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Retaining Teachers Rated as Effective in Title I Schools

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
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Abstract

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Teacher retention and continuity are important for students, particularly for those in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. There is a gap in practice related to providing support for and overcoming barriers to the retention of teachers rated as effective, particularly keeping them with students with socioeconomic and academic need. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of leaders in Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify for retaining teachers rated as effective. Bruner's work explaining how needs, motivations, and expectations influence perceptions informed the study. Research questions were designed to have school leaders describe the needs and supports that help effective teachers stay in Title I schools and how the leaders provided support to those teachers. Data were gathered through individual interviews with 9 school leaders from middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving elementary schools in the Mid-Atlantic United States. A combination of a priori and open coding was used to support thematic analyses. Key themes included *effective school leadership*, *teacher leadership practices*, and *nurturing school environments*. Archival data from the staff section of past school climate surveys aligned with the focus of the study and supported the themes developed from the interviews. The participants indicated they maintained open and frequent communication with teachers and helped create a strong school culture where teachers felt supported as professionals. The leaders identified a need for system-wide efforts to support the retention of effective teachers. Increased teacher retention would support increased student achievement and influence long-term positive social change.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research study to my family, who have been very supportive throughout this doctoral journey. My husband, Devin Johnson, cared for our children while I completed my research and writing. My mother, Karen Queen, has been my encouragement throughout my entire life, letting me know that I can do anything I put my mind to and providing all the support I could dream of along the way. I am truly blessed to have the greatest mother on the planet. Finally, to my beautiful daughters, Devyn and Bliss Johnson, who were both born during my doctoral studies. I lovingly call them my "research assistants", they have been so patient with me during this process. While "mommy" typed, they deleted my words from time to time. I am truly a blessed woman to have "everything" now that my studies are complete because my husband, mother, and daughters allowed me the space to work to complete this journey.

Acknowledgments

I would like to acknowledge my doctoral chair, Dr. Mary Hallums, who was instrumental to my success in completing this process. Dr. Hallums has provided me with the assistance I needed to grow as a steward of the profession. This opportunity would have not been possible without Past President Jonathan Kaplan's generous scholarship. I would also like to thank Walden University for this experience and allowing me to impact social change through education, our newest civil rights frontier, to impact our global society.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Teacher shortages are a growing problem in the U.S. public school system. High-poverty, high-minority urban schools have 20% higher teacher shortages compared to middle- or upper-income majority schools (García & Weiss, 2019) . Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, and Carver-Thomas (2019) noted that Title I schools have a teacher turnover rate 50% higher than non-Title I schools. Middle- to high-poverty, low- achieving schools are typically staffed with inexperienced, uncertified, or alternatively certified teachers (Swain, Rodriguez, & Springer, 2019), and alternatively certified teachers may have limited onboarding available to them and as a result may struggle with basic, day to day teacher tasks (Glazer, 2020). Furthermore, these middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools are often staffed by a rotating cast of substitutes (Sutcher et al., 2019). Teacher shortages at Title I schools often result in disproportionate consequences for the most disadvantaged students (Sutcher et al., 2019). Retaining effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools is crucial because teachers rated as effective are more likely to improve achievement of the students who have the greatest socioeconomic and academic needs (Wronowski, 2017).

This study focused on middle- to high-poverty Title I schools with low academic performance. The study setting was a large, geographically diverse school district where, according to the State Department of Education, teacher attrition is the highest in the state but still maintains 90% of its teachers. Most teachers leave this district between years 1 and 5 of teaching, which is consistent with the national teacher attrition trends. The study's findings could be used to help school leaders understand the elements that

influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. Bruner's (1957) constructivism theory, which is characterized by the learner's ability to organize experiences and derive meaning from them, guided this research. I explored the perspectives of the school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to identify the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay.

Chapter 1 presents the problem statement and purpose of the study, which is to explore the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. I introduce two research questions that address the influences and elements that school leaders attribute to retention of teachers rated as effective in this context. The chapter also includes the background of the teacher retention problem in the United States. In addition, I provide the framework of the study, its nature, definitions of key terms, assumptions, limitations, and the study's significance. The study addresses the actions of school leadership, the school conditions, and the structures that contribute to teachers rated as effective staying at the school. Examining school leaders' perceptions of why the teachers rated as effective stay could help middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools retain teachers rated as effective. According to the district website, the teacher rating scale indicates that teachers rated as effective raise student achievement, have effective formal observations, and meet professional responsibilities.

Background

Teacher retention in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools has become a significant problem in the United States. Castro, Quinn, Fuller, and Barnes (2018) affirmed the shortage of highly qualified and prepared teachers in schools serving students of color and in high poverty areas. This shortage of highly qualified and prepared teachers is extended to specific content areas and to teachers of color to reflect the student population in middle- to high-poverty schools (Castro et al., 2018). Jones and Watson (2017) found supporting data when considering teacher retention overall, as teacher turnover remains a persistent national problem that is worsening as more teachers are exiting the field and fewer students are registering in teacher preparation programs at the university level. García & Weiss (2019) shared that class sizes are increasing, the pool of teacher candidates is becoming slimmer, and the teacher shortage is growing. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education estimated that 1.6 million teachers will need to be hired between 2012 and 2022 (Abitabile, 2020).

This study addressed the gap in the practice of improving the educational experience for U.S. students through the retention of effective teachers. An effective teacher is characterized in the study district by an effective district teacher rating, which includes teaching observations, growth in student achievement, and school-based elements including attendance and climate data. Modan (2019) suggested school districts partner with competitive teacher programs, be selective with hiring, offer attractive benefits, and establish a career ladder to develop effective educators. Krasnoff (2014, 2015) reported that New York City teachers who were the most successful at raising

student achievement were fully certified, completed a university preservice program before teaching, had a solid academic record, and more than 2 years of teaching experience. Correspondingly, Redding (2018) found that student achievement was hurt by inexperienced and uncertified teachers who serve mostly minority students in middle- to high-poverty schools. Failure to retain effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty schools disrupts student learning, negatively impacts school climate, and creates costly staffing issues (Redding, 2018). This current study was needed because the retention of effective teachers has the potential to improve student achievement (Opper, 2019).

Addressing teacher effectiveness is a method to reduce educational inequality, especially across schools with middle- to high-poverty schools and low student achievement. Teachers with education degrees, teaching certifications, and experience helped to close the student achievement gap by an average of 25% between middle- to high-poverty and affluent students (Krasnoff, 2014, 2015). If the United States were able to reduce teacher attrition by half to 4%, the national teacher shortage would end (Westervelt, 2016). The United States could be more selective about the quality of teachers who serve in classrooms across the country (Westervelt, 2016). Access to high-quality teachers is crucial for middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools that are at the most significant risk of recruiting underqualified teachers (Westervelt, 2016). Working conditions, including teacher preparation, mentoring, and comparable professional salaries would improve teacher retention (Westervelt, 2016). Furthermore, recruiting and retaining teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-

achieving schools increases the likelihood of closing the achievement gap for students with the most need (Wronowski, 2017).

Problem Statement

The research problem was a lack of understanding regarding the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools (Robertson-Kraft & Duckworth, 2014; Robertson-Kraft & Zhang, 2018). The school district where the study took place characterizes effective teachers through calculations of student achievement data, teacher observations, and school-based elements, including attendance and climate data. Middle- to high-poverty students have a lower probability of participating in high-quality teaching and learning than students in more affluent communities (Duncombe, 2017). Students with the most need often have teachers with the least experience (Duncombe, 2017). Though experience does not equal effectiveness, it is a teacher's influence on student achievement through their teaching and learning efforts that matters (Tucker & Stronge, 2005).

Exposure to high-quality instruction is essential when considering the elements that raise student achievement (Opper, 2019). Teachers matter more than personal, family, and neighborhood elements when examining variables related to students' academic performance (Opper, 2019).

Teachers who provide high-quality instruction in classrooms where students have low achievement will contribute to closing the achievement gap (Sutcher et al., 2019). Elkind (2005) reported that effective teachers commonly use high-impact instructional strategies to garner percentile gains of between 29 and 45 points, meaning a student in the

50th percentile increases to the 79th or 95th percentile, which closes the achievement gap. Over time, this would have a substantial effect on student achievement. The University of Tennessee's Value-Added Research and Assessment Center (as cited in Elkind, 2005) studied the influence of effective teachers. It found that students assigned to high-performing teachers three school years in a row starting in Grade 3 were able to achieve an average score in the 96th percentile on Tennessee's standardized statewide mathematics assessment. When students with similar academic achievement histories were assigned low-performing teachers three school years in a row, they were only able to achieve an average score in the 44th percentile, an astounding percentile point difference of 52 (Elkind, 2005). Consequently, the study indicated evidence of the beginning of an achievement gap for these students, which would support the need for this current study (Elkind, 2005).

Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, and Darling-Hammond (2016) shared that teachers have a high attrition rate in middle- to high-poverty, low-income environments. According to Podolsky et al., 10% of public school teachers in middle- to high-poverty schools left the field in 2012-2013, which was 50% higher than teachers in schools that were not impoverished. The National Education Association (as cited in McLaughlin, 2018) reported that 40% of teachers exit the field within their first 5 years of teaching, with most leaving from the southern part of the United States. Additionally, attrition rates are significantly higher for conditionally certified teachers in minority schools (McLaughlin, 2018). All of these elements are present in the schools in this current study. High rates of teacher attrition create a barrier to staffing public schools with effective teachers (Papay,

Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2017). Higher teacher attrition in middle- to high-poverty schools with mostly students of color generates conditions in which teachers with the least experience and preparation are serving these students (Podolsky et al., 2016). Retaining teachers rated as effective in schools where the students have middle- to high-poverty rates and low academic achievement could change their potential for growth (Callahan, 2016).

Shavers (2018) indicated that an original contribution of research is a start for developing a larger body of knowledge focusing on strategies school leaders can employ to retain teachers rated as effective. Shavers also noted that further research is needed for the retention of teachers. The current study addresses the need for further research through exploration of the elements related to retention of teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. With a better understanding of the retention elements of teachers rated as effective, school leaders could be more likely to retain these teachers who have the potential to improve student achievement. This study serves as an original contribution to the retention of teachers rated as effective.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify in retaining teachers rated as effective. This study could help school leaders and teachers create school environments where middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving students are served by effective teachers. I sought to explain why teachers rated as effective may have elected to stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-

achieving schools to help enable school leaders to retain effectively-rated teachers in these types of schools.

Research Questions

Title I school leaders are charged with the responsibility of providing quality instruction to students. Teachers rated as effective positively impact school culture and student achievement. Therefore, school leaders are tasked with retaining teachers rated as effective. The research questions (RQs) that guided this study were focused on the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. The following research questions guided the study.

RQ1: What do school leaders describe as the needs and supports that help teachers rated as effective stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools?

RQ2: How do school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools describe their actions in supporting the retention of teachers rated as effective?

Conceptual Framework for the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was Bruner's (1957) constructivism. Constructivism is the process of learning that requires human beings to interact with the world to create experiences and then to draw on the experiences to form new knowledge (Elkind, 2005). In Bruner's framework, the learner constructs the information in an active process in which prior knowledge is connected to new information to create subjective representations of objective reality (David, 2015). The research method and analysis in the current study followed Bruner's framework that learners build new ideas or concepts

based on their present experience and prior knowledge (see Bruner, 2004). Components of the constructivist process include the selection and transformation of information, decision-making, generating hypotheses, and making meaning from information and experiences (Bruner, 2004. The current study addressed the constructivist concept that knowledge is formed based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment (see David, 2015). It is personal perceptions of the research participants that will help identify the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools (see David, 2015).

The interviews addressed participants' experiences with taking in information, constructing ideas, and making decisions depending on their cognitive structure. The interview process I used aligned with Bruner's (1957) theory that the outcome of cognitive development is thinking that the intelligent mind creates from experience. Bruner postulated that researchers could use generic coding systems that allow them to go beyond the data to new and hopefully productive predictions (p. 234). In this study, I recorded the perceptions and opinions of school leaders of middle- to high-poverty, low achieving schools' to explore the elements that cause teachers to stay in these types of schools. Bruner's (1957) constructivist framework provided organization and significance to the experiences of teachers and their school leaders. I organized the interview findings and interpreted the experiences described by effective teachers that played a role in their decision to continue to teach at a Title I school (see Kalpana, 2014).

Nature of the Study

The research methodology was a qualitative case study. The participants shared their knowledge about retaining teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools by sharing personal school leadership experiences and ideas. A case study is an exploratory method used to describe a complex social phenomenon using a case from a holistic and real-world perspective (Yin, 2017). For this research, case study participants were asked to answer interview questions developed to provide an in-depth description of the social phenomenon. Potential school leader participants of the study were identified from a list of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools in a given district. I contacted school leaders from the list to see if they are willing to participate and interviewed them once they agreed to the terms of the study. In this study I aimed to understand why teachers rated as effective continue to take on the challenge of teaching at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. I expected to understand from the analysis of their responses that there are underlying supports and a human connection component that compels these teachers to continue to serve at these schools. A more detailed discussion of this analysis is found in Chapter 3.

Definitions

Effective teacher: The selected local education agency uses multiple measures to assess the effectiveness of teachers. Per the local education agency's state department of education's model, these measures include professional practice (50%) and students' growth (50%). Teachers rated as effective score in the proficient range based on an average of scores from at least 2 observations using the Danielson Framework for

Teaching, a student perception survey, and an assessment of professional growth to measure professional practice. Student growth measures are evaluated through student learning objectives, locally selected assessments, and local school progress index.

Middle- to high-poverty school: The National Center for Education Statistics defines a public school where more than 75% of the students are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch as high-poverty. Mid-poverty schools are schools where 50.1 to 75% are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020.

Low-achieving (performing) School: The United States Department of Education defines low-achieving schools as those that are performing in the bottom 10% in the state or that have significant achievement gaps based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 or that have low graduation rates (U.S Department of Education, 2015).

Assumptions

An assumption of this study was that most middle- to high-poverty low-achieving schools have similar student needs and offerings for their students and staff (Childs & Russell, 2016). Childs & Russell (2016) highlighted this finding by noting that failing schools are often classified by teachers who lack experience, low student achievement, chronic student absenteeism, and high rates of school leader attrition. This study also assumed that the school leaders of teachers rated as effective at these schools have similar characteristics that will be shared during the interview process. Further, it was assumed

that honest and truthful responses of school leaders interviewed would be provided. Finally, I assumed that the sample size is sufficient to be representative of the perspectives of school leaders of middle- to high-poverty, low achieving schools.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was focused on determining what keeps teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. I was interested in finding if school leaders report any common underlying supports or conditions provided by them as the reason teachers rated as effective return each school year. The research questions of this exploratory case study looked specifically at the school leaders' perception of support to teachers rated as effective at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. The research was focused on understanding how school leaders are constructing their interpretation of influences and support based on their current and past knowledge. Perceptions of school leaders are important in understanding the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay in these middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. Önder (2019) completed a study about teacher perceptions and found that teachers' engagement influences work attitude. Önder's study helped me understand that although all teachers in a school have virtually the same conditions and resources, the perception of them can be viewed very differently.

The study was completed in a diverse, predominately African American school district. The school district is the lowest academically performing in the state. The subset of schools I worked with were Title I schools with more than 50% of students receiving free or reduced lunch. The participants were school leaders of middle- to high-poverty,

low-achieving schools. The expectation was that information obtained can be transferred to similar school settings with the intent to use the findings to retain teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools.

The delimitation of the study was the inclusion of only nine school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. School leaders of non-Title I schools were not included in the study because the goal of the study was to understand the school administrators' perceptions of the elements and supports in middle- to high-poverty low-achieving Title I schools helpful in retaining teachers rated as effective. Additionally, the research questions required open-ended responses with no guidance from the interviewer. Omitting constructed response answers, similar to survey responses, could have influenced the research. Specifically, this could have happened, if there are no specific trends were found when coding the responses thematically.

Limitations

A limitation of the study was that it only included the responses of nine school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools within one local education agency in a single state. It was not feasible to interview every school leader in all of the middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving elementary schools in the selected district; that would have included over 60 school leaders. However, the small sample size may constitute a potential weakness in this qualitative study. Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommended 5-25 participants, which was supported by Morse (1994) who suggested a minimum of six.. This study required the cooperation of school leaders at middle- to high-poverty, low achieving elementary schools. Rather than reach out to schools blindly

and hope for continued collaboration, which can be difficult in a doctoral study, I reached out to schools in my network that were willing to cooperate fully. To address the limitation, I stayed in communication with the school leaders about my timelines, and they had an interest in understanding the elements and supports that helped to retain their teachers rated as effective.

Survey sample size could have served as a limitation because I was not able to interview all school leaders at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools in the district. Therefore, I had to rely on the school leaders who volunteered at five middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving elementary school sites. To address this limitation, I interviewed a large sample of school leaders, 9, to find trends in the data. Accordingly, this survey relied on school leaders' perceptions of the needs of teachers rated as effective and their interpretation of supports offered. Therefore, the concern was the data being overwhelmingly positive because the participants shared the support that they believe their school offers and may overestimate their efforts of support. To address this concern, which could have been a limitation to the study, I reminded participants before the interview that their responses could not be linked to them. I also shared with the participants that pseudonyms would be used, and that the information collected would not serve as an evaluation of their performance.

Significance

The significance of this study and its original contribution to the field of educational leadership is the identification of the elements and supports that influence teachers rated as effective to continue to teach in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving

Title I schools. Butler (2014) noted that further research should be conducted in specific types of schools. For this study, the research was done in five traditional public elementary schools. The research premise was the same as Butler's. However, this research differed by identifying teacher retention elements unique to school types rather than the broad Kindergarten through 12th grade spectrum that Butler employed.

School leaders could benefit from knowing the elements in their control, barring salaries, that influence effective teachers to stay in low-achieving, middle- to high-poverty Title I schools. Shifrer, Turley, and Heard (2017) addressed teacher performance pay programs, and opponents of teacher performance pay programs, theorize that money is not the motivation to stay. Retention of teachers rated as effective in high need schools was a critical problem to research because there is a lack of understanding around the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to remain employed at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools (Shavers, 2018). The implication of studying the problem is that it could potentially inform teacher retention practices in Title I schools nationwide. Accordingly, the research findings could likely result in positive social change through reflection, practice, and advocacy. An understanding of retention elements could help principals retain the teachers who increase student achievement in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I school environments (Walden 2020: A Vision for Social Change, 2017).

Summary

Retaining effective teachers is necessary to close the achievement gap for students who attend middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. Teacher turnover serves as a

barrier to providing consistent, high-quality school experiences for the students who have the most need. For this study I employed a qualitative case study research method paired with Bruner's theory to explore the support and leadership actions needed to retain effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. There has been substantial research on retaining teachers in a variety of schools and from a variety of backgrounds. Limited research can be found related to the retention of effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. With this research I aimed to uncover elements that influence effective teachers to stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools to share that information with school leaders of similar type schools. The school leaders could perhaps then replicate the conditions that influence effective teachers to stay, which could positively impact achievement outcomes for students, which is the goal of all educators.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a gap in research about the elements that influence the retention of teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools (Robertson-Kraft, & Duckworth, 2014). The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify as helping to retain teachers rated as effective. Chapter 2 consists of a review of current, relevant research related to the retention of effective teachers. Chapter 2 also includes sections reviewing the conceptual framework, teacher attrition, high school demographics, teacher support, professional development, administrative support, and parental support. Discussion of the overall school climate establishes background knowledge about the research topic. The literature includes extensive articles from peer-reviewed journals as well as seminal research.

The present research highlights that middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools are frequently staffed with inexperienced, uncertified, or alternatively certified teachers (Swain, Rodriguez & Springer, 2019). Furthermore, these schools experience teacher turnover at a higher frequency than more affluent schools with higher achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This study was critical because there is a need to keep qualified, expert teachers in all classrooms, especially in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools, because these teachers are more likely to improve student achievement (Wronowski, 2017).

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, I conducted a search for literature on the topics of effective teachers and teacher retention. I also completed searches related to the research methodology and conceptual framework. The primary resources used were Walden University Library and Google Scholar for manual searches and a Really Simple Syndication Feed. The databases used were mainly Education Source, ERIC, Google Scholar, SAGE Journals, and ProQuest. The search to find background information of the research topics was narrowed with the terms: *attrition, retention, Title I schools, middle- to high-poverty schools, low-achieving schools, mentoring, support, principal support,* and *school climate.* I focused the search on peer-reviewed articles and books written within the past 5 years, except for text related to the research theorists and seminal works. The review is organized into the categories of the conceptual framework, teacher attrition, high need school demographics, teacher support, professional development, and administrative support. The categories adequately addressed the background information required to understand the research problem and begin the study.

Conceptual Framework

Middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools benefit from recruiting and retaining teachers rated as effective because doing so is likely to improve student achievement. Information about the teachers' experiences and backgrounds must be gathered to understand the reasons why effective teachers stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. The constructivist theory recognizes that people form knowledge through their experiences (Bruner, 1957). I used the theory as a lens through

which to understand the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to elect to stay at high- need schools.

The constructivist theory originated with Bruner (1957) who proposed that learners form new ideas or concepts based upon their current knowledge (Bruner, 2004). Components of the process include selection and transformation of information, decision making, generating hypotheses, and making meaning from information and experiences (Bruner, 2004). This process demonstrates the constructivist concept that knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences and hypotheses of the environment (David, 2015). Bruner shared that the essential outcomes of learning include not just the concepts, categories, and problem-solving procedures invented previously by the culture, but also the ability for individuals to "invent" these things for themselves. In this study, the findings of the participants display that learning is an active, subjective process constructed by the learner of information and linked to prior knowledge and experience (see David, 2015).

In this study, I took a constructive psychological view when organizing the interview findings and interpreting the reality described concerning the participants' work conditions. The process included the review of the mental activity involved in understanding reality as the research participant perceived it (see Kalpana, 2014). I recorded the subjective accounts of the participants' experiences interpreting the needs of and providing support to teachers rated as effective in Title I schools. Bruner's conceptual framework has been applied in previous research, including a study of the retention elements of teachers in a high-poverty middle school (Marston, 2014). In that

study, teachers were interviewed, and their thoughts and opinions were recorded using the constructivist perspective to understand why they stayed at a high-poverty middle school (Marston, 2014). This study of nine middle- to high-poverty elementary school leaders is similar in that both include Bruner's framework, interviews, and middle- to high-poverty school settings.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

Teacher Attrition

All but two states and the District of Columbia experienced teacher shortages in critical subject areas in 2016 (Sutcher et al., 2016). The National Education Association highlights that teacher attrition is a critical problem in the United States (McLaughlin, 2018). Lindqvist and Nordänger (2016) remarked that providing skilled teachers to all students has become a world-wide quest due to the growing shortages in the developing and industrialized worlds. Fewer people are choosing to major in education at the university level and entering the profession, and those who enter the profession are sometimes leaving after only a few years (Lindqvist & Nordänger, 2016).

The highest rates of teachers' attrition occur during the first 2 years of teaching, which is known as the survival period (Glazer, 2020). The Learning Policy Institute reported that teacher attrition is 8% annually in the United States, with two-thirds of the teachers leaving the field altogether (Sutcher et al., 2016). Newberry and Allsop (2017) provided similar findings, noting that 30%–46% of new teachers exited the teaching profession within the first 5 years, 8% of teachers move between schools annually, and 8%–14% of all teachers leave the profession altogether annually. The teacher transitions

are alarming, as more than a million teachers enter, leave, or transfer between schools and districts in the United States. These teachers' transitions cause serious disruptions in school cultures and communities (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

The National Center for Education Statistics report looked at a cohort of beginning teachers in public elementary and secondary schools in regard to teacher attrition and mobility over 5 years (Gray & Taie, 2015). The study looked closely at these groups' specific characteristics and found a consistent decline in the teacher population, 10% after Year 1, 12% after Year 2, 15% after Year 3, and 17% after Year 4 (Gray & Taie, 2015). This longitudinal study followed national attrition trends. By Year 2, almost three-fourths (74%) of teachers remained at the same school they taught at during Year 1 (stayers), about a sixth (16%) transferred to a different school (movers), and a tenth (10%) left the profession altogether (leavers; Gray & Taie, 2015). By the fifth year of the study, the data didn't change significantly: 70% of teachers remained at the same school they taught at since Year 1 (stayers), 10% transferred to a different school (movers), 3% returned to teaching, and 17% left the profession altogether (leavers; Gray & Taie, 2015).

What has not been addressed are the many teachers who leave the profession involuntarily. A teacher can have their contract not renewed for performance, attendance, or simply because their position is no longer needed. The school type should also be considered as public charter schools and traditional public schools and have different governance as it relates to releasing teachers. The rules of unions and the district also come into play in this case. However, despite the national teacher shortage, teachers are

released or moved, typically at the discretion of the school leader and the labor relations department. Of the initial teachers who were teaching in a different school during their second year (movers), 21% were moved without their consent or because their teaching employment agreements were not renewed by the fifth-year (Gray & Taie, 2015). The percentage of teachers who were moved involuntarily or their teaching employment agreements were not renewed almost doubled between 2007-8 (40%; Gray & Taie, 2015). As far as the leavers, those who were not teaching during any year of the study but taught the previous year, the percentage who left teaching involuntarily or because their teaching employment agreements were not renewed varied over the 5-year period, 27% in the first year, 36% in the second year, 25% in the third year, and 20% in the fourth year. The attrition reported in this study is more than 2 times the national average.

Reasons teachers leave the profession. Most teachers who leave do so within the first 5 years, which is the same time they report the highest amount of stress, emotional exhaustion, and eventual burnout (Kelly & Northrop, 2015). Burnout elements also include pressure from school leaders, concerns with student discipline, insufficient professional development, low pay, long working hours, and a wide array of teachers' responsibilities (Darling-Hammond, Furger, Shields, & Sutcher, 2016). The Teacher Follow Up Survey published by the National Center for Education Statistics found that teachers leave the profession for various reasons. The reasons include personal life reasons (37%), a different position (28%), school accountability/assessment policies (25%), discontent with teaching as a career (21%), frustration with the school administration (21%), too many classroom interruptions (18%), student behavior issues

(17%), lack of support with student assessment (17%), absence of autonomy (14%), desire for a higher salary (13%), not having a part in the creation of school policies (13%), the need to register in coursework to improve career opportunities (13%) dissatisfaction with their teaching assignment (12%), and commute (11%; Podolsky et al., 2017). While reasons differ for leaving the profession, the outcome of the nation's need to replace teachers consistently remains the same. Clandinin et al.. (2015) conducted a study on early career teachers and found similar findings in their qualitative interviews. The experience of each of the early career teachers varied but centered around similar themes. Early career teachers discussed their reasons for retention were based on the support they received, the feeling of belonging, tensions around contracts, the construct that new teachers will do "anything," work-life balance, and their endurance to keep teaching. Clandinin et al. (2015) concluded with even more questions from the researchers to include consideration of how each early-career teacher could be viewed as an individual as well as how teachers can be supported in their work and personal life. All of the studies researched various topics that affected teacher attrition and retention, but the common theme of stress with each resonated. Harmsen, Helms-Lorenz, Maulana, and Klaas van Veen (2018) shared that the beginning teachers perceived negative student qualities related to stress responses to include tension, discontent, and negative emotion (Harmsen et al., 2018). The negative, stressful feelings are then observed during the teachers' instructional time and interactions with the students (Harmsen et al., 2018). When the teachers developed feelings of discontent, their teaching quality suffered, and they ultimately left the profession (Harmsen et al., 2018).

Podolsky et al. (2016) also researched the critical problem of high rates of teacher attrition by examining teacher recruitment and retention data to understand what influences teachers to join, stay or exit the education field. The elements identified were wages, preparation and entry costs, human resource concerns, teacher induction and support for novice teachers, and working conditions, including relationships school leaders, professional development and collaboration, shared decision-making, accountability systems as well as instructional supplies (Podolsky et al., 2016). Cross & Thomas (2017) cited similar findings, in that most teacher pre-service programs provide insufficient professional development with teaching methodology and pedagogy to adequately prepare teachers for today's classrooms, which ultimately leads to teachers leaving the profession. Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) cited career dissatisfaction, weak relationships with students, poor school management and support, heavy workloads, desire for future career prospects, and strained relationships with parents as critical reasons for leaving. Additionally, Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012) found that pre-service teachers with limited student teaching experience, a lack of observation of effective teaching, and minimal feedback on student teaching have a higher probability of leaving within their first three years.

Towers and Maguire (2017) used a different population when exploring teacher attrition, veteran teachers. The experienced teachers they focused their study on indicated the decisions to leave the profession were dependent on a few personal, professional, and situational elements related to the teacher's identity. Modan (2019) cites the 2018 Gallup poll found that 50% of teachers surveyed admitted to actively looking for a job. What is

most alarming is 60% of the polled teachers cited their desire to leave their current teaching position was due to a lack of career development and advancement (Modan, 2019). Janzen and Phelen (2015) described a veteran teacher's experience leaving the profession for the reason of "job dissatisfaction" with stress and physical injuries as a result of being assigned an uncontrollable student and not being supported to educate him effectively. Skaalvik and Skaalvik's (2016) research supported Janzen's research, which noted that teacher burnout, emotional exhaustion, and lower job satisfaction as reasons for teacher attrition. The U.S. Census Bureau conducted a survey in 2012-2013 that suggests these findings, noting more than 50% of public school teachers who left the teaching profession reported their new workload and work conditions were better in their current position than they were in teaching (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014).

When teacher attrition occurs, more than two-fifths of teachers leave the classroom within five years, creating teacher shortages across the nation (McLaughlin, 2018). Glazer (2018) indicated the highest rates of teacher attrition are within the first two years of teaching during the "survival period," attrition slows down but does not stop, which makes the profession increasingly unstable. Adding to the stress of teachers, are the increased accountability practices at the state and federal levels, which link student learning accountability monitored by standardized assessments to performance evaluations, merit pay, and tenure in the field (Ryan et al., 2017). This problem is exacerbated in Title I Schools, where the teacher attrition rate is 50% higher, 70% higher for schools serving students of color, and 80% higher for alternatively certified teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). This study features teachers of Title I

schools where all three of those attributes are present. Additionally, teacher attrition elements include the 20% of teachers who change schools within the first five years and that 50% of teachers who do not return after leaves of absence (Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, & Marinell, 2018). Researchers have indicated that teacher attrition is a growing problem that is only expected to get worse (Papay et al., 2018).

The veteran teachers, who leave teaching later in their careers, cited compulsory curricula, strict assessment and accountability policies, and job insecurity as their main reasons for leaving the profession in their study (Glazer, 2018). Darling-Hammond (2014) cited similar results when reporting on the outcomes of the 2014 Teaching and Learning International Survey (T.A.L.I.S.), which highlights that American teachers when compared to other industrialized nations. American teachers work under the most challenging conditions, receive less useful feedback and professional development, have less time to collaborate, and two-thirds feel that their work is not valued by society, which all directly harms student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2014). T.A.L.I.S. went to show that, American teachers spend a large amount of time helping families manage the issues of access to food, healthcare, housing, and a safe environment rather than focusing on learning which ultimately widens the achievement gap (Darling-Hammond, 2014.)

The costs of teacher attrition. With school budget limitations, urban school districts are forced to replace the teachers who left at average hiring cost $20,000 per position that amounts to more than eight billion dollars in hiring cost nationally across all school types (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Papay et al. (2018) noted that

not only is cost high financially, but it is also detrimental to the school experience, especially for students in poverty and of color. One of the most harmful outcomes of teacher attrition is that students are being taught by underqualified teachers, mostly substitutes and teachers with alternative/emergency qualifications, that negatively impact student achievement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Richard Ingersoll's research indicates similar teacher attrition costs. He cites that the general costs of teacher attrition ranges from about $1–2.2 billion annually and that the cost of teachers who transfer to different schools and districts is about $2.7 billion annually, this result in a cost of about $4,300–15,000 per district per year (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). Hence, the focus should shift to the retention of effective teachers, which is relatively higher than less effective teachers, to reduce teacher acquisition costs and improve student achievement (Podolsky et al., 2017).

Teacher Influence on Student Achievement

Dahlkamp, Peters, and Schumacher (2017) reported that the impact of teacher attrition is a harmful effect on school culture and climate, student achievement, and school district funds. Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) reported that attrition is regarded by many as an essential factor in the inadequacy, poor performance, and deficiency of quality in contemporary American education, which makes teacher retention increasingly important. The RAND Corporation (see Opper, 2019) study evaluated the importance of quality teachers and their impact on student achievement; most notably, the report indicated that teachers matter most outside of all other elements when determining how students performed academically. According to Shaw and

Newton (2014), "If the most precious product developed in education is the student, then our most prized commodity should be the classroom teacher" (p. 101). This means that academic achievement can be produced with the development of highly qualified teachers in every classroom. Experienced teachers are proven to be better teachers because they have the ability to yield higher rates of student achievement with students (Callahan, 2016). However, when compared to the influence of teachers, family characteristics can have between 4 to eight times the impact on student achievement (Opper, 2019).

Podolsky et al. (2017) confirmed the importance of teachers and their role in increasing student achievement and cited teacher attrition as the reason for the teacher shortage. Longitudinal studies have been completed to uncover the effects of the 17-50% of teachers who exit the teaching profession within the first five years; they found that students who are impacted by teachers who leave have lower reading and math scores (Cross & Thomas, 2017). Teacher attrition affected all students but most greatly disturbed students in poverty, of color, and with low academic achievement (Podolsky et al., 2017). Podolsky et al.'s findings support the larger body of research that advocates for recruiting and retaining excellent teachers into the profession for students' academic success (Vagi, Pivovarova, & Barnard, 2017). When controlling for student demographics and school type, the more prepared teachers were retained (Vagi et al., 2017). Similarly, Jennings et al. (2017) observed that teacher turnover harms the student experience and the quality of their education. Conversely, the effects of experienced teachers who stay in the profession have better classroom management, differentiation

strategies, and are better able to increase student self- esteem; these are all positive influences of teachers who have staying power in the field (Thomas & Cross, 2017).

High Need Schools

Demographics of high need schools. The high need school demographics featured in this study are identified as students who are included in Title I Part A under the federal system. Title I schools have high percentages of low-income students that receive federal funds from Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, which helps students meet academic standards by funding supplemental support for students. (Carver-Thomas & Linda Darling-Hammond, 2019). Students in high need schools tend to be children of color because race and poverty continue to intersect in the United States. The U.S. Census Bureau reported that approximately 38% of Black and 34% of Latino students live in poverty and are educated in increasing homogenous schools (Ullucci & Howard, 2014). These students of color typically receive a double dose of segregation, both class, and race, which isolates them in Title I schools across America (Ullucci & Howard, 2014). These students also suffer because their parents' or caregivers' job insecurity causes them to move often and change schools, which results in compromise learning opportunities for students (Ullucci & Howard, 2014). In high need schools, most of its students experienced a life living in poverty to include experiencing childhood trauma, possible behavior problems, and low academic achievement.

Teacher attrition in high need schools. Compounding these elements is the teacher attrition rate in Title I schools is nearly 50% higher than schools that are not classified as Title I schools (16% in Title I schools versus 11% in non-Title I schools)

(Carver-Thomas & Linda Darling-Hammond, 2019). In fact, half of the teacher attrition nationwide takes place in high-poverty urban and rural schools (Walker, 2019). Likewise, mathematics and science teacher turnover rates are also 70% higher in Title I schools (18% in Title I schools vs. 11% in non-Title I schools) (Carver-Thomas & Linda Darling-Hammond, 2019). It is surprising to many that teachers are not leaving the profession because their students are disabled, poor, and have other challenges to obtaining their free and appropriate public education (Ansley, Houchins, & Varjas, 2019). However, instead, the teacher attrition in these schools is a result of consistently elevated stress levels and job dissatisfaction that are caused by inferior working conditions in the schoolhouse (Ansley, Houchins & Varjas, 2019). These recurring teacher shortages are a result of inadequate funding in under-sourced schools that offer low salaries and poor working conditions for teachers (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019).

Turnaround in high need schools. Sun, Penner, and Loeb (2017) provided context around school turnaround in the lowest-performing Title I schools; the federal government provides funding to these schools to improve school climate and academic achievement over three years. The turnaround process involves the implementation of programs, policies, structures, changes in staffing, and professional development. The outcomes of the turnaround process were favorable in the schools studied with improvements in family satisfaction, retention of effective teachers, attendance, and growth in teacher proficiency (Sun et al., 2017). Swain et al. (2019) noted the research that established middle- to high-poverty schools that serve students of color struggle to

acquire and retain effective teachers, which widens the achievement gap because these students are not exposed to high-quality instruction.

Teacher influence in high need schools. Correspondingly, Rodas (2019) found that Title I teachers overall are not as effective as teachers in non-Title I schools, which widens the already sizable achievement gap. Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond (2016) concluded that students who attend schools with high teacher attrition and therefore have less experienced teachers in the classroom suffer academically. One reason the teachers could be considered less effective is due to teacher attendance, meaning the teachers have chronic absenteeism or leave mid-school year (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). When a teacher leaves mid-year, student learning is set back significantly with a loss between ⅙ and ½ of the school year (Redding, 2018). Darling-Hammond & Podolsky (2019) found that students who attended schools with high turnover suffer from large class sizes, canceled courses, and frequent substitute teachers. These are all research-proven elements that reduce student learning (Sutcher et al., 2016). Therefore, schools with higher concentrations of students living in poverty, often only have access to the most inexperienced and underprepared teachers, which also negatively impact student learning (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Teacher retention in high need schools. Teacher attrition and mobility disproportionately affect low income, minority schools. Teachers are two times as likely to leave high-poverty schools when compared to affluent schools (Redding, 2018). An average of 20% or more of teachers leave these schools annually, either transferring to other schools or exiting the teaching profession altogether (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

Teacher attrition in high need schools creates a more significant issue because these schools are already hard to staff, and finding replacements is an even more challenging duty for school leaders. The impact on the students is a constant revolving door of new teachers who are not familiar with the students and the school culture, which ultimately impacts the ability to provide a rigorous education for students (Djonko-Moore, 2015). The effect to the teachers in these schools is the lack of effective mentoring due to the unfortunate attrition of experienced teachers, the availability of mentors with organizational understanding can support new teachers during their first years of teaching is significantly reduced (Djonko-Moore, 2015).

Lehman (2018) discussed the idea of learning about the cultures of the students and went as far as suggesting teachers of color encourage their students of color to become teachers at high need schools to improve student achievement with cultural competency. When students from impoverished families are provided with reduced student-to-teacher ratios and more equitable distribution of staffing based on student needs, they experience greater academic outcomes, and the result is a reduced achievement gap when compared with the peers of a similar demographic (Rodas, 2019). Interestingly, teachers who leave middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools with high concentrations of students of color attribute the reason for leaving as a dysfunctional school environment, and not the students (Torres, 2016). One program recruited teachers who grew up in challenging school demographics and provided scholarships for them to teach in similar demographics found that retention rates were higher (Boggan, Jayroe, & Alexander, 2016). The issue is that this approach has not spread to all high need districts

to improve retention (Boggan, Jayroe, & Alexander, 2016). As a result, middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools do not provide adequate opportunities for the students they serve, which contribute to community instability (Swain et al., 2019).

Dunn and Downey's (2017) research supports the idea that extracurricular investment into the school community is key to teacher retention in urban schools (Dunn & Downey, 2017). The connection to the urban schools was captured in personal narratives, personal letters, observations, etc. from teachers in the southeast and northeast of the United States (Dunn & Downey, 2017). The type of investment is the little "extra" that creates a connection to the school and its community. For example, one automotive teacher took the time to teach a student to read and practice for job interviews; his mother wrote a letter about this teacher's dedication, and the former student still sends the teacher an annual Christmas card (Dunn & Downey, 2017). The teacher stated that the work he did with this student only made him want to work harder at this urban school. The findings of the other teachers were similar, those involved with individual students or school projects, stayed in their urban schools and it positively influenced their teacher identities and retention (Dunn & Downey, 2017).

Teacher Retention Efforts

Teacher retention strategies. Podolsky et al. (2016) at the Learning Policy Institute (LPI) advises policymakers to recruit and retain teachers by improving teacher pre-service training, refining the hiring process, raising pay and benefits, providing robust novice teacher support, and upgrading working conditions. While LPI's strategies require support and action at the district and school administration level to be achieved, most can

be carried out by school leaders and teacher leaders in schoolhouses. The only factor that may be out of reach at the school level is pay, as that is often out of the school leader's control and at the discretion of the district. A school in New Orleans, adopted LPI's researched-based retention model to improve its retention rate from 70% to 95% (Podolsky et al., 2016).

Teacher preparation programs as a teacher retention strategy. Some school districts have started at the time of hire to begin with preparation programs to support their teacher retention. Lee (2018) reviewed the preparation of urban teachers, where the goal of the program is to create a pipeline of urban teachers who are committed to teaching in the community. This urban preparation program highlights the development of educating teachers on the communities that they serve with cultural training (Lee, 2018). The purpose is to positively affect teacher persistence, resilience, and higher rates of retention over time in urban schools (Lee, 2018). A similar study was conducted by Whipp and Geronime (2015); they evaluated the experiences of 72 urban teachers that participated in an urban teacher preparation program to examine urban teacher commitment, first job location, and retention in an urban school for three years or more. The researchers reviewed the correlation between whether urban public schooling from K-12th grade, prior volunteer service, and experience student teaching in a middle- to high-poverty urban school predicted urban commitment, employment, and retention for at least three school years in an urban school (Whipp & Geronime, 2015). They found that all three elements predicted a fervent commitment to teaching in urban schools and that strongly forecasted first job location and retention over time (Whipp & Geronime, 2015).

Kohli's (2018) study found that racial literacy development was critical to preparing teachers for the hostile racial climate of some urban schools to improve teacher retention.

Professional development as a retention strategy. Correspondingly, numerous studies have revealed that professional development programs can improve teacher quality and help teachers stay teaching in the classroom longer than teachers who did not participate in professional development programs (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra, & Volman, 2014). Gaikhorst et al. (2014) studied the professional development of urban teachers to uncover how it affected teacher quality and retention. The teachers built a professional learning community and felt more competent as a result of the training; the study showed teacher self-efficacy and knowledge improved as a result of the professional development (Gaikhorst et al., 2014). Moore (2016) shared the impact of early-career teacher mentoring in her district reduced teacher attrition of first-year teachers from 31% to 9% in 3 years. The coaching model included conversations, data collection, and activities aligned directly to the early career teacher, but what is essential to this model is that it is self-directed by the early career teacher (Moore, 2016). The goal was that the practitioner would develop the cognitive capacity for excellence that the district was looking to raise student achievement (Moore, 2016). Holdheide and Lachlan-Hache' (2019) offered a long-term approach to effective teacher retention, and it involved offering professional development in pre-service, then throughout their early career to develop them into effective teachers who serve as teacher leaders. The concept is built around the research that novice teachers leave within the first 5 years because they are ill equipped to teach effectively. By offering professional development early and often at a

high level then teachers will become highly effective educators swiftly with less struggle, want to stay, and motivated to develop their colleagues.

Mentoring as a teacher retention strategy. Morettini (2016) reported that mentoring is a critical factor in reducing teacher attrition in urban schools. Mentoring can be offered to teachers during their university internships, pre-service level, and after placement in the career. Mentoring is designed to support early-career teachers, yet research has found that it takes as long as 3 to 7 years for a teacher to become highly qualified as a teacher (Callahan, 2016). School leaders are encouraged to offer experienced veteran teachers leadership roles to serve as mentors to novice teachers (Abitabile, 2020). If mentoring is only offered in the first or second year, as it often is, teachers are not receiving support from mentors long enough to be highly qualified. Accordingly, mentoring is especially vital with alternatively certified teachers because they work closely with the teachers to meet high-performance standards required for completion of the program (Zhang & Zeller, 2016). The Morettini article cited that the essential portion of mentoring is the social-emotional support and encouragement of mentors for first-year urban teachers above all other aspects of mentoring support to include lesson planning, pedagogy, and classroom management (Morettini, 2016). For this relationship to be productive, trust is built, and accountability is a significant factor. The National Center for Education Statistics proved the importance of mentors for early career teachers during a longitudinal study (Gray & Taie, 2015). Novice Teachers who were provided a mentor during their first year of teaching had a 92% retention rate after year one, compared to a retention rate of only 84% for teachers who were not assigned a

mentor (Gray & Taie, 2015). This trend continued during year two at 91% for teachers with a mentor and 77% for those without (Gray & Taie, 2015). In year 3 at 88% for teachers with a mentor and 73% for those without, and 86% for teachers with a mentor and 71% in year 4 for those without (Gray & Taie, 2015).

Mentoring can be offered to teachers in training who have demonstrated content knowledge but need support during student teaching (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). It can also be provided in high retention programs, such as residencies, which serve as in-house mentorships, offered post-baccalaureate, could immediately fill vacancies in shortage areas with the job-embedded training and incentive that support retention in teaching (Carver-Thomas and Darling Hammond, 2017). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), conclude their study by highlighting that mentoring has proven to be a factor that contributes to sharp declines in the number of underprepared teachers hired. Therefore, mentoring shows to influence teacher retention positively.

Social-emotional care as a teacher retention strategy. Another group of teachers participated in a professional mindfulness development titled C.A.R.E. to promote teachers' social and emotional competence and classroom interactions (Jennings et al., 2017). C.A.R.E. showed positive effects on adaptive emotion regulation, mindfulness, psychological distress, time urgency, and emotional support, which were shown to improve teacher retention (Jennings et al., 2017). Accordingly, teachers stay when they feel they are valued and trusted professionally (Kelchtermans, 2017). Providing recognition with those items strengthens the relationship, supporting retention because teachers by nature are social (Kelchtermans, 2017).

Newberry & Allsop (2017) cited similar findings in their research. They found that teachers feel a lack of accomplishment when their students do not make substantial academic achievement gains and then begin to feel unsuccessful in the profession (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). When the feeling of failure escalates when the psychic and intrinsic needs of teachers are not met, teacher attrition goes up (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). These emotional needs are supported through their relationships with colleagues because teaching is an emotional practice, and as a result, their relationships between them foster employee growth and well-being (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). The work relationships help support meaningfulness and are highly influential in the satisfaction of the work environment, which helps improve teacher retention (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

Positive school climate as a teacher retention strategy. The value of teachers extends to creating a professional and productive school climate, which tends to be an underrated factor when considering the retention of teachers. When a negative school climate is present, student learning breaks down because the knowledge about students, the curriculum, and school programs is lost when teachers exit a school (Redding, 2020). school. However, when teachers feel job satisfaction, the likelihood increases that the teachers will stay (Abitabile, 2020). Public school leaders do not have control over external elements that contribute to teacher retention to include parental involvement, student and community demographics, aging schoolhouse facilities, and salaries (Podolsky et al., 2017). However, public school leaders do have control over the climate of the schoolhouse (Podolsky et al., 2017). Creating a school climate and culture that

makes teachers feel valued professional and excited about their work while never letting the idea of leaving the school enter the teachers' minds is the responsibility of school leaders (Podolsky et al., 2017). Finally, Cross and Thomas (2017), described how working conditions, a supportive professional culture, and a reasonable workload contributed to teacher retention.

Improving teacher pay as a teacher retention strategy. Teacher pay can also be a significant factor in teacher retention. Teachers are paid 60 cents on the dollar to other professionals with similar education levels, according to a 2017 report by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (Viadero, 2018). Shifrer et al. (2017) looked at the use of an incentive program in a large urban district with students of color and found that these teachers did not have higher test scores or choose to stay in the profession with the addition of the financial incentive. This study highlighted that other elements are needed outside of money to improve student achievement; possible elements could be teacher experience, motivation, professional development, and similar items. The study concluded that it might be essential to differentiate the money awarded for student scores, the cut score to receive the reward, and how students from disadvantaged schools are influenced (Shifrer et al., 2017). Swain et al. (2019) researched selective retention bonuses (S.R.B.s) for teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools to find that teachers who received S.R.B.s achieved higher test scores gains with even more significant gains in state reading exams. Therefore, it can be concluded that S.R.B.s awarded to highly effective teachers who provide access to high-quality instruction can result in higher student achievement (Swain et al., 2019).

To support the conclusion that teachers stay in the profession longer when their pay is higher, Gray & Taie (2015) found the percentage of beginning teachers who continued to teach after the first year contrasted by first-year compensation levels. For example, there was a 10% retention difference between beginning teachers with salaries over $40,000 (97%) versus those making less than $40,000 (87%). The salary component stayed relevant over the next few years of the study (Gray & Taie, 2015). The study showed that 89% of beginning teachers whose first-year base salary was $40,000 or more stayed in the field for at least 3-4 years, whereas 80% of those with a first-year salary less than $40,000 were teaching 3-4 years later (Gray & Taie, 2015). The research displays that highly effective teachers will continue to stay in the profession at their middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools when they receive additional money for improving student achievement (Gray & Taie, 2015). The research also shows that more teachers will stay in their profession if they are paid a more competitive wage (Gray & Taie, 2015).

District and Local Administrative Support to Teachers

School leadership has a strong influence on working conditions for teacher retention. Working conditions continue to dominate as the leading factor between high attrition rates and school demographics, with the highest attrition at high need schools (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). School leaderships' support with opportunities for professional development, high quality mentoring, and policy mitigates attrition, which ultimately improves school climate and student achievement (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Torres (2016) shares that administrative support and leadership are the most

significant predictor of teacher retention above all other working conditions to include teachers' influence in decision-making, student discipline, quality of facilities and resources, colleagues, community support, professional supports, and school culture. These findings are confirmed in the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), where teachers who described stronger principal leadership were less likely to transfer between schools (Player, Youngs, Perrone & Grogan, 2017). On the contrary, principal leadership did not predict the transitions of teachers out of the profession (Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017). Surprisingly, the TFS did not show a statistical difference between the effects of leadership as it relates to teacher mobility with novice, experienced, or Title I teachers (Player, Youngs, Perrone & Grogan, 2017).

Accordingly, Jones and Watson (2017) noted the great influence principals have on teacher retention and the need for principals to do everything in their power to retain effective teachers. The retention of teachers is done with the application of effective leadership practices that meet the needs of the school and faculty (Jones & Watson, 2017). Simon & Johnson (2015) found in their research that the vital working conditions for teachers are school leadership, workplace relationships, and job design. A supportive principal is critical to creating a school when students and teachers flourish (Redding, 2018). The teachers who stay report, they are more satisfied when their school leaders provide consistent enforcement of school policies, support for student behavior management, regular communication, constructive feedback, flexibility for teacher autonomy, teacher inclusion in school-wide decision making, allocation of necessary resources, and mentorships for early career teachers (Simon & Johnson, 2015).Vari,

Jones, and Thomas-El (2018) added that principals need to focus on what it takes to retain teachers before and after the hiring process rather than looking at the elements surrounding why they left. The authors challenged principals to look for positive teachers that they can develop (Vari et al., 2018).

The recruitment effort should be slow and calculated to help find the best fit for the school (Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017). Teacher mobility reduces when teachers find a solid fit between their abilities and demands or needs of the teaching profession (Player, Youngs, Perrone, & Grogan, 2017). Slow recruitment may be a challenge if there are many vacancies before the school year begins. Further, principals need to hold the teachers accountable while providing support after hire (Vari et al., 2018). One way this can be done is through servant leadership, where the principal focuses on the needs of the teachers, as a result of teachers' job satisfaction and retention improves. Hughes, Matt, and O'Reilly's (2014) research displayed the importance of principals providing emotional support to include being available, offering individual praise, attendance to classroom activities, support in front of parents, as well as other elements as critical elements in teacher retention.

Comparably, Farinde-Wu and Fitchett (2016) examined the correlation between job satisfaction and teacher attrition of black female teachers. The findings of the quantitative research study stated that when administrative support is provided, students have positive behavior, and teacher commitment is present than teachers are more satisfied in urban schools (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). The article also built on the notion that climate and student achievement is positively influenced when teachers are

retained (Farinde-Wu & Fitchett, 2016). Wronowski (2017) agrees that the way school leaders engage with teachers is critical to the retention of teachers, as many teachers who exited the profession did so because they did not feel valued or respected as professionals. The teacher shortage serves as a barrier to school leaders attempting to improve workplace conditions because it makes it difficult to build a solid reputation for teaching and personalization (García & Weiss, 2019). Offering a positive work setting was a method to retain teachers, as was having competent school leaders who had an open-door policy for engaging with teachers. Young (2014) concluded that school leaders who desired to retain dedicated and effective teachers were advised to provide a clean and safe workplace, reasonably well-behaved students, offer teacher leadership opportunities for experienced teachers, grade-level teams, professional development, and an open-door policy.

Summary and Conclusions

The literature was strong and plentiful on the issues of teacher attrition and retention. The research was detailed that teacher attrition is on the rise in the United States, especially in urban schools, where students have the widest achievement gap and middle- to high-poverty. The literature was conclusive in stating that teacher attrition is causing school districts, mainly urban districts, to put underqualified teachers in front of students. It is important to note that urban districts have the most underqualified teachers. Effective teachers have the most significant positive effect on student achievement. Therefore, the absence of effective teachers contributes to widening the achievement gap.

The literature evidenced that the working conditions teachers experienced weighed heavily on their decision to stay. Teachers who were professionally developed and felt supported had higher retention rates. The literature varied with the type of professional development and support offered as well as its effects on retention. The literature was divided on if bonuses improved teacher retention and student achievement, but it was evident that pay was a factor in the evaluation of workplace conditions. However, the literature displayed that administrative support provided the highest rate of retention. Teachers are willing to stay when they feel valued and respected as professionals.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify in retaining teachers rated as effective. I selected a qualitative case study because it allowed school leaders to share their authentic experiences leading a middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I school. This chapter includes the research design and rationale and research questions, and I discuss the phenomenon of the study. Additionally, in the methodology section, I discuss participant selection and instrumentation, along with the procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, and the data analysis plan. I also include strategies to establish trustworthiness and ethical procedures.

Research Design and Rationale

School leaders desire to put teachers rated as effective in front of their students because teachers with this rating demonstrate professionalism, raise student achievement, and have effectively-rated formal observations. Schools in middle- to high-poverty areas with low student achievement have an even greater need for effective teachers. Correspondingly, the research shows that teachers leave these types of schools at higher rates, which is a greater problem because lower-achieving students have an even greater need for effective teachers to close the achievement gap (Swain et al., 2019). The questions that guided this study were focused on the elements that influence effective teachers to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

RQ1: What do school leaders describe as the needs and supports that help effective teachers stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools?

RQ2: How do school leaders describe their support in the retention of teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools?

The central phenomena of this study included elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. I used the perceptions of school leaders to develop this understanding. The research showed that it is critical to retain effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools to close the achievement gap (Djonko-Moore, 2015). Yet, to retaining teachers regardless of rating remains a struggle in these types of schools (Carver-Thomas & Linda Darling-Hammond, 2019). Understanding the elements could help similar schools improve the retention of effective teachers at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

The research methodology for this study was a bounded qualitative case study. Participants shared their perceptions about effective teacher retention elements and supports founded on personal experiences and ideas to support the understanding of the phenomenon of this study. Qualitative research allows the researcher to serve as the observer to record and interpret people's responses and behaviors in their natural settings to understand a phenomenon within locally constructed realities (Webb & Welsh, 2019). The case study is bounded because the researcher makes clear statements in the research objectives about the focus and degree of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

I reviewed other types of qualitative case study types but did not select them because they did not meet the needs of this study. For example, phenomenology is a

research approach that focuses on finding the collective meaning of the lived experience of several individuals about a particular phenomenon (Webb & Welsh, 2019). Phenomenology was not appropriate because this study did not require any commonalities amongst study participants. Grounded theory is another exploratory research method that requires the researcher to develop a theory (Ivey, 2017). Grounded Theory offers an explanation about the population of the applicable area and how the approach to address the issue (Ivey, 2017). In this study, theory development was not required, and I did not select grounded theory. I did not use the narrative research method because it relies on stories in written or spoken word to explore the learned significance of the human experience. The emphasis on the narration method was not essential for determining elements that cause effective teacher retention (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The ethnographic research method requires long term immersion in the culture, and that was not required to identify elements for teacher retention because they can be collected in an interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018.)

The research began with a sample of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. The sample were nine Title I elementary school leaders in five Title I schools. The sampling technique was convenience sampling. I selected the participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. I also used purposeful sampling to select participants who had experience with the phenomenon (Robinson, 2014).

The data collection consisted of Zoom video conference interviews that I video recorded and then transcribed. I used an audio recorder as a back-up data collection tool.

Each interview took approximately 40 minutes. The data analysis was a thematic analysis that I used to organize and examine the information. The rights of participants were protected by using pseudonyms with no identifiers beyond the number of years leading a Title I school. Accordingly, the research methodology that best served this type of research was a bounded qualitative case study. The school leaders had the opportunity to share their personal experiences in an interview to help me understand the phenomenon in their natural setting schoolhouse to be interpreted within locally constructed realities. The goals of the research were met with this methodology.

Role of the Researcher

I took an observer role in this study and worked primarily on data collection and analysis. The methodology of the case study took nine school leaders' responses to interview questions derived from the research questions. I coded the data collected for thematic content analysis. I maintained trustworthiness of the research with credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable data (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). I maintained an ethical process by following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines to ensure that school leaders were recruited and treated fairly during the research. I also used pseudonyms, and the data collected was kept confidential to protect participants in the research process.

My role as the researcher was to serve as the critical instrument in this qualitative case study. I was primarily an observer and data collector (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). As the researcher, I created the research questions and formed them into interview questions that I asked the research participants. I collected the data through the

examination of archived climate data and the interviewing of participants. I identified the sample population and recorded the data provided during the interviews. I probed to get a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences to understand the elements and support that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

I had no personal relationship or supervisory responsibility with any of the research participants. I was responsible for thematic coding of responses and did not introduce any bias into the data provided. Because of the significant role of the qualitative researcher in the case study process, I approached the study from an objective perspective. In this role, I compiled data with the support of Bruner's (1957) theory to give a clear summary of the trends found in the participants' experiences.

Methodology

The research methodology was a qualitative case study; the participants shared their knowledge about effective teacher retention elements and support in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. The interview responses were the personal experiences and ideas of the participants. The research population consisted of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. The sample was nine school leaders at five middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. In this bounded case study, the sampling technique was convenience sampling. I selected participants based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study (see Robinson, 2014). Purposeful sampling was also used because of the participants' experience with the phenomenon (Robinson, 2014). The data collection consisted of

interviews that I audio-recorded and then transcribed. The data analysis protocol that I used was a thematic analysis to organize and examine the information that I obtained. I protected the rights of participants by using pseudonyms and no identifiers beyond the number of years teaching at a Title I school.

Participant Selection

Approximately 120 elementary schools exist in the school district in which I conducted my research, and about half are Title I elementary schools. The district is diverse socioeconomically and is majority African American. I focused on the most disadvantaged school populations with the lowest academic achievement records. To be considered a middle- to high-poverty school, the student population has a 50% or higher free or reduced lunch rate. The schools featured in this study have significant achievement gaps based on student academic performance in reading/language arts and mathematics on the assessments required under the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. I sent a letter to request participation in the study, and I sent an overview of the study to the principals with the study's desired population.

The setting for this study was five middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. Because this was a bounded case study, I used purposeful sampling to select the participants from each of the schools. Purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research to select cases aligned with the research. Specifically, I used criterion sampling, because the participants must have met the criterion of being a school leader of a middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving school to participate in the study (see Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, Wisdom, Duan, & Hoagwood (2015). I reviewed a list of Title I schools in the school

district looking for schools with poverty rates of more than 50% to meet the mid-high poverty rate requirement for the study. I invited school leaders to be interviewed. The goal was for nine school leaders of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools to agree to be interviewed and complete the process, and that was accomplished.

Instrumentation

The instrumentation method for this qualitative case study was interviews that I conducted with the participants (see Appendix: Interview Guide). I scheduled the interviews via e-mail after the participant consented to be interviewed. Next, the school leader and I identified a mutually agreed upon time to conduct the interview. Then I sent a Zoom video conference invitation. Before the interview, I ensured my Zoom account was set up to automatically record the interviews, and I had the audio recorder on for back up. I provided the participants with informed consent forms before the interview began. I read them a script that explained all of their responses would be kept confidential, and they could withdraw from the study at any time with no penalty. During the interview, I recorded responses on both the Zoom video conference and the audio recorder. I also transcribed the information provided by the participants. After the video call I organized the information and looked for trends in the data.

I created questions and wrote them for the participants to review and understand, although I asked the questions orally during the interview. I developed the questions, and their probes using the main components of the research questions. I probed when the question was not fully answered to provide more information for a deeper understanding of the participant's experiences. I established content validity by reviewing if the items to

measure the content I intended to measure in a field test. I audio-recorded and transcribed the interview data and provided participants with a copy of their responses to verify that the recorded data is correct and accurate (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.259). I measured the sufficiency of data collection instruments to answer the research questions was measured in the field test to determine if the interview questions could completely answer the research questions and show that saturation can be achieved during the research phase.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I began by obtaining permission from Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to recruit participants and start my study. Study participants were the school leaders at the identified middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. A blind copied email was sent to the participants within the selected population to invite them to participate in the study. Included in the email invitation was a brief introduction of myself as a researcher, a description of the study, invitation to participate in the study and Walden University's Letter of Cooperation. The standard letter of participation includes consent to the study and participant's rights. Further, I included an updated letter of support for data collection from the school district. I also shared in the email that I was a doctoral student at Walden University and an employee of the school district. Participants responded to the email invitation with their desire to participate in the study. If participants had questions or concerns about the study, I was available to answer them via email.

The school leaders' interviews took place via Zoom video conferencing at a mutually agreed upon time. Each interview took approximately 40 minutes but were

scheduled in one-hour blocks. The interviews were semi-structured because an interview structure was used, but I had the flexibility to deviate from the structure to garner additional information through follow up questioning (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The question and answer portion of the interview took about 25 minutes, and then another 15 minutes to review the responses with the participant before he or she exited the interview. Each interview began with me reviewing the study's purpose. If the participant had a question about the study, I could answer it at this time. The participants also had the opportunity decline participation in the study and would have been allowed to exit the study.

The data collection took place over two weeks. The data collection events included video and audio recordings of the participants. A back-up audio recording device was used in the case of technology failure and the contents of the interview responses were kept on my password protected personal laptop computer. The participants were exited from the study after a simple debrief at the conclusion of the interview. The transcripts of the interview were sent to the participants within a week of the week to verify their accuracy before the data collected was analyzed. In the event that a participant elected to add or modify their responses after the transcript review, he or she had the opportunity to do so in writing via email. After the transcript review, participants could have also asked the researcher any additional questions that they may thought of. Finally, the participants had another opportunity after they reviewed their interview transcripts to exit the study by having their responses excluded from the study; no school leaders chose to exit the study.

Data Analysis Plan

The data collected in the interviews was used to understand the central phenomenon in this qualitative case study. The interview data directly correlated the participants' interview responses about the elements and support that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. The data collected from the responses to the interview questions allowed the research to explore the perspectives of what school leaders believe influences effective teachers to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. The interview responses helped the researcher develop understanding in this constructivist study (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.30).

Understanding was developed with thematic coding for data analysis. Coding was used to help the researcher reveal patterns and themes within the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). This process involved recording participants' responses that are linked by a common theme or idea, allowing the researcher to catalog the responses or parts of them into categories and therefore establish a framework of thematic ideas about it. Both research questions fit the criteria for this type of coding because they explore the perspectives of school leaders based on their experiences with teachers rated as effective in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools. Data that did not fit into a defined category that emerged from the themes found in the responses was still coded but did not have a defined category. The transcripts and audio recordings were organized with the Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software to support the researcher

with coding and sorting the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). From there, the themes were written in the final dissertation to demonstrate the data uncovered in the interviews.

Trustworthiness

Credibility

Qualitative studies require that the research study's findings be credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable to be considered trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017). With this burden, it is required that data analysis be completed in a meticulous, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough specificity to enable the reader of the study to determine whether the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017). Qualitative researchers must feel confident about the truth of the study's findings, and this will be achieved when saturation is reached with nine school leader participants. The research guidelines of Walden University will be utilized to include consent forms for the study. Additionally, participants were aware of my employment within the school district. However, the researcher had no supervisory responsibilities with the participants or personal relationships that would interfere with the credibility of the study. Finally, the peer review was used to maintain adherence to the credibility requirements.

Dependability

Qualitative studies require that the data collected is dependable, and that is accomplished with triangulation and a member check. First, the interview transcripts data were reviewed by the study participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Participants had the opportunity to edit their responses upon review if they felt I did not

correctly understand their ideas. The data was triangulated by reviewing the information from multiple sources. For example, the school leaders are employed at different elementary school sites, and the interview data was compared to the school climate surveys. A member check was completed to ensure I did not misunderstand the information they provided and found accurate major themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278).

Transferability

Ravitch & Carl (2016) described the ability to apply a study to a broader context as transferability. The data must also be transferable to other similar situations, meaning that a reader of this study, such as principals of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools can apply the study's findings to help retain effective teachers. Transferability through a thick, holistic view of the narrative was provided along with a detailed account of the location, time, conditions, and circumstances under which the data was collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278). In this case, the purposeful random sample was used across multiple Title I schools' effective teachers and their school leaders to allow for variation in participant selection. Finally, the data analysis allowed the study to be decontextualized to be used at similar school types.

Confirmability

Data are confirmed through reflexivity, where the researcher will complete a self-reflection about her own bias, preferences, and pre-conceptions. With this process, researchers reflect on how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences could shape their interpretation of themes in the data (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018, p.278). It was important for me, as the researcher, to not use my background as a former principal of a high-poverty, low-achieving school to be the lens for how I interpret the data and define themes. I relied on the transcribed data and only used what was explicitly said without personal bias. Providing the study participants, the opportunity to review the data collected after the interview, transcription, and then again to check for themes with the member check helped develop the confirmability in this study. The combination of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability allowed for a trustworthy study.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures ensured the researcher behaved acceptably. Without them, the trustworthiness of the study would be in question. Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission was obtained at the proposal stage (IRB Approval # 03-25-20-0657474). A list of Title I schools in the school district was used to recruit school leaders. There were no ethical concerns with this recruitment strategy, as this is public information. Walden University's IRB addresses ethical standards for case study research materials and policies with adult research participants were followed. The school district also provided consent for the study to be completed.

In this study, the guidelines for ethical procedures came into consideration because of a potential conflict of interest because the school leaders are colleagues, and we may or may not have been acquainted before the data collection. The study's participants had to feel comfortable sharing their experiences in a confidential setting. Nine school leaders were interviewed. The identities of the participants are confidential,

and pseudonyms were used. All interview questions were directly related to the research questions and did not require the participants to share any personal information, only the perception of their experience in the schoolhouse as it relates to effectively-rated teacher retention. Questions were provided to the participants before the interview for their review.

If, at any time, the participants felt uncomfortable for any reason and wished to withdraw, they could have done so with no penalty. All interviews were recorded with the participants' permission. Participants were not compensated in any way for their participation in the study. The transcripts were shared with the participants for their review. The data were thematically coded and analyzed. I followed the code of honesty, objectivity, respect for intellectual property, social responsibility, confidentiality, and non-discrimination to achieve the goal of the constructivist view. This view required the development of understanding, creating meanings from multiple participants, social construction, and theory generation (Creswell & Creswell, 2019). Data was stored by the researcher on a password-protected personal laptop, not shared with anyone, and destroyed after the research was completed to maintain confidentiality.

Summary

The qualitative case study approach allowed the researcher to provide an authentic summary of the participants' view. Interviews were used to explore school leaders' perceptions of the elements that influence teachers rated as effective to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. In this chapter, I discussed the components of that study to include its participants, data collection, and analysis. Data

was collected until saturation was reached and then triangulated between the school leaders and teachers across multiple school sites. The IRB regulations will be followed to meet the ethics guidelines to include consent from the school district and the study's participants. Finally, the trustworthiness of the study was established with credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability practices. A detailed presentation of the findings and their interpretation is provided in Chapter 4 for recommendations and conclusions in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify in retaining teachers rated as effective. An improved insight about the retention elements for teachers rated as effective has the potential to inform school leaders of similar type schools' retention practices. I used a qualitative case study as the methodology with a constructivist conceptual framework. I sought to explain the phenomenon of why effective teachers have elected to stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools through data collection. The study provided awareness that supports the retention of effective teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

School leaders could benefit from retaining teachers rated as effective in high poverty, low achieving schools. The reason is, to be rated effective, a teacher must demonstrate effectual formal observations, have improved student achievement based on assessment data, and exhibit professionalism. The questions that the guided study were focused on the factors that influence teachers rated as effective to stay in high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

RQ1: What do school leaders describe as the needs and supports that help teachers rated as effective stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools?

RQ2: How do school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools describe their actions in supporting the retention of teachers rated as effective?

In Chapter 4 I begin with a description of the setting of the study. Next, I discuss the data collection and analysis. Then I present the study's findings including the methods used to ensure trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with a summary of the study's findings.

Setting

The study took place in an urban school district in the Mideastern United States. Most of the students in the district are African American. However, the socioeconomic landscape of the school district is diverse. Over 60 of the more than 120 elementary schools are identified as Title I schools. Because this was a bounded case study, I used purposeful sampling to select the participants for this study. The schools included in this study had a 50% or higher population of students receiving free and reduced meals and were considered low-achieving. Participation in the study was open to school leaders of middle- to high-poverty schools who were willing to be interviewed. One school that participated in the study was considered high poverty, and the remaining four were considered mid-poverty schools.

Nine school leaders including five school principals and their four assistant principals consented to the study via confidential e-mail correspondence. The elementary schools served a range of grades from prekindergarten to sixth grade. All school leaders interviewed held graduate degrees. Three school leaders have Doctor of Education (EdD.) in Leadership degrees, one principal and one assistant principal are in pursuit of their EdD. in Leadership degrees, and three assistant principals hold Master of Education degrees. The school leaders have a range of experience from 1 to 19 years as an administrator in Title I schools and a range of 1 to 24 years of experience in Title I

schools overall as an educator. Eight of nine school leaders have served in this school district for the majority of their careers. The years of experiences as a school leader in a Title I school provided thoughtful perceptions of the elements and support teachers rated as effective need to stay at middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonym, Title I Leadership, Title I Experience, Education

Participant pseudonym	Title I leadership experience	Leadership position	Title I experience overall	Education	Mid- or high-poverty school
Makayla	9 years	Principal	22 years	Doctorate	Mid-Poverty
Riley	2 years	Principal	8 years	Masters+	Mid-Poverty
Kennedy	3 years	Principal	13 years	Doctorate	Mid-Poverty
Helen	5 years	Principal	12 years	Doctorate	Mid-Poverty
David	19 years	Principal	22 years	Doctorate	High-Poverty
Summer	4 years	Assistant Principal	24 years	Masters	Mid-Poverty
Michael	1 year	Assistant Principal	1 year	Masters+	Mid-Poverty
Teresa	14 years	Assistant Principal	22 years	Masters	High-Poverty
Jennifer	2 years	Assistant Principal	8 years	Masters	Mid-Poverty

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of interviews with nine school leaders held via the Zoom video conference system. The interviews were held at the convenience of the school leader. Each interview took approximately 40 minutes but were scheduled in 1-hour blocks. The interviews were semistructured because I needed the flexibility to deviate from the structure to garner additional information through follow up questioning (see Doody & Noonan, 2013). The Zoom video conferences were recorded, and an audio device was used as a backup recording device. I saved the video conference and audio

data to my password-protected laptop and cell phone. I also recorded their verbal responses in the field notes of the interview guide. I transcribed the audio responses and shared them with each participant to ensure accuracy. All participants accepted the transcripts as true and accurate. All interviews were completed within 2 weeks. There were minimal variables to the interview process as all interviews were completed following the same protocol. The only variable was the time of day for the interview because the school leaders were allowed to select their interview times based on their convenience. After the interviews, I reviewed my field notes to identify themes.

I reviewed the archived climate surveys to triangulate the interview data for trustworthiness. The climate survey is provided by the school district and administered at the school level to staff, students, and parents. I looked specifically at the staff responses to the subscales related to the focus of the study, which were *effective instructional leadership, positive nurturing environment, teacher involvement in decision-making,* and *relevant professional development*. I looked for parallels between the elements and support based on the perceptions of school leaders and the climate survey responses of the staff. Nothing atypical occurred during the interview or review of the archived climate data.

Data Analysis

The interviews were completed within a 2-week time frame. I transcribed each recording within one week of the interview and sent the transcription to the participant for review. Participants had the opportunity to review and revise their responses, if needed. Participants accepted the transcripts as true and accurate, and the revision time frame was not used. I uploaded the interview transcriptions, field notes, and archived

climate survey data from my password-protected laptop for analysis and coding using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

The climate surveys, which served as archival data, had four subscales from the staff section that were aligned to the focus of the study; Effective Instructional Leadership, Positive Nurturing Environment, Teacher Involvement in Decision Making, and Relevant Professional Development were the subscales used for triangulation. I analyzed the qualitative data collected from the school leaders' interviews and archival data through thematic coding. This process involved recording participants' responses that were linked by a common theme or idea, cataloging the responses or parts of them into categories to establish a framework of thematic ideas (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Both research questions fit the criteria for this type of coding because they were designed to explore the perceptions of school leaders based on their experiences in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools.

The interview transcripts, field notes, and archival data uploaded to NVivo helped to reveal recurring words and themes in the data. I also used the thematic coding based on my field notes from the school leader interviews. I used the NVivo software to record the repeated ideas found on the transcriptions, field notes, and archival data. I sorted responses into several categories (Table 2). Some terms that emerged were trust, family, communication, professional development, mentoring, and passion for high need students.

Table 2

Phrases, Categories, and Themes used in Data Analysis

Phrase	Categories	Themes
Trust Communication Distributive leadership Effective feedback Provides resources Coaching Visible	Communication Approach Leadership Actions	Effective School Leadership
Mentoring Professional Development High performing Share ideas Motivated Results oriented	Effective Instruction Teacher Voice in Decision Making Career Growth	Teacher Leadership
Family Support Teams Job satisfaction Collaboration Title I funding	Collaboration to meet goals Common Mission	Nurturing Environment

Theme 1: Effective Leadership

The theme of Effective Leadership included the categories of communication approach and leadership actions. All school leaders interviewed emphasized the importance of the open lines of communication between them and their effective teachers to promote retention. Makayla discussed that teachers rated as effective appreciate feedback because they want to know what they are doing well with and how they can improve. Helen highlighted that her consistent, effective feedback and open door policy helped to establish trusting relationships with the effective teachers. All school leaders mentioned the element of trust in their interviews along with open dialogue and how they

used these practices to push their teachers rated as effective toward teacher leadership opportunities.

The interviews also revealed patterns of consistent leadership actions amongst the school leaders included visibility, appropriate allocation of resources, and distributive leadership. All school leaders interviewed described their visibility or presence in the classrooms of the teachers rated as effective. Summer shared that she completed daily classroom "pop-ins," provided informal and formal observations, offered feedback, and shared areas the areas the school thrives in to help the school's administration staff effectively-rated teachers. Michael said he makes sure he is

> in their classrooms [of effective teachers] so I know what is going on. I am visible, present, and available for questions or concerns. Classroom presences allows them to take the feedback because I am not sitting behind my desk saying, you should [do this].

School leaders also described the need for the appropriate allocation of resources to teachers to help them meet their goals. David said he even asks his effective teachers what resources they need because he is confident in their ability to use them appropriately once secured. Helen said, "Whether they're [teachers rated as effective] asking for resources or waiving the white flag, the administration is still supporting them."

Finally, each participant discussed how they used distributive leadership to develop the leadership capacity of their teachers rated as effective and allowed them to lead building initiatives. Kennedy illustrated distributive leadership by empowering her teachers rated as effective to "lead task forces when problems arise in the schoolhouse."

Makayla encouraged distributive leadership at her school by sharing, teachers rated as effective "want to be pushed to the next level of their practice." She offers ideas about classes to take, recommends someone to talk to, or informs them of a leadership opportunity.

Theme 2: Teacher Leadership

School leaders shared the multiple ways that they engage their teachers rated as effective in teacher leadership activities. Most of the teacher leadership activities described were based on the school leaders' observation of the effective instruction of teachers rated as effective. Effective instruction and overall competence emerged as the first category under the theme of teacher leadership. Every school leader interviewed asked teachers rated as effective to share best practices in a Title I school either through mentoring novice teachers, delivering professional development, or leading teams. Michael shared that teacher leaders were selected based on their motivation and expertise. Riley discussed that these types of teachers want to use their voice to make decisions in the schoolhouse; teacher voice became category 2. David shared that when teachers use their voice, it builds a culture where people feel heard and respected. Makalya supported this point, by sharing that teachers rated as effective have a lot of ideas and suggestions, she encourages them to try their ideas and offers her support.

Jennifer mentioned her school allows the teachers rated as effective to weigh in on decisions about professional development topics. At Kennedy's school, she empowers her teachers rated as effective to use their voice to serve as liaisons between the administrators and teachers. She trusts her teachers rated as effective to understand the

data behind the decision-making process they shared and then to serve as a liaison between the school leaders and teachers.

Career Growth was a common theme that emerged in the data analysis as a category. Helen described how Title I schools provide the diverse experience to equip teachers for future leadership opportunities. She discussed how "Title I schools require expertise in high leverage instructional practices such as differentiation, talented and gifted education, and English language learning". Summer talked about how teacher leaders may aspire to formal leadership roles, such as principal or assistant principal, and teacher leadership offers preparation for those roles. Teresa proposed another viewpoint, offering the idea that the teachers rated as effective may simply want growth in their instructional skills and may seek a grade or content change to hone new skills. Overall, all school leaders discuss how teachers rated as effective desired to improve their craft to grow their careers.

Theme 3: Nurturing Environment

The first category that was found within the nurturing environment was a common mission. Every school leader interviewed shared that their effectively-rated teachers had a passion for Title I students. Teresa talked about that it may be because there is a personal connection and the teachers desired to "pay it forward" and teach in the type of school they were educated in. Helen offered that teachers rated as effective are high performing, and therefore ready for the challenges and rewards that come with teaching high need students, which correlated with Kennedy's observation of teachers

rated as effective appreciating feeling needed because they had the skill set to educate students with limited resources and show incremental success.

The second category that emerged within this theme was collaboration. More than half of the school stated the word family. They discussed how the teachers felt a sense of home, belonging, and appreciation at their Title I school. Teresa said the teachers rated as effective in a Title I school are offered a lot of support and resources to earn their effective rating. Makayla talked about the support coming from many stakeholder groups to include parents, colleagues, and the community. Summer noted that the school leaders work to retain teachers rated as effective by building relationships with them and helping them buy into the culture. All school leaders discussed the formal and informal methods they employ to ensure collaborations amongst teachers rated as effective. The methods included collaborative planning, mentoring, coaching, meetings, and informal chats to allow the exchange of ideas, and create a space for support to teachers rated as effective or for them to provide support to novice teachers.

Results

The results from the nine school leader interviews and supporting archival data are summarized below. The results are organized by research questions and thoroughly explained using direct quotes from interviews and data tables.

Research Question 1

RQ1: What do school leaders describe as the needs and supports that help teachers rated as effective stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools?

Interview data. According to the results of the interview data, all nine school leaders implemented similar leadership actions and structures that they perceived helped teachers rated as effective stay at their middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools. Data gathered during the interview fell within three themes: Effective school leadership, Teacher leadership practices, and nurturing school environments.

Each school leader interviewed was thoughtful about how they fostered a nurturing environment to help retain teachers rated as effective. Participants repeated similar phrases to include family, team, support, passion for serving Title I students, desire to serve high need students, and equipped for the challenge. Each participant shared how the nurturing environment was developed at their school site. The data displayed teachers rated as effective stayed in Title I schools because they have a lot of support to be effective. They discussed how they believed teachers rated as effective had high expectations for their students and their effective teaching would help students make academic progress. Creating a community of support with administration, colleagues, and the Instructional Lead Teachers (ILT) allows for the support to the challenges in Title I schools that come along with serving a high need population and the desire to raise student achievement. Jennifer supported Teresa's statement with a similar testimony. Jennifer stated, “An element to retain them is providing a support group feeling that only the resources of a Title I school allows for.” Because Title I schools have additional funding, out of classroom positions can be purchased, such as a reading and math specialist, who serve as effectively-rated teacher leaders that help teachers become effective with lesson planning, technology, and instructional delivery. Michael’s words

complimented Jennifer's with the notion that "building a culture of support, where staff feels like family, promotes success". Michael emphasized the "principal, assistant principal and effectively-rated teachers who serve as ILTs, mentors, and grade level chairs use their support to create a nurturing culture".

In alignment to Michael's observation, Kennedy offered that the teacher leaders rated as effective and school leaders can create a culture of support through the provision of resources and the training to use them. Title I schools offer additional funding that allows school leaders to purchase a variety of resources for teachers and students that provides for the enhancement of the instructional program to include professional field trips, technology, and so forth. Kennedy said, "The sky's the limit!" in reference to the abundance of resources Title I funding provides.

A passion for the work at Title I school was an element that school leaders perceived as an influence to keeping teachers rated as effective returning. Every school leader cited the emotional component that they believe keeps their teachers rated as effective returning to the school. I already described the camaraderie that was cited about experience with staff members but the category of desiring to teach at a Title I school for because of the type of students it serves resonated just as profoundly. Kennedy said, "effectively-rated teachers at Title I schools have a heart and passion for students with limited resources and that this allows them to feel needed. These teachers understand that instructional expertise is appreciated in a middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving school setting". Helen echoed this notion with a similar statement about why these types of teachers stay. She believes her teachers rated as effective stay because they are up for the

challenge and desire to give the students something they do not get at home to decrease their large achievement gaps. The commitment and dedication that effectively-rated teachers bring to Title I schools comes from a desire to support students who need the most and create something better. Within a supportive school culture that allows growth and development of teachers the results are positive. Makayla included "the support that Title I parents provide and along with that of the school based partnerships." She explained that Title I parents want the best for their students but may not know the best ways to interact with the school to get the greatest results for their students. She continued that teachers rated as effective have expertise with parents that helps the parents then become a support rather than be a barrier because they create authentic opportunities for the parents to productively engage in the schoolhouse. She also discussed how the community partners support the schoolhouse by providing financial support, volunteer service, career & college exposure, and any other resources unique to their business or individual talents. The perception is the needs of the teachers rated as effective at Title I schools are being met with strategic support from colleagues, school leaders, parents, and the community.

Archival school climate data. School climate surveys provided an opportunity to triangulate the information provided by the participants during the interviews. The archival data supported school leaders' perceptions that the sense of a shared mission was evident at their schools, with an average of 76% agreement rate of surveyed staff. A shared mission is defined as, "all stakeholders believe in the school's mission, have a sense of shared ownership for student success, and participate in activities to support the

school's mission" (District website, 2017). Cornerstone, Cedar Hill, and Bethune had similar data about the establishment of a positive nurturing environment. However, Longfellow's data was the outliner because it was significantly lower in this area. Reasons for this discrepancy may be that Longfellow was the only high-poverty school in this study school, and unlike the other principals in the study, the principal but did not describe the activities to create a shared mission. Not describing explicit activities to lead all stakeholders to believe in the school's mission may have contributed to a lower score in this area. Similarly, across all five schools, the staff agreed that they had high expectations for all students (86%) and effective teaching (89%) that would support them in meeting the schools' missions of raising student achievement.

Archival climate survey data related to the perception of a positive and nurturing environment, averaged an agreement rate of 75% of surveyed staff. The data shows evidence of alignment between the school leaders' perceptions and the beliefs of the staff. A positive and nurturing environment is defined as, "principal, teachers, and students in the school are respectful and supportive of each other and students' successes are rewarded and publicly recognized" (District website, 2017). The responses were higher at schools where the principal and assistant principal shared similar responses Bethune, Cedar Hill, and Cornerstone and then lowest at the high poverty of Longfellow. Longfellow's principal did not describe what he does personally to create a nurturing environment outside of sharing that there is a "need for good administrators." However, his assistant principal described in detail her specific actions to create support and said that the environment should be "welcoming and supportive" for effectively-rated teacher

retention. There may be a need to focus on leadership actions that encourage positivity to improve this component of the survey. The results of the climate survey indicated this given population needs to be intentional about how they develop the sense of a shared mission as well as a positive nurturing environment due to the inconsistency of intentional strategies to provide these elements described by school leaders.

Table 3

Achieved Climate Survey Results (Elements of Selected Indicators with the Percent of Staff Agreement)

	Cornerstone	Longfellow	Cromwell	Cedar Hill	Bethune
Effective leadership	63.60%	50.00%	78.60%	78.60%	79.50%
Sense of shared mission	72.70%	61.10%	85.20%	78.60%	81.60%
Effective teaching	90.90%	72.20%	85.70%	85.70%	94.70%
High expectations for all students	90.90%	83.30%	88.00%	88.00%	92.10%
Positive and nurturing environment	90.90%	50.00%	64.00%	84.00%	84.20%

Research Question 2

RQ1: How do school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools describe their actions in supporting the retention of teachers rated as effective?

Interview data. The school leaders' perceptions about how their actions supported the retention of teachers rated as effective showed the consistent themes of

effective school leadership and opportunities for teacher leadership. School leaders shared how they believed their leadership actions influenced teachers rated as effective to stay in Title I schools. They also discussed the different types of leadership opportunities that they offered to teachers rated as effective based on their motivation, expertise, and leadership potential.

There were running themes in the interview data; every school leader talked about their visibility and communication with teachers rated as effective. There was some variance in the relationships, but trust was at the core of each relationship. The trust was established by providing consistent and effective feedback. Helen shared that teachers rated as effective "open their doors for school leaders to come in and give feedback because they want to be pushed to be better." Jennifer added that her effectively-rated teachers invite her to their classrooms outside of the observation times to ask specific strategies to be modeled or to get specific feedback on an instructional strategy that they are trying. This is the type of coaching that was a consistent theme that showed up in every school leaders' interview.

The majority of the school leaders also discussed the strong relationship they had with their teachers rated as effective. Makayla highlighted her "open-door policy involved effectively-rated teachers to ask clarifying questions, give suggestions, or share something they would like to try to do". Because she trusts this group of teachers, she encourages them to take the risk and try what they are suggesting with the compliments of her guidance and support. Michael mentioned open office hours as well, he discussed that "they serve as a safe space for honest conversations where effectively-rated teachers

can share their needs, wants, successes, and challenges". Helen shared, teachers rated as effective feel comfortable asking for resources or help during their conversations because of the trust that has been built. Summer stated, "Open dialogue is used to build relationships and positive school cultures with effectively-rated teachers for teacher retention." David uses these types of conversations to show and "take the burdens that he can of his effectively-rated teachers" to support their retention. Riley continued with the same concepts when describing how her leadership actions influenced her teachers rated as effective to include open lines of communication, offering resources to enhance instruction, and providing leadership opportunities in and out of the schoolhouse.

The final theme that emerged in the data collection was teacher leadership. Every school leader described how he or she developed leadership in their teachers rated as effective and that they believed when effectively teachers used their voice and leadership in the building they were influenced to stay. Every school leader created opportunities for the teachers rated as effective to mentor novice teachers. Michael shared that teachers rated as effective were selected to mentor because they were tenured teachers with content knowledge who knew how to have success in a Title I school. The mentors support practice of the novice teachers varied by school, but the purpose was to share best practices.

One school in this study qualified United States Department of Education's Teacher School Leader grant to improve teacher hiring, placement, support, and retention in high need schools (District website, 2020). District personnel require interviews, requires a portfolio of teaching and learning successes, a stipend teachers rated as

effective who mentor novice teachers at select high need Title I schools (District website, 2020). At all other schools, mentors were selected based on the potential the leader saw in them. Kennedy gave examples about how she used the existing teacher leaders and then cultivated new teacher leaders based on the potential she saw in them. Michael talked about how his school asks teachers rated as effective to serve as grade level chairs, who offer support to novice teachers entering grade, classroom management, or to model best instructional practices on learning walks.

Another example is New Teacher Academy, every school but one offers this. The academies are led by teachers rated as effective and topics driven by the districts required learning for novice teachers and trends in the building. Riley shared, teachers rated as effective lead professional development and collaborative planning based on their expertise, the feeling of ownership with school initiative influences the effectively-rated teacher to stay. Summer said teachers rated as effective are always trying to build on their current knowledge and eager to model and share it with others. Teresa gave examples of her teachers rated as effective sharing best practices at collaborative planning with their teams and then being asked by school leaders to share with the full staff at staff meetings. Finally, Makayla shared about how her school has a partnership with a local university that allows her effectively-rated teachers to mentor student teachers, this partnership encourages effectively-rated teachers to return because they are offered incentives to participate in the program that is only offered at this type of school. Additionally, Summer discussed how leading professional development extended to teachers rated as

effective sharing information for the parents during Parent Teacher Organization meetings.

These teachers' unique teacher leadership experiences that are found at a Title I school to deepen their current practice or leadership opportunities, such as a district mentor teacher, ILT, assistant principal, or eventually principal. Teacher voice was a clear category that emerged with teacher leadership. When teachers feel that they have a voice, they are more vested in the school community overall because they are a part of the decision-making process. Helen stated that these teachers felt comfortable bringing their ideas and suggestions to the school leaders and full staff and offer a pulse of the school about the successes and challenges with the school initiatives.

Kennedy found it important to share the school data with the effectively rated teachers on her instructional leadership team to help the full staff understand the data behind the decision and be a part of the decision-making process. Teacher voice is used at Jennifer's school to allow teachers rated as effective to select the topics for differentiated professional development. By effectively offering teachers a voice in the selection of the topics, they can use their influence to get all teachers on board to implement the strategies discussed. David said that teacher leaders are able to discuss next steps and resources with expertise that extends to their colleagues and school leaders. He goes on to say that when teachers rated as effective have a voice in the decision-making process, they feel heard and respected, which creates a culture that retains them.

Archival school climate data. School climate surveys provided an opportunity to triangulate the information provided by the participants during the interviews. The archival data supported that school leaders' perception that the effective leadership was evident at their schools, with an average of 70% agreement rate of surveyed staff. Effective leadership was defined on the district website as the "principal communicates his/her vision/goals to all stakeholders and he/she is knowledgeable about and supports/promotes best practices to advance student learning (District website, 2020)." Cromwell, Cedar Hill, and Bethune have the highest scores in the areas of effective leadership with scores showing agreement of more than ¾ of the staff. These three schools have instructional leadership teams (ILT) that help execute the vision/goals of the school, which would be a support in understanding the principals' missions. Cornerstone only has one school leader, while the other schools in this study have 2, this could be a factor in a slightly lower rating, because only one person may be viewed as taking on the heavy lift of this indicator. Longfellow has the lowest rating (50%) in this area. Longfellow's principal clearly articulated the importance of having a "good administrator who is personable" and his assistant described the best practices of being "present in classrooms to provide immediate feedback and model". I could postulate that Longfellow may not be strategic about creating opportunities to have the principal communicate his vision and goals.

Archival climate survey data related to the perception of teacher involvement in decision making averaged an agreement rate of 65% of surveyed staff. The data shows evidence of some alignment between the school leaders' perceptions and the beliefs of

the staff. Teacher involvement in decision making was defined as "teachers in the school are involved in and can influence decisions regarding school operations" (District website, 2017). Cornerstone, Cromwell, Cedar Hill has similar rates of teacher agreement in the area of teacher involvement in decision making. Each of these schools has at a minimum, an informal ILT that includes teacher leaders, which meets to make decision in the school. Longfellow was an outlier with the lowest agreement rate (29%), it did not describe the presence of an ILT at their school. While Bethune had the highest agreement rate (89%) and has a formal ILT, which is a part of the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program. These data indicated that this given population, the presence of an ILT improved the agreement rate of teachers as it relates to their involvement with decision making.

Archival climate survey data related to the perception of relevant professional development scored over 90% staff agreement at the majority of schools with the exception of Longfellow, where the agreement rate was 59%. This shows evidence of alignment between the school leaders' perception and the beliefs of the staff at all but one school. Relevant professional developments were defined as, "professional development opportunities that are aligned with teachers' needs are available, and teachers' participation are encouraged." (District website, 2017). Cornerstone, Cromwell, Cedar Hill, and Bethune had similar rates of teacher agreement in the area of relevant professional development. Every school described their offerings of weekly collaborative planning, novice teacher mentoring, coaching for struggling teachers or to push highly effective teachers, and afterschool professional development. All schools shared how

their effectively rated teachers offer professional development to their teams or the full staff in the form of workshops at meetings and collaborative planning and mentoring. The four highest performing schools also offered a new teacher academy, at minimum monthly afterschool professional development, and had grade level team chair positions. Longfellow was an outlier with the lowest agreement rate (59%), it did not describe the presence of a new teacher academy, grade level leads, and offers afterschool professional development quarterly. These data indicated that this given population, the presence of informal professional development from a grade level leader, more frequent professional development opportunities after school, and a new teacher academy garnered higher agreement rates with staff as it relates to relevant professional development.

Table 4

Achieved Climate Survey Results (Selected Elements with Percent of Staff Agreement)

	Cornerstone	Longfellow	Cromwell	Cedar Hill	Bethune
Effective leadership	63.60%	50.00%	78.60%	78.60%	79.50%
Teacher involvement in decision making	68.20%	29.40%	68.00%	68.00%	88.90%
Relevant professional development	95.50%	58.80%	96.00%	96.00%	91.70%

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Qualitative studies require that the research study's findings be credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable to be considered trustworthy (Nowell et al., 2017). With this burden, it is required that data analysis be completed in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and disclosing the methods of analysis with enough specificity to enable the reader of the study to determine whether the process is credible (Nowell et al., 2017). The internal credibility of the research used to aid me in feeling confident about the truth of the study's findings. Participants were selected from the school district I am affiliated with. Emails requesting consent to the principals who met the study's criteria were sent and those who agreed to participate responded with the message, "I consent". Member checking was done to review the accuracy of the participant's narrative responses. and the research findings were shared with participants to verify the accuracy of what was recorded. NVivo qualitative data analysis software was used to organize the interview and archived climate survey data. A peer review allowed for adherence to the process and prevented bias from the research. Finally, saturation was addressed by interviewing nine school leaders and with the thorough review of the district climate survey for each of the participating schools.

Transferability

Ravitch & Carl (2016) described the ability of applying a study to a broader context as transferability. The data must also be transferable to other similar situations,

meaning that a reader of this study, such as principals of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools can apply the study's findings to help retain effective teachers. Transferability through a thick, holistic view of the narrative was provided along with a detailed account of the location, time, conditions, and circumstances under which the data was collected (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278). In this case, transferability was established when the purposeful random sample was used across multiple Title I schools to obtain nine school leaders' perception through interviews to allow for variation in participant selection. The selection process included five school principals and their four assistant principals at five middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools across a given district. Finally, the data analysis allowed the study to be decontextualized for use at similar school types.

Dependability

Qualitative studies require that the data collected is dependable, and that is accomplished with triangulation and a member check. First, the interview transcripts data were reviewed by the study participants to ensure the accuracy of the data collected. Participants had the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the data. Participants did not find any necessary revisions. The data was triangulated by reviewing the information from multiple sources for the phenomena of study. For example, the school leaders are employed at different elementary school sites. Additionally, interviews of school leaders were compared with the archived climate survey data. The data served as the required triangulation that Patton describes as the exploration of information across multiple sources. Finally, a member check was

completed to ensure I did not misunderstand the information they provided and found accurate major themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278).

Confirmability

Data were confirmed through reflexivity, and I completed a self-reflection about my own bias, preferences, and preconceptions. With this process, researchers reflect on how their role in the study and their personal background, culture, and experiences could shape their interpretation of themes in the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p.278). While engaged in the data collection, as the researcher, I did not use my background as a former principal of a high-poverty, low-achieving school to be the lens for how I interpret the data and define themes. I recorded all interviews and had them transcribed to maintain the integrity of participants and study. I relied on the transcribed data and only used what was explicitly said without personal bias. Providing the study participants', the opportunity to review their transcripts, supported the establishment of confirmability. Finally, a review to check for themes with the member check helped develop the confirmability in this study. The combination of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability allowed for a trustworthy study.

Summary

In this study, I researched the perceptions of school leaders with the retention of teachers rated as effective. The research questions explored what school leaders describe as the needs and supports that help effective teachers stay in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools and how school leaders describe their support in the retention of effectively-rated teachers in middle- to high-poverty, low achieving schools.

I found that school leaders used three main principles to retain their e teachers rated as effective: nurturing environment, teacher leadership, and effective school leadership.

Participants identified that teachers rated as effective need a common mission of educating students with high needs and the collaboration to address the challenges associated with educating high need students. Participants also shared that this group of teachers has expertise that they are willing to share with multiple stakeholders, which creates a sense of feeling needed and quality, connected relationships. These teachers rated as effective are also comfortable sharing their ideas with school leaders and want to be a part of the decision-making processes at the school. They are willing to lead initiatives, share ideas with school leadership, as well as fix problems because their leadership empowers them. Finally, the school leaders discussed how they use open communication and specific leadership actions to retain their effective teachers. No participants referenced any specific training or coursework when determining what they deemed were best practices in retaining teachers rated as effective. Instead, participants relied on their own experiences as teachers rated as effective to guide the choices they made to retain teachers rated as effective. In Chapter 5, I provided a more detailed discussion of the study's findings. The study's limitations and my recommendations are also discussed further.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify in retaining teachers rated as effective. This study took place at five Title I elementary schools in a diverse, mostly African American school district in the Mideastern United States. By acquiring a better understanding of retention elements of teachers rated as effective, school leaders of similar school types can implement these elements to retain their effective teachers. This practice has the potential to improve student achievement in middle- to high-poverty, low achieving schools.

I found that school leaders used three approaches to retain their teachers rated as effective: a nurturing environment, teacher leadership opportunities, and effective school leadership. Each school leader interviewed was able to discuss how their experience in the Title I school setting allowed them to observe the elements that they believe influence the retention of the teachers rated as effective. Therefore, they were intentional about maintaining and building on the elements that are viewed as influencing the retention of effective teachers.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this chapter, I discuss in detail the conclusions based on the data collected and analyzed via categorization and theme identification. The themes followed similar findings to those of Simon and Johnson (2015), who asserted that vital working conditions for teachers are school leadership, workplace relationships, and job design.

Key finding 1. School leaders of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools, struggle to retain teachers. High teacher attrition in these types of schools confirms the need for school leaders to determine what elements in their control can be used to retain teachers rated as effective. A nurturing environment was observed as the most significant influence on retaining effective teachers. Teachers were willing to work in school environments where there was a common mission to educate students who had the greatest needs and where they felt nurtured and respected as professionals. A common theme among the responses of every school was that teachers rated as effective believed they could use their expertise to educate the students with the highest need. The observation was that types of teachers felt called to working in these types of schools and were confident that their work would result in improved student achievement. Wronowski (2017) confirmed the need for respect for teachers in the schoolhouse as many teachers who exited the profession did so because they did not feel valued or respected as professionals. Offering a positive work setting was a method to retain teachers (Wronowski, 2017).

It was also determined that there was a need to develop a strong school culture where teachers felt supported as professionals. The term that resonated was family. Newberry and Allsop (2017) confirmed that teacher retention improves when their emotional needs are supported through their relationships with colleagues, which foster employee growth and well-being. The work relationships help support meaningfulness and are highly influential in the satisfaction in the work environment (Newberry & Allsop, 2017). The principal is also a part of the desired support for teacher retention. A

supportive principal is critical to creating a school where students and teachers flourish (Redding, 2020). The school leaders perceived that teachers rated as effective develop strong relationships with their peers, leaders, and families, which influences them to stay. In these relationships, the effective teachers collaborate to build their skillset and educate others.

Key finding 2. School leaders of middle- to high-poverty schools would benefit from understanding what support they can offer to retain teachers rated as effective. One of the most effective elements was offering teacher leadership opportunities that allowed teachers to use their expertise and voice. Abitabile (2020) suggested recruiting veteran teachers to take on leadership roles to include mentoring. Correspondingly, Glazer (2020) supported this finding with the recommendation to gain teacher voice in decision making about school policy and how they are implemented to improve teacher retention. School leaders cultivated the leadership of teachers rated as effective to lead grade-level teams, mentor novice teachers, and serve or lead committees and task forces. Teacher leadership supports overall teacher retention because novice teachers are more likely to seek out experienced colleagues than school leaders (Abitabile, 2020). Leading provides ownership within the school community, which positively influences retention. Holdheide and Lachlan-Hache' (2019) substantiate the claim that teachers should be professionally developed to become effective and then cultivated in teacher leaders to improve the retention of effective teachers and student achievement.

Finally, effective school leadership was perceived to influence the retention of effective teachers. School leader interviews shared how they maintained open lines of

communication to guide teachers rated as effective. Abitabile (2020) confirmed that when school leaders are highly visible and have a high level of interactions with staff and students, the communication is improved. With high levels of communication, student achievement and teacher retention increase (Abitabile, 2020). The participants reported being intentional about their leadership actions, which included visibility, the coordination of resources, and differentiated supports to help these types of teachers grow. The research indicated the retention of teachers is done with the application of effective leadership practices that meet the needs of the school and faculty (Jones & Watson, 2017).

Limitations of the Study

The small sample size could have served as a potential weakness in this qualitative study. However, it met the requirements for a qualitative case study. Creswell & Creswell (2018) recommend 5-25 participants, which was supported by Morse (1994), who suggested a minimum of six participants. The study included the responses of nine school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools within one local education agency in a single state. It was not feasible to interview every school leader in all of the middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving elementary schools in the selected district, which would have included over 60 school leaders.

Another limitation was that a purposeful sample was needed. The study could only include middle- to high-poverty, low achieving elementary schools. Rather than reach out to schools blindly and hope for continued collaboration, which can be very

difficult in a doctoral study, I reached out to schools within my network that were willing to cooperate fully. To address the limitation, I stayed in communication with the school leaders about my timelines, and they had an interest in understanding the elements and supports that helped to retain their teachers rated as effective.

The final limitation was that I was only allowed to interview school leaders to explore the retention elements with effective teachers. The organization I am affiliated with would not allow me to interview teachers rated as effective because that would require them to share a list of teachers who are so rated, which is not allowed as it is confidential personnel information. Therefore, there was the concern about the data being overwhelmingly positive because the participants would share the support that they believe their school offered and may overestimate their extent of support. To address this concern, which could have been a limitation to the study, I reminded participants before the interview that their responses could not be linked to them. I also shared with the participants that pseudonyms would be used and that the information collected would not serve as an evaluation of their performance.

Recommendations

One recommendation for future studies is to expand the scope of the study to include the perspective of teacher leaders. The teacher leaders could be interviewed or complete a questionnaire to explore their perceptions. These teachers are typically high performing and have effective ratings, which allows them to lead. That would provide another perspective about the influences that retain teachers rated as effective. It would not require the school district to share confidential personnel information.

Another recommendation for a future study would be to review the retention rates of each specific school. This data point would offer quantitative data to determine how well the retention practices are working across time. The school leaders would have to review their retention data during their tenure as the school leader to see how many teachers rated as effective returned annually. School leaders could use the information to monitor the effectiveness of their retention practices for teachers rated as effective.

Implications

The findings of this study displayed the importance of strategically coordinating leadership efforts to support the retention of teachers rated as effective. In this study, creating a nurturing school environment, providing teachers leadership opportunities, and using intentional leadership actions positively influenced the retention of teachers rated as effective. This study found that while the schools had practices that they believed influenced retention of teachers rated as effective, no school had a defined plan to do so. If middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools had the best practices in mind and were able to map out a plan to retain effective teachers, they would have the potential to improve retention of teachers rated as effective. Improving the retention of these types of teachers increases the likelihood of improving student achievement overall.

Social Change at the Organizational Level

All school leaders interviewed had taken leadership actions they believed were retaining their effective teachers, but they lacked a strategic plan to do so. To maximize retention of teachers rated as effective, a plan would need to be created. The Title I elementary school leaders could unite at the district level to create a comprehensive list of

retention methods collected from the other school leaders that have proven effective. The district could provide a retention plan template that would be shared with the Title I elementary schools. The leadership team at each Title I elementary school site could use the template to develop a retention plan based on the school's unique needs and characteristics. The plan would need to be progress monitored to ensure the retention methods were being implemented effectively. The results of the study would be reviewed annually when the principals of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools review the retention data. The strategic and individualized approach would help school leaders retain the teachers who increase student achievement in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I school environments

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore the perceptions of school leaders in middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving Title I schools to understand better the elements and support they identify as helping to retain teachers rated as effective. Interviews with school leaders and the review of archived climate data provided insight into the existing structures and existing leadership methods that support the retention of teachers rated as effective. The focus on increasing effective teacher retention centers on the actions of the school leaders. Creating a nurturing school environment, providing teacher leadership opportunities, and effective leadership were themes that emerged for all school leaders in the data analysis. The needs that emerged from the research is to shift from ad hoc methods to retain teachers rated as effective to a strategic plan. The school leaders of middle- to high-poverty, low-achieving schools continue to battle

higher teacher attrition than non-Title I schools. With a comprehensive plan for effective teacher retention that is implemented, and progress monitored, the school leaders have the potential to increase retention, which has a high probability of increasing student achievement and sustaining long-term positive social change.

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Appendix: Interview Guide for School Leaders

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Pseudonym/Code:
Location of Interview:
Years in a Title I School:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	Hello, my name is Jessica Johnson. Thank you for taking time to participate in this interview. As a reminder, the purpose of this interview is to understand your perception of why effectively-rated teachers stay working at a high need school year after year. This interview should last approximately 40 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. I will not identify you by name in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your responses. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. This interview will be recorded for transcription purposes only. ● Do you have any questions? ● Are you ready to begin?
Question 1	Why do you believe that your effectively-rated teachers stay at a mid/high-poverty, low-achieving school? Probing questions: 1. Are there any particular needs that you feel that you and/or your team are meeting at the school that cause effective

	teachers to stay? 2. What support do you and/or your team offer that you believe influences effective teachers to stay?
Question 2	Research Question 2: What kind of supports does the school leadership offer that you believe influences effectively-rated teachers to stay? Probing Questions: 1. Is coaching or mentoring offered? 2. Do you offer professional development? What are the topics? How often? 3. What is your relationship with your effective teacher(s)? What kind of support, assistance, or resources do you provide?
Close	Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you would like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time, have a good evening.