review the candidates' data (job evaluations) or have the candidate teach a lesson to a class, and increase internal staff involvement by having a team of teachers participate in the interview process and interact with the candidate in order to solicit a variety of opinions. When a principal includes teachers in the interview process, the teachers can analyze the candidate to see if the candidate is suited for the dynamics of the school. Explicitly, “by charging stakeholder groups with certain responsibilities during the interview process, you capitalize on their unique views” (Eller & Eller, 2018, n.p.). Eller and Eller (2018) provide an example of increased engagement by way of a parent group reporting on how they think a potential candidate may interact with and relate to parents.

**Principal Incentives for Recruitment**

The district plays a role in recruitment, but the principal is the driving force behind attracting the teachers to his or her high-needs school. In most cases, monetary incentives come from the district and not the principal. While districts can offer enticing monetary incentives, Berry, Rasberry and Williams (2007) suggest that “monetary incentives—even large ones—are insufficient to recruit and retain good teachers in high-needs schools” (p. 11). Accordingly, Eller and Eller (2018) offer principals the following suggestions for recruitment: build and maintain a good reputation (personal/school), use attractive wording in ads and postings, and network to meet teacher candidates.
Importance of Advertisement. Positive and action-oriented language is often attractive to potential candidates. Networking is also key. Principals have to network if they want to find quality teaching candidates. Professional development sessions and college presentations are great places to network to find good teacher candidates. Attractive advertisements that speak positively of the school are key to hiring good teacher candidates (Eller & Eller, 2018).

Many schools and principals use meetings and professional development sessions as a means of recruiting. When you or your teachers attend these sessions, be on the lookout for good teacher candidates. Volunteering to present at university classes in teacher development or administrative preparation is another way to meet great candidates (Eller & Eller, 2018, n.p.).

Importance of Retention

When teachers leave schools, the hiring process starts all over again. Carver (2002) discusses a case in which a team of teachers assists the principal in hiring over the summer, and details how the team makes the new teacher feel welcomed, assigns them to a mentor, and provides them with teaching resources. As time goes on into the year, however, this support fades away. The new teacher tends to leave the school after his or her first three years due to "impossible demands, poor working conditions, and low pay" (Carver, 2002, p. 1). If this is the case, how can a principal sustain teachers to have a positive impact on students and overall achievement?

Carver (2002) outlines some characteristics of an effective principal that can benefit his or her school. These characteristics include the ability to: "recruit aggressively and facilitate the hiring process (be active and involved), hire early (do not wait until the end of summer), invest in your teachers (resources, mentorships, professional development), have clear expectations for
teachers, establish rituals and routines (uniform discipline policy), communicate with your teachers (listen to the teachers and staff), [and] build leaders (teacher leadership)” (Carver, 2002, p.1). Job-embedded professional development can be an especially appealing asset to new teachers because it enables them to become productive and educated on a new skill, strategy, or task, which they can then implement with their students.

The principal and district both play integral roles in staffing teachers in hard-to-staff schools such as Title I schools. As stated in the above passages, districts and principals must employ pay differentials, clear and concise job requirements, and maintain a positive school/principal’s reputation when staffing hard-to-staff schools such as those classified under Title I.

**Principals’ Actions to Improve Teacher Retention**

This section discusses the principal’s critical roles. Building a positive school culture, fostering a good school reputation, and ensuring a safe school environment are some actions that a principal can take to improve teacher retention. Cultivating a student-centered/data-driven environment and building a culture centered on professionalism are further initiatives that a principal can implement to improve teacher retention. Finally, cultivating open forms of communication with teachers, being active/visible, and promoting school spirit are the final actions that principals need to take to improve teacher retention.

**Building a Positive School Culture**

A useful 2016 study (Osiname) focuses on five elements of leadership practiced by principals to ultimately produce inclusive school cultures. These principals collaborated and communicated, led with encouragement, built positive relationships, sustained a renewal process, and took responsibility for students. These styles will be elaborated in the following sections.
**Foster School’s Reputation.** Sagir, Dos, and Cetin (2014) state that academic success, social and cultural values, and the parents' and communities' perception of the school contribute to a given school’s reputation. As for the leader’s reputation, Carver (2002) emphasized the fact that good leaders provide site orientation and resource assistance, manage the school’s environment effectively and efficiently, build relationships with teachers, foster instructional development, and thoroughly explain expectations for evaluations to facilitate a supportive school context (p. 1). In other words, as Carver (2002) suggests, the principal’s reputation is based off of his or her actions. For example,

> Whatever specific actions principals decide to take, it’s important that they demonstrate their care and concern. Gestures, large and small, add up. This is particularly true when the principal’s actions are immediately visible. The novice teacher benefits when the principal quietly asks a colleague next door to keep an eye on the classroom, but gains even more if the principal personally observes in the classroom and offers counseling and advice (Carver, 2002, n.p.).

**Promote/Build Safe Environment.** Ensuring a safe environment is critical to teacher retention. Meador (2019) suggests that principals need to ensure that the school’s policies are effective and efficient, completing the following steps to ensure a safe environment: 1) create a discipline plan for teachers to follow; 2) support teachers when students come to the office; 3) be consistent and fair with all students and parents; 4) document everything; and 5) be calm but stern and know the district policies and pertinent state laws.

High needs schools must attain and retain effective teachers. According to Darling-Hammond (2010), teachers have the greatest impact on student achievement. One way that a school leader can retain teachers is by ensuring their safety. Sindhi (2013) suggests the following
criteria for principals to ensure the safety of their staff: accept responsibility for providing a safe environment for staff and visitors, communicate the key principles of a safe school to staff, and engage all stakeholders in creating a vision of a safe school. Sindhi (2013) further suggests that principals identify existing school practices that are compatible with the vision, ensure that the vision statement and strategies are clearly documented, systematically review progress in relation to achievement of the vision, seek regular feedback on the achievement of the vision from various school representatives, and reshape and adapt the vision and accompanying strategies.

**Build a Student-Centered Culture.** When it comes to building relationships within the school, principals need to create a student-centered environment focused on students taking control of their own learning:

A school focused on increasing autonomy utilizes a constructivist approach; returning the locus of control back to the students, making the students responsible for their own education. The results of this approach will be felt almost immediately. Students will feel more engaged, less burned out, and less apathetic (Bastoni, 2018, para. 7).

The constructivist view contends that learners construct meaning from their experiences and the learning environment (Duffy and Jonassen, 1992). Duffy and Jonassen (1992) further state that teachers need to situate experiences within authentic activities, bringing real-world activities into the classroom for their students.

All stakeholders can benefit from a student-centered environment, but the most critical stakeholder that would benefit from such an endeavor is the teacher. Bastoni (2018) argues that “one of the benefits of using student autonomy to change school culture is that principals will not overwhelm teachers with yet another new initiative” (para. 5). Bastoni (2018) further states that “increasing student autonomy represents a small shift in teaching practices and does not require
huge commitments of time or prep work from teachers” (para. 5). Teachers can definitely benefit from less work in today’s growing educational system.

That being said, of course, teachers need a voice in the student-centered environment. Parrish and Sadera (2020) state that teachers play a critical role in the implementation of any endeavor of this type, and they need a clear understanding of the expectations for their instructional practice. Bastoni (2018) argues that principals need to have teacher buy-in in order to increase student autonomy, further suggesting that principals can hold a staff meeting to talk about student autonomy and should be sure to set a positive tone in the meeting—teachers need to know that honesty will not be held against them—giving them “time to share some of the hesitation that they might feel in giving students more autonomy in the classroom” (para. 6). Bastoni (2018) also suggests that principals need to take time to address ways that teachers can overcome any concerns related to the student-centered environment and share autonomy-supportive teaching practices. A teacher’s voice in changing the dynamics of the school to rely heavily on student-centered lessons builds capacity and develops a uniform culture where teachers have a voice: “By allowing teachers to share what is and what isn’t working, you are both modeling autonomy and developing a culture that appreciates it” (Bastoni, 2018, para. 6).

**Establishing a Culture of Professionalism**

Rigsbee (2009) suggests some strategies for principals when it comes to staffing: Good principals build in-school relationships by treating teachers as professionals, supporting data-driven instruction, establishing parent-school communication, remaining active and visible, and promoting school spirit and teamwork and develop leaders. These tenants will be explored further in the following sections.
**Treating Teachers as Professionals.** Bruno (2018) states that teachers have had enough. Schools in West Virginia, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Arizona, Colorado, and North Carolina have either been shut down or turned into sites of resistance. Bruno (2018) further states that:

…under the cover of a commitment to improving schools, school district(s) and local governments have instead closed neighborhood public schools, opened charter schools, instituted standard curriculums, mandated poorly thought out high-stakes, standardized testing, attached teacher tenure, instituted merit pay instead of annual salary increment, restricted collective bargaining rights and subjected teachers to questionable and punitive evaluation schemes (para. 3).

Leithwood (2013) outlines some guidelines that principals can follow to treat teachers as professionals. The guidelines are as follows: 1) treat the teacher as a whole person; 2) establish a school culture based on norms of technical collaboration and professional inquiry; and 3) carefully diagnose the starting points for teacher development. Guideline one focuses on professional expertise and the expansion of the teacher’s instructional repertoires. Guideline two focuses on the psychological development of the teachers. Guideline three focuses on the career-cycle and helps to develop goals for the teachers in relation to their professional growth.

**Support Data-Driven Instruction.** Principals know that student achievement data offers invaluable support for making good decisions about instruction, but they have to know how to use the data (NAESP, 2009). NAESP (2009) outlines five recommendations to help principals put student achievement data to the best possible use: 1) “make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement”; 2) “teach students to examine their own data and set learning goals”; 3) “establish a clear vision for schoolwide data use”; 4) “provide supports that foster a
data-driven culture within the school”; and 5) “develop and maintain a districtwide data system” (p. 8). (See Table 2).

**Establish data as on-going cycle.** According to data retrieved from NAESP (2009), recommendation one suggests that principals should provide teachers with the autonomy to use data to make instructional decisions in the classroom that will ultimately meet students’ learning needs. NAESP (2009) states that “data use is an ongoing cycle of collecting multiple data sources, interpreting data to formulate hypotheses about strategies to raise student achievement, and implementing instructional changes to test hypotheses” (p. 3). Teachers need to utilize data to make instructional decisions that impact student achievement.

**Teach teachers how to help students use data.** Principals have to teach the teachers how to get students to analyze their own data. Recommendation two discusses how teachers can teach students how to analyze their own data in order to set learning goals. NAESP (2009) states that teachers need to provide explicit instruction to elementary and secondary students on regular use of achievement data to monitor their own performance and establish learning goals.

**Create and articulate a data-driven vision.** As suggested by Whitaker, Whitaker, and Lumpa (2008), principals are responsible for creating and articulating the vision of their school. NAESP’s recommendation three discusses the critical use of a schoolwide vision for data use. NAESP (2009) states that “a strong culture of data use is critical to ensuring routine, consistent, and effective data-based decision making” (p. 5). The need for a data team is necessary: “A data team comprising an assortment of stakeholders can solicit input from, and work with, the entire school community” (NAESP, 2009, p. 5).

**Provide support.** Recommendation four discusses the need for principals to provide support that centers around a data-driven culture. For example, NAESP (2009) states that
“providing leadership through data facilitators or other instructional leaders and ongoing professional development, helps teachers, principals, and other school staff members obtain a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities in using data” (p. 6). NAESP (2009) argues that leadership, professional development, and time for collaboration do not establish the culture of data, but rather provide the supports needed to build a culture that fosters data use as a guide to making instructional decisions.

**Establish a uniform data system.** Even though principals do not have direct control over district-wide data dissemination, recommendation five suggests that there should be a uniform data system comprised of a variety of stakeholders in order to meet the needs of a wide range of audiences. Principals need to create a uniform school-wide data system. In this sense, principals can advocate for timely dissemination of data that is relevant and useful to educators (NAESP, 2009). Further, it is critical that teachers feel empowered when they need immediate access to data that is related to their students and used to make informed decisions in regard to instruction. This empowerment lends itself to teacher retention.

**Table 2**

**Five Stages of Student Achievement Data, NAESP (2009)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
<th>Actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Make data part of an ongoing cycle of instructional improvement.</td>
<td>Teachers need to systematically and routinely use data to guide instructional decisions in order to meet students’ needs.</td>
<td>-Collect and prepare a variety of data about student learning. -Interpret data and develop hypotheses about how to improve student learning. -Modify instruction to test hypotheses and increase student learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Teach students to examiner their own data and set learning goals.</td>
<td>Teachers should provide explicit instruction to elementary and secondary students on regularly using achievement data to monitor their own performance and establish learning goals.</td>
<td>-Explain expectations and assessment criteria. -Provide feedback to students that is timely, specific, well formatted, and constructive. -Provide tools that help students learn from feedback. -Use students’ data to guide instructional changes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Establish A Clear Vision for School-Wide Data Use

A strong culture of data use is critical to ensuring routine, consistent, and effective data-based decision making.

- Establish a school-wide data team that sets the tone for ongoing data use.
- Define critical teaching and learning concepts.
- Develop a written plan that articulates activities, roles, and responsibilities.
- Provide ongoing data leadership.

### Provide Supports That Foster A Data-Driven Culture Within The School

Providing leadership through data facilitators or other instructional leaders, and ongoing professional development helps all stakeholders: (principals, teachers, and other school staff members) obtain a thorough understanding of their roles and responsibilities in using data.

- Designate a school-based facilitator who meets and collaborates with teacher teams in discussing data and solving problems.
- Dedicate structured time for staff collaboration.
- Provide targeted professional development regularly.

### Develop and Maintain A Districtwide Data System

To meet the needs of a wide range of audiences, a district data system advisory council comprising a variety of stakeholders should be involved in determining the district’s requirements and selecting and implementing the new system.

- Involve a variety of stakeholders in selecting a data system.
- Clearly articulate system requirements relative to user needs.
- Plan and stage the implementation of the data system.

Note. Creating a data-driven environment can support instruction.

**Establish Open Communication**

The power of communication is an essential component of effective leadership (Whitaker et al., 2008). Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) suggest that “a principal’s main staple for improving support and having schools with positive culture is communication” (p. 133). Reid (2020) states that “administrators, teachers, and parents all have to work together to create and maintain a healthy, productive learning environment for students” (para. 1). Reid (2020) further states that “good communication skills are a crucial part of creating an environment where everyone can thrive” (para. 1). Reid (2020) goes on to suggest seven tips for principals to use when establishing healthy lines of communication between administration, teachers, and parents. Those seven tips include: regular communication, keeping an open-door policy, offering opportunities for feedback, setting objectives, following a 24-hour rule, using various forms of
communication, and establishing trust (See Table 3). So many of the barriers to retention can be overcome through better communication. Building bonds of trust and creating teacher leadership with a shared vision can improve the retention of teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Also, as Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) argue, “a collaborative principal-teacher relationship is important and must include open forums, discussions, meetings, and reviews to evaluate the needs of the school, teachers, and students” (p.133).

**Table 3**

**Seven Tips for Effective Communication in Schools, Reid (2020)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tips</th>
<th>Recommended Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate Regularly</td>
<td>Maintain consistent and constant communication. Share ideas and stories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keep and Open-Door Policy</td>
<td>Allow teachers to speak to you at any time. Be accessible to teachers via mobile devices, in-person, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offer Opportunities for Feedback</td>
<td>Incorporate surveys for feedback. Incorporate performance questionnaires.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Objectives</td>
<td>Streamline conversations by using an agenda. Make sure that your message is clear when communicating with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow a 24-Hour Rule</td>
<td>Respond to teachers within 24 hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use Various Forms of Communication</td>
<td>Newsletters Blogs Facebook Groups Mobile Apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish Trust</td>
<td>Create safe places for discussions without chastisement and judgment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Listen to the teachers’ opinions about what works and does not work.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Create psychological safety during conversations with teachers.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Note. Principals can foster effective communication with teachers by incorporating the tips listed above.

**Lead by Example.** Tip number one asks the principal to keep consistent and regular communication with all stakeholders because “Relationships don’t have a chance to form with
interruption contact” (Reid, 2020, para. 4). Tip number two involves the principal welcoming the teachers and parents to talk to him at any time, since “An open-door policy helps increase collaboration between administrators, teachers and parents, as well as promote mutual trust and respect” (Reid, 2020, para. 6). Tip number three includes the need for the principal to accept feedback from other stakeholders. Reid (2020) suggests the use of surveys to gain feedback from teachers on how things are going in the building. Tip number four involves the principal setting objectives for conversations in which “He advises them to create conversations that advance an agenda, not simply meet a requirement for outreach” (Reid, 2020, para. 13). Tip number five asks the principal to respond to teachers within 24 hours: “Cheryl Paul, principal at Bradford Academy in Michigan, advises administrators to respond to teacher and staff outreach within 24 hours” (Reid, 2020, para. 16). Tip number six includes the principal communicating to the staff through various mediums and platforms. Reid (2020) suggests that the principal use newsletters, blogs, Facebook groups, and mobile apps. Lastly, tip number seven encourages the principal to allow teachers to voice their opinions about what is working and not working without chastisement or judgement. Reid (2020) suggests that principals “must foster environments where [teachers] feel free to speak their minds, to openly and honestly discuss what is and isn’t working, to make collective decisions, to take risks, and to fail” (para. 25).

Lynch (2020) argues that “deeds speak louder than words” (para. 1). For example, the teachers that one works with “can tell if [the leader is] dedicated and working hard to make [the] school the best...” (Lynch, 2020, para. 1). Lynch (2020) further suggests that a lethargic leader will create a culture of lazy educators, emphasizing that leaders “put their nose to the grindstone and... get things done” (para. 2).
Remain Active and Visible. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that effective leadership requires principals to be available and accessible to everyone during the school day. They go on to suggest three aspects of being active and visible, all of which revolve around time: finding the time, using the time, and the gift of time. (See Table 4).

Establish Observational Time. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that principals need to set time in their planners to visit classrooms, divide up their time to see multiple classrooms and teachers, track their visits, and maintain a presence in areas where there are a large group of students. It does not matter the length of time, but the value in being there is the most important. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that principals visit classrooms for 2-10 minutes to get an idea of what is going on in the classrooms and provide positive feedback during the visit. Their presence in the classroom is the most integral, even if it is only for a few minutes.

The gift of time is important when it comes to teachers being able to plan or just catch a breath. Whitaker et al. (2008) states that principals should provide breaks for teachers on parent-teacher conference nights, teach classes to give teachers breaks, allow new teachers to observe the principal teaching lessons, and incorporate peer observations for teachers to get ideas from each other in order to promote student achievement. Nethels (2010) argues that “principals should incorporate time for teachers to plan and collaborate with their coworkers” (p. 51). Being able to plan with other teachers allows for ideas to be exchanged between teachers and allows teachers to use the time in an effective manner.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three Aspects of Time, Whitaker, et al. (2008)</th>
<th>Recommended Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Aspect of Time</strong></td>
<td><strong>Finding the Time</strong> Set time in a planner to visit classrooms. Vary classroom time in order to see multiple teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using the Time</td>
<td>Set up a daily rotation schedule in order to see all classes. Track all classroom visits. Maintain presence in areas where there are large groups of students.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visits can be 2 to 10 minutes in length. Provide positive feedback during classroom visits. Carry sticky notes with you at all times. Write notes to teachers or students and place on their desks. Use the library to work on things that need uninterrupted time. Eat in the lunchroom or on the playground. Sort emails in the lunchroom. Fill out forms while in the classrooms. Set meeting agendas while in the classrooms. Outline grants while in the classrooms. Use classroom visits as a time to take a break from your desk.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Gift of Time</td>
<td>Provide teacher breaks on parent-teacher conference nights. Give teachers “The Gift of Time” during Teacher Appreciation Week by teaching their classes. Allow teachers to observe the principal teaching a class. Allow teachers to conduct peer observations when you teach one of their classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Principals can be active and accessible by finding the time, using the time, and gifting time to teachers.

*Maintain Accessibility to Staff.* Whitaker et al. (2008) state that the "power of presence can never be overstated" (p. 135). They further discuss, "Leadership by walking around" as one of the most important strategies that any administrator can use (Whitaker et al., 2008, p. 135). Whitaker et al. (2008) further suggest that leaders need to be available to teachers, and be visible in classrooms, lunchrooms, and at recess, which puts the leader in control of interacting with everyone and not just the staff members that come up to the leader. A leader can model
expectations for all stakeholders in a school by being present in heavily populated areas. "Being visible in these areas also allows you to model expectations for staff… First of all, being in the lunchroom shows your commitment to the kids and that you are willing to assist in any way. The staff can observe how you interact with students and staff" (Whitaker et al., 2008, p. 137). The principal’s presence is integral in any school. Tomlinson (2014) stated that “the principal who stood in the hallway was creating an opportunity to act as a symbolic and cultural leader” (Leading By Vision, para. 1). Tomlinson (2014) further states that a steady presence in the lives of those who traveled the halls provides “a smile, an affirmation, an encouragement” (A Steady Presence, para. 1). Principals must show their teachers, staff, and students that they are active in all aspects of the school, whether it is in the cafeteria, hallway, media center, etc.

**Promote School Spirit.** School spirit is a great way to bring everyone together and retain teachers. Hopkins (2010) states that “each year, school leaders… plan all sorts of activities with the sole aim of building school spirit,” and the activities bring parents, teachers, and students together, which is good for the school (para. 7). Hopkins (2010) then goes on to highlight some suggested ways for principals to increase school spirit and have fun. Those suggestions include scavenger hunts to build morale and increase team spirit; spirit week, where lower grades create posters for the upper grades that have to take standardized assessments; and friendly competitions such as games where the staff plays against the students, as well as fundraisers, and dance contests. The principal must boost school spirit and create a pleasant working environment in order to retain teachers. Ingersoll (2002) suggests that the concerted effort of leadership to work on changing working conditions is needed to keep teachers satisfied with their jobs. Weiss (1999) suggests that workplace conditions appear to play a key role in keeping teachers in the
field. Johnson (2006) states that “supportive working conditions can enable teachers to teach more effectively” (p. 3).

**Support Teachers**

Supportive principals who encourage teachers’ freedom to use professional judgment and guarantee the opportunity to work with like-minded and similarly skilled colleagues are valued more by quality teachers than extra pay. Berry, Rasberry and Williams (2007) suggest that supportive leadership is the key to recruitment for high-needs schools. In fact, principal support is integral in any school, especially in high-needs schools. A major factor that principals face in recruiting skilled teachers lies in the support that the administrators offer to the teachers. For example, there are not many administrators that know how to effectively support their teachers: "Regrettably, too few administrators know how to support teachers' efforts to educate all children at high levels, or, how to nurture teacher leaders" (Berry, Rasberry & Williams, 2007, p. 9).

The principal is a driving force to ensure that teachers are treated as professionals in the school. Leithwood (2013) suggests three stages of development where principals can have the most influence. Those stages are professional expertise, psychological development, and career-cycle development. Leithwood (2013) argues that professional expertise is the stage where teachers contribute directly to the growth of students. Psychological development is where teachers gain moral and conceptual skills, and career-cycle development is where teachers grow in their careers based on years of experience.

Leithwood (2013) states that professional expertise encompasses the teachers’ role in the classroom, school, and district improvement. Leithwood (2013) further suggests that there are six stages for teachers to develop their professional expertise, which entail the following: 1) developing survival skills; 2) becoming competent in the basic skills of instruction; 3) expanding
one’s instructional flexibility; 4) acquiring instructional expertise; 5) contributing to the growth of colleagues’ instructional expertise; and 6) participating in a broad array of educational decisions at all levels of the education system. Stages 1-4 focus on classroom responsibilities, and stages 5-6 focus on the out-of-classroom and out-of-school roles occupied by good teachers (See Table 5).

Stage one encompasses the teachers’ need for survival skills. Leithwood (2013) suggests that teachers must partially develop classroom-management skills, gain knowledge about limited skill use in teaching models, and maintain summative assessments that report academic growth to students. Stage two encompasses the teachers’ need for competence in basic skills of instruction. Leithwood (2013) suggests that teachers create and maintain well-developed classroom-management skills, incorporate the use of several teaching models, and use habitual application of trial and error of certain teaching models, incorporating formative assessments of learning along the way. Stage three encompasses the teachers’ need to expand their instructional flexibility. Leithwood (2013) suggests that teachers automatize classroom-management skills, grow awareness of the need for existence of other teaching models, and have a choice of teaching models that is influenced most by providing variety to maintain student interest and incorporate both formative and summative assessments. Stage four encompasses the teachers’ need to acquire instructional expertise. Leithwood (2013) suggests that teachers must integrate classroom management with program, which means that little attention is required to classroom management as an independent issue, and teachers must possess skill in the application of a broad repertoire of teaching models.

Stage five encompasses the teachers’ need to contribute to the growth of colleagues’ instructional expertise. Leithwood (2013) argues that teachers must possess high levels of
expertise in classroom instructional performance, reflect about their own competences/choices and the fundamental beliefs and values on which they are based, and be able to assist other teachers in acquiring instructional expertise through planned learning experiences such as mentoring, in-service education, and coaching programs. Stage six encompasses the teachers’ need to participate in a broad array of educational decisions at all levels of the education system. Leithwood (2013) argues that teachers must be committed to the goal of school improvement, accept responsibility for fostering that goal through legitimate opportunity, be able to exercise leadership, both formal and informal, and have a broad framework from which to understand the relationship among decisions at many different levels, staying well informed about policies at these many different levels.

Table 5

*Six Stages of Professional Expertise, Leithwood (2013)*

| Developing survival skills | - Partially developed classroom-management skills  
| - Knowledge about and limited skill in use of several teaching models  
| - No conscious reflection on choice of model  
| - Student assessment is primarily summative, and carried out using limited techniques in response to external demands (e.g., reporting to parents); may be poor link between the focus of assessment and instructional goal |
| Becoming competent in the basic skills | - Well-developed classroom-management skills  
| - Well-developed skill in use of several teaching models  
| - Habitual application through trial and error of certain teaching models for particular parts of curriculum  
| - Student assessment begins to reflect formative purposes, although techniques are not well suited to such purposes; focus of assessment linked to instructional goals easiest to measure |
| Expanding one’s instructional flexibility | - Automated classroom-management skills  
| - Growing awareness of need for and existence of other teaching models; initial efforts to expand repertoire and experiment with application of new models  
| - Choice of teaching model from expanded repertoire influenced most by interest in providing variety to maintain student interest  
| - Student assessment carried out for both formative and summative purposes; repertoire of techniques is beginning to match purposes; focus of assessment covers significant range of instructional goals |
Acquiring instructional expertise

- Classroom management integrated with program; little attention required to classroom management as an independent issue
- Skill in application of a broad repertoire of teaching models

Contributing to the growth of colleagues’ instructional expertise

- Has high levels of expertise in classroom instructional performance
- Reflective about own competence and choices and the fundamental beliefs and values on which they are based
- Able to assist other teachers in acquiring instructional expertise through either planned learning experiences, such as mentoring, or more formal experiences, such as in-service education and coaching program

Participating in a broad array of educational decisions at all levels on the education system

- Is committed to the goal of school improvement
- Accepts responsibility for fostering that goal through any legitimate opportunity
- Able to exercise leadership, both formal and informal, with groups of adults inside and outside of the school
- Has a broad framework from which to understand the relationship among decisions at many different levels in the education system
- Is well informed about policies at many different levels in the education system

Note. Teachers need professional expertise in each stage.

Critical considerations for how principals support teachers revolve around the advocacy of the teachers, empowerment of the staff, implementation of collaborative planning, and fostering an induction/mentoring program. These four key principles are explained in detail in the next sections.

Advocate for Teachers. Retention is important for principals developing a strong staff. Eller and Eller (2018) state that there are four factors related to advocating for teacher retention: induction/mentoring, interests’ in teachers’ success, periodic check-ins and sense of purpose.

Induction/mentoring, includes helping new teachers acclimate to the school. If teachers have a mentor, they can seek advice from their mentor on lessons and feel a sense of support in the building, which could potentially emerge as a reason to stay at the school. Interest in teachers' success is the second factor. Periodic check-ins, the third factor, is designed to see how things are going and can be beneficial to teachers. Finally, a sense of purpose is the fourth factor. It is
important that the principal articulates ideas such as we are a team and not separate entities
within the school setting. Ultimately, the sense of purpose is that the teachers and principals
work together for the good of the students.

**Empower Staff.** Empowering teachers can be an asset in retaining teachers. Whitaker et al. (2008) argue that "providing opportunities to get teachers involved is a great way to begin the
teacher-leadership process" (p. 40). Whitaker et al. (2008) further argue that:

> Everything from organizing volunteers to having meetings in teachers' classrooms can
get the teacher in a leadership position without having much time or preparation. These
simple activities can help teachers gain confidence in their leadership abilities and can be
a “kick start” to additional leadership roles. (p. 40)

Another way to empower teachers is to include them as leaders in staff meetings:

> Staff meetings can be the best part of the week if teachers have a vested interest,
discussions are relevant, and the tone is upbeat, fun, and positive. One way to accomplish
this, along with putting teachers in leadership roles, is to have teachers take key roles in
each meeting. (Whitaker et al., 2008, p. 41)

Knowing that your leaders promote growth in teachers is key for any principal.

**Support Collaborative Planning.** Building capacity and showing the teachers that
collaboration is key allows them to understand that they are working with individuals who share
the same interest with them and who are willing to work together to positively impact student
achievement. In addition, teachers can share effective lessons with their grade levels and across
the school to support student academic achievement. Collaborative planning is integral to any
school because it enables the teachers to plan lessons as a team opposed to in solidarity. Learning
programs for all staff are important because everyone else that is not in a classroom is support for
the students and teachers. Individuals must be knowledgeable about curriculum and standards in order to be of support. Many (2009) suggests that a collaborative culture is developed around “designated and protected time for teachers to meet and collaborate during the regular school day” (p. 9). For example, principals must free up time (decrease teacher duties), purchase time (hire substitutes), restructure/reschedule time (incorporate late arrivals for teachers), make better use of existing time (foster real/reflective faculty meetings), and schedule common planning time (rearrange the schedule to incorporate time for teachers to work together) (Many, 2009, pp. 8-9).

**Establish Induction and Mentoring Programs.** Induction programs can be useful resources for new teachers and aid in building a cadre of effective teachers. However, an excellent induction program moves beyond the mundane introductions, “room key and badge pick-ups,” to more focused support and distribution of resources needed “to understand the professional responsibilities, district and school expectations and state content standards” (American Federation of Teachers, 2007, pp. 8-9). According to National Governor’s Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices (2002), induction programs tend to keep teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

**Building Capacity**

Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that the principal can transform the school by empowering the teachers, staff, parents, and students to use their talents to make the school better. Transformation is necessary to build capacity. One key issue for teacher satisfaction is class size. The critical issue of class size is important to teachers. Berry, Rasberry and Williams (2007) suggest that “many National Board-Certified Teachers would teach in a high-needs school if they had a reasonable class load” (p. 6). A survey conducted by Berry, Rasberry and Williams (2007)
suggests that that "only 39 percent of teachers reported that the number of students they teach is reasonable if they are to help all of their students succeed" (p. 6).

**Teacher Retention Impacts Student Achievement**

In a 2019 essay, Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019) noted that “Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff (2009) agreed that ‘teachers are the primary influencers regarding student learning and achievement, but principals play a vital role as supporters of teachers' professional growth, development, and ultimately retention’” (p. 30). Holmes, Parker, & Gibson (2019) go on to argue that "a highly effective principal can increase student achievement by retaining effective teachers, which helps to ensure stability in the classroom” (p. 30). They further cite Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff (2009), who argue that "schools can raise standardized test scores as much as 10 percentile points in one year" when principals retain highly effective teachers (Holmes, Parker, & Gibson, 2019, p. 30). Holmes, Parker, and Gibson (2019) ultimately observe that "effective principals may influence teacher retention by addressing other student outcomes that closely affect teachers such as making efforts to reduce suspension rates and improving graduation rates" (p. 30). They also cite Kimball (2011), who argues that "school leadership influences retention from a position of human capital management, with the ultimate goal being school improvement" (p. 29). Kimball (2011) further suggests that "handing teachers classroom keys and demanding accountability for student outcomes is counterproductive to school improvement and teacher performance and retention” (Holmes, Parker, and Gibson, 2019, p. 29).

Based on the perceptions of teachers listed above, principals have to put forth a lot of effort to retain teachers.

Holmes, Parker, & Gibson (2019) contend that "a well-defined system devoted to management of performance, which also includes formal setting of goals, facile access to support
and mentoring, ongoing feedback, and recognition of accomplishments, as well as repercussions for poor performance were critical indicators of teachers' attitudes toward the nexus of leadership support and retention decisions." In particular, "presence and advocacy for teachers is one way to demonstrate faculty support fully" (Holmes, Parker, & Gibson, 2019, p. 29).

**Teacher Perception of Principal Support**

Hughes, Matt, and O’Reilly (2015) conducted a study on ways to retain teachers in hard-to-staff schools. Based on teacher interviews, the results of the study were as follows: teachers want positive feedback, recognition, and communication, as well as emotional, environmental, and instructional support from their principal. Hughes, Matt, and O’Reilly (2015) further suggested that principals' perception of teacher support was different from the teachers' perspective on the support received from their administrator, which can harm teacher retention in hard-to-staff schools.

Greenlee and Brown (2009) took a survey on teachers' perceptions of their building principal and the efforts made by the principal for them to stay at the school. The survey results are listed below: 41% felt that their principal created a positive school culture, 37% felt that the principal created conditions that enhanced the staff’s desires and willingness to focus energy on achieving educational excellence, 19% felt that the principal demonstrated integrity and well-reasoned educational belief based on an understanding of teaching and learning, and 19% felt that the principal provided opportunities for teachers to think, plan, and work together.

Principal support is key in teacher retention, and it is therefore "critical for principals to understand the impact their support has on their teachers" (Hughes, Matt & O'Reilly, 2015, p. 133). Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly (2015) suggest that "principals must be able to work within the
leadership structure of the institution to provide the necessary tools for their staff to succeed and reduce the possibility of teacher attrition in hard-to-staff schools” (p. 133).

**Support as a Tool for Retention**

Support is a big factor in retaining teachers. Adams and Bailey (1989) make it clear that principals need to take care of their teachers. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that principals should provide a belief in people, job and role diversity, high expectations, positive reinforcement, and celebrations of good performance.

Trust is also a factor in creating effective leadership. The teachers must trust their principal. The thinking is that "if people trust someone, they tend to do much less second-guessing of their everyday decisions" (Whitaker et al., 2008, p. 23).

Supervision is another facet of retaining teachers. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that principals need to manage their time such that they can come to classrooms to provide ideas for reinforcement and support and to give teachers additional opportunities and support for improvement.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bandura’s Social Cognitive Theory was the model for this study. SCT informs this work by explaining human behavior in terms of a three-way dynamic reciprocal model, in which personal factors, environmental influences, and behavior continually interact (Bandura, 1999). The theory holds that people learn from their own experiences and the experiences and actions of others (Bandura, 1999). SCT analyzes cognitive behavior, “synthesiz[ing] concepts and processes from cognitive, behavioristic, and emotional models of behavior change so that it can apply to counseling interventions for disease prevention and management” (Glanz, 2016, p. 14). Glanz cites a figure (Figure 3) from Bandura’s work (1986), which displays an image of the
Social Cognitive Theory; it encompasses a three-way paradigm including personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences. The individual factors, behaviors, and ecological influences affecting teachers within a challenging schools impact their decision to stay or leave the school.

Bandura's (SCT) (1986) states that learning occurs in a social context with a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between the person, environment, and behavior (LaMorte, 2019). SCT looks at how an individual acquires and maintains behavior while considering the social context in which individuals perform their actions (LaMorte, 2019). Within SCT, people can react to their surroundings based on their environments, such that “In social cognitive theory, people are agentic operators in their life course, not just on looking hosts of brain mechanisms orchestrated by environmental events” (Bandura, 1999, p. 22). The cognitive processes of the brain determine and influence people's actions:

Cognitive processes are not only new brain activities; they also exert determinative influence. The human mind is generative, creative, proactive, and self-reflective, not just reactive. People operate as thinkers of the thoughts that serve determinative functions… to suit ever-changing situations, assess their likely functional value, organize and deploy the selected options strategically, evaluate the adequacy of their thinking based on the effects which their actions produce, and make whatever changes may be necessary (Bandura, 1999, p. 23).

Proactive thought provokes a reaction or plan. For example, if a teacher likes or dislikes the school principal, this provokes the teacher to decide whether they will leave or stay at the school. The teacher's perception of the school leader can play a major factor in staying at or leaving the school. In perspective, the cognitive behavior of the teacher's experience with the
principal can impact his or her decision to remain at the school. How a person feels based on their experiences can alter a person's response or action.

Bandura's SCT discusses three types of environmental structures: “imposed environment, selected environment, and constructed environment” (Bandura, 1999, p. 23). The imposed environment is "thrust upon people" (Bandura, 1999, p. 23). People have little control over the imposed environment but have leeway in how they construe or react to it (Bandura, 1999). The selected environment consists of people's choices of “associates, activities, and milieus” (Bandura, 1999, p. 23). The constructed environment is people's “construct [of] social environments and institutional systems through their generative efforts” (Bandura, 1999, p. 23). The environment that people are in can play a role in their interaction with the environment. In fact, "the construal, selection, and construction of environments affect the nature of the reciprocal interplay between personal, behavioral and environmental factors" (Bandura, 1999, p. 23).

In the context of this study, Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) relates to how teachers perceive the environments that their administrators create. Based on the perceptions of the environment/climate that their administrators create, teachers have to decide on whether to stay at or leave the school. SCT relies on the personal factors, behavior, and environmental influences acting on or acted out by individuals. However, the individual elements of a teacher’s life or personality can interfere with their decision to stay or leave. Therefore, it is essential to gather the notes and viewpoints of the administrators to determine what strategies he/she implemented in the school to retain teachers.

Figure 1 describes the topical and theoretical framework—as well as my personal connection to it—research problem statement, and research question. The topics of my research
included teacher working conditions, teacher attrition/mobility, elementary teachers' needs, issues of retention/recruitment, and teacher retention policies. The topics relied on factors that cause teachers to leave or stay within a building regarding working conditions and leadership issues. The theoretical framework relied heavily on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (a unique way in which individuals acquire and maintain behavior while also considering the social environment in which individuals perform the behavior) (Bandura, 1999). The problem statement relied on the high retention rate in the failing Title I school in one large suburban/urban school district and the teachers' perception of the administrator’s role in retaining teachers. The research questions were, “What are teachers’ lived experiences of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district?” and “How can teachers’ lived experiences help to understand the underlying factors for teachers leaving the school and/or profession?” The research study analyzed the teachers’ perception of what made them stay or leave their school based on how they felt about the school's administrator.
Figure 1. **Theoretical Framework**

**Personal Interests/Goals**
As a new leader, I would like to implement a style of leadership that retains teachers at one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district.

**Identity & Positionality (Worldview)**
Phenomenography will employ my worldview because it involves interviewing eight participants based on their lived experiences in one failing Title I Elementary School. The participants’ perceptions of their school leader explore the reasons as to why they left the school.

**Topical Research**
- Concept 1: Teacher Working conditions (Center for Teaching Quality, 2007)
- Concept 2: Teacher Attrition and mobility (Goldring, Taie, Riddles & Owens, 2014)

**Theoretical Framework**
Social Foundations of Thought and Actions (Social Cognitive Theory, Bandura, 1986)

**Problem Statement**
Teacher retention in Title I schools is a current issue (Jacob, 2007). Philip (2013) conducted a study on 472 new teachers and their experiences as a first-year teachers. The article discusses how their experiences impacted their decisions to stay at or leave the school. Elridge and McGuire (2018) state that there are 300 teacher vacancies to fill in one large suburban/urban county school district in a Southeastern state.

**Research Questions**
1. What are teachers’ lived experiences of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district?
2. How can teachers’ lived experiences help principals to understand the underlying factors for teachers leaving the school and/or profession?

**Research Design**
A phenomenographic study exploring the role and practices that principals deploy to support or detract from teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School.
Figure 2 depicts the worldview of this study, which emulates phenomenography. A phenomenographic worldview discusses ways in which people understand phenomena. The topic of my research investigated how effective teachers in a failing Title I Elementary School in one large suburban/urban county school district perceived their administrator to be in retaining them in the building.
Context of Phenomenographic Study: This instrumental study will investigate how teachers’ view their school administrators’ and their role in staying or leaving the school. Is this a systemic issue in one urban GA School District? The study will investigate one failing Title I elementary school with high turnover rates. The researcher will interview teachers who left the school. The location will be suitable for the researcher and participants.
Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter investigated the actions of principals in retaining teachers. Some of the topics discussed included the role that principals and districts play in hiring, and principals’ actions to build a positive school culture, support teachers’ professional and career growth, and create and maintain a vision in their school community. Specific studies highlighting research around the retention of teachers and various factors that contribute to their attrition were discussed as well. Based on the above review of literature, this study concludes that the principal plays a critical role in teacher retention. Specifically, principals with a proactive approach in supporting new teachers are able to retain teachers at a higher rate than their peers who do not (Brown & Wynn, 2009). In the following chapter, the methodology that was used to gather data for this study will be described in great detail.
Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the proposed methodology for this study, as well as the data sources and procedures for analyzing all collected data. The purpose of this study was to determine teachers’ perceptions of the role that their principal plays regarding teacher retention in a Title I elementary school in a large suburban/urban county school district. This chapter also elaborates more thoroughly on the research questions used to guide this study as well as the research design, setting, ethical considerations, and identified limitations and delimitations.

Research Questions

This study examined the principal's role in teacher retention in a failing Title I elementary school in a large suburban/urban county school district. Two questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are teachers’ lived experiences of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district?
2. How can teachers’ lived experiences help administrators to understand the factors underlying a teacher’s decision to leave the school and/or profession?

Research Design

Several studies have examined issues around teacher retention using different methodologies (Ismail, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Siddiqi, 2012). For example, Ismail (2012) conducted a basic interpretive qualitative study on teachers’ perception of principal leadership styles and their impact on teacher job satisfaction. However, one limitation of Ismail’s research was in the selection process of the participants interviewed, as the principal alone chose the
participants who were able to be interviewed at each school (Ismail, 2012). Another limitation of Ismail’s research was the setting of the study. Specifically, low-performing Title I schools were not variables in the study. On the other hand, Johnson (2010) conducted a descriptive quantitative research design based on teachers’ perceptions of factors that contribute to attrition. Teachers received a survey of questions to discuss their perceptions on the factors that contribute to attrition. However, the researcher did not interview teachers directly to learn more details about their actual experiences within their schools. Further, Siddiqi (2012) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between principals’ sense of achievement and teachers’ perceptions of their principals’ leadership behaviors. Surveys were administered to principals and teachers in a suburban school district in Virginia. However, one limitation was that the survey was not administered to all principals in the district. Additionally, teachers were not able to freely convey their experiences or feelings about their principal’s leadership behaviors. Hence, this research study’s use of phenomenography provides a useful methodology to explore the complexities of teacher attrition and the role that administrators play in their departure.

To explore the research questions, phenomenography—a qualitative methodology—was selected to gather data on teachers’ experiences with their school leaders. Phenomenographic studies describe the different ways that a group of people understand phenomena (Marton, 1981). How people think, perceive, or experience a particular phenomenon is the foundation of phenomenographic research. For example, one teacher may perceive his or her principal as a micro-manager or as being arrogant. Another teacher may have the opposite perception of the principal. This research study investigated the teachers' perceptions of the administrator's role in teacher retention.
A phenomenographic research design encompasses a methodology of inquiry based on philosophy and psychology. Specifically, this methodology culminates in the essence of shared experiences between participants and how they experienced the same phenomenon. Grounded in philosophy and psychology, this methodology generally calls for individual interviews. (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). For this phenomenographic study, the focal point will be on the role and practices that principals deploy to support or detract from teacher retention.

**Value of Specific Methodology**

I conducted a qualitative study following a phenomenographic research design. Quoting Marton (1981) in Chapter 2, I argued that phenomenography denotes a research tradition aimed at describing the different ways that a group of people understands a phenomenon. My study focused on gaining insight into how teachers in one Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county perceived the role of their administrator in retaining teachers in the school. A qualitative phenomenographic study was the best method for my research based on the following characteristics:

Phenomenographers adopt a particular (albeit with some variations) methodological strategy for data collection and analysis. This strategy typically involves the use of interviews as a method for collecting data on the phenomenon of current interest. However, other forms of data, such as written responses, may also be used. All of the data collected is then treated collectively for analysis, such that the focus is on the variations in understanding across the whole sample, rather than on the characteristics of individuals’ responses. (Tight, 2016, p. 320)
The ability to interview the teachers directly impacted by the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one Title I elementary school in a large suburban/urban county school district was befitting to this research.

Setting

The current data trend in a large suburban/urban county school district showed that teacher turnover was high in the district. Eldridge and McGuire (2018) stated that there were over 300 teacher vacancies in one large suburban/urban school district ahead of the first day of school. This study will investigate the reason for teacher turnover within one Title I elementary school in one large urban school district in the Southeast region of the United States. Specifically, this study aims to understand the underlying factors for teachers leaving.

In one suburban/urban school district, teacher turnover was strikingly high. A large suburban district in the metropolitan area of a Southeastern state had a high turnover rate. "Human capital management reports from meetings held between July 2017 and June 2018 show 682 teacher resignations in that time" (Walker, 2018a, para. 2). Based on data from the Governor's Office of Student Achievement (GOSA), the demographics of students in the suburban/urban school district in question are: 62% of African American descent, 18% of Hispanic descent, 7% of Asian/Pacific Islander descent, 11% of white descent, and 2% of multi-racial backgrounds. Out of 100% of the student populations in the suburban/urban school district, 41% of the student population comes from economically disadvantaged homes (GOSA, 2018). In the Southeastern state, “the state data shows that in the Spring of 2015, there were 109,327 teachers and 99,317 teachers in Fall 2015, which accounts for a 90.8% teacher retention rate in the state.” (Tio, 2017, p. 48). In the metropolitan area selected for this study, 76% of teachers were retained from the 2014-15 and 2015-16 school years. The teacher retention rate for newly
hired teachers in 2015-16 for this area was lower than the teacher retention rate for all teachers in the state (Tio, 2017). Specifically, 88.6 percent of recently hired teachers were retained in 2015-16 as compared to 90.8 percent of all teachers. The suburban/urban school district had a high teacher turnover rate, consistent with research that showed that teacher turnover rate in Title I schools was significantly higher than at non-title I schools.

The setting of this research was in one large suburban/urban county Title I elementary school dubbed “Turnover Elementary,”¹ where the turnover rate for the school increased between the 2017-18 school year and the 2018-19 school year. According to data gleaned from the GOSA (2020) during the 2017-18 school year, Turnover Elementary school had less than 35 new inexperienced teachers but went up to less than 50 new inexperienced teachers during the 2018-19 school year. Therefore, Turnover Elementary will be the site of this study. Teachers from this Title I elementary school received invitations to participate in the study to gain insight into why they left the school based on the teachers’ perceptions of their school administrator.

**Overall and Sample Populations**

Since the researcher has two teachers in his current building from Turnover Elementary school, the researcher chose to use these teachers in the study. The researcher also requested the names of other teachers that left Turnover Elementary at the same time as their departure, based on their voluntary agreement to participate in the study. The researcher made contact with eight participants (teachers) through e-mail solicitation. Their information was provided from a list of teachers that left or transferred from one Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district. Purposive sampling (a non-probability sample that is selected based on the characteristics of a population and the objective of the study), was used to select the participants

¹ Turnover Elementary is a pseudonym for the school listed in the study.
(Crossman, 2018). A homogeneous sample of teachers was obtained from participants who chose to be interviewed and who were part of a marginalized group of teachers who left Turnover Elementary School. The group consisted of seven Black women and one Black man.

**Access to Site**

IRB approval was necessary before initiating the study. To obtain district approval, the researcher completed the IRB and submitted the approved IRB to the district office to receive approval for the solicitation of the interviews from participants. Participation in this study was voluntary, and individuals had to meet the following criteria in order to participate: be a teacher from Turnover Elementary, a Title I elementary school. To ensure that participants were treated ethically throughout this research process, each potential participant gave informed consent regarding their participation in the study. The informed consent explained the nature and purpose of the study. Each participant received a list of possible interview questions, was informed of their right to decline or terminate participation at any time and asked to reflect on whether they felt that they adequately met the provided criteria for participation in this study. The researcher also conducted in-depth follow up interviews with participants who consented. Participation was voluntary and uncompensated. At the advice of researchers like Koenig (2020), who states that the researcher can ask other people to nominate participants if they fit the research criteria, community nominations were obtained by the researcher, and potential participants were invited to voluntarily take part in the study.

**Instrumentation**

*Reliability.* The reliability of a qualitative study lies in the dependability of the study. To ensure dependability within my study, the following steps were taken: I created a detailed map of the research process, which included research design, data gathering processes, data analysis,
procedures followed, materials utilized, and risks/benefits of the study. Abellan, Koz and Abad (n.d.) suggest that in addressing the issue of reliability, the positivist employs techniques to show that, if the work were repeated, in the same context, with the same methods, and with the same participants, similar results would be obtained. Abellan et. al (n.d.) further state that to address dependability in qualitative research, the process guiding the study should be reported in detail, thereby enabling a future researcher to repeat the work, if not necessarily to gain the same results. Thus, the research design may be viewed as a detailed "prototype model." To ensure confirmability within my study, the following steps were taken: I interviewed the participants thoroughly and transcribed the interviews to get an accurate account of the participants’ points of view, dismissed my assumptions without comparing my assumptions to those of the participants, and created a step-by-step account of my research. Guba and Lincoln (1989) suggest that confirmability cannot be established until credibility, transferability, and dependability are all achieved.

Validity: Abellan et al. (n.d.) state that one of the key criteria addressed by positivist researchers is that of internal validity, in which they seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended. For example, this study ensured the following steps for credibility: ensured that eight teachers from one failing Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district voluntarily agreed to participate in the interviews, incorporated triangulation of data methods with a focus group and individual interviews of the participants involved in the study, allowed peer scrutiny in the research where peers and other scholars provided feedback to challenge any assumptions, and conducted member checks among the participants to determine the correlation between what they stated and their intended purpose regarding what was needed from the administrator to retain them in the building. Abellan et al.
(n.d.) state that external validity "is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations" (n.p.). Abellan et al. (n.d.) further state that in positivist work, the concern lies in demonstrating that the results of the work at hand can be applied to a wider population. For example, this study ensured the following steps for transferability: reviewed and analyzed teacher attrition in the Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district from the 2017-18 school year to the 2018-19 school year and interviewed eight teachers who left this Title I school under the current principal.

**Data Collection**

Data was collected via a focus group interview and individual interviews with teachers who left one failing Title I elementary school within one large suburban/urban county school district. The interviews ranged between thirty and forty minutes per individual, and one to two hours for the focus group interview. The researcher interviewed eight teachers who left one failing Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district to see what strategies their building leader could have implemented to retain them. Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) state that saturation occurs around 12 participants in a homogenous group. Eight participants were the minimum number of participants, and saturation was reached at eight participants. The interviews generated specific information about what administrators in Title I elementary schools in one large suburban/urban county school district can do to retain teachers in their buildings. Interview data was printed and saved on a jump drive and stored in a safe place at the researcher’s home in a locked cabinet. Interview participants were selected on a voluntary basis by participants who were teachers working at Turnover Elementary and who transferred to the same school as the researcher.
Interviews with teachers who left the Title I elementary school were an essential source for data collection, in order to gain insight into the teachers' perceptions of the administrator's role in teacher retention and the perception of the administrator on the whole, as well as on what he or she could have done to retain teachers in their building. Interviews occurred in two formats (focus group/individual). The interviews were semi-structured due to the open-ended question format. Probes were used to elicit more information from the participants. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) state that semi-structured interviews in qualitative studies take between 30 minutes to several hours based on open-ended questions. The interviews ranged between thirty and forty minutes for individual interviews and one to two hours for focus group interviews. The researcher interviewed eight teachers who left one Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district. The interview process consisted of one focus group interview for teachers who left the Title I elementary school along with individual interviews of the same participants. The teacher participant/speaker perspective is integral to the study because the interviews provided the researcher with the teachers’ perception of the administrator’s role in teacher retention.

**Data Analysis**

Interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim and then analyzed following an initial open coding process (Davis, 2018). Open coding is the first type of analysis concerned with identifying, naming, categorizing, and describing phenomena found in the text (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The researcher read and re-read the transcripts, coded the discussions based on similar themes, reviewed themes to ensure that they fit with the data, defined and named themes, transcribed the interviews, and quoted the participants' points of view accurately. Each line and sentence of the interview was analyzed to see if the participants' points of view
aligned with that of the research questions. After the open coding process, the researcher conducted an axial coding process where the researcher identified relationships among the themes that emerged from the open coding process. Followed by the axial coding, the researcher performed a selective coding process focused on identifying the central/core categories emerging from the analyzed interviews. The researcher conducted a focus group interview that occurred with eight teachers who left one Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district. The focus group interview occurred in a virtual environment using virtual video conferencing software, Zoom, outside of the school setting, which provided a comfortable environment for all participants. Individual teacher interviews occurred in a virtual environment using virtual phone conferencing software, the Trint app, that was also comfortable for both the participants and the researcher. The single interview location was a decision made between the researcher and the participant.

**Validity of Interpretation**

To ensure credibility within the study, the researcher explained that the participation of the participants was voluntary. The researcher conducted purposive sampling of the participants and facilitated the triangulation of data through the data collected from the focus groups and interviews, peer feedback from academic scholars, and member checks to ensure that what the participants stated in their interviews met their intended purpose. To ensure transferability within the study, the researcher reviewed and analyzed teacher retention rates in one large suburban/urban county school district. The researcher interviewed eight teacher participants who left said Title I elementary school. The researcher performed a thick-description method where research and findings were compared to similar data at his school and role as assistant principal. To ensure dependability within this study, the researcher created a detailed map of his study,
outlining all steps taken. To assure confirmability within my research, the researcher included interviews, coded the interviews, and transcribed the focus group and individual interviews to get an accurate account of the participants' points of view. The researcher was careful to be mindful of his assumptions by creating an audit trail that depicted a step-by-step account of his research, including procedures and materials.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations. There were several limitations to this study. One limitation was with the sample size. Only teachers that left Turnover Elementary were interviewed. This study did not interview teachers who remained at Turnover Elementary under the current principal. For example, all eight participants only focused on the negative aspects of the principal and shared very little on the positive aspects that the principal contributed to Turnover Elementary School. Interviewing teachers who remained could provide a different perspective on the principal’s leadership style. The second limitation was with John who was hard to reach and did not participate in the focus group interview. The third limitation was in the positive attributes of the principal. Even though, the participants chose to leave the school because of the principal’s actions, it would be great to know one positive action of the principal that could be utilized to retain teachers.

Delimitations. The delimitations of this study included one failing Title I elementary school in one large suburban/urban county school district. Eight teachers who left this Title I elementary school were interviewed voluntarily to gain their perceptions of the school administrator at the time and what role he or she played in them leaving the school. This particular Title I elementary school was the study chosen based on data from the Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (2020), where less than thirty-five new inexperienced teachers
were employed at this school during the 2017-18 school year, and the number increased to less than fifty new inexperienced teachers for the 2018-19 school year.

**Ethical Considerations**

To ensure ethical responsibility in this study, the researcher conducted the following strategies: established a safe and orderly environment that was conducive to the researcher and participant in regard to the location and time of the interviews. The researcher did not engage in any discriminatory practices with participants. Participants voluntarily accepted the invitation to participate in the study. The researcher obtained informed consent from each participant before conducting the interview. In addition, the informed consent document was read during the individual and focus group interviews to gain verbal consent as well. The researcher ensured the anonymity of participants within the study and established shared responsibility between the researcher and participants regarding the timeline of the research. The researcher created a secure and fair environment between the researcher and participants. A professional relationship between the researcher and participants was established to respect everyone involved in the study. All data from the interviews and focus group were transcribed in their entirety and shared with each participant.

**Chapter Summary**

Chapter 3 discussed the phenomenographic methodology used to conduct this study. Eight participants from one failing Title I elementary school in a large suburban/urban county school district were interviewed about their lived experiences at Turnover Elementary School. Interviews occurred in two formats—individual and focus group. Interviews were conducted virtually, using a virtual software platform (Zoom and Trint). Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding processes. The Black male participant was hard to reach
and did not participate in the focus group interview, which contributed to a limitation. All participant information was confidential, and interviews were conducted in a safe/orderly environment agreed upon by the researcher and participant. Professionalism was established and maintained throughout the interview process.
Chapter Four: Findings

For this qualitative study, this researcher conducted individual teacher interviews from teachers who left Turnover Elementary School and a focus group interview that consisted of the teachers who participated in the individual interviews. Table 6 provides an overview of interview participants.

Table 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Number</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Years at Turnover</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Charlene</td>
<td>28.5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Tawanna</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mary</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Susan</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Lois</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Christina</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>John</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table lists each participant, as well as the pseudonym used in the study, along with demographic years of experience and years at Turnover Elementary School.

The interviews consisted of demographic questions and open-ended questions to ascertain each participant’s perception of the school administrator and the role that the administrator played in teachers’ retention or departure from Turnover Elementary. The goal of this chapter is to report the findings for the following research questions:

1. What are teachers’ lived experiences of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one failing Title I Elementary School within one large suburban/urban county school district?

2. How can teachers’ lived experiences help administrators to understand the underlying factors for teachers leaving the school and/or profession?
Open, selective and axial coding revealed the three essential themes that emerged throughout the interview process, including:

Theme one: Teachers and other stakeholders have lost motivation regarding the life of the school, and teachers feel stressed and hopeless.

Theme two: The leader demonstrates poor relationships and communication with faculty.

Theme three: The leader behaves authoritatively, yet remains disconnected from the life of the school.

Further, phenomengraphic analysis suggested that participants experienced these themes in different ways. For instance, in theme one, some participants experienced motivation loss internally (e.g., feeling that they were ineffective teachers) while others experienced external motivation loss (e.g., no longer wanting to give their best to the school). In theme two, participants experienced isolation (e.g., a lack of support from the principal and favoritism), the principal’s lack of commitment (e.g., principal failed to build relationships due to his placement at a school that he did not want), and the principal’s lack of integrity (e.g., principal failed to be transparent and honest with the staff). Theme three also revealed differences in perceptions of the principal, including that the principal was intimidating (e.g., retaliation schemes) and lacked accountability (e.g., excessive absences and inappropriate handling of discipline). Ultimately, these themes and the differing ways that participants experienced them lend evidence to the rationale behind the school’s teacher attrition. The details of the nuanced differences found in the qualitative interview data are described below.

**Theme One:** Teachers and other stakeholders have lost motivation regarding the life of the school, and teachers feel stressed and hopeless.
Theme one focused on the teachers/stakeholders losing motivation in the life of the school because of stress and feelings of defeat. Table 7 illustrates how the qualitative coding process rendered theme one as well as the clusters of codes that are integral to the theme. Deep analysis of this theme revealed that participants experienced motivation loss in two distinct ways. Some participants internalized the stress and work conditions. This internalization was marked by participants’ feelings of hopelessness and low self-efficacy regarding the effectiveness of their teaching. Others externalized the stress and work conditions at Turnover Elementary. Externalized motivation loss appeared to be a result of the stress and work conditions and was marked by participants’ apathetic attitude towards the school and refusal to go above and beyond the call of duty.

Table 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inferred Codes</th>
<th>Code Clusters</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work Conditions,</td>
<td>Frustrating/</td>
<td>Teachers and other stakeholders have lost motivation regarding the life of the school, and teachers feel stressed and hopeless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health,</td>
<td>Stressful Environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deadlines,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture/Climate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents, Students</td>
<td>Critical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Miserable,</td>
<td>Stakeholders lost Motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers Defeated,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers unempowered,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers have no motivation to stay</td>
<td>Teachers lost motivation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table describes theme one regarding research question one.
While both internalized and externalized motivation loss were evident in theme one, the sources of the motivation loss are central to addressing research question one. Specifically, the lived experiences of teachers who leave turnover elementary indicate that their motivation to persist and perform were negatively impacted by leadership in the school.

**Contributors to Motivation Loss**

In general, interview participants discussed their stress levels increasing while working at Turnover Elementary School. Of particular note were the work conditions and, specifically, a poor working climate. Several participants discussed how unmotivated they were to teach at Turnover Elementary, prompting them to leave the school. From the focus group interview, some speakers referenced their misery while at Turnover Elementary. Participants clearly evidenced struggles within the environment and with leadership at Turnover Elementary.

The challenges that teachers experienced at Turnover Elementary impacted the participants in different ways. Some participants internalized the stress with health concerns and feelings of self-defeat while others externalized the stress with apathy towards the school and leader. Several participants also noticed that this loss of motivation is impacting the parents and students as well, suggesting that these critical stakeholders were giving up and losing faith in the principal.

**Internal Motivation Loss**

Charlene, Tawanna, and Becky shared their experiences of internal motivation loss at Turnover Elementary. Charlene expressed this motivation loss as a function of stress and potential decline in her health. “And so, at the point that I feel like my health started to not fail, but just, it alarmed me in a way, that I just felt like I just really needed to just get out of this
alive” (Charlene, personal communication, August 26, 2020). Tawanna discussed an example of an unreasonable deadline that seemed to be proposed on a whim, and the stress that resulted.

There was an unreasonable deadline, like it was due the next day. And the expectation was that if you don’t get it done, then it’s a problem. And so that’s the kind of chaotic, mandatory, random, non-academic, strenuous activities that we’re being asked to do, just on a whim, because it looked good. (Tawanna, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Tawanna went on to suggest that she considered taking time off using the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA) due to work-related stress and has experienced feelings of self-defeat. She said:

My capacity for that building had demolished, like, it was all I could do. But my motivation at that point was zero to none to come back. I was ready to do FMLA and take off the rest of the school year. (Tawanna, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

When asked if there was anything that could have been done at that point to retain her, Tawanna shared, “You know what? Honestly, I’m not sure if anything could’ve been done” (Tawanna, personal communication, August 27, 2020). Becky summed up the essence of the internal motivation loss phenomena when she shared her frame of mind while at Turnover Elementary: “I can’t do anything right. I don’t know anything. That’s the perception that the teachers have” (Becky, personal communication, August 27, 2020).

External Motivation Loss

In contrast to Charlene, Tawanna, and Becky, Christina, John, and Mary experienced the loss of motivation towards external endeavors within the life of the school. These participants developed an apathetic attitude towards the school and leader due to the leader’s tendency to
force stress on teachers. Christina illustrated, “We had a very high absence—teacher absence at that school—just because teachers did not want to come to work. Teachers lived on doubt; they were tired of the work conditions that were going on” (Christina, personal communication, September 5, 2020). This apathy, or external motivation loss, was pervasive throughout the interviews both as a function of authoritative, uncompromising leadership and failure of leadership to respond to challenging environmental issues. Further, it was suggested by some that this apathy affected more than just teachers, as both students and parents became disenfranchised as well.

Unsurprisingly, participant characterizations of external motivation loss were linked to the external environmental issues, such as the socioeconomic positioning of the students. Participants suggested that Turnover Elementary’s status as a Title I school presented specific challenges for teachers and administrators. These challenges created a stressful environment that participants suggested the administrator was unable to address. Mary shared:

But it was a difficult school to be in because it was low income, the children came with issues, and because their issues were not met by the school leadership, it just made it extremely difficult for them to focus on learning. (Mary, personal communication, August 28, 2020)

It is important to note that prior to the principal coming to Turnover Elementary School, teachers and parents had a working relationship in handling student challenges. After the new principal arrived, he blamed teachers for student misbehaviors. As a result, parents bought into the principal’s notion that the teachers were the problem and the relationship that parents and teacher formally had significantly diminished.
Christina shared the impact of the helplessness that teachers felt as a result. The only thing that she could focus on was getting out. She said:

> I got to a point where I would come to work every day and all I could focus on was packing up my class and sending out resumes and things of that nature. Like what she said, I was over it, and my focus was not [on] being a great teacher; my focus was [on] how to get out of here, and I just started packing. (Christina, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Mary provided evidence of why teachers felt like Christina did, suggesting that the principal’s lack of professionalism had an impact on the school culture and climate:

> Well, I know as far as the culture and climate [for] the teachers were concerned, we were being bullied. I mean, we were being basically told that we weren’t any good. The reason[s] why the children were failing were solely our fault. (Mary, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Susan was generally in agreement and suggested that the external factors discussed above had a significant impact. Susan said, “And so my last year at Turnover Elementary, my plan was to leave education altogether. I didn’t really have any likes. There wasn’t really anything that stood out” (Susan, personal communication, August 29, 2020). Susan’s predetermined decision to leave before beginning her final year is an example of the apathy generated by the external motivation loss experienced by participants, both as a function of the environment and school leadership.

> The attitude of externally unmotivated participants like Mary, Christina, and Susan presented an approach that was distinct from internally unmotivated participants, in that externally unmotivated participants framed their loss of motivation as a loss of faith in the school
because of the principal. Alternatively, the internally unmotivated participants framed their motivation loss as a loss of faith in themselves. This is central to the difference in this theme of internally and externally impacted motivation.

This apathy impacted more than just teachers, too. John shared, “Well, it drained me. Like I said, when you teach in an environment like that, it’s not about the money, it’s about the kids” (John, personal communication, September 5, 2020). John’s comment was contextualized in the broader interview as a recognition that teacher apathy affects engagement with students. Participants Mary, Charlene, and Lois generally identified apathy from parents and students looking forward to being done with Turnover Elementary. Participants described the apathetic attitudes of parents and students. Mary shared:

The level of respect started to slowly diminish. I didn’t hang around long enough to see how far it was going to diminish. I got myself and got out. They started out drinking the Kool-Aid like the rest of us did, and they slowly started to see what we were seeing.

(Mary, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Charlene referenced how the parents of the fifth graders were glad to be leaving the school. She said:

But there were parents who came and spoke to me personally about some of the things that they were unhappy about. It was a lot of negative things I heard from parents. I’ll just leave it at that. So, the fifth-grade parents were glad that they were leaving, especially if that was their last kid there. (Charlene, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Alarmingly, Lois described very little student motivation to succeed. Rather, she referenced the students not being motivated by just going with the flow, saying, “I don’t think the kids knew
any different. They kind of just went along to get along” (Lois, personal communication, August 31, 2020). Though Lois described suffering from external motivation loss, she did provide feedback regarding what the leader should do to empower teachers, saying:

I think that as the administrator, you need to do any and everything to empower that teacher to do what they need to do to get that child from one hump to the next. All the extra stuff doesn’t matter, because at this point, we’re trying to save a life. Hey, forget about everything else. Treat your teacher’s kind, give them what they need to teach the babies, and get them to the next level. All the extra stuff should be out the door.

(Lois, personal communication, August 31, 2020)

In the end, the environment, the leader’s lack of response to the environment, and the leader’s style and behavior at Turnover Elementary appeared to be central contributors to a loss of motivation among the teachers. Several participants discussed how unmotivated they were to teach at Turnover Elementary, which prompted them to leave the school, citing misery as a hallmark of daily life.

**Theme One Summary**

Evidence from the interviews showed two different points of view from the participants. Some participants internalized the work conditions and stress, whereas other participants turned to apathy to survive the school year until they could leave. Internal factors were revealed by Charlene, Tawanna, Becky, and Susan. Charlene discussed her health and having an anxiety attack at work due to the stressful nature of the leader. Tawanna was stressed and considered taking leave under the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA). Becky spoke about teachers experiencing self-defeat by thinking they could never do anything right. Susan wanted to leave education and not transfer. Charlene, Tawanna, Becky, and Susan internalized the school
environment due to health concerns and self-defeat. External factors were revealed by Christina, John, Mary, and Lois. Christina discussed the excessive absences of teachers due to being tired of the school. John discussed his eagerness to remove himself from the building without having another job solidified. Mary discussed the school being Title I, which came with particular stresses. Mary also discussed the principal being a bully and telling them that they were not good teachers. Lois suggested that the principal needed to empower teachers and treat them with respect, which makes a better culture. All four participants perceived the school as a stressful, unmotivating environment that was no longer conducive to their needs. Christina, John, Mary and Lois did not internalize the situation or experience self-defeat.

Teachers losing motivation due to stress and feelings of hopelessness addressed research question one regarding teachers’ perceptions of the administrator’s role in teacher retention at Turnover Elementary. Participants discussed Turnover Elementary being a stressful environment, and stakeholders (teachers, parents, students) feeling unmotivated. The details from each participant’s interview revealed their perceptions of the leader. All participants wanted to leave the school. However, one participant wanted to leave the field of education due to the environment at Turnover Elementary, an environment that had been created by the administrator. Other participants experienced health concerns, while the remaining participants stopped being active and worked hard to find other alternatives each day. The perceptions of the participants revealed that the leader did not do anything to retain them at Turnover Elementary. Further discussion will come in chapter five.
Theme Two: The leader demonstrates poor relationships and poor communication with faculty.

Theme two focused on the teachers/stakeholders experiencing isolation in the school, as well as a lack of commitment and lack of integrity from the principal. Table 8 illustrates how the qualitative coding process rendered theme two, as well as the clusters of codes that are integral to the theme. Deep analysis of this theme revealed that participants experienced the leader’s poor relationship with staff and lack of communication in three different ways. Some participants felt a sense of loneliness due to the lack of support with resources, teacher development, and cohesiveness as a team. Other participants did not feel as though the principal was committed to the school because he failed to build relationships with the teachers. In addition, some participants in both groups felt that the principal lacked integrity, due to his lack of transparency and instances of showing favoritism. Though it was viewed in three different ways, the central theme surrounding a lack of communication and relationship building was consistent across all participants.

**Table 8.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme Two Coding</th>
<th>Code Clusters</th>
<th>Theme</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inferred Codes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Support</td>
<td>Lack of Support/Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Development</td>
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<td>Discipline</td>
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<td>Resources</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Feedback</td>
<td>Lack of Building Relationships</td>
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<td>Staff Morale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Programs</td>
<td>Broken Promises</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Trips</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Promises</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The leader demonstrates poor relationships and communication with faculty.
Feelings of Isolation

One group of participants described their experiences at Turnover Elementary based on their feelings about the leader’s actions. These participants felt alone because the administrator did not support them with resources, discipline, or teacher development. It was evident that this group of participants felt like they had been abandoned and left to fend for themselves, which made them feel alone in the building.

Tawanna, Christina and Mary revealed their feelings of isolation by describing the principal’s lack of support with teacher development, discipline, and resources. Tawanna shared:

I was not being supported by our administrator. And what I can say is that the administrator was not supportive. I laid out all of the things that I needed to complete my certification for leadership, and everything that I did, once it was time to present, the administrator just basically canceled it, so I had nothing to go on my portfolio. (Tawanna, personal communication, August 27, 2020)

Christina noted that, in general, the school leader did not work to support teachers, saying: “But also working with the kids, it just seemed like the teachers were not fully supported by him. I don’t think that he had all the teachers’ backs, it didn’t seem” (Christina, personal communication, September 5, 2020). Tawanna also shared that the principal did not build
relationships with students, especially the fifth-grade boys. Not only were the teachers feeling alone and feeling deprived, but all of the students faced the same feelings as well. Tawanna shared:

And I think this bears repeating, because I think I said it in our one-on-one, the fifth grade students, especially the boys… I think because this particular administrator had experience with high school, older age grown men type boys, he really looked at those little 10- or 11-year-old boys like 18-year-old men. His disdain and his lack of support in helping them to become respectful young men, his support was just not there. (Tawanna, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Mary focused more closely on resources in her interview. She referenced the need for support, saying:

Just so many things… just not feeling supported when we needed materials. We had to buy things like writing paper out of our pockets. So many things that we had to buy out of our pockets that I didn’t feel like we should have had to. Just the lack of support as far as supplies. (Mary, personal communication, August 28, 2020)

In addition to the lack of support, teachers needed a voice in the programs being implemented at the school. The participants stated that their voices were not heard by the principal. The principal left the teachers out of all decision-making, further contributing to a sense of loneliness. Susan referenced the need for teacher feedback on programs being implemented in the building.

I felt like maybe if he took time to speak to teachers and ask what works, or what programs work, or what have you used in the past and things of that nature, to try and get a consensus of what we could use and what we could do to help students—I think that
would have made me more comfortable [if there was] at least a person… trying to keep us together and keep us as a group. (Susan, personal communication, August 29, 2020)

Susan and Becky discussed the principal having cliques and showing favoritism, which isolates others and leaves them out of the group. Susan shared:

I think there were a couple of teachers there at my time that had a really good connection with him, so they seemed to be the go-to people that he would constantly rely on, and everybody else just got what they got from him. But it was definitely a sense of favoritism towards some of the teachers. (Susan, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Becky shared the apparentness of the cliques in the building. For those that were not in the clique, they were looked at negatively and received no support from the principal.

It was just that we w[ere]n’t in the clique or that circle, we got looked at as negative, and we w[ere]n’t. It was just [that] the culture was negative. (Becky, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Teacher development, discipline, and a lack of resources were reasons that the participants felt isolated. The principal did not support Tawanna with her leadership certification, nor did he support Mary with the resources needed for her classroom. Becky discussed the favoritism that the principal showed to certain teachers in the building. Teachers were left to fend for themselves. The principal ignored the teachers and left them out to dry.

**Lack of Commitment**

Another group of participants categorized their experience at Turnover Elementary based on their belief that the principal was not committed to the school. The principal came from a high
school and was placed at Turnover Elementary involuntarily. The principal failed to connect with staff by building effective relationships. For example, Susan offered the following commentary.

Probably, the main reason was, the principal had no elementary experience. He came from a high school. This was the leader’s first placement at an elementary school. There was no faith that the principal was a leader capable of leading the school as well as leading a school in that particular community. Especially because this administrator had not worked in an elementary school before. (Susan, personal communication, August 29, 2020)

John identified the problem as a disconnect in purpose. He suggested that teachers and the leader had differing motives for engaging with the life of the school. John said: “Again, I don’t think he was there for probably the same reason I was, and that was part of the disconnect” (John, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

John’s disconnect with the principal, and the latter’s lack of commitment to the school seemed to be the primary reasons that he refused to sign his contract. John said, “And I didn’t sign my contract when it came out. I just literally did not sign my contract. I didn’t know what I was going to do, but it was that bad” (John, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Several participants spoke on the principal not being the right fit and not wanting to be at Turnover Elementary. For example, Tawanna offered the following commentary.

Also, you can tell the difference from somebody who wants the job versus somebody who does not want this job, and I never got the impression [from him]. You can fake it ‘til you make it only to a certain point, but if you really did not want this assignment, it’s going to show itself. (Tawanna, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)
Christina discussed the principal being comfortable in a high school setting, as opposed to an elementary setting.

I think he was very comfortable where he was, he had been there for years. He was big man on campus, and he was dealing with teenagers, which I think was his comfort level, and was dropped here at Turnover Elementary with a bunch of babies. Not trying to defend him, but I agree, he didn’t want to be there. (Christina, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Christina and Tawanna referenced the principal’s lack of commitment in building relationships. From their perspective, they did not feel as if the principal showed a commitment in building relationships with the teachers or putting forth any effort to boost morale. For example, Christina offered the following commentary:

and even in addition to the student behavior, it was some issues even with staff members, where you don’t have good relationships, maybe with someone on your team, or maybe you don’t have good relationships with the administration. The main thing that would have kept me at Turnover Elementary was to improve the work environment. There was… I would say that the teachers there had good personal relationship[s] with each other. However, the staff morale was not developed from things that the administrator put into place. (Christina, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Tawanna compared Turnover’s principal to another principal, noting the differences between the two principals (and how the former failed to build relationships). She said:

But then having left and worked under a different principal that mirrored the first principal I worked under, I noticed that building relationships is key, and the
administrator at Turnover Elementary just did not think that building relationships with
his staff was important. (Tawanna, personal communication, August 27, 2020)

Susan and John referenced the principal being placed at Turnover Elementary
involuntarily by the district office. It was evident that he did not want to be there due to his
attitude towards the school. Tawanna noted that the principal did not try to build relationships
with the teachers. The principal showed no commitment in the school.

Not Leading with Integrity

Finally, the last group of participants categorized their experience at Turnover Elementary
based on their belief that the principal did not operate with integrity. The principal was not
transparent, failed to follow through on promises, and showed favoritism with teachers. This
group of participants did not feel as if they could trust the principal. Susan, Christina, Mary and
Becky referenced the principal’s broken promises regarding instructional programs and field
trips, as well as other general promises that were broken. Trust was a factor for the participants.
Susan suggested:

I would say that in comparing [the] Turnover administrator with a previous administrator,
the main comparison I can make is follow-through. My previous administrator would
present things to us or different programs that were going to come into place, or different
procedures that were going to be changed, and they would follow through with it and
they would come into full fruition before there were changes made, and I just didn’t feel
like that at Turnover Elementary. [I felt] that one thing was said, and another thing was
done. (Susan, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Christina agreed that the principal did not follow-through on things and supported Susan by
saying:
Let’s say that there was a particular promise that was made to teachers pertaining to
student misbehaviors—different rollouts that would be put into place to assist teachers—
and there was a full plan put in place, but there was no follow-through to the plan.
(Christina, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Mary from the focus group interview referenced the broken field trip promises. Mary shared:
I think the parents were like us, they drank the Kool-Aid early, and once you get all
of these promises presented to you, “We’re going to take the kids on two field trips
a semester. I’m going to take the fifth graders to Disney World for their fifth grade trip.
they’re not going to have to pay for anything.” Once your deliver things like this and you
don’t hold up your end of the bargain, people start to call you on it, and what we started
noticing was the teachers got wind of the broken promises early on, but the parents, it
took them a little longer. (Mary, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Christina and Becky referenced the general broken promises made by the principal. For example,
Christina offered the following commentary:
However, on top of that, again, there was no follow-through to what he said, I felt like
He lied a lot about stuff, he would say one thing and he would do another. (Christina,
personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Becky discussed the need for the principal to follow-through, which could have retained her as a
teacher at Turnover Elementary.
And something that could’ve been done to keep me there is if the administrator was more
supportive and followed through on things that he asked me to do. Just follow things
through. (Becky, personal communication, August 27, 2020)
Mary and John focused on trust factors with the principal. The need for the principal to communicate truthfully with his or her teachers was especially important to Mary and John. Mary stated, “One thing is just to be honest” (Mary, personal communication, August 28, 2020). John compared the Turnover Elementary principal to his new principal.

Like I said, we would have to start with a conversation, with trust, get our feelings out there, my expectations for him as a principal, [and] his for me as a teacher.

The principal that I have now, she’s a woman. And one thing I love about her, she’s a straight shooter. Whether you like what she’s saying or not, you can respect it because she’s honest. She tells you what she’s thinking. There’s a line of communication. (John, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Mary and John discussed the principal being a dishonest and lacking transparency. John compared his new principal to the principal at Turnover, and his main point was that she was a “straight shooter,” meaning she was up front and transparent with the staff. Becky discussed the principal’s lack in follow-through. The principal said one thing but did another. Trust and transparency were ideal for all of the participants.

**Theme Two Summary**

The interview data revealed that the participants experienced aloneness, a principal’s lack of commitment to his staff, and a principal’s integrity-deficient leadership. Tawanna, Christina and Mary referenced loneliness and discussed the principal’s lack of support with teacher development, discipline, and resources. Tawanna cited an instance on which the principal agreed to support her with her leadership certification, however, he continually canceled her presentation when it was time for her to present her findings. Tawanna felt alone because she did not have his support. Becky referenced the formation of cliques in the building, encouraged by
the principal. Becky felt alone because she was not a part of the clique. Regarding a lack of commitment, John, Susan, Christina, and Tawanna explained that the principal was coming to Turnover Elementary from a high school, and it was not where he wanted to be. The principal was placed at Turnover Elementary involuntarily by the district office. John mentioned not signing his contract due to the principal showing no commitment in the school. Susan, Christina, Mary, Becky, and John revealed their trust issues with the principal. The principal said one thing but did the opposite. Mary and John explained that the principal needed to be transparent and truthful with all stakeholders.

The leader building poor relationships and demonstrating poor communication with faculty addressed research question two. Participants explained that they felt lonely due to the principal’s lack of support and the formation of cliques within the school. Participants revealed the principal’s lack of commitment to building relationships, due to his involuntary placement at Turnover Elementary. Finally, participants discussed the principal’s lack of integrity due to his broken promises and lies. The participants did not trust the principal due to his lack of transparency and openness with the staff. These reasons were contributing factors to the teachers leaving Turnover Elementary School. Further discussion will come in chapter five.

**Theme Three: The leader behaves authoritatively yet remains disconnected from the life of the school.**

Theme three focused on the participants’ feelings toward the principal, and his intimidation tactics and lack of accountability related to his excessive absences and inappropriate management of discipline. Table 9 illustrates how the qualitative coding process rendered theme three, as well as the clusters of codes that are integral to the theme. Deep analysis of this theme revealed that participants experienced the leader’s authoritative behavior and his disconnect from
the school. Based on the lived experiences of five participants, the principal was intimidating and used methods of retaliation when they did not agree with him or do what he wanted them to do. John, Mary, Charlene, Becky, Lois, and Christina discussed the principal’s lack of accountability because of the principal’s numerous absences, especially on the day of the school shooting, when he was needed most.

Participants also experienced a lack of accountability based on discipline. The principal did not hold the students accountable for their actions. Fifth grade students were fighting kindergarten students and received no repercussions for their actions. How can you be accountable for a school if you are not there and do not discipline the students when display inappropriate behavior? The participants summed up theme three with the label of authoritarian leader who was disconnected from Turnover Elementary.

Table 9.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inferred Codes</th>
<th>Code Clusters</th>
<th>Theme</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manipulation, Retaliation, Tyrant, Dictator</td>
<td>Authoritarian Behavior</td>
<td>The leader behaves authoritatively yet remains disconnected from the life of the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not being visible to students, Excessive Absences</td>
<td>Lack of Visibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inappropriate handling of discipline, Good Person vs. Bad Leader (Just a bad leader)</td>
<td>Poor decision-making skills</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The table describes theme three regarding research question two.
Tactics of Intimidation

Five participants (Lois, Tawanna, Becky, Mary, and Charlene) spoke directly to the intimidation tactics on how they experienced intimidation from the moment that the principal became the leader at Turnover Elementary School. Lois and Tawanna referenced the principal threatening to put all teachers on a Professional Development Plan (PDP) when he first arrived at Turnover Elementary School. Tawanna shared:

And then, also the very first faculty meeting we had, the administrator talked about putting everybody on a PDP because this is a failing school. The administrator went into the blame game like, “It’s the teachers, it’s you all, it’s not the kids, it’s not the parents, it’s all your fault. You’re not doing what you’re supposed to be doing. I’m gonna put everybody on a PDP. That’s the only way you’ll become a better teacher. (Tawanna, personal communication, August 27, 2020)

Lois suggested that the leader’s message was, “you can go to any other school than Turnover Elementary. I really don’t care cause I’m gonna get another warm body in here to do the same job” (Lois, personal communication, August 31, 2020). The assertion that the principal immediately blamed the faculty and identified them all as expendable or interchangeable indicated that the leader-teacher relationships at Turnover Elementary were problematic from the very start.

The relationships at Turnover Elementary seems to worsen as things devolved into personal attacks from the perspective of the participants. Several participants discussed how the principal turned professional issues into personal issues. Charlene, Tawanna, Becky, Mary, and Susan referenced the principal’s retaliation schemes. For example, Charlene commented, “I personally felt targeted, maligned, like somebody’s just trying out to get me, and all I’m trying to
do is teach kids how to be good citizens and read (Charlene, personal communication, August 26, 2020). Tawanna discussed the retaliation via email as if the principal started a paper trail. She said, “Some people just felt like it just wasn’t worth the beat down and the constant emails. Please explain to me why, whatever the case may be, whatever it was for that week, you were being reprimanded” (Tawanna, personal communication, August 27, 2020). Becky and Mary indicated being targeted by the principal as their reason for departure. Becky shared, “I felt like I was being targeted after I didn’t do something that he asked. That’s why I left, I felt like I was being targeted and harassed” (Becky, personal communication, August 27, 2020). Similarly, Mary shared, “I felt that I was being targeted and harassed” (Mary focus group interview, September 14, 2020).

According to Susan from the focus group interview, the assistant principal was bullied as well.

I just want to add one more thing about bullying. The assistant principal expressed to me that she was frustrated because she would be written up if teachers did not complete their duties and tasks, such as: turning in lesson plans on time or coming to work late. I feel like the bullying was towards us as teachers, but I know that the assistant principal expressed to me, she didn’t use the word bullying but that’s what it was. (Lois personal communication, September 14, 2020).

Lois discussed the overbearing, micromanaging nature of the principal.

Turnover Elementary principal’s style of leadership just was not for me. It was overbearing. He wanted to tell me what to do every hour on the hour, every minute. (Lois, focus group interview, September 14, 2020).
The authoritarian tactics of intimidation noted in the passages above appeared to be a significant contributor to teachers’ rationale for leaving Turnover Elementary. Beyond the authoritarian intimidation and micromanaging described by the participants, favoritism was also a concept discussed throughout the interviews. Participants shared the principal’s apparent preference for teachers who seemed to be on his side. Becky described the principal as an authoritative leader who grouped teachers based on who was on his side and who he wanted to get rid of, based on the following commentary:

The administrative style was more authoritative. He kind of grouped certain teachers. He grouped them as the ones he knows will follow him, the ones that he had to ride, and then the ones that he felt like he was going to push them out of his school. (Becky, personal communication, August 27, 2020).

Two participants described the principal as a tyrant and dictator. For example, Mary discussed working in a dictatorship saying, “I felt like it was a dictatorship. It was his way or the highway” (Mary, personal communication, August 28, 2020). Along with being an authoritative leader, Lois discussed the principal being a tyrant, sharing:

Okay, so the staff was not really that diverse at that time. Our principal was an African-American male, but the staff definitely came together from the standpoint of, we all felt the same way about our principal being a tyrant. (Lois, personal communication, August 31, 2020)

Mary’s mention of the principal’s race and gender illuminates an identity-based critique of the principal, however participant interviews made it clear that those sharing the principal’s racial and gender-based identity were made to especially suffer. John, a Black male educator, referenced the principal having issues with other Black males in the building. John explained that
the new principal seemed to be intimidated by Black male teachers, which made it a place of torment for the Black male teachers. “And we eventually got a principal who I don’t know if they felt threatened by other Black males. It became a place of torment” (John, personal communication, September 5, 2020).

Interview data illustrated that pitting teachers against each other and choosing favorites among parents were other tactics used by the principal. In the focus group interview, Charlene and Becky spoke on how the principal pitted teachers against one another. For example, Charlene offered:

And really, the only thing that made it worth anything was the caliber of teachers that worked there alongside me and the fact that we all understood that it was not us. And I think that was the only thing that kept me from like colleagues have said, considering leaving the field. So, there were strategic things to put the teachers in a bad light in the parents’ mind[s]. (Charlene, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Becky corroborated, “I feel that the administrator was trying to pit teachers against each other, trying to make it like it was a competition thing” (Becky, focus group interview, September 14, 2020). Participant suggested that not only did the principal bully teachers, but he also used bullying tactics with parents. For example, Becky offered the following commentary:

Just like he had certain parents that believed in him, the ones that believed what he said, he was all about them… and he supported them. The ones who w[ere]n’t active, he talked down to, he talked about them when they did try to get active. He grouped teachers based on his personal opinion of them. From my perspective, these are the ones that I’m gonna target and bully. These are the ones I’m just gonna push out
cause they’re not doing nothing anyway. They are not of value to me. So, I’m gonna make it hard for them because they’re not of value to me. (Becky, personal communication, August 27, 2020)

The divide and conquer strategies noted by the participants above further illustrates the experiences of authoritarianism that participants shared as essential to their decision to leave.

Participants shared that the principal at Turnover Elementary came in on his first day and threatened to put all teachers on a PDP due to the low test scores. Participants felt undervalued as the leader told them, “You can work anywhere else because I will find another body to fill your spot” (Principal at Turnover Elementary). Becky and Charlene discussed him dividing the teachers based on who was on his side versus who he wanted to get rid of. Charlene, Becky and Mary discussed how the principal used retaliation as a method to “get you” because he would send an email about an issue that he already had addressed. The feelings of retaliation and being targeted were addressed throughout Charlene’s, Becky’s, and Mary’s interviews. Susan referenced the assistant principal being targeted by receiving written reprimands from the principal when teachers did not meet a deadline or complete an assignment. Finally, John felt as if the principal was intimidated by the other Black males in the building, which is why he drove them away and created an environment of torment for them. All eight participants shared that their lived experiences at Turnover Elementary was intimidating and stressful, which is why they chose to leave the school.

Lack of Accountability

Participants shared that the principal at Turnover Elementary was excessively absent and did not hold the students accountable for their actions. Their lived experiences also indicated that the participants believed the principal did not take accountability for student discipline and
safety. John, Mary, and Charlene from the focus group interview referenced the lack of accessibility of the principal because of his excessive absences. For example, John offered the following commentary when discussing the principal’s lack of visibility.

Again, it’s funny, cause he wasn’t there. He wasn’t as present as other principals were. I’m used to principals being on the hallway, speaking to kids, coming to the classroom, making their presence felt. Again, I don’t know where he was most of the time, but I just didn’t feel the presence, or I didn’t see the presence that was the norm prior to him. (John personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Mary discussed the principal’s excessive absences.

And there were many days that he was not there. If he was there, he sat out in his truck. and I know because when we walked our children to Specials at 10 o’clock, he would still be sitting in his vehicle, not even have come into the building yet. (Mary, personal communication, August 28, 2020)

The principal was absent on critical days when leadership was necessary. Charlene and Becky referenced the excessive absences in their interviews. For example, Charlene discussed the school shooting and the principal being absent on that day.

The last year that I was there was also the year that somebody came in with an AK-47, ready to shoot up the school. He was not even there that day. So, his leadership was just noticeably absent. We were noticeably without top leadership. (Charlene, personal interview, August 26, 2020)

Becky discussed the principal needing to be at work.

Several participants discussed how the principal did not address the disciplinary concerns within the school or the issues that dealt with safety. From the focus group interview, several
participants addressed disciplinary concerns. For example, Christina spoke on her reason for transferring.

I transferred primarily because of the behavior concerns and the toxic work environment. The students basically did what they wanted to do with no consequences. The school day started at 7:00 a.m. By 9:00 a.m., 15,000 things have already taken place before the school day had even really gotten started. (Christina, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Lois discussed the dangerous accounts of students with no repercussions for their actions.

There were children in the fourth and fifth grade that were body slamming kindergarten students over the bus seats with no repercussions; they were cursing out teachers every day with no repercussions; they were setting trashcans on fire with no repercussions. (Lois, focus group interview, September 14, 2020)

Christina made a distinction between the principal as a good person and a leader. She referenced the principal being a good person because he supported her during her brain surgery. However, she noted that she transferred because he was not a good leader and could not be trusted. Again, the principal did not hold himself accountable for his actions at Turnover Elementary, which is not a good way to build relationships or get the staff to trust you. Christina shared:

I would say personally, as a person, I did like the principal as a person because he was there to support me through my health issues that I had as far as my brain tumor, but professionally, on a professional level and working as a principal to teacher, I don’t think there was a good trust. (Christina, personal communication, September 5, 2020)

Excessive absences and disciplinary concerns with no repercussions for the students’ actions were the subjects repeatedly addressed by the participants during the interviews. Charlene
referenced the school shooting and the principal being absent on that day. Lois and Christina referenced the principal not disciplining the students when they performed heinous acts such as fifth graders fighting kindergarten students. Due to the lack of accountability, the participants chose to leave Turnover Elementary School.

**Theme Three Summary**

Participants from the interview referenced the leader behaving authoritatively while being disconnected from the school. Tawanna discussed the principal threatening to place all teachers on a PDP at his first faculty meeting. Charlene and Becky discussed the principal retaliating against the teachers by sending emails about situations that he has already addressed. Lois referenced the tone of the faculty meeting was intimidating due to the principal informing the staff that they could go to any school that they wanted to because he was going to get a warm body to fill their positions if they chose to leave Turnover Elementary School. John referenced the principal being intimidated by Black males in the building, which is why he made it a place of torment for Black males. Charlene and Mary discussed the principal’s excessive absences, with one being the day of the school shooting. Finally, Christina discussed the principal having a good heart by supporting her during her brain surgery but said that he lacked good leadership. Christina chose to leave Turnover because she could no longer trust him.

The leader behaving authoritatively while being disconnected from the school addressed research question two. Participants described the leader as a tyrant and dictator with it being “his way or the highway.” Participants were not supported with discipline and the principal was excessively absent. Participants were intimidated by the principal through his words and retaliation schemes. Finally, the principal refused to hold the students accountable for their behavior. These reasons contributed to all participants leaving Turnover Elementary School.
Chapter Summary

All participants revealed that Turnover Elementary was a not a great place to work and their rationale for leaving stemmed from the principal being an authoritative leader with negative leadership practices. The top three themes that emerged from the principal’s leadership practices were: teachers’/stakeholders’ loss of motivation regarding the life of the school and feelings of stress and hopelessness, leaders demonstrating poor relationships and communication with faculty, and leaders behaving authoritatively while being disconnected from the life of the school. All participants are in a new school within the district or in another district. However, one participant left teaching after leaving Turnover Elementary and going to another school. Lois left and went to another school where she was not happy and is now in another field. She informed the researcher that she decided to leave teaching due to the continuous bad principals that she came across. All participants informed the researcher that they were happy and secure in their new positions under their new principals or bosses.

This chapter highlighted the findings which emerged on the account of the interviews that were conducted regarding teachers’ perception of their administrator’s role in teacher retention in a failing Title I Elementary School. The findings from this study indicate that a principal’s leadership practices can negatively impact teacher retention in a failing Title I school. For example, the principal involved in this study exhibited an authoritative leadership style that could be characterized as either a dictator or a tyrant. While an authoritative leadership style need not be negative or positive, in the case of the principal at Turnover Elementary, his leadership practices reinforced his tendency toward authoritarian leadership and consequently had a negative impact on teacher retention. Specifically, teachers reported that they left because they lost motivation in the school, the principal made them feel isolated in the school, the principal
failed to commit to the school, the principal did not lead with integrity, the principal used intimidation tactics, and/or the principal did not hold himself accountable for the school.
Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

Each year thousands of teachers leave the profession. Garza (2017) suggests that nationally, about 1 in 6 teachers leave their schools annually, although attrition is generally more of an issue in low-performing schools. This is particularly true in high-poverty, high-needs schools. The focus of this study was on a failing Title I elementary school referred to in the study as Turnover Elementary School. In a large southeastern state school district where Turnover Elementary is located, teacher turnover is high. For example, in 2018, the district had to hire nearly 300 teaching positions immediately ahead of the first day of school (Eldridge & McGuire, 2018). This trend applied to Turnover Elementary as well. The state’s Governor’s Office of Student Achievement (GOSA) suggest that Turnover Elementary had less than 35 new inexperienced teachers during the 2017-18 school year and less than 50 new inexperienced teachers during the 2018-19 school year (GOSA, 2020). To better understand teachers’ lived experiences, how they contributed to teachers leaving Turnover Elementary, and the connections of these rationales to school leadership, this qualitative study was conducted with eight former teachers of Turnover Elementary. Semi-structured interviews of these eight participants, who all chose to leave Turnover Elementary School, revealed three themes (discussed in chapter four) suggesting that leadership plays a critical role in retaining teachers. The implications of each of these themes will be discussed in this chapter as well as suggestions for practice and further research.

Theme One: Teachers and Other Stakeholders Have Lost Motivation Regarding the Life of the School, and Teachers Feel Stressed and Hopeless.

Interview data showed how a leader can have an impact on teachers, students, and parents’ motivation. Due to the work-related stress caused by the principal, participants
encountered health concerns, developed apathetic attitudes towards the school and feelings of self-defeat and misery. Participants were not happy. Some participants anticipated leaving the field of education while others made plans to leave Turnover Elementary without having solidified a new position. Based on the participants’ perception of the school leader, the school leader did not motivate them to become better teachers. In addition, the school leader made unreasonable deadlines, chastised the teachers for low test scores and made the culture/climate at Turnover Elementary depressing. Participants transferred or resigned from their positions due to the demotivating atmosphere and stressful culture.

The findings in theme one demonstrated that teachers who chose to leave turnover elementary did so, in large part, to decreased motivation to persist in the life of the school. Across nuanced responses illuminating motivation loss that manifested as both external (apathy towards the school and its work) and internal (low teacher self-efficacy) teachers cited feelings of stress and hopelessness. The interview data showed that the teachers’ perceived the leader’s actions (e.g., stress induced environment and chastisement for low test scores) to be a significant cause of this motivation loss. Data revealed that participants perceived their school leader negatively when the leader failed to motivate the teachers towards better performance, created a stressful environment with unreasonable deadlines, and chastised teachers with low test scores. Teacher motivation is central to educational leadership and has been discussed often in the context of educational leadership.

The principal’s autocratic leadership style evident at Turnover Elementary School was a significant contributor to participants’ desire to leave the school. Eyal and Roth (2011) suggest that power in educational systems is delegated to school principals and if principals are encouraged and trained to offer autonomy and support to their teachers, then these steps can
facilitate teachers' autonomous motivation, satisfaction, and well-being. Osiname (2016) focuses on five leadership practices of principals, which ultimately produces an inclusive school culture: collaborated and communicated, led with encouragement, built positive relationships, sustained a renewal process, and took responsibility for students. In the case of Turnover Elementary, the participant’s made clear that their school leader did not value teacher autonomy or practice any of the positive leadership behaviors described in the literature. The result of the leader's autocratic and disconnected practice at Turnover Elementary was disjointed faulty of distrustful and hopeless teachers. John wanted to leave the school without solidifying a new position. Tawanna wanted to take FMLA due to the stressful environment. Charlene had an anxiety attach while on the job. All of the above scenarios were created by the leader’s stressful environment. Ultimately this apathy and lack of self-efficacy resulted in attrition for the study participants.

The environment at Turnover Elementary was another root cause of teacher attrition according to participants. Meador (2019) suggests that principals need to complete the following steps to ensure a safe environment: create a discipline plan for teachers to follow, support teachers when students come to the office, be consistent and fair with all students and parents, document everything, and be calm but stern and know the district policies and pertinent state laws. Whitaker et al. (2008) suggest that "providing opportunities to get teachers involved is a great way to begin the teacher-leadership process" (p. 40). Keeping teachers in a school depends on the working conditions of the school. Specifically, the literature describes how principals are responsible for creating favorable working conditions. However, participants in this study described very different conditions from the ones espoused in the literature. For example, Christina discussed teachers not coming to work. Mary discussed the school being Title I which came with stress. Susan referenced how she was determined to leave before the school year
started. All of these conditions were effects of the leader’s lack in creating a nurturing/safe environment for the teachers and students. Failure of Turnover Elementary School’s principal to maintain a safe and supportive environment appeared to be another significant contributor to teacher attrition.

Both the environment and leadership style of the leader at Turnover Elementary contributed to working conditions that sapped motivation from the teachers. Williams (2018) suggests teachers’ working conditions play a significant role in attracting, developing, and retaining effective teachers. Darling-Hammond (2010) suggests professional working conditions that allow teachers to be effective are essential and critical to teachers’ decisions about whether they remain in a school or even in the profession. Principal support, strong co-workers, and opportunities to participate in decisions often determine whether teachers remain or leave a school. Lois discussed ways that the principal could empower the staff which creates a bettering working environment for the teachers. If a principal would like to retain teachers, he or she must create an environment that is conducive to the needs of the teachers. It was clear, from the participant’s perspective, that the leader of Turnover Elementary failed to create such and environment.

Summary

Teachers at Turnover Elementary had no motivation from their leader to be a better teacher. Participants shared that the principal failed to motivate them in any way. Participants shared that some of them internalized the lack of motivation and stressful environment due to health concerns and feelings of self-defeat. Others externalized the lack of motivation by finding ways to leave on a daily basis and not giving their all to their students. Both factors of internalized/externalized motivation contributed to the participants’ desires to leave the school.
As stated, Eyal and Roth (2011) stated that principals have the power to motivate and support their teachers. Darling and Hammond (2010) stated that the working conditions of a school are critical to teachers staying or leaving the school. Unfortunately, the principal at Turnover Elementary failed at motivating and supporting the teachers which impacted teacher retention.

**Theme Two: The Leader Demonstrates Poor Relationships and Communication with Faculty.**

Evidence from the interview data revealed that participants felt alone, did not feel as if the principal was committed to the school, and did not trust the principal. Several participants shared that the principal was unsupportive in their endeavors to further their education. Other participants shared that the principal did not provide necessary resources for teachers in the classroom. Discipline was a concern with the students being beaten up and receiving no repercussions for their actions. The principal created cliques and ignored teachers that were not in his clique. The principal made promises and failed to keep them which hindered in building relationships with the staff. Integrity was important to the participants, but John and Mary specifically referenced the need for the principal to be transparent and honest with the staff. Participants were not happy because they were left to fend for themselves, they did not have a principal who was committed to the school and teachers, and they had a principal who lacked integrity. The feeling of being alone in the school, lack of commitment, and lack of integrity from the principal was due to the principal being in the wrong placement. The principal was moved from a high school and involuntarily assigned to Turnover Elementary by the district office. As a result, the principal’s demeanor and attitude towards the school was negative because Turnover Elementary was not his chosen school. Due to the principal’s involuntary assignment to
Turnover Elementary School and his subsequent negative attitude towards teachers, the teachers suffered and left the school.

When teachers feel as if they have to fend for themselves, it contributes to a feeling of being alone in the school and lack of support from the leader. The participants discussed the lack of resources, teacher development and lack of discipline issues with the principal. Participants furthered shared that the principal did not want to be at Turnover Elementary which contributed to the principal’s lack of commitment to the school. Finally, participants shared the level of distrust they had in the principal due to him being dishonest and lacking transparency. In summation, the principal made the teachers feel alone in the school due to his lack of commitment and lack of integrity. Due to the principal’s lack of effective leadership, the participants left Turnover Elementary.

Berry, Rasberry & Williams (2007) suggest that supportive leadership is the key to recruitment for high-needs schools. Principal support is integral in any school, especially in high-needs schools because the students are placed at a disadvantage. Turnover Elementary being a Title I school places the teachers and students at a disadvantage because of the lack of resources for the students and lack in real-world experiences of the students. Being at disadvantage from the beginning makes it a necessity to have a supportive principal.

Rigsbee (2009) suggests some strategies for principals when it comes to staffing: Good principals build in-school relationships by “treating teachers as professionals, supporting data-driven instruction, establishing parent-school communication, remaining active and visible, and promoting school spirit and teamwork and develop leaders” (p. 1). Building relationships was not an action of Turnover Elementary’s principal. Thus, teachers left. As stated by Rigsbee
(2009), a principal must treat teachers as professionals, support teachers in all capacities, promote school spirit and develop leaders.

An effective school leader must act with integrity. Bryk and Schneider (2002) highlight the integrity of one school principal who experienced several difficult years counseling out teachers from the school who were unwilling to give 100 percent to students. Eventually, the staff and community supported the principal's decisions, and student achievement rose. A leader who acts with integrity encompasses: a moral commitment to behave justly, promote student success, support teacher growth, and foster quality relationships in the school community (Alvy and Robbins, 2005).

Summary

Participants shared that the principal made them feel alone in the school due to his lack of support and formation of cliques. Participants shared that the principal was not vested in the school due to his lack of commitment and level of dishonesty. In conclusion, the principal was involuntarily placed at Turnover Elementary which led to a poor attitude and towards the school and teachers. The principal’s disconnect with the school led to the teachers being miserable due to loneliness and working for a dishonest leader who is not committed to the school. Referenced in chapter four, participants left Turnover Elementary due to the principals’ actions (aloneness in the school, lack of commitment, and lack of integrity).

Theme Three: The Leader Behaves Authoritatively yet Remains Disconnected From the Life of the School.

The participants’ lived experiences provided evidence of intimidation and lack of accountability from the principal. Charlene shared that the principal would address situations with them and follow-up with an email asking them to explain the situation again. Becky
discussed the principal treating the parents horribly and using intimidation tactics with the parents. From Becky’s experienced, the principal treated parents just like he did teachers. For example, the parents that he felt were on his side, he praised; whereas the parents that were not active or on his side, he talked down to and talked about them. John referenced the principal being intimidated by black male educators which is why he targeted and tormented them. Mary discussed the principal’s excessive absences and not being there to run his building. Lois discussed the lack of discipline and how the students were out of control with no repercussions for their actions.

Findings from the interviews revealed that the principal used intimidation tactics to intimidate teachers and parents. The principal used retaliation schemes towards the teachers and tried to divide and conquer the staff based on the teachers that were in his clique opposed to the teachers who were not. The principal was constantly absent and did not deal with the discipline problems in the building. Intimidation tactics and lack of accountability were the recurring messages that the participants discussed during their interviews. The principal was an authoritative figure who intimidated teachers and failed to uphold his duty as a principal. Participants shared that they could no longer work for a leader who did not fulfill his duties and used intimidation methods to get what he wanted. Thus, participants left Turnover Elementary.

Being an authoritarian leader with the use of intimidation tactics was the type of leader described by the participants in this study. Barnes (2017) suggest that teachers do not quit schools, teachers quit principals. Barnes (2017) worked for an intimidating principal and recounted a statement made by her principal, “Nobody has a gun to your head. If you don’t want to be here, leave” (np). Barnes (2017) further suggest that a teacher’s mental health can be compromised by a bad leader, and when that happens, the teacher cannot be the best he or she
can be for his or her students. Strong leaders are key to any school (Barnes, 2017). Barnes (2017) also suggested that “school districts across our country need to invest more resources into developing their leaders” (np). Not only does intimidation not work, but also the school suffers because teachers leave which impacts achievement due to continuous turnover, “Yes, teacher development is important, but a great teacher under a poor leader is a teacher who is likely to leave and a school that is not likely to succeed” (Barnes, 2017, np). The principal must treat the teachers as professionals and show the teachers respect. Leithwood (2013) suggests three stages of development for teachers that principals can have influence. Those stages are professional expertise, psychological and career-cycle development. Leithwood (2013) suggests that psychological development is where teachers gain moral and conceptual skills, and career-cycle development is where teachers grow in the careers based on years of experience. Based on the lived experiences of the participants, the principal at Turnover Elementary used intimidation tactics and bullying which failed to retain the teachers in the building.

Lack of accountability was the phrase used to describe the participants’ perception of the principal at Turnover Elementary. Gill (2017) suggest that principals should practice professional accountability which encompasses four mechanisms (evaluation, identifiability, reason-giving, mere presence of another). For example, teachers in one district are always “on point” in teaching due to them seeing their principal daily in the classrooms (Gill, 2017). The principal made it routine to visit classes each day. Rice (2010) suggest that principals’ effectiveness depends on their sense of efficacy on particular kinds of tasks and how they allocate their time across daily responsibilities. The principal at Turnover Elementary was absent and ignored the discipline problems in the school. If the principal held himself accountable for Turnover Elementary, he would be present and find ways to mitigate the discipline issues in the school.
Gill (2017) and Rice (2010) shared that principals must hold themselves accountable and provide a sense of efficacy to different tasks each day if they want to be an effective leader.

**Summary**

Theme three was based on the leader’s authoritative behavior while being disconnected from the life of the school. Participants shared the principal’s use of intimidation. Participants also shared the lack of accountability of the principal in handling discipline issues and with his excessive absences. Participants were not happy and chose to leave due to the principal’s ineffective use of authoritarian leadership.

**Implications for Future Practice in Local Context**

Based on the content of this research study, a future principal may incorporate the strategies listed within the study to retain teachers at a high-needs schools. A principal of a high-needs school with high teacher retention may revamp his or her leadership style to foster an effective culture/climate that retains teachers. A school district may invest in principal development to ensure that the principal embodies effective skills and characteristics: build effective relationships, foster a positive culture, support teachers, establish trust, communicate effectively with teachers and staff, empower staff to move forward in their careers (teacher development), etc. District principal support includes developing an induction program for new principals and principals with high turnover rates. The induction program needs to be introduced in phases where principals are taught various skills for effective leadership. District officials should observe the principals periodically based on a rubric. At the conclusion of the program, principals should provide evidence of effective practices implemented in the school and the actions taken to retain teachers.
Implications for Future Research

One implication for future study is to conduct a study of teachers in a high-poverty school with low teacher turnover to determine the leadership style and leadership practices of a successful principal. Another implication for future study is to conduct a study on principals in high-poverty schools with high turnover rates who are involved in a mentoring/induction program. The study would examine the results of teacher retention after the successful completion of the induction/mentoring program. Given that each year teachers leave the profession and the schools that are most difficult to staff tend to be those in high-poverty areas, it is imperative that school leaders begin to find ways to recruit and retain talented teachers. Recruiting highly qualified teachers is not enough. Principal’s leadership practices must support teachers, empower teachers, treat teachers as professionals which creates a positive school culture/climate geared towards retaining teachers. Teachers’ perception of their school leader impacts teacher retention. Principals must implement effective practices geared towards retaining teachers. The leadership practices determine if the teachers stay or leave the school.

Chapter Summary

The principal at Turnover Elementary was an authoritative leader with negative leadership practices. Teachers left due to the principal’s ineffective practices. Participants were unhappy, unmotivated, and determined to leave Turnover Elementary School. The principal failed to motivate critical stakeholders (teachers, students, parents), build relationships with critical stakeholders, and stay connected with the life of the school. The principal at Turnover Elementary failed to retain teachers.
APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: A Phenomenographic Study of Teachers’ Perception of A School Leader’s Role in Teacher Retention in a Failing Title I Elementary School

Researcher's Contact Information: Alex Davis, 706-717-0854, adavi401@students.kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study conducted by {Alex Davis} of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of the study is to examine teachers’ perception of the role principals play in either the retention or attrition of teachers in a failing Title I Elementary School (Turnover Elementary).

Explanation of Procedures

Participants in the study are being asked to participate in an individual and focus group interview to explain their reasoning for leaving Turnover Elementary School and how the principal played a part in their decision to leave. All interviews will be virtual. All participant data will be anonymous for data recording purposes.
Time Required

Individual interviews will take from 30-45 minutes each. The focus group interview will range from 30-45 minutes.

Risks or Discomforts

There are no known risks related to this study. Participants will be able to explain their rationale for leaving Turnover Elementary. The date, time, and virtual platform will be conducive to all participants and the researcher.

Benefits

Although there will be no direct benefits to you for taking part in the study, the researcher may learn more about teacher retention (at Turnover Elementary). Finding the reasons as to why teachers left can help the administrator find new ways to retain teachers with the goal of increasing student achievement.

Compensation

Participants will not be compensated. Participation is on a voluntary basis.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be {anonymous}. Participants will be identified by an alias (Participant 1 - Participant 8). There will be no personal disclosure of names or any unique identifier during the interview. The participants will only respond to the questions asked and provide their reasons/rationale for leaving Turnover Elementary. Interviews will occur virtually. Informed consent
must be obtained. Participants’ identities will be anonymous. The environment will be safe and secure. Professionalism between the researcher and participant will be established.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

Participants must be 18 years of age or older. Participants must be a former teacher of Turnover Elementary.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

__________________________________________________
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

__________________________________________________
Signature of Investigator, Date

PLEASE SIGN BOTH COPIES OF THIS FORM, KEEP ONE AND RETURN THE OTHER TO THE INVESTIGATOR

Research at Kennesaw State University that involves human participants is carried out under the oversight of an Institutional Review Board. Questions or problems regarding these activities should be addressed to the Institutional Review Board, Kennesaw State University, 585 Cobb Avenue, KH3417, Kennesaw, GA 30144-5591, (470-570-7721).
APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview # __________________
Teacher Pseudonym: ___________
Date: ______/_____/_____
Beginning Time of Tape: ______
Beginning Tape Position: _____
End Time of Tape: ___________
End Time of Tape: ___________

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Alex Davis, and I am a doctoral candidate at Kennesaw State University conducting a research study on teacher’s perception of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in one low-performing Title I Elementary School. This interview will take about 30 minutes and will include questions regarding teachers’ perception of administrators’ role in teacher retention in a Title I Elementary School. I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used only for class and educational purposes.

At this time, I would like to ask for verbal consent and also inform you that your participation in this interview also implies your consent. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You
may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any
questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

Demographic Questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?

2. How many years had you been teaching at Turnover before you resigned or
   transferred?

3. What factors contributed to your leaving the school?
   a. Could you provide one or two specific examples?

Open-Ended Questions:

4. Describe the administrator’s leadership style when you were a teacher at Turnover
   Elementary.

   Probes:
   • Characteristics of leadership

5. How did the administrator’s leadership style while you were at Turnover
   Elementary affect your job performance?

   Probes:
   • Discuss your effectiveness in comparison/contrast to administrations’ leadership style
   • Motivation to teach
   • Ability to lead ???? Whose ability to lead? The teacher’s? Why would they be
     leading?
   • The former administration’s relationships with staff, students, parents
   • Attitude about current administration

6. What was your perception of the effectiveness of the administrator?

   Probes:
   • Your perception of principal’s role in teacher retention in Title I schools
• Your likes/dislikes of administration
• What administrative actions did you find to be problematic? Would you explain.

7. **How did the administrator’s actions affect your job performance?**

   **Probes:**
   
   In what way(s) did the administration affect your:
   
   • Effort put into the job
   • Motivation to go above and beyond
   • Whether you felt supported by administration
   • Your involvement in extracurricular activities

8. **Before we conclude this interview, is there anything else you would like to share in regard to teachers’ perception of the administrator’s role in teacher retention in a Title I Elementary School?**

   Thank you for your participation in this interview.
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW

Interview # __________________

Teacher Pseudonym: ____________

Date: _______ / ______ / _______

Beginning Time of Tape: _______

Beginning Tape Position: _______

End Time of Tape: ___________

End Time of Tape: ___________

1. 1 Focus Group (teachers who have either resigned or transferred)

2. 8 teachers that resigned or transferred from Turnover Elementary

3. Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today. My name is Alex Davis, and I am a graduate student at Kennesaw State University conducting a research study on teacher’s perception of the principal’s role in teacher retention in one low-performing Title I Elementary School. This interview will take about 30 minutes and will include questions regarding your life and teachers’ perception of administrators’ role in teacher retention in a low-performing Title I school. I would like your permission to audio record this interview so I may accurately document the information you convey. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue the use of the recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know and we will stop. All of your responses are confidential. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used only for class and educational purposes.
At this time, I would like to ask for verbal consent and also inform you that your participation in this interview also implies your consent. Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

1. When you were employed at Turnover Elementary, how long had the current administrator been in their current position?

2. How long had you all been working at Turnover Elementary before you resigned or transferred?

3. How long had you been an educator in total?

4. For those who resigned, what factors contributed to your resignation? For those who transferred, what factors contributed to your transfer?

5. Describe the culture and climate within the school when you were employed at Turnover Elementary School?
   Probe: Attitudes of teachers, parents, administrator, children

6. In response to the above question, what role did the administrator play in creating, maintaining, fostering the culture/climate within the building?
   Probe: Impact on your ability to do your job, motivation to teach

   Can you cite specific examples of instances that affected your ability to do your job?

7. What role, if any, did the administrator play in your ability to effectively and efficiently do your job?
   Probe: Impact on your ability to do your job, motivation to teach

   Can you cite specific examples of instances that affected your ability to do your job?

8. If you have worked in other schools, how would you contrast the role of the administrator at Turnover Elementary School to your former or current school in creating, maintaining the culture in that school?
Thank you for participating in this group interview. My contact information is as follows: phone number 706-717-0854 and email adavi401@students.kennesaw.edu. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. The data from the interview will be transcribed and coded to distinguish similar themes between why teachers stay and leave schools/profession. Your personal information will remain anonymous. The data will be reported out in the research findings of my dissertation. Thanks again for your participation.
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