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Challenges Faced by Executive Leaders at Schools for the Deaf

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Hiring and sustaining qualified executive leaders at schools and programs for the Deaf continue to be challenging for board members and communities. More information is needed to understand issues contributing to the retention and recruitment of these executive leaders. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to understand factors that contribute to retention and recruitment in these positions and to learn possible solutions for overcoming challenges. An economic labor market theory for superintendents informed the study. Data were collected via interviews with 11 executive leaders from public and private schools for the Deaf from different regions of the United States; the schools varied in size and enrolled students from preschool through 12th grade. Interviews were video recorded and transcribed into written English for coding and thematic analysis. Participants identified concerns including inadequate preparation for the role specifics, challenges of the scope of responsibilities and stressors of the position, the need to defend the worth of these schools, skills needed for working with a governing board, inadequate compensation, and the locations of the schools. Participants expressed a need for more support, continuing education, mentoring, and enhanced compensation. Key recommendations included increasing preparation programs for and enhancing ongoing leadership training in Deaf education, enhancing the capacity of the schools for succession planning, providing mentoring for individuals within existing programs to become executive leaders, and focusing on the positive elements of the schools and their locations when recruiting executive leaders. Improving and stabilizing the leadership capacity within the schools elevates the quality of education provided to Deaf and hard-of-hearing students and leads to positive social change.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Executive leaders are in high demand at schools for the deaf across the United States (US). For the purposes of this study, I use the term executive leader to be inclusive of superintendents, chief executive officers, executive directors, and others who act as senior leaders of schools for the deaf. Constant change in senior leadership at schools for the deaf is well documented (Fischgrund & Tucker, 2018; Kamm-Larew & Lamkin, 2008; LaSasso & Achtzehn, 2012). These leaders are responsible for many demanding activities. Executive leaders must ensure that special education law is honored for each deaf and hard-of-hearing student. They are tasked with providing services to a very specialized group of students, managing rapidly changing societal perspectives. At the same time, high-stakes testing involves scrutinizing the academic performance of students and schools. These leaders must understand and wisely use funding sources to operate schools and programs. Budgetary restraints and critical shortages in this specialized field of deaf education can cause difficulties in terms of maintaining highly qualified professionals and staffing structures. Positive and collaborative relationships with school boards and other relevant stakeholders (i.e., the Deaf community, parents, and local communities) are necessary for schools and programs to operate efficiently (Andrews & Covell, 2006; Keller, 2015). However, stakeholders can often be at odds with other groups, further exacerbating problems. Opposing philosophies and methodologies involving language use of deaf students can also polarize professionals in deaf education (Thompson, 2016). Since these schools require leaders with very specialized skills beyond traditional leadership abilities, these leaders have been difficult

to replace as there are few qualified individuals to assume these roles. These additional skills include fluent use of American Sign Language (ASL), understanding special education law as it applies to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and the history of deaf education and ability to comfortably interact with Deaf community members (Keller, 2015).

Owing to the unique nature of schools for the deaf, their location is critical to understand findings of this case study involving retention and recruitment of their top leaders. Grissom and Andersen (2012) said, place-based characteristics help define working conditions that impact executive leader attrition. The unique nature of these schools adds a level of complexity to sustaining the health and function of programming. Under these circumstances, these schools are unique compared to other educational entities and district superintendent roles. These schools have a smaller number of students than other district superintendents. They only provide education to students with hearing loss. Many of the state schools report directly to their governor, State Board of Education, or a board of regents. Budgets for these schools are developed differently compared to how other district budgets are structured.

Location of these schools is a critical factor that must be considered in the context of retention and recruitment of executive leaders. At a school for the deaf, the allure of an executive leader position may be tempered by the fact that it may require a move to another state. Superintendents at typical schools can move from one district to another without moving from their home. However, executive leaders at schools for the deaf must consider ramifications of moving to another state. Many reasons could prevent such a

move. Grissom and Andersen (2012) said location of a school has an impact on the ability of the school to recruit and retain executive leaders, and this problem is exacerbated at schools for the deaf.

The relationship between the executive leader and the governing board is critical in terms of the concept of attrition in these roles. Grissom and Andersen (2012) said a main issue with retention of superintendents are high-conflict or negative relationships with their governing board. Positive working relationships in which individuals are aligned with the same goals makes for a positive experience. However, poor alignment can cause conflict between the executive leader and the board (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). The internal dynamic of a governing board has a strong correlation with superintendent attrition. This conflict can end relationships between governing boards and executive leaders regardless of the performance of the leader.

With these challenges in mind, it was crucial to understand executive leaders' needs and the depth of problems they encounter as they juggle these responsibilities and unique concerns. Results of this study will help determine these difficulties and their impact on the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Understanding issues involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at public and private schools and programs for the deaf can help explain underlying factors impacting these issues and how they can be reduced to maintain stability in the workforce for these positions. Solutions to factors impacting retention and recruitment of executive leaders are presented. Reducing turnover of these leaders will lead to stability for students, programs, and the schools they oversee.

I highlight the background that created this environment at schools for the deaf and articulate the problem involving the existing educational environment for schools and programs for the deaf. Definitions and assumptions involving the field of education for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are used to understand this topic of study. Understanding factors involving retention and recruitment of these highly specialized positions is essential in terms of solving these challenges.

A broad understanding of deaf education and its history with specific information regarding how critical issues impact the field is shared. A history of the field of deaf and special education establishes necessary background knowledge to comprehend the value of the study. The study includes information about laws and skills necessary to manage and administer at these specialized schools. Finally, a study of various positions impacting succession planning of schools and programs for the deaf provides more insight to understand the problem.

This study was intended to gather information from superintendents at schools for the deaf throughout the US using a case study approach with interviews as the data source. This approach to research is recommended for addressing key questions in the field of deaf education (Enns, 2017). Interviews were intended to understand challenges these executive leaders face that affect retention and recruitment. Findings of the case study are analyzed and shared, culminating in recommendations for future study that may help the field of deaf education.

Background

Since the formalization of education of the deaf and hard-of-hearing children in 1760 by the French priest Charles Michael de l'Eppe, there has always been a leader of specialized schools for Deaf and hard-of-hearing children (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). This has helped to shape the current structure of deaf education. Initially, most deaf educators were ecclesiastical leaders wanting to teach deaf children about God and recognized the need for literacy to make that happen (Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012). Some early teachers used a form of hand gestures and sign-based communication or intensely focused on the development of speech in deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

In the US, no formalized education for deaf children existed until 1817, when wealthy families hired tutors to informally educate their deaf and hard-of-hearing children in the privacy of their homes. In Hartford, Connecticut, Doctor Mason Cogswell was concerned about the educational wellbeing of his daughter Alice, who was deaf. At the time, hearing loss was treated as a mental illness. Nevertheless, Dr. Cogswell hoped that his daughter was educable when he encountered Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, who took an interest in educating Alice. In hopes of providing a formalized education for his daughter, Dr. Cogswell and several other wealthy patrons paid to send Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet to Europe to learn their approaches for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing children (Moores, 2010).

When Thomas Gallaudet returned from his travels in 1817, he brought Laurent Clerc, a French teacher of the deaf, from Paris. Upon their return to Hartford, they commenced teaching Alice Cogswell, and soon after, more deaf students joined the class.

This teaching of Alice Cogswell is considered the first formalized education of deaf students in America. This small class of students would later build into the American School for the Deaf, the oldest permanent school for the deaf in America (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002).

Shortly after establishing this school in the east, other schools for deaf children spread throughout the west (Knudson, 2003). This growth led to the establishment of at least one school for the Deaf in almost every state. Despite this spread of schools, several schools have been shut down, and now there are currently seven states (Hawaii, Nebraska, Wyoming, Nevada, New Hampshire, South Dakota, and Vermont) with no school for the deaf. In 12 states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Utah), there is more than one school or campus for deaf and hard-of-hearing students (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018, 2021).

Development of administration in these schools paralleled public schools (Knudson, 2003). Many deaf school early administrators were deaf or hard-of-hearing themselves (Keller, 2015; Knudson, 2003; Lane, 1984). As schools for the deaf have increased in enrollment, the need for additional leadership positions increased proportionately. This necessitated the development of a hierarchy in terms of leadership at these schools. This hierarchy has typically included principals, directors of instruction, and executive leaders, often known as superintendents.

However, schools for the deaf have not kept pace with the demand for developing educational leaders from within these specialized schools. There is a lack of qualified

candidates to assume executive leaders' roles for these specialized schools. According to Keller (2015), 85% of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing agreed there is a shortage of applicants for executive leadership positions. Schools for the deaf are reporting severe difficulties in terms of recruiting executive leaders into these roles. Lack of leaders to fill even principal roles has impacted this critical shortage of executive leaders at these schools.

In addition to the limited number of applicants for executive leadership positions, there is a high turnover rate of individuals in these roles (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). These pivotal roles require a great deal of experience and education in the classroom, working with deaf and hard-of-hearing students, and managing educational services and resources. These leaders must demonstrate the value of their schools and programs in an educational landscape that encourages mainstreaming deaf and hard-of-hearing students back into typical public schools. The roles of schools for the deaf are often in question considering the high costs to run these specialized schools. While defending the value of schools for the deaf, executive leaders must often work with legislatures to request funding, manage budgetary stresses, find specialized educators qualified to teach the student body, and deal with human resource concerns, in addition to other issues, while maintaining the delicate balance of opposing philosophies within these schools.

Unique skillsets are cultivated in educator and principal roles before one can achieve these specialized executive roles. There is a critical need to develop candidates who are ready to take leadership roles within schools for the deaf and retain executive leaders currently in these positions. This case study involved investigating the gap in

practice contributing to problems with retention and recruitment of these executive leadership roles at these schools and programs for the deaf.

Problem Statement

The problem is that there is significant struggle at schools and programs for the deaf across the US to hire and retain qualified executive leaders (Fischgrund & Tucker, 2018; LaSasso & Achtzehn, 2012). Some titles for executive leadership include the superintendent, headmaster, head of school, executive director, and chief executive officer. According to the 2018 reference edition of the American Annals of the Deaf*,* a peer-reviewed journal focused on deaf education research, there are 66 schools for the deaf throughout the US serving students from preschool through 12th grade using ASL as a basis of communication. During the 2018-19 school year, two of eight vacant executive leadership positions across the nation were filled by individuals with no background in deaf education. From 2012, these executive leadership positions have remained unfilled or reposted later in hopes of finding qualified candidates (Fischgrund & Tucker, 2018). Andrews and Covell (2006) said, "there are insufficient numbers of deaf professionals being trained for leadership positions" (p. 472). They predicted that a third of the teaching and administration workforce would reach retirement age, and upcoming students were not predicted to seek teaching positions (Andrews & Covell, 2006). Taylor and Youngs (2018) said leadership succession in deaf education was now a significant issue in New Zealand. They noted narrow applicant pools and high stakes testing environments negatively impacted deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

LaSasso and Achtzehn (2012) said schools for the deaf struggle to fill teaching and administrative positions. Taylor and Youngs (2018) said in New Zealand, leaders of deaf schools recommended that the field of deaf education must act, or there may be an issue with retention and recruitment of quality leaders at schools for the deaf. They asserted that leadership succession strategies must support future leaders and create conditions where research translates into practice. Otherwise, these roles will remain vacant or underfilled, with individuals who lack necessary skill sets for these specialized roles, and retention and recruitment concerns will continue to negatively affect executive leadership at schools for the deaf.

Among schools for the deaf, there are several categories of schools: residential schools, day schools, public schools, private schools, charter schools, oral only schools, and district-based programs (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018, 2021). Within these schools, students receive services in general education core curricula, language, and speech therapy. Some schools for the deaf only focus on developing oral language and typically only serve students up to the 2nd grade. Other schools for the deaf include instruction in ASL and continue to provide educational services until age 22. Many of these schools offer residential facilities for students (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2018). For this study, the focus was on public and private schools for the deaf that serve students from preschool through age 22 using ASL and English in residential and day school programs. Given current and worsening leadership shortages, this study was needed to explore factors executive leaders at schools for the deaf face that contribute to retention and recruitment challenges and

identify what can be done to mitigate these challenges. Additional information from these leaders can lead to recommendations to potentially fill these roles and assist in understanding reasons upcoming leaders either do or do not chose to consider these positions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate factors that contribute to problems with retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the nation. Increasing understanding of challenges faced by these executives was needed to reduce turnover in these positions and maintain qualified leaders in these positions. A case study approach can be used to shift research to strength-based approaches for deaf education (Enns, 2017). This case study included interviews of executive leaders that describe current dynamics impacting retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. As case studies are a form of problem-based learning, this approach allowed me to improve learning, gain knowledge, and apply that knowledge to the gap in practice and add information to this body of research. By studying this phenomenon, recommendations were developed to mitigate this gap in practice.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do leaders of schools for the deaf describe factors contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US?

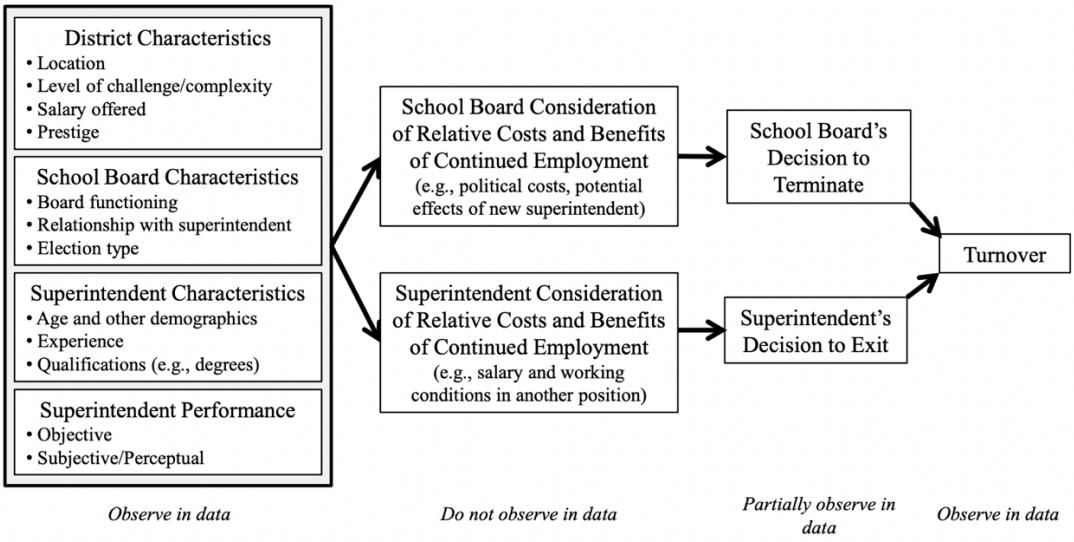
RQ2: What solutions do executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the United States believe would help resolve issues involving retention and recruitment in these executive leadership positions?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of the economic labor market model for superintendents developed by Grissom and Andersen (2012) was used to analyze this study (see Figure 1). Economic labor market models have been widely applied to the study of turnover among teachers and school-level administrators (Baker et al., 2010; Guarino et al., 2006). When applied to executive leaders, including superintendents at schools for the deaf, turnover is a two-sided decision between labor supply and demand. The superintendent, or labor supply, considers costs and benefits of staying in the current position against the value of other options. Districts or school boards similarly weigh costs and benefits of retaining current superintendents against the alternative of letting them go in favor of the next best candidate or labor demand (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

Figure 1

Framework for Understanding Superintendent Turnover



Note. From "Why Superintendents Turnover," by J. A. Grissom and S. Andersen, 2012, *American Education Research Journal, 49*(6), p. 47. http://dx.doi.org/10.3102/0002831212462622 Reprinted with permission.

The main advantage of applying the labor market theory as a conceptual framework for analyzing superintendent retention and recruitment is that it aids in identifying which factors are likely to affect decisions made by either superintendents or their school boards. This theory involves considering such factors as salary, superintendent working conditions, and alternatives available to the executive leader. From the district or governing board's perspective, this framework involves factors that might make other candidates for the superintendent position relatively more attractive, such as poor performance by the current executive leader. This conceptual framework is

important due to consideration of forces that operate on both the superintendent and school board.

This perspective on superintendent retention and recruitment incorporates workforce decisions that do not involve moves to other districts and retirements by including other possibilities and their costs and benefits in terms of choices that superintendents consider when making employment decisions. Moreover, it can also include community dissatisfaction as a factor that increases the governing board's political cost of retaining the superintendent or seeking a replacement, which in turn increases the probability of involuntary turnover (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

This framework shows retention and recruitment can occur from either school board decisions to terminate a superintendent or a superintendent's decision to exit, which are determined by respective considerations of relative costs and benefits of retaining the superintendent (for the school board) and staying in the district (for the superintendent). Grissom and Andersen (2012) described four characteristics of retention and recruitment of superintendents: district characteristics, school board characteristics (including the relationship between the superintendent and the school board), superintendent characteristics, and performance. District characteristics include location, community socioeconomic status, student race and ethnicity, per-pupil spending, and district size. School board characteristics measure how school board members work together with superintendents. Some characteristics include how they communicate with the board and govern the district and how this affects the relationship between the school board and superintendent. Superintendent characteristics include gender, age, and number

of years the superintendent has held their current position. Other measures include the superintendent's academic preparation and competitiveness of the undergraduate program from which the superintendent graduated. Additionally, Grissom and Andersen (2012) studied whether the superintendent of these districts reported having been promoted to the position from within the school district or not. The final characteristic is superintendent performance. This factor includes the superintendent's formal and informal evaluations, including an objective measure of growth for the district based on standardized test scores of student performance (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

As perceptions of executive leaders at schools for the deaf were gathered regarding retention and recruitment of these positions, the economic labor market model for superintendents developed by Grissom and Andersen helped in terms of understanding factors impacting the issues involving retention and recruitment of these specialized executive leaders. Using the four characteristics described by Grissom and Andersen, relevant patterns in data were highlighted. This has the potential to improve current conditions of these positions.

Nature of the Study

A case study involves a comprehensive study of an issue within a specific community group and involves in-depth information instead of gathering broad data. Case studies emphasize full analysis of a problem and its interrelations with other challenges. This case study involved identifying unique factors that contribute to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US. To fully understand how leaders of schools for the deaf describe these factors, a case

study approach was used to provide a thorough understanding of this problem by addressing issues faced by professionals in these roles. One form of gathering information as a part of a case study is to interview individuals closely associated with the situation being studied. Through interviews, rich personal information was gained from executive leaders currently serving in these positions about factors that may affect retention and recruitment of these positions. Personal experiences were shared by executive leaders during interviews involving factors that are often overlooked.

Understanding this phenomenon involved understanding issues these leaders face that contribute to retention and recruitment in these positions. As rich conversations occurred regarding the subject of retention and recruitment in these highly specialized positions, I video-recorded interviews and took notes about gathered data. Interviews were transcribed into written English and reviewed for common themes and patterns among respondents.

Since this study involves a human dynamic requiring an in-depth understanding of what happens to executive leaders that may lead to retention and recruitment issues, the case study design helped me understand underlying experiences, reasons, opinions, and factors affecting this problem. Using a case study tradition, I gained insights into the problem while addressing thoughts and opinions of superintendents of schools.

Definitions

The following terms are defined to help the reader understand the context of each term in this study.

American Sign Language (ASL): A visual-gestural language with its own unique grammar and syntax rules. Like all languages, ASL is a living language that grows and changes over time. ASL is used predominantly in the US and many parts of Canada (National Association of the Deaf, 2020a).

ASL/English: A philosophical approach to educating deaf and hard-of-hearing children which includes the use of ASL and English in its written form. Use of spoken English among those students who can use speech is promoted. The focus is on development in both languages, although the primary language for communication is ASL (Garate, 2012).

Audism: This is discrimination or prejudice against individuals who are deaf or hard-of-hearing. Humphries (1977) explained this term as, "The notion that one is superior based on one's ability to hear or to behave in the manner of one who hears" (p. 12). This term is applied to individuals and institutions that practice oppression of deaf persons.

Cued Speech: A visual system of communication used with deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This tool involves using different hand shapes near the mouth, known as cues, which identify consonants and vowels that are spoken (Spencer, 2011).

Deaf vs. deaf: "Deaf" is capitalized when used to describe someone whose native language is ASL, and individuals who closely associate with others who identify as culturally Deaf. The lower case "deaf" is used to describe the general term for a hearing loss (Padden & Humphries, 1988).

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): A concept from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that children who receive special education should educate students with disabilities in general education settings to the maximum extent possible (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004)

Listening and Spoken Language (LSL): An approach to teaching a deaf or hard-of-hearing child spoken language through listening. This approach involves focusing on maximizing students' hearing abilities with hearing technology and intensive therapy to acquire spoken language abilities (Hearing First, 2020).

Low Incidence Disability: A severe disabling condition with an expected incidence rate of less than one 1% of total statewide enrollment in special education (Howley et al., 2017). Low incidence disabilities include hard-of-hearing, deafness, visual impairment, orthopedic impairment, and deafblindness.

Seeing Exact English: A manual sign system created in 1945 based on morphemes of English words. It is not a language but an invented system of English (Nielsen et al., 2016).

Signed English: Systems of initialized signs on hands created to represent every spoken English word. It involves using the grammar of spoken English and not the visual grammar structure of ASL (Nielsen et al., 2016).

Assumptions

The first and most fundamental assumption of this study is that respondents were sharing honest and truthful responses to questions. Another assumption was that respondents came from various backgrounds and career journeys that led to their current

positions. This was critical to discovering if findings had any correlations with specific backgrounds. Respondents represented all genders. Gathering information from deaf and hearing individuals led to more well-rounded findings. It was assumed that executive leaders had varying degrees of hearing abilities and communication preferences. It was assumed that all respondents had a postbaccalaureate degree and knowledge of the history of deaf education and critical issues facing leaders in the field of deaf education as well as an understanding of shortages in the field of deaf education, as it was important that participants had a depth and breadth of understanding of this field. I also assumed that executive leaders were comfortable using video conferencing technology for interviews.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this research was limited to executive leaders of public and private schools for the deaf that use ASL and English at day and residential schools for the deaf within the US from preschool through 12th grade and have been in operation for 100 years or more. Although there are numerous executive leaders in mainstream programs for deaf and hard-of-hearing children throughout the US, only executive leaders of public and private self-contained schools for the deaf using sign language and offering day and residential programming for deaf and hard-of-hearing students in preschool to 12th grade for over 100 years were included in this study, as these schools had the time to develop a well-established leadership structure. Executive leaders of schools for the deaf who were solely focused on listening and spoken language for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students were excluded, as these leaders did not need to know ASL and were typically

not involved with the Deaf community. For this study, leaders of charter schools were excluded due in part to the fact that there is a limited leadership hierarchy at these schools, and they have not existed for over 100 years.

Limitations

This case study has limitations. Personal lenses and biases of the researcher are a limitation of any study. As a veteran of more than 23 years in deaf education, I have developed certain notions, ideas, and perspectives that may limit how I perceive and interpret data based on past experiences. To overcome this bias, I took notes during each interview and keep a journal about potential biases. Alternate explanations were considered to create a clear understanding of factors impacting the study.

Although I am a hearing person with native-like proficiency in ASL and have been a part of the culture of Deaf people and a professional in the field of deaf education, there was potential bias when interviewing executive leaders who are culturally Deaf, as they may refrain from fully expressing their concerns to a hearing person. Researcher notes and member checking by another professional in the field of deaf education who is also culturally Deaf helped to mitigate these limitations and ensure that biases were adequately addressed during this case study.

Deafness is a low incidence population, with 1% of the total school population across the US (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). There are only 108 recognized residential and day programs for the deaf in the US (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018, 2021). By focusing only on schools that use ASL to teach students in preschool through 12th grade, the number of schools to include in this

study was significantly reduced. Using these parameters, the total number of executive leaders who could participate was small compared to the total population of students throughout the US. Studying a small and highly specific population can be challenging to apply to a broader context of education that does not involve the constraints of this specialization. For example, the importance of knowing of ASL is not critical in other fields of education.

Furthermore, some participants in this study used ASL as their primary language, necessitating translation considerations and the potential for translation issues. To prevent translation issues, another fluent user of ASL and English verified translation of interviews for accuracy.

Significance

Taylor and Youngs (2018) indicated there is a need for leaders in deaf education to become more proactive in terms of developing new leaders. Alternatively, they warned of a significant decline in the quality of education provided to deaf and hard-of-hearing children if this is not addressed. During conferences and professional meetings with executive leaders from schools for the deaf and in personal conversations at CEASD meetings with other superintendents of these schools, the issues of limited numbers of applicants for educators of the deaf and lack of qualified applicants for leadership roles within schools are recurring themes (Fischgrund & Tucker, 2018).

It is unlikely that schools for the deaf will sustain leadership roles without qualified candidates unless turnover of these positions is reduced (Taylor & Youngs, 2018). The specialized nature of deaf education limits the number of professionals

entering the field as teachers. To become an educator of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, individuals must obtain a bachelor's or master's degree in education of the deaf. Leadership pathways beyond this may not be as clearly established in schools for the deaf.

Beyond the ability to teach special education students, executive leaders must know the intricacies of educating children who have limited access to sound and verbal language. In most higher institutions, to become a teacher of the deaf requires a master's degree. Additionally, deaf education professionals must learn the cultural language of the Deaf, ASL. Typically, higher education institutions graduate an average of six to eight teachers of the deaf per year (Johnson, 2013). Therefore, the number of educators with the appropriate background for deaf education is minimal. This critical shortage of teachers of the deaf (Johnson, 2013) has a ripple effect on leadership roles at schools for the deaf. It is recommended that a leader at a school for the deaf should have been a former educator of the deaf, fluent in ASL, and possess leadership skills (Johnson, 2013). It is difficult to find individuals who have all these traits and are therefore qualified to fill leadership roles in deaf education.

Roberson and Serwatka (2012) raised the importance of involving Deaf adult role models in schools for the deaf. Despite this demonstrated need, there are a minimal number of deaf and hard-of-hearing role models in leadership positions of schools for the deaf (Keller, 2015). I sought to understand all factors that contribute to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the US.

This study was significant because it provides a better understanding of challenges faced by executive leaders that affect retention and recruitment and thus provide ideas for needed social change at schools for the deaf and those individuals considering these positions. Sharing knowledge gained from this case study with schools for the deaf across the US has the potential to create positive social change in terms of retention and recruitment of these executive leadership positions. By addressing issues involving retention and recruitment of these positions, appropriately trained executives may be maintained in roles that, in turn, provide stability for the students they serve. Information collected from this study may allow current executive leaders at schools for the deaf to identify similarities and differences in terms of challenges they face and improve their understanding of dynamics that impact these roles. It may also help them to avoid problems faced by other executive leaders. This shared understanding should lead to positive social change by establishing realistic expectations for these roles and provide possible training for those seeking executive leadership positions in deaf education, thus improving the leadership capacity of schools for the deaf. This improved leadership capacity will strengthen schools' ability to provide quality education to the students they serve.

Summary

Understanding challenges executive leaders at schools for the deaf face in the current climate was worthy of exploration as it relates to the current phenomena of retention and recruitment for these positions. Superintendents of traditional school districts throughout the country are known for high attrition rates. This is exacerbated at

schools for the deaf, where additional skills are needed to run these schools, and the number of individuals possessing these traits is limited. Although executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf manage smaller programs compared to typical district superintendents, lack of qualified professionals to assume these roles makes it more difficult to properly fill these positions. It is essential to better understand retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf since there is already a critical shortage of qualified applicants for these hard-to-fill positions.

This study was conducted to understand difficulties involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. Understanding key reasons for this gap in practice can mitigate potential problems with this unique workforce of executive leaders to maintain the stability of these critical positions for students at schools and programs for the deaf. Influential leaders with the ability to navigate difficulties are necessary for the stability of schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. When there is strong leadership, opportunities for students to thrive increases. This is ultimately the goal of all educational programming for students (Quin et al., 2015).

Limited research has been conducted in the field of deaf education related to educational leadership. This study adds to the body of research involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf using ASL and the impact this has on the field of deaf education. This was intended to further research in the field of deaf education.

To better understand the current climate of educational leadership in deaf education, it is necessary to understand the history of deaf education and the educational climate that led to these conditions. Knowledge of educational leadership generally as well as special education laws that are impacting deaf education were relevant to this discussion. An understanding of critical shortage areas is imperative to comprehend the need to study this topic. Chapter 2 includes an extensive review of literature that culminates in the rationale for this case study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The goal of this case study was to investigate factors that contribute to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the Deaf across the US. Understanding causes of retention and recruitment in these key leadership positions requires understanding issues facing deaf education generally as well as educational philosophies and language methodologies that have impacted this field. This cannot be fully understood without background knowledge of the history of the field of deaf education and how it has led to current issues involving deaf education and perceptions of deaf individuals that have been perpetuated throughout history and impact how deaf people are treated today.

Because deaf education is identified as one of the disability categories under the IDEA Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., also known as PL94-142, there also needs to be an understanding of the role special education laws play in the field of deaf education. Before discussing retention and recruitment of leaders at schools and programs for the deaf, an explanation of critical shortages in special education and specifically deaf education is explored and articulated. Finally, the literature review addresses limited research involving executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Specifically, there is limited current research published within the last 5 years related to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf, which led to a need to review older research. By starting with broad topics and then focusing on issues involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders, I was able to address issues that lead to challenges among these unique positions.

Literature Search Strategy

Using a systematic approach while exploring side topics provided a strong basis for the literature review. Formulating the research questions was the first necessary step in preparing to search literature for this dissertation and having clear research questions provided guidance and direction in terms of the type of information needed to answer these questions. Key concepts were identified by using research questions as guides that were relevant to the study. Key concepts involving retention and recruitment of educational leaders at schools for the deaf emerged as a theme for literature study. I used the following search terms: *deaf, deaf education*, *executive leader*, *leadership*, *attrition*, *shortage*, *retention and recruitment*, *superintendents of the deaf*, *schools for the deaf*, and *history of deaf education*. Keyword searches made it possible to locate information that had applicability in terms of the research questions; however, many sources of information were published more than 5 years prior to commencement of this study. Keyword searches were input separately and in combination with one another in Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, Project Muse and Google Search to expand the scope of my literature review.

Once articles, books, dissertations, and information relevant to the research questions were located, I searched reference lists in these documents to provide additional information. This led to more research that was helpful in the search for more information. Some references led to other documents that had little to do with the research focus, but some of the references on the newly found document led to another article that was relevant to the topic of this research search.

I conducted searches for literature using the following databases: Education Source, ERIC, SAGE Journals, ProQuest, and Project Muse. Additional searches outside of these professional search engines were conducted using Google Scholar. These articles were scrutinized for potential references to other peer-reviewed content to locate more aspects of this topic. Seeking information from a variety of sources was a well-rounded method of gathering all relevant information involving this topic.

When I continued to find limited current research articles, I sought the assistance of a Walden librarian to ensure I had not missed a relevant search engine and had exhausted all possible ways of gaining more information about this topic. To accommodate this issue, dissertations and conference proceedings were included as part of the literature review. In addition, I asked colleagues in the field of deaf education for any known information that could be helpful. There was research on the scarcity of educational leaders in regular education programs, but it was difficult to find information about executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. This research was helpful in terms of establishing basic issues involving retention and recruitment of educational leadership positions generally.

Most research in the field of deaf education has centered on debates between communication philosophies and how to teach reading to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. There is little information related directly to the topic of educational leadership in deaf education.

Once all options within databases were exhausted, leaders in deaf education were approached regarding their knowledge about research focused on educational leadership

in deaf education. A few suggestions were offered, and I sought out these recommended articles, which led to names of higher educational professionals in the field of deaf education who could potentially have further knowledge. This produced a few more relevant research articles that were applicable to this study. Articles were then grouped by related concepts. These became headings for the literature review. A final effort was made to glean more information by working with librarians at Walden University once again. No additional research was discovered.

Conceptual Framework

Educational leaders have many stressors and factors that could lead to problems with retention and recruitment in these positions. There is an increasing need to emphasize management of resources to ensure efficiency and increase performance of learners (Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005). These skills are essential in all levels of decision-making involving the administration and school board maintaining strong executive leaders in these roles. Sebastien (2017) stated that transformative leadership should emphasize effective management of resources, development of sound budgets, and compliance with laws, rules, and policies with a prioritization of student learning outcomes. The study was used to understand what leadership skills were needed to develop effective leaders and determination of satisfactory performance of individuals in these roles.

Grissom and Andersen's (2012) economic labor market model of educational superintendents was the conceptual framework used for understanding what factors contribute to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across

the nation. Understanding Grissom and Andersen's (2012) economic labor market model increases understanding of factors that impact attrition among these unique executive leadership roles.

Four characteristics can affect turnover of executive leaders of schools. These are district characteristics, school board characteristics, superintendent characteristics, and superintendent performance, both actual and perceived. Grissom and Andersen (2012) applied this theory to superintendents in large and small districts and discovered similarities in all district superintendents except large districts where there were higher turnover rates. These characteristics can help in terms of interpreting some of the factors impacting retention and recruitment in these positions.

Analyzing the information through the lens of this theory, can attribute retention and recruitment issues with the characteristics of the district, school board, superintendent, or student performance is impacting the retention of executive leaders from schools for the deaf. This review of the research reaches beyond other theories and considers the labor market theory of supply and demand related to an executive leadership role. This theory will help the researcher better understand how these characteristics affect retention and recruitment of superintendents of the deaf.

Literature Review Related to Other Concepts and Variables

Studies of executive leadership positions at schools and programs for the deaf are limited. To ensure that I reviewed all the literature related to this issue, an extensive search was conducted of Walden University's resources and searches of other databases. To expand this search, issues related to retention and recruitment were broadened to

include information from the general population of educational leaders. The bulk of literature surrounding the deaf and hard-of-hearing education focuses on the debate between communication methodologies of educating this specific population. Since this debate and other aspects related to this debate are such a high priority topic in the field, there is limited research regarding leadership at schools and programs for the deaf. Most learnings about these positions were gained by reading historical accounts from the field of deaf education.

A basic understanding of the history of the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing students is critical to understanding the field of deaf education globally as this led to the current landscape. Several researchers and authors provided lengthy descriptions of the history of deaf people, which always included education. For Deaf people, these places of learning are of prime importance in their lives. Schools for the deaf are often the place where most students learned a language and found others like themselves. The bond that Deaf people feel within schools and programs for the deaf are akin to family associations. This description of the Deaf community was articulated by Harlan Lane in 1984 in his book and reemphasized by Lane et al. in 1996.

Several authors of books and articles and research focused on the history and ongoing debate within the field of deaf education between oral and manual education. The data and statistics help interpret this history of deaf education and facts relevant to the field of deaf education. In 2016, the National Institute on Deafness and Other Communication Disorders (2016, December 15) shared a variety of statistics related to hearing loss across the country that helps understand the impact these issues have on the

social and emotional development of a child. The impact of the deprivation of language can have long lasting social and emotional consequences (Cawthon, et al., 2018).

Another critical aspect of the research question is understanding the difficulties of finding qualified executive leaders as schools and programs of the deaf. Although the literature is more limited in this aspect of the question, authors have highlighted a few studies that share the concern for schools and programs lacking leadership succession plans. This critical shortage begins with a severe shortage of qualified applicants for these specialized teaching positions. In 2013, Johnson explained this shortage has a ripple effect on leadership roles. Several researchers raised concerns about leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Warnings about the impact of these shortages in leadership were noted by LaSasso and Wilson in 2000 and again by LaSasso and Achtzehn in 2012. They cautioned that severe problems in the field would occur if these issues were not remedied.

Andrews and Covell (2006) said there was a severe lack of individuals prepared to take over leadership roles in the field of deaf education. This lack of leadership training is further impacted by inadequate succession plans for these leadership roles (Taylor & Youngs, 2018). An investigation of the workplace ecology and level of career satisfaction of superintendents of the deaf throughout the US conducted by Keller, (2015) furthered the discussion about these key roles. Some relevant aspects of these positions that may discourage the longevity of individuals in these positions were discovered.

In deaf education, there is an added need for the leader to have a strong connection to the Deaf community. O'Brien and Robinson (2017) found that the

connection between the superintendent of the deaf and the Deaf community directly related to how the leader was perceived. This connection between the executive leaders of these schools and the Deaf community was identified as a critical factor in the success of these individuals. Kamm-Larew, and Lamkin (2008) recommended a new type of leadership known as a collective individualist would help improve the retention of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

It is relevant to the question to understand the stressors for any individual in the role of executive leader of other schools, such as superintendents of district programs. Although most of the executive leaders in these roles manage larger populations of students, superintendents of the deaf have similar leadership structures and duties. Understanding the dynamics of these roles and the stresses encountered by executive leaders of schools helps understand the questions raised. Several authors conducted research related to executive leaders of district programs and factors contributing to their attrition rates.

Deaf Education

The education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children is often complicated and challenging for a variety of factors relating to the low incidence of the disability (NCES, 2019) and the debates that rage within the field. Since hearing loss is a low incidence disability, the available research and data are limited compared to other disability categories. The NCES (2019) said educationally significant hearing loss as a low incidence disability comprised less than 10% of special education disability categories. However, there are a wide variety of placement options for the small number of students

to choose from within the public education system throughout the US. These can include placement in the regular education setting, special classes within a regular school, and a special school of all deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This further delineation of how deaf and hard-of-hearing students are educated limits the conclusions that can be drawn from research regarding the best instructional practice for each student (Luckner, 2017).

Best practices for educating a deaf or hard-of-hearing child are debated by educational professionals and this contention limits and biases research findings in the field. Geers et al. (2017) said sign language hinders the speech and listening development of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This research was met with much published research-based rebuttals that further spurred the debate (Hall et al., 2019; Samuels, 2017). Therefore, the findings must be interpreted with great caution.

Some professionals in the field of deaf education advocate for an educational placement of deaf and hard-of-hearing students with typically developing peers that have no hearing loss. Others feel strongly that the least restrictive environment for a deaf or hard-of-hearing student is with other deaf and hard-of-hearing (DHH) peers where communication has no barriers. Another factor that complicates deaf education is the fundamental and firmly entrenched ideological battle amongst two conflicting perspectives.

Deaf and hard-of-hearing students are often viewed from a purely medical perspective. From this vantage point, professionals consider the child with a hearing loss as having a deficit that needs to be remedied. This perspective encourages assimilation with broader concepts of society. Speech, articulation, and hearing amplification are

highly valued. This group, known as oralists, are proponents of this medical view. They actively support the sole use of listening and spoken language, with particular focus given to technology and audiological devices for the student. Intensive therapy focuses on developing speech and listening skills with the hopes that the child will become as normal as possible (Moores, 2010).

The counter perspective to the medical view espouses a view that a deaf or hard-of-hearing child is a member of a rich culture with its own language, cultural norms, and history. Those individuals with a cultural view of deaf and hard-of-hearing people value American Sign Language as the language of the deaf without physical barriers to communication. This belief is promoted by members of the Deaf community and hearing people known as their allies. This cultural perspective is often referred to as supporters of a manual communication methodology (Moores, 2010).

Other deaf education debates center around the involvement of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the mainstream with typical students or in centralized special schools associating with other deaf students. Depending upon the needs of a deaf or hard-of-hearing student and where the child may live plays a significant role in a student's educational placement options. Those individuals that advocate for assimilation of deaf or hard-of-hearing students support the integration of these students in their local schools. Members of the Deaf community and its allies argue in opposition that uninhibited direct communication with teachers and peers produces the most successful adults socially, emotionally, and academically (National Association of the Deaf, 2020b).

Low instances of this disability category compared to the general population (IDEA, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004), limits awareness amongst the general population regarding deafness. This limited understanding of a complicated issue has exacerbated this debate in the public education arena. When individuals with a limited understanding of this disability category intervene in educational decisions, decisions are made that often do not reflect the complexity of the issue (Luckner, 2017). Most professionals in general and special education do not understand the intricacies of the culture or what it truly means to live with a hearing loss and the role of sign language and speech in the lives of deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals (Lane et al., 1996). This misunderstanding was manifest with the authorization of Public Law 94-142, also known as the IDEA, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., (2004) when the least restrictive environment was defined for all disability categories instead of the individual circumstance of a deaf or hard-of-hearing child.

History of Deaf Education

Deaf education has a long history of controversy with varying perspectives regarding the preferred modes of communication and instruction. Lack of understanding of the experiences and views of deaf and hard-of-hearing people has existed for thousands of years. In 2009 Tijsseling and Tellings noted that Greek philosophers and writers of the Christian Bible mentioned people with hearing loss in various passages. Most of these authors portray hearing loss as a debilitating condition worthy of pity. In the Christian Holy Bible, deaf people are depicted as needing saving (Mark 7:31-37, King James Version). After the death of Christ's apostles, having a hearing loss was

considered a significant handicapping condition to life. Not only were communication difficulties challenging, but the disability was often associated with sin or ill deed committed by the parents or child. Educating individuals with a hearing loss was seen as inconceivable under these circumstances and deaf people were excluded from educational opportunities (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002).

Even the Greeks recorded some discussion of educating deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. The notable philosopher, Socrates, promoted the theory that language and thought were inseparable and believed that speech was thought (Gleitman, 2005). Those that did not possess speech were considered without reason and thought. At that time, language was strictly defined by one's ability to produce clear spoken speech. This ability to speak was so fundamental to this ancient notion of language and for most of the human history that those with hearing loss were called deaf and dumb or deaf-mute referencing their inability to hear and speak properly (Gleitman, 2005). Many governments shared this perspective, and therefore deaf children were not allowed to be educated.

Although these were references in ancient times, formalized education of the deaf did not show up until much later in history. The first teacher of deaf children ever mentioned was Pedro Ponce de Leon, a 16th- century monk who tutored about 16 deaf children of the Spanish aristocracy (Moores, 2010). In 1620, the first book for education deaf students was published by Bonet, a friend of Ponce de Leon (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). Formalized education of deaf and hard-of-hearing children promoted by the government initially occurred in Paris, France in the 1760s. A French priest, Abbe' de l'Epee, became interested in the plight of deaf people (Senghas & Monaghan, 2002). He

was primarily interested in the salvation of their souls. At the time, deaf and hard-of-hearing people were denied Catholic rites due to the communication barriers inherent between people with hearing loss and those with hearing. Abbe' de l'Epee believed that sign language was the natural language of the deaf and their only real option for thought (Moores, 2010). Using sign language developed by the Deaf community in Paris with constructed adaptations, he was instrumental in the evolution of what is now called French Sign Language.

The local government gave Abbe de l'Epee approval and support to create a school in Paris to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing children for secular and religious reasons. Deaf and hard-of-hearing students who had been denied an education throughout France came to Paris to receive an education. Many students later returned to their provinces in France to establish schools for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, giving rise to deaf schools using a sign-based teaching philosophy (Berthier & Henry, 2009).

In Germany, another approach to educating deaf and hard-of-hearing children was developing. Samuel Heinecke, known as the father of oral education for the deaf, began using a speech-based approach to deaf education (Berke, 2020). At first, Heinicke used only writing, sign language, and gesture to teach, but he believed that was not sufficient and began utilizing speech and lipreading techniques. He labeled his technique "oralism." In England, the Braidwood family established a school (Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012). However, due to the secrecy of their approach, no one is certain what techniques were used. The general belief is that it was a combination of signed English and oral methods. On a small island of Massachusetts in the United States, known as Martha's Vineyard, a

high degree of genetic deafness led to a community that set the foundations for deaf education in America (Lane et al., 1996; Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012).

Nomeland and Nomeland (2012) shared their historical analysis that formalized education of the deaf in America began in the 1800s in Connecticut when several affluent families in the Hartford area found themselves with children who had a hearing loss that limited their abilities to participate in typical schooling. Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, a congregationalist minister, was interested in educating deaf children. He met Dr. Mason Cogswell, who was a parent of a child with a hearing loss. Dr. Cogswell invited Thomas to work with his daughter, Alice Cogswell. With the financial backing of other members of Connecticut society, Gallaudet was sent overseas to discover the secret to educating deaf children.

Gallaudet initially sought guidance from the Braidwood family in England. They were favorable to his request but required payment to use their method. Since he was unable to learn about the method before payment, Gallaudet was unwilling to pay the expense to gain their knowledge (Lane et al., 1996). In London, he met the successor to De L'Epee, Abbé Sicard, at a demonstration with two of his most successful students, Jean Massieu, and Laurent Clerc. During the presentation, audience members asked the students questions through sign language, and the students wrote their responses on a chalkboard in French and English (Berthier & Henry, 2009). Gallaudet was so impressed that he followed the men back to France to learn more about their educational methods. After studying their techniques, Gallaudet convinced Laurent Clerc to return to America

to establish a school for the deaf in the New World. It is believed that during the voyage to America that Clerc taught Gallaudet sign language (Moores, 2010).

Upon their arrival in 1817, the first school for the deaf was established in Hartford, Connecticut (Gannon, 2011; Valentine, 1993). It provided an education for those families with the ability to pay the $200 per year tuition. By 1830 all deaf or hard-of-hearing children in the New England area were able to attend the school due to public funds (Gannon, 2011; Valentine, 1993). American Sign Language was born through the combination of deaf students attending this first school, including the community members from Martha's Vineyard (Berthier & Henry, 2009; Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012). Many other schools for the deaf were created by deaf individuals wanting to improve education for their deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Between 1810 and 1860, there was a rapid growth of schools for the deaf across the US (Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012). During this time, other individuals began promoting an oralist approach for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing children in America. The leaders in this continuing debate between methodologies were Alexander Graham Bell, supporting an oralist approach, and Edward Miner Gallaudet, the son of Thomas Hopkins Gallaudet, supporting the use of sign language.

This debate has been the central issue and ongoing issue of deaf education across the world ever since. This debate hit a tipping point in 1880 at a conference on deaf education in Milan, Italy. During the meeting, the delegates decided to commit to one method of instruction for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Those at the convention voted to adopt the oral approach. Some objected, including Edward Minor Gallaudet.

However, most attendees came from oral schools, and only one deaf individual was present (Lane et al., 1996). After this conference, schools and entire countries immediately changed their approach to educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This shift in perspective had a long-lasting effect on generations of deaf and hard-of-hearing children.

Oral education in the United States began in 1867 with the establishment of the New York Institution for the Impaired and the Clarke School for the Deaf in Northampton, Massachusetts (Moores, 2010). The Clarke School for the Deaf was supported by Alexander Graham Bell, who was a strong supporter of educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students orally. By the 20th century all schools offered oral-only instruction through the elementary grades. If the students were not successful with the oral-only approach by age 12, they were allowed to learn sign language for instruction (Moores, 2010).

After several years of poor performance by many deaf and hard-of-hearing students, a wide variety of sign language-based approaches started to emerge again across the US. Some of these approaches included the Rochester Method and Cued Speech (Padden & Gunsauls, 2003; Spencer, 2011). The Rochester Method spelled all the words in each sentence instead of using a singular sign to represent a concept. This communication technique was initially introduced at the Rochester School for the Deaf in New York and was later adopted by other schools for the deaf across America. Dr. R. Orin Cornett developed cued speech, in 1966 to improve poor literacy skills in deaf children. Cued speech is a visual communication system that uses eight handshapes in

four different placements near the face, combined with the mouth movements of speech to make the sounds of spoken language look different from each other. This method was intended to clarify the formation of sound produced on the lips for deaf or hard-of-hearing students but evolved into a form of communication.

Most schools have used a form of manually coded signed English systems. These have included Seeing Essential English and Signing Exact English. These signed systems follow English grammar and syntax while using signed words created by hearing people to mirror English terminology. Over time, these evolved signs were combined with spoken English to become what has been termed Total Communication or "TC." This approach was commonly used in deaf education throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Moores, 2010). At its foundation, Total Communication means that the students communicate in both the spoken language and sign language at the same time. At face value, this solution seemed to accommodate all perspectives, but using two languages simultaneously proved to be difficult, and studies soon demonstrated that, by simultaneously using English and ASL, both languages were compromised, and communication errors were abundant. Studies demonstrated that teachers used both languages inconsistently, and both languages suffered, which resulted in delays in both languages (Marschark et al., 2006).

Although the advent of deaf education began with religious zeal and purpose, eventually, deaf education became part of the special education movement, which made it subject to federal and state laws designed for students with disabilities (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat. 2004). The 2004 reauthorization of the

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is still the current governing law for special education. At present federal law approves of sign language use but does not promote one language or communication system over another. The emphasis is instead on the concept of the Least Restrictive Environment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., (2004). This concept of what is the least restrictive environment sparked the age-old debate anew. The definition of what is the least restrictive environment for a deaf or hard-of-hearing child and who should who determine the least restrictive environment sparked the debate again. And lines have been drawn between the two opposing groups once more.

Recent debates are newer versions of the older linguistic debate that has raged since the inception of schools and programs for the deaf and is still the central issue of deaf education today (Geers et al., 2017; Hall et al., 2019; Samuels, 2017). Statements from the national organizations for the deaf echo the prominent role language plays in the education of deaf and hard-of-hearing students today (National Association of the Deaf, 2020c; World Federation of the Deaf, 2016). The National Association of the Deaf (2020b) asserted, “Deaf and hard-of-hearing children must have the right to receive early and full exposure to ASL as a primary language, along with English”. They believe that when deaf and hard-of-hearing children are exposed to ASL at an early age, they can achieve their full potential.

Many schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing across the US use ASL, a sign system, speech, or a combination of a signed system with speech called Simultaneous Communication. Those that use American Sign Language identify

themselves as a bilingual-bicultural ASL/English program (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018, 2021). This approach to deaf education is closely aligned with strategies for students learning English as a second language (Hult & Compton, 2012). In these settings ASL is considered the native language of deaf and hard-of-hearing children since it is the only fully accessible language and does not require the ears to understand the language. (Marschark, et al., 2014).

Research indicates that bilingual strategies associated with second language learners align with the best practices for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students (Marschark, et al., 2014). However, deaf and hard-of-hearing students have a distinct difference from other second language learners. Unlike other second language users, deaf and hard-of-hearing learners remain lifelong users of both languages (Griffin, 2021; Marschark, et al., 2014). This bilingual-bimodal educational approach to teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing students values the importance of American Sign Language and the English language while giving the students opportunities to communicate directly with their teachers and peers. Culture is incorporated into language learning, and pride is developed in a Deaf self-identity (Caldas, 2017; Moores, 2010).

Deaf Education and Special Education Law

Special education laws have had a profound impact on the educational experience for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act U.S.C. 1400 Stat. of 2004, also known as IDEA, grew out of previous laws guaranteeing the education of all students with unique educational needs. This law initially passed in 1972 as Public Law 94-142 or the Education of All Handicapped Children Act and was

reauthorized in 2004 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004).

IDEA contains six basic principles for educating students with special needs or disabilities. These principles include the requirement that all students with special needs have a right to an education; a nondiscriminatory identification and evaluation; due process rights; parent and student participation and shared decision making; free, appropriate public education (FAPE); and access to the least restrictive environment (LRE) for the student (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004). For each student, these requirements are outlined within a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). This document describes a student's current educational progress, goals for a student's continued growth, services, and related services provided to the student to receive FAPE, and accommodations made within the classroom. Hearing loss is identified as a disability category under IDEA. Therefore, deaf and hard-of-hearing students qualify for services under this law.

Although this law has been beneficial to deaf and hard-of-hearing students, it has also caused other issues to arise. The concept of the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) creates unique problems for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Typically, LRE has been interpreted to mean that a child is placed in a school setting that maximizes the student’s academic and social development and equalizes, to the greatest extent possible, their education with typical hearing peers. Most education professionals believe the general education classroom to be the least restrictive environment for students (Carson, 2015). However, for deaf and hard-of-hearing students with a communication barrier with

regular education students, this placement in a regular education setting can be very restrictive for communication needs. In 2010, Spencer and Marschark reported research findings that highlighted this difficulty when they acknowledged that hard-of-hearing students who attended general education classrooms with peers with no hearing loss had weaker performance than their hearing peers. In these settings, spoken language is the primary means of communication, although some use sign language interpreters. The environment is not ideal for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. With larger class sizes the sound level increases, making it difficult for deaf or hard-of-hearing students to understand communication in the room. Even hard-of-hearing students struggle to identify the location of a speaker in a classroom when there is noise (Spencer & Marschark, 2010).

IDEA identifies the various settings for student placement, including general education with minimal supports, a special program within a general education setting, a specialized school, a special program within a specialized school, or home/hospital instruction (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004). Residential schools, also known as schools for the deaf, are considered a specialized school in the law. However, the Deaf community views these schools as the home where Deaf Culture is nurtured and validated. These schools are seen as important academic, social institutions that help deaf and hard-of-hearing students develop an identity within the Deaf Culture. From this perspective, mainstream schools are considered isolating, culturally removing, and a subpar educational and social option for deaf and hard-of-hearing students (Khalifa, 2019; Nomeland & Nomeland, 2012). The

continuum of placement options can often be confusing for parents of deaf and hard-of-hearing students to navigate as professionals with differing philosophies weigh in on the best educational placement of a student.

Shortage in Special Education

Throughout the United States, the field of education has been experiencing a marked shortage of educators in all settings (McLeskey, et al., 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2021). The causes of the teacher shortage are involved; however, special education teachers' attrition is a significant contributor (Peyton, et al., 2021) to the overall shortage. Several states report that special education teachers suffer from higher attrition rates than their general education counterparts (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). In 2007 Thornton et al., reported that "Up to 9.3 percent of special education teachers leave the field at the end of their first year of teaching and 7.4 percent move to general education annually" (p. 234).

This shortage is chronic and severe and exists in every geographic region of the nation (Peyton, et al., 2021). The reasons for the high attrition rates of special educators are categorized into the following general areas: employment issues, working conditions, personal issues, lack of support, issues with the student population, and other miscellaneous reasons (Peyton, et al., 2021). Often the working condition for a special educator is not as expected. These teachers report a lack of appreciation for the services rendered, challenging students and parents, additional paperwork, and other unanticipated demands beyond teaching special needs students. Principals and schools struggle to fill

the open positions as educators leave the field at a more rapid rate, and experienced educators retire (Samuels & Harwin, 2018).

The difficulty in finding special educators is more pronounced than the struggle to hire regular education teachers (McLeskey, et al., 2004). This constant attrition causes districts to face a continuous cycle of recruitment, hiring, and induction (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). The time, energy, and resources that special education leaders spend to induct teachers takes a toll on the education of students with special needs. As special educators leave the field, their experience and understanding leave with them. This leaves special education administrators facing a major problem with recruitment, retention, and professional development of special education personnel (Peyton, et al., 2021). These special education leaders must grapple with training large numbers of new hires about education and building policy, special education law, writing of IEPs, managing behavior, involving parents, and adapting curricula to meet students' individual needs (Peyton, et al., 2021). This strain can have an impact on student performance.

There has been a sharp decrease in the number of graduates from higher education majoring in special education over the past decade. Special education teachers have dropped more than 17% (Samuels & Harwin, 2018). This reduced interest in the field adds to the chronic problem of critical shortages in special education. As the number of individuals seeking degrees in special education has reduced, the number of students qualifying for special education has increased by one percent (Samuels & Harwin, 2018). To adjust to the problem, many schools have had to increase class sizes to accommodate the increased number of students qualifying for special education.

Shortage of Educators of the Deaf

Johnson reported in 2013 that although there has been a significant increase in the number of deaf and hard-of-hearing students in the nation's schools, the number of teachers being prepared to teach such students has remained virtually the same. The specialized nature of deaf education limits the number of professionals available to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing children. Most higher education institutions require a master's degree in the education of the deaf and hard-of-hearing to become an educator of these unique students. (National Association of State Directors of Special Education, Inc., 2018). Beyond understanding the ability to teach special education students, they must know the intricacies of educating children who have limited access to sound and verbal language. In most higher institutions, becoming a teacher of the deaf requires a bachelor's degree in a general education field and a specialized master's degree in teaching deaf and hard-of-hearing children (Johnson, 2013).

In addition to learning pedagogy to educate a deaf child, college students studying the field of deaf education must learn the language of the Deaf, American Sign Language (ASL). This added requirement to learn a language beyond the typical academic rigor for a masters' degree requires another layer of skill needed for the potential teacher to master. Training to become a teacher of the deaf varies within higher education institutions and by state. This variation includes the license categories and requirements for state licensure.

Higher education programs that train teachers of the deaf typically only offer one teaching methodology as part of the curriculum. A few programs report a 'comprehensive'

approach. No one methodology is espoused in these comprehensive programs, therefore the graduates lack specialization to teach either method in depth. There are very few higher education institutions that even offer a degree in deaf education throughout the country and abroad. There are currently 57 recognized college programs that offer a degree in Deaf Education throughout the United States and Canada (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018). In 2013, Johnson reported that in most cases, higher education institutions graduate an average of six to eight teachers of the deaf per year. A study done by the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf in 2018 by Fischgrund and Tucker reported that more than 500 new teachers of the deaf are needed at schools for the deaf in the next three years (Fischgrund & Tucker, 2018).

Within the small number of colleges and universities providing programs, the methodology debate is further delineated. Of the schools and programs publicly offering a deaf education degree program, ten use a bilingual ASL/English approach, 7 schools use a listening and spoken language approach, and 40 are using a comprehensive approach that combines signs with speech (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018). Students often either select a methodology or end up accepting the philosophy presented to them. Therefore, the number of educators with the appropriate background to be involved with deaf education is extremely limited, thus contributing to an increased shortage of deaf educators.

In 2006, Andrews and Covell explored the impact of the critical shortage of educators on deaf and hard-of-hearing students. They identified a shortage in qualified

personnel as a significant factor in poor educational outcomes for this student population, along with examining the importance of workplace dynamics between deaf and hearing professionals. Current research still reports educational outcomes that are below the general population. The average reading level of a deaf or hard-of-hearing student is a 4th-grade reading level. Andrews and Covell (2006) asserted that this is due, in part, to the shortage of qualified educators and the lack of adult deaf role models for students. This limited number of educators who are Deaf themselves further diminishes the opportunities students have for deaf and hard-of-hearing adult role models in professional positions.

Shortage of Educational Leaders

Pijanowski et al. (2009) said, "the impending leadership crisis in America's public schools have been around so long that it often accepted as an unquestionable fact that there is a critical and pervasive shortage of school leaders" (p. 85). Educational leaders in all aspects of education are in critical demand across the country. Cieminkski (2018) reported that workforce trends, increased accountability, demands of the job, and turnover rates of school principals have been a cause for concern. Cieminski (2018) stated, "The rewards of giving back to the community, supporting teachers, having greater influence and progressing on a career path have been overshadowed by the downsides of accountability pressure, lack of support, lack of job security, and demanding schedules" (p. 22).

The work of school principals is challenging. Principals in the current climate are responsible for organizing and managing staff, student, and staff well-being, responding

to various stakeholders' needs and promoting student and school achievement (Collie, et al., 2020). All countries report shortages in principals however, Collie et al., (2020) found similar demands that were taxing on these professionals. Their findings suggest that principals who work in schools with shared involvement by different stakeholders and experience with staff are more likely to be satisfied with their position and committed to the profession. Although a certain amount of turnover is believed to be beneficial to schools, excessive principal turnover, even if the successor is effective, it is likely to impact student outcomes negatively (Cieminski, 2018).

Several studies indicate there is a myriad of reasons for the shortage of qualified candidates for principal positions. Educational leaders have cited factors such as excessive workload, lack of high-quality training and lack of courses to meet their professional needs and identified the shortage of qualified teachers as another source of stress for principals (Collie, et al., 2020). Other factors relate to the principals' job satisfaction. These include administrative support, school facilities, disciplinary climate, support from superintendents, pay and recognition of their efforts (Collie, et al., 2020).

Shortage of Educational Leaders in Deaf Education

This critical shortage of teachers of the deaf has a ripple effect on leadership roles at schools for the deaf. Schirmer (2008) noted, "Just as research indicates shortages of leadership personnel in special education, it appears that qualified faculty leaders in deaf education are also in short supply" (p. 411). A leader at a school for the deaf must possess a very specific skill set. A leader in deaf education should have experience as an educator of the deaf, fluent in ASL, and possess leadership training and skills. Ideally,

there would be deaf individuals to also serve as a role model for the students. There are very few individuals who have all these skills and are therefore qualified to fill a leadership role at a school for the deaf (Ballard, 2019). As Taylor and Youngs (2018) said there is a need for leaders in deaf education to become more proactive in developing new leaders. Alternatively, they warn, there will be a significant decline in the quality of education provided to deaf and hard-of-hearing children if this trend continues. During conferences and professional meetings of executive leaders from schools for the deaf, and in private conversations with superintendents, the issues of a limited number of applicants for educators of the deaf and a lack of qualified applicants for leadership roles within the schools are constant topics of discussions. It is unlikely that schools for the deaf will be able to sustain leadership roles without appropriately qualified candidates.

Knowing the value of deaf adult role models in deaf and hard-of-hearing children, the National Deaf Center on Post-Secondary Outcomes (2021) raised the importance of involving deaf adult role models in schools for the deaf. Despite this demonstrated need, there are a minimal number of deaf and hard-of-hearing role models in leadership positions of schools for the deaf (Ballard, 2019).

Deaf leaders often do not get the same kind of mentoring hearing administrators receive. Furthermore, Deaf leaders may obtain an administrative position but lack adequate preparation. When they face challenging issues, they may not have colleagues to advise and support them (Ballard, 2019). When a Deaf leader is fired, the public often overgeneralizes that administrator's performance to all deaf people, thus jeopardizing another deaf leader's chances of filling a similar position (Thibodeau, 2019).

A survey of administrators by Kelly-King (2001) reported that since 1998, 27 schools and programs for the deaf had 70 vacancies in positions for supervisors, principals, assistant superintendents, and superintendents. Kelly-King's survey indicated a severe imbalance between the number of available Deaf professionals with multicultural backgrounds and the amount needed to meet the needs of deaf students with such backgrounds. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of deaf adults being selected to lead schools and programs for the deaf. In the Spring of 2016, six new Deaf leaders were hired to work at six different schools for the deaf. It was the first time in American Deaf history that this number happened in one year (Taylor & Youngs, 2018).

Executive Leaders at Schools and Programs for the Deaf

The role of an executive leader at a school for the deaf is to serve as the school's overall senior leader. This workload can be complex and critical to the success of the school district (Hussey et al., 2019). Understanding the big picture and the intimate details of the daily operations are essentials skills for the position. Working closely with departments of education, legislators, principals of the school, and taxpayers, an executive leader must advocate for increased funding and manage the school or program's needs within the confines of state allocations. Overseeing personnel matters is an essential duty of an executive leader. In the event of an emergency, they are called upon to make decisions and serve as the face of the district. Inclement weather, incidents, school safety concerns, workplace injuries, and illness are examples of issues that executive leaders must handle. Having strong interpersonal skills is an essential quality of an executive leader so that positive relationships can be developed with a variety of

stakeholders. The role requires a long workday, which often begins early in the morning and ends by attending special meetings or extra-curricular events in the afternoon or evening (Kelly, 2018).

According to Kelly (2018), as an executive leader's role expands in complexity, the necessary skill set for these leaders increase as well. Superintendents are required to understand the needs of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, run the organization's daily operations, serve as the point person for all district matters, supervise other leaders and staff, work with school board members, and manage fiscal operations. Executive leaders are responsible for hiring quality staff with limited resources, solving internal and external problems with stakeholders, and lobbying for additional resources. Executive leaders should possess strong leadership, problem solving, and communication skills.

Summary and Conclusions

A review of the history of the deaf and hard-of-hearing education is pivotal to understanding the scope and breadth of the topic of educational leadership at these specialized schools and programs. Understanding the history of deaf education explains the current landscape of deaf education and how it impacts the current dynamic of retention and recruitment in the field. This history has influenced current challenges faced by the executive leaders that impact the retention and recruitment. It is critical to understand what has led to the current conditions in this field. Although there are similarities to the development of education on the American continent, understanding how the current climate developed separate schools across the nation provides relevant information to understand the research question. This recap included recounting the

historical underpinnings that caused schools for the deaf to be established on this continent and within other countries since America is a relatively young country that incorporated aspects of education from our progenitors. This history has shaped the current perspectives shared by other educational entities and society at-large.

The key to understanding the history of deaf education and one of the major forces impacting schools and programs for the deaf is understanding the philosophical battle and how it began and evolved and how it influences the function of the schools at the time of this study. This philosophical debate has waged since almost the inception of educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students. This debate has evolved as new laws have been enacted, and current issues in special education have played a role in the placement and education of deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Most literature focused on various aspects of this educational communication debate, and limited research was uncovered regarding educational leadership in the field of deaf education.

The lack of qualified teachers of the deaf not only impacts the number of teachers in the classroom, but these critical shortages limit the number of personnel available to become leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. This lack of qualified personnel affects the availability of leaders in these specialized programs, which, in turn, reduces the number of applicants for executive leadership roles. Minimal research is available on the shortage of qualified executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf.

Since this study's focus is the executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing across the US using American Sign Language, it is vital to understand each of these aspects that impact this field of study. Deaf education is listed as

a disability category within IDEA law, therefore an understanding of special education law and how it impacts deaf education provides another factor that impacts the function of this role at schools for the deaf. An executive leader at these types of schools must understand the intricacies of special education law and how schools for the deaf fit within the dynamics of that law. This literature review comprised a comprehensive search of the key issues related to a study of this topic. Understanding the history and relevant laws connected with deaf education is vital to understanding why the research for this study is conducted in a particular format and structure.

Chapter 3: Research Method

I used a qualitative case study method for this study. A systematic and organized process was implemented to accomplish the purpose of the case study by investigating factors that contribute to issues involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the US. Increasing understanding of challenges faced by these executive leaders is needed to understand what may be causing retention and recruitment problems in these positions and present ideas to solve these challenges. The goal was to use data to generate solutions to mitigate factors impacting retention and recruitment of executive leaders at public and private schools for the deaf using ASL and offering education for students from preschool through 12th grade.

Research Design and Rationale

There are variety of approaches in which a study could potentially be conducted (Yin, 2018). These include narrative research, phenomenology, grounded theory, and ethnography. All five approaches have a common general process of research that begins with a research problem and then proceeds to questions, gathering of data, data analysis, and interpretation, culminating in a research report. However, there are fundamental differences between each type of qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Maxwell, 2013). At the most fundamental level, they differ in terms of what they are trying to accomplish. Although all approaches involve understanding a phenomenon, they vary in purpose. In narrative research, the focus is on stories shared by individuals that are arranged in chronological order. A phenomenological approach involves understanding the essence of the experience. An ethnography approach involves stories that are put into

the context of a culture or group. In the context of a case study, the research involves illustrating an issue. The researcher provides a detailed description and setting for the case. Grounded theory involves developing a theory grounded in data from a field. Each of these approaches involves employing similar data collection techniques to varying degrees. However, differences in terms of data analysis are more pronounced. A case study allows for analysis of data through descriptions of cases and themes that emerge, as well as case themes.

As this was an exploration of factors contributing to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US, a deeper understanding of experiences, stressors, and influences affecting unique leaders in these roles needed to be understood, in addition to reasons why qualified applicants may not seek one of these positions. Therefore, a case study research tradition was the most appropriate way to explore and develop more in-depth insights into all factors affecting this problem. Oshunrinade (2016, Case Study, para. 1) stated, "A case study involves both complex and intensive analysis of an individual unit as a group or community. It emphasizes developmental issues and relationships with the environment, while it documents real-life situations and other events through data collection involving multiple sources of materials rich in context." This case study was intended to glean rich and meaningful data to deepen understanding of dynamics regarding retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf. By gathering rich information from executive leaders during this case study, research findings provide a more comprehensive understanding of retention and recruitment. To gain understanding, personal interviews of executive

leaders at these specialized schools for the deaf across the US were conducted. By spending time with executive leaders currently in these roles and examining factors that lead to problems involving retention and recruitment, knowledge about this topic was gained.

A complicating factor in terms of gaining this information was that some participants used ASL, and others used spoken English to communicate. As I possessed native fluency in ASL as demonstrated by an ASL Proficiency Interview (ASLPI) rating of 4 and college-level skill in American English, interviews were conducted in the native language of the participant, whether it was in ASL or spoken English. Due to the visual nature of ASL, all ASL interviews were recorded using Zoom, and then reviewed by another fluent user of ASL for accuracy of translation.

After interviews were transcribed, there was an initial coding of text from videos. To accomplish this, each video was watched while notes were taken about the subject matter and translations were made into written English. Broad themes and highlights were made on transcripts via the GoReact platform. GoReact is an application used for analysis of video content to provide feedback and highlight common themes in data. This was followed by a line-by-line analysis of interview text. All information was coded for broad categories. Next, responses were grouped into similar categories. By analyzing and sorting codes, consistent and overarching patterns of meaning were discovered. The more prominent categories became overarching themes, while subcategories were supporting themes. From these broader themes and supporting categories, I collected data.

Role of the Researcher

The roles of the researcher include learner, observer, and analyzer. As a current executive leader at a state school for the deaf, I had many opportunities to interact with study participants in professional settings. The stressors involving these roles is a common theme of discussions with colleagues. Many common claims exist among executive leaders of these schools and programs that were shared with me. With such a deep understanding of the issues involving deaf education, there may be some biases that have developed over time. This was managed via notes and journaling, which were evaluated for bias and helped to maintain objectivity of the study. To remain as objective as possible, I did not include issues related to my own school. As the researcher, I prepared interview questions with executive leaders, as well as all follow up questions. All interviews were recorded by me using Zoom. Some interviews occurred in spoken English, and others were in ASL; all interviews were coded using a visual format. Upon completion of interviews, information was checked for accuracy by another fluent user of ASL.

Methodology

I focused on executive leaders at public and private schools and programs for the deaf throughout various regions of the US that use ASL as the language of instruction. I aimed to understand factors that impact retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf using ASL. To address this, interviews with executive leaders were conducted to help to gather data involving perceptions and experiences

about this phenomenon occurring in the field of deaf education at schools and programs for the deaf throughout the US.

Because the purpose of this study was to understand challenges faced by executive leaders at schools for the deaf and hard-of-hearing in these specific settings and how this impacts retention and recruitment, a case study design was the most appropriate approach to conduct research. This approach helped identify key issues of retention and recruitment of executive leaders of schools for the deaf and recommend courses of action to solve this problem. Interviews with individuals currently in these positions provided an in-depth understanding of stressors and factors impacting executive leaders of these very specialized schools. Using Grissom and Andersen's (2012) economic labor market conceptual framework as the lens to view the findings of this case study, I interpreted results and provided clarity to understand the findings.

Participant Selection

Although there are 108 schools for the deaf across the nation, only 66 schools and programs for the deaf throughout the United States met the criteria for participating in this case study (Educational Programs for Deaf Students, 2018). Schools were identified by information gathered from the reference issue of the Educational Programs for Deaf Students (2018, 2021) American Annals of the Deaf, a publication considered to be the definitive guide on schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. To gain a representative sample of the schools for the deaf using American Sign Language, eleven schools were invited to participate in the study. In selecting the eleven schools to sample, the private and public schools for the deaf using American Sign Language for instruction

of grades preschool to 12th grade were categorized by size and location. Schools with less than 100 students on campus were categorized as a small school. Schools with a population between 100 and 350 campus students were considered a medium-size school. Schools with more than 350 students were categorized as a larger school for the deaf. Executive leaders representing various schools were selected from each size grouping and balanced from differing regions of the country. An attempt was made to select executive leaders with varying years of experience in that role. Even a leader with limited experience provided valuable insight as to the reasons for the shortages of these executive leaders. A leader with extensive experience also provided a valuable perspective due to longevity in the position. Therefore, an executive leader at a school for the deaf with less than three years of experience was included in this study.

Once IRB approval was granted to conduct the study, each executive leader was personally invited to participate in this case study by the researcher. For this study, executive leaders refer to various titles for leaders of deaf and hard-of-hearing schools and programs. These include superintendent, headmaster, executive director, and chief executive officer. These individuals typically answer to a formal Board and are the final decision maker at the school or program. Once an executive leader agreed to participate in the cast study, informed consent was obtained before proceeding.

Instrumentation

Each executive participant was personally invited to participate in this study. Since superintendents and executive leaders are often inundated with many emails each day, I extended personal invitations through a phone or video call, when needed. I used a

follow up email invitation to any individual executive leader that failed to respond promptly to participate in this study. The general invitation included the purpose of the study and why the individual was selected to participate in the study. Each invitation included the research questions and a copy of the questions that were to be asked. The approximate length of the interview was also shared.

Interview questions were developed following protocols developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016) and processes described by Willis (2004) to refine the interview questions and process. The study's instrumentation included personal interviews of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Interview protocol development was broken down into the protocols developed by Castillo-Montoya (2016) to arrive at quality questions that answer the research questions. The interview included an introduction, open questions, transition questions, key questions relevant to the study and closing questions. The interview questions were developed to understand the participants' perspectives surrounding retention and recruitment of their executive leadership role at a school for the deaf. The questions encouraged executive leaders to share their personal perspectives about the perceived challenges faced by executive leaders currently in these positions and gathered information about the challenges encountered for recruiting for these positions. Once the questions were developed, the interview protocol was applied in the research setting with the participants. The interview began with gathering a basic understanding of the school structure and environment of each executive leader's school. Queries of the participants included directly asking the research questions of the executive leaders and encouraging them to share their personal experiences related to

retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. As the participants answered the questions the researcher took notes of the responses and asked clarification questions to ensure a clear understanding. Later these responses were coded to identify similar themes among the participants. Finally, the responses were analyzed to determine how the information shared by the executive leaders answered the research questions and addressed the problem statement. All interviews were recorded using Zoom to capture the conversation in the visual language of American Sign Language and those interviews conducted in spoken English.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Each school and program for the deaf and hard-of-hearing across the United States is listed in an annual reference issue of the American Annals of the Deaf. Included with the list of all the schools and programs for the deaf is the contact information for each school or program, the grade levels served by the school and the methodology of the program. As a colleague and Board member of the professional network of these executive leaders, the Conference for Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD), the researcher also used the contact information provided by CEASD of other executive leaders at these schools for the deaf as publicly available information shared with all members of CEASD. In some situations, an additional Google search was used to gather the current contact information of each executive leader. A search of each school's website was also utilized to learn the direct contact information of each executive leader at each of these specialty schools and programs.

The number of participants were limited to eleven executive leaders to gain a representative sample of the schools. Only schools offering programming for students in preschool through 12th grade providing instruction in American Sign Language were included. Schools representing differing demographics in student population and various areas of the country were included in the case study.

After IRB approval, I reached out to each of the identified eleven executive leaders at a private or public school for the deaf selected from various parts of the United States providing instruction in American Sign Language to their student body in preschool through 12th grade to personally invite them to participate in this study. Knowing the number of emails executive leaders receive in a day and the culture of the field, sometimes this invitation was made with a personal phone or video call to the leader. Once the leader agreed to participate in the study, a follow up email with the formal letter of invitation to participate in the study that included a letter of consent was attached and sent to the participant. No interview commenced without the confirmation of written informed consent from each participant. Prior to the interview, the list of the questions to be asked was shared with each participant.

Once the executive leader agreed to be interviewed, a time was set for the interview over the Zoom platform. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Interviews began with open-ended introductory questions about the participant's path to becoming an executive leader and background information about the school. As the interview proceeded, more focused questions followed with the intent to gather data regarding the issues and challenges faced by these executive leaders, specifically those

that contribute to problems with retention and recruitment in these executive positions and the factors they believed may be impacting this gap in practice. Follow-up questions were asked to clarify any response that was unclear. Questions about the executive leader's relationship with stakeholder groups and the governing board were also explored.

Probing questions were posed to understand stressors affecting the interviewee. The executive leader was asked specifically to describe factors that affect retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the United States and provide recommendations for mitigating these factors. At the conclusion of each interview, each participant was asked to share any other relevant information that may not have been covered. The goal of this activity in this study was to help ensure that the participants were able to fully articulate their thoughts about the subject matter before the interview ended and they were provided with the appropriate resources and contact information if they had any other information they would like to add. A debriefing statement at the end of the interview included reiterating the purpose of the study. Information on how all participants can learn about the results of the study were shared. Opportunities to withdraw and the withdrawal procedures were also be shared with the participants. Contact information of the researcher and the IRB chair were given to each participant. Research references were available to any participant wanting to learn more about the subject matter. Finally, each participant was thanked for their involvement in the study.

No follow-up interviews of executive leaders were necessary to clarify information or to understand the issue more fully. Since several of the executive leaders of these programs are deaf or hard-of-hearing themselves, seven of these interviews were conducted in American Sign Language and five interview were conducted in spoken English. All interviews were recorded electronically using Zoom technology.

Written notes captured any research thoughts during and after each interview. All notes about the interviews, research, and insights gained were saved for reference later. Data from these interviews was transcribed into written English by the researcher and reviewed for accuracy by another fluent user of American Sign Language and written English that also signed a non-disclosure form. A copy of the interview was made available to each executive leader upon request. This finalized document was used for analysis in this case study.

Data Analysis Plan

Using a data-driven approach to the coding, the researcher sought to identify ideas and concepts in the interview transcripts without a preconceived outcome in the data, thus letting the data drive the coding (Oshunrinade, 2016). The initial coding of the text included watching the recordings of each interview over again and becoming familiar with the specifics of each response. While watching the videos again, general notes and highlights were taken in the program at the time the statement was made. This step was followed by an analysis of each sentence of the transcript for categories of information. These categories were refined as each transcript was reread. The next step in the process was open coding. As the transcripts of the interviews are analyzed and the content broken

down into discrete parts, the codes were created to label these parts. The codes that were created were based on the qualitative data itself. This coding of the transcripts was completed manually, allowing reflection on each interview as theories began to emerge from the data. Coding helped the researcher understand the perspectives of participants and assist in the analysis of similar experiences among the executive leaders. Using this process, codes emerged based on commonalities in the data (Oshunrinade, 2016; Saldana, 2009).

Once all the categories were identified, they were grouped into similar categories. This process is known as axial coding (Saldana, 2009). In contrast to open coding where the data is broken down into discrete parts, during this step the goal was to make connections between the codes that have been created. These categories were based on the existing codes. Through this analysis, consistent and overarching patterns of meaning were uncovered, and the data was grouped by themes. Overarching and supporting themes were identified. These themes guided the research on the factors affecting retention and recruitment of these positions and provided some solutions to the problem. These categories formed the axes of the coded themes.

Selective coding was the final step in bringing all the data and categories into one core category or theme. This provided definition and structure for a theory of what is happening in relation to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. This core category represents the central thesis of this research (Saldana, 2009).

By using this approach to coding with the steps of open coding, axis coding and selective coding a story from the data emerged. This process prevented the interviewer from overemphasizing the importance of any aspect early in the study and gave structure to the analysis while reducing bias. This process provided a more thorough analysis of the information shared by the executive leaders of these specialized schools (Oshunrinade, 2016; Saldana, 2009). All data analysis was connected to understand each factor impacting retention and recruitment of executive leaders at preschool – 12th grade schools for the deaf throughout the nation.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness and validity of qualitative research will determine the credibility of any study. Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are essential in establishing trustworthiness. As a student in Educational Administration and Leadership for Experienced Administrators (AEAL), interviewing multiple people is enough for the data source being collected and accomplishes triangulation. Additionally, as a professional of more than 23 years in deaf education and an educational leader for over ten years at a school for the deaf, the researcher was uniquely qualified to conduct these interviews. Additionally, the researcher possesses a high fluency rating in American Sign Language. The most respected standardized evaluation tool used to measure American Sign Language proficiency is called the American Sign Language Proficiency Interview (ASLPI). This evaluation is conducted by a native user of ASL and then sent to 3 professionals of American Sign Language for a rating from 0 – 5. Ratings with a 0 indicate ‘no sign skills’ are present and gradually build to a score of 5 to indicate ‘native

fluency'. The researcher for this study has a rating of 4, which a near native-like proficiency in ASL. Therefore, the researcher has demonstrated sufficient experience and skill to be credible to discuss the phenomenon being explored.

Bias from this study was minimized in several ways. Using reflexivity, I examined my own conceptual lens, explicit and implicit assumptions, preconceptions, and values, and how these affect my research decisions in all phases of the case study as data was compiled in a researcher log. This included detailed notes about the study. This was accomplished by taking notes about the process and writing thoughts throughout the case study about the information being shared. The focus of the interviews was to understand the information being shared within the context of what factors are impacting retention and recruitment of these executive leaders. Recording features within Zoom was utilized to capture the interviews and prevent the researcher from adding or excluding any data from the participants' interviews. All transcriptions of interviews were completed by the researcher and confirmed by a peer debriefer that is familiar with deaf education and possesses an ASLPI rating of 4 or higher to ensure that the data collected was accurate. This peer debriefer was an educational leader in the field of deaf education, but not a participant of the study. This perspective was helpful in reducing any potential researcher bias and provided critical feedback to the researcher on information that would be helpful to include in the explanation of the study for individuals that are not familiar with deaf education. This was also helpful to provide clarity of key terms used in the field of deaf education and how they pertained to this study. Feedback on the identified

themes, along with the analysis, and interpretations of the findings were shared with the researcher.

The data of this study was triangulated by collecting data from a variety of deaf schools in various parts of the country and of varying size and population and from differing perspectives. Data was collected from executive leaders of varying backgrounds and experiences. As an AEAL student, a second data source is not required. I used a qualitative case study method as required by my program. Member checking was used as another form of trustworthiness in the data. Each transcribed interview was shared with a fluent user of American Sign Language for accuracy.

A potential limitation of this study was conducting the interviews over a video conferencing call versus an in-person discussion. The interviews were conducted in the same way with each participant, using Zoom, even if proximity was available with the interviewee that would allow an in-person interview. The purpose of this was to maintain a standard format among all interviews.

Transferability is limited from this research study, as this case study specifically explored a specific group of executive leaders. The intention of this case study was to describe the unique experiences of the executive leaders within the context of specialized schools for the deaf, therefore the results are meaningful to other executive leaders at a school for the deaf. The field of deaf education is a specialized field of education, separate from special education, limiting the transferability of knowledge to other schools and programs for the deaf.

Manually coding interviews using a case study methodology helped ensure the objective interpretation of the data. The use of notes and memos aided in the reflection of the data during the research process. This coding of the data assisted in discovering themes and allowed for a systematic comparison of the data. This comparative analysis lends credibility to the theories that emerge from the data. The data for this research will be accessible for five years following the study. All transcripts and recordings and individual data will be disposed of upon completion of the study to maintain the data's integrity.

Since a case study involves both a complex and intensive analysis of an individual unit as a group or community and emphasizes relationships with the environment (Oshunrinade, 2016), it was the most appropriate way to study this problem. Using the method of interviewing as part of this case study provided a deep understanding of the factors impacting retention and recruitment in these executive leader roles by the individuals currently in these positions. It was equally significant that the researcher possessed the appropriate level of experience in the field and fluency in American Sign Language (ASL) and English. Each interview was conducted in either ASL or spoken English. This additional factor of language modality needed to be considered for this case study since several interviews required translation from American Sign Language into written English.

Ethical Procedures

Ethical procedures were a priority throughout the study. Following the methods outlined above were paramount in ensuring the validity and reliability of this case study.

The informed consent form complied with US federal guidelines of an informed consent letter that includes a good explanation of procedures, description of risks reasonably to be expected, a description of benefits reasonably to be expected, an offer of inquiry regarding the procedures, and instruction that the person was free to withdraw. This letter was shared with the participant in English or American Sign Language before the start of each interview and was agreed upon by each participant before completing the interview.

In this case study, the risks to human subjects were minimal. All participants were over 18 years of age and functioning in an executive role over a school or program, which indicated a high level of mental capacity, as determined by their ability to perform in the role that they hold. Meeting these criteria was what qualified them as a participant in this case study. Participants are referred to anonymously by number in this study and attempts were made to remove any personally identifiable information from the study. Additionally, all recorded materials will be erased after five years following the research committee's final approval, minimizing any future risks related to confidentiality.

Summary

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research method to answer research questions involving factors that are contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US as well as factors executive leaders believe contribute to issues of retention and recruitment in these executive leadership positions. A discussion of procedures, study participants, data collection, and interview questions were used to address specifics of how this case study was intended to be conducted and who participated in the study.

The goal of this study was to understand factors that impact retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf using ASL for instruction. Interviews with executive leaders at these specialized schools were used to gather perceptions and experiences about this phenomenon occurring in the field of deaf education at schools and programs for the deaf throughout the US. Because the purpose of this research was to understand issues involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing, a case study design was the most appropriate choice as it involves documenting real-life situations within contexts. All study participants shared their experiences as executive leaders at schools or programs for the deaf, as well as their perspectives regarding what factors impact retention and recruitment in these positions, and suggestions for solutions were proposed.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate factors that contribute to problems involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the US. Two research questions were developed to understand factors contributing to this challenge at schools and programs for the deaf:

RQ1: How do leaders of schools for the deaf describe factors contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US?

RQ2: What solutions do executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US believe would help resolve issues involving retention and recruitment in these executive leadership positions?

Findings are described first in terms of what executive leaders expressed were factors contributing to the issues of retention and recruitment. This is followed by a report of their recommendations for retention and recruitment for these executive leadership positions. This chapter is organized into the following sections: setting, demographics, data collections, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, results by research question, and summary of data.

Setting

Eleven executive leaders were interviewed as part of this case study. Participants represented unique schools for the deaf and hard-of-hearing from various geographical locations across the US. Each interview was conducted using video conferencing technology, Zoom, that allowed for clear video transmission of conversations, which was especially essential for interviews conducted in ASL. Working with executive leaders at

schools and programs for the deaf required patience in terms of scheduling mutually convenient times during the school day. While participants were willing and eager to participate in the study, they also had many other responsibilities that made scheduling interviews difficult. It required blocking out an hour of their time for each interview. This was precious time for executive leaders considering requirements of these positions. It was especially difficult during the start of the school year. Eventually, I reached all intended participants, except one individual who, I later learned, had left that position for another related field in deaf education with another education entity.

Executive leaders represented public and private schools for the deaf that use ASL and English during the day and residential schools for the deaf within the US from preschool through 12th grade that have been in operation for 100 years or more. Executive leaders of schools for the deaf solely focused on listening and spoken language for educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students were not interviewed. Of the 11 participants, six were male and five were female. Seven of the participants were Deaf and four were hearing. Four participants had been an executive leader of their school or program for more than 10 years. Four participants had been in their roles between 3 and 10 years, and three had been in their roles for less than 3 years. Executive leaders were representative of small, medium, and large sized schools for the deaf. Schools with less than 100 students on campus were categorized as small schools. Schools with between 100 and 350 campus students were considered medium-size schools. Schools with more than 350 students were categorized as larger schools for the deaf. Two participants represented private schools for the deaf, and the remaining participants represented public schools for

the deaf. Each participant came from different locations in the country, which impacted retention and recruitment of executive leaders. Seven interviews were conducted in ASL, and four interviews were completed in spoken English (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant Number	Gender	Hearing Status	Years in Position	Location	School Size
P1	M	Deaf	>10 years	Midwest	Large
P2	F	Hearing	>10 years	Southwest	Large
P3	F	Deaf	<3 years	Southeast	Large
P4	M	Deaf	3-10 years	East	Med
P5	F	Deaf	3-10 years	West	Med
P6	M	Deaf	3-10 years	Northeast	Small
P7	F	Hearing	<3 years	West	Med
P8	F	Deaf	<3 years	West	Large
P9	M	Deaf	3-10 years	East	Med
P10	M	Hearing	>10 years	Midwest	Small
P11	M	Hearing	>10 years	West	Small

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, each participant was invited by email to participate in this study. Participants were identified in the reference issue of the Annals. This is the only peer-reviewed research journal focused on deaf education research in America. This reference issue lists all schools and programs for the deaf using ASL as the primary communication tool for their students. Any schools that have not been in existence for 100 years or more were not included. Those schools without an executive leader were not considered. Participants were then selected to represent executive leaders from a variety of regions in the US and schools of various sizes. Additionally, it was important to have representation in terms of men and women, deaf and hearing status, and years of

experience. Once executive leaders agreed to participate in interviews, I shared letters of consent and interview questions and set up meeting times for virtual interviews. Interview times lasted 1 hour in length or less, depending on the participant's length of response. Each interview was conducted and recorded using the video conferencing tool Zoom, and both participants and I were onscreen during interviews.

Most participants were in their personal office space and had set aside an hour to be undisturbed. I participated in interviews from various office spaces, all free from interruptions. No interruptions occurred during any interviews. Lighting was clear in each location to understand signed or spoken conversation. For those interviews in spoken English, sound was checked prior to starting the interview. I recorded meetings and kept a printed copy of interview questions near me for notetaking. To ensure both parties were recorded during interviews, I highlighted the participant and myself on the screen using Zoom to ensure both of us were included in the visual recording. At the end of each interview, I checked recordings to ensure participants and I were captured on screen, and both could be seen and heard clearly.

The interview protocol (see Appendix A) was followed for each interview. After some open discussion, questions began with learning about school leadership structures. This was followed structures of governing boards of schools. To understand the background of executive leaders, each participant was asked to describe the path that led them to their current position and responsibilities they enjoyed about their current position. This was followed by a question regarding responsibilities or situations that participants believed were the greatest challenges. Remaining questions focused on

retention and recruitment issues related to the position of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. If a response was not clear to me, I followed up with clarification questions. After interviews, each participant was invited to add any information they felt would help identify and solve challenges related to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf.

After each interview, I saved recordings in password-protected files on my computer. Before watching video recordings again, I uploaded them into a program for video coding called GoReact. This video assessment tool allows for time coded feedback and involves using markers to identify recurring themes (GoReact, 2022). As I watched each video again, I was able to make notes with flags in systems of information as I transcribed interviews. These notes were flagged at the precise moment that the individual expressed them. Categories were developed from notes using customized code markers on videos.

Data Analysis

Since these interviews were completed over Zoom, an additional step included translation of responses into written English. These notes became the basis of transcripts from each video. These transcripts were printed for further study. Rereading printed transcripts involved identifying common responses, words, and phrases that emerged in the data. This was broken into categories that allowed me to identify themes in data. A more detailed description of the process follows.

After each interview, I saved recordings in a password-protected file on my computer. Before watching each video recording again, I uploaded it into GoReact,

which allowed for time-coded feedback and using markers to identify recurring themes. This was helpful in terms of transcribing and coding data since all interviews had been recorded in a visual format. As I watched each video again, I paused at the precise moment of a phrase to take notes and code information being shared. Categories were developed from codes using customized code markers on videos. Video recording categories were coded with various colors or markers. If a participant made a particularly important statement, this was identified in quotes in the text box, which was translated to English as needed. Categories were based on qualitative information shared by participants.

While watching recordings of interviews, I translated the signed or spoken responses from participants into the GoReact platform into written English in a text box next to the video image. After the content was transcribed into written English, transcripts from each video were printed for further study. Transcripts were coded manually, reflecting on each interview as codes and categories emerged from the data. Rereading the printed transcript included identifying common words or phrases that emerged in the data. I identified categories on my second read of the printed version of the coded transcripts. This was followed by an analysis of the initial categories of information that were then broken down into more discrete themes. The coding process (Oshunrinade, 2016; Saldana, 2009) helped me understand the participants' perspectives and assisted in the analysis of discovering similar experiences among the executive leaders. Using this process, codes were initially identified using the GoReact platform. Codes were noted by flags from the system and notes were taken at each of these points

in the data. Initial coding included challenges with retention, challenges with recruitment, recommendations with retention, and recommendations with recruitment. Watching the interviews again provided more specificity about what executive leaders indicated were the challenges and their recommendations for solving these challenges. The coding noted on the screen and transcript developed into categories that emerged based on commonalities in the data regarding retention and recruitment of executive leaders as schools and programs for the deaf. Finally, these categories were used to identify common themes. To reinforce the information from my interview notes, I made sure to watch to the video recording again while I reread their transcripts to contextualize the text in relation to other parts of the interview. These themes are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Themes

Research Question	**Retention**	**Recruitment**
How do leaders of schools for the deaf describe factors contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the United States?	Working with people Value of the school Stressors of the position Inadequate preparation Personal reasons Governing boards Compensation	Lack of qualified applicants Preparation Compensation Negative perceptions Employment culture Location
What solutions do executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the United States believe would help resolve issues with retention and recruitment in these executive leadership positions?	More support Continuing education Mentors Enhanced compensation	Leadership training Succession planning Mentoring Focus on the Positive

RQ1

RQ1 was as follows: How do leaders of schools for the deaf describe factors contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US? Six themes emerged as factors that are contributing to issues with the retention of executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf (see Table 2). These included working with people, inadequate preparation, scope of responsibility or stressors of the position, educating others about the worth of the school, difficulty with a governing board, and pay not commensurate to the responsibilities. There were two outlying issues that were presented related to the COVID-19 pandemic and philosophical issues related to the field of deaf education.

The list of responsibilities and challenges associated with these positions that gave an executive stress was numerous. Working with people was discussed by every participant. These included human resource issues, difficulty navigating relationships with various stakeholders, including relationships with their governing boards. Inadequate preparation by higher education were generic to the need for specific training for these unique leadership positions in deaf education. P7 shared, “My plan was never to be a superintendent at a public school. My plan was always to be a superintendent at a school for the deaf and the current higher education training does not apply to that goal.”

Other responsibilities mentioned included public relations and social media concerns, and fiscal responsibilities associated with budgets and compensation. This list was extensive, so some explanation will be provided as the participants in the study expanded on these stressors. Another interesting finding was the need of these executive

leaders to overcome the lack of understanding shared by other educational professionals not familiar with deaf education. Compensation was also mentioned as a contributing factor to retaining executive leaders in these positions.

Retention Issue Theme 1: Working with People

All the participants mentioned the difficulty of dealing with people and stakeholder groups. Issues involving human resources was the most frequently mentioned stressor for executive leaders. P10 estimated that he deals with human resource issues between 70 – 80% of each day. Working with teachers' unions was discussed frequently and the difficulty of interacting with those groups. P4 and P8 discussed issues working with school district personnel within their state. A few participants mentioned the stress of working with their governing board. Some felt their lack of experience working with a governing board to be the problem with knowing how to address and satisfy differing perspectives. In contrast, others mentioned the struggle of working with a governing board that does not understand the needs to deaf and hard-of-hearing students or other aspects of running a school or program for the deaf. P8 shared that she frequently encounters audism as she deals with other professionals. Another aspect of working with people mentioned by P3, P5, and P11 was dealing with individuals on social media or managing public relations in this format. This included a demanding public requiring immediate communication on social media platforms. P6 felt people are more demanding now and not respectful of leadership on these platforms. P8 struggled with addressing the needs of the Deaf community, "They think they own this school and want to tell me how to run the school."

Retention Issue Theme 2: Stressors of the Position

Every participant articulated several stressors they experienced in their positions. Since every participant discussed dealing with people in depth, it needed its own theme and addressed previously. Some of the participants listed budget and funding concerns as a stress. This ranged from managing a large multi-faceted budget to securing funding for the school from the state legislature or through fundraising efforts. P3 stated, "I have had to learn to develop relationships with legislators and understand the political process in our state to advocate for the needs of my school." P2 felt that working within the constraints established by their state government policies and procedures to use these funds was often a barrier since there are so many compliance requirements for purchasing and using the allocated funding. P5 expressed concern for making life altering decisions when budgets are being cut. She stated, "I have had to look people in the eye that I care about and tell them their position may be cut. That is hard!"

Several participants shared that finding appropriate staff for positions is a constant struggle. P1 expressed that this problem is generally shared with public education as society has been attacking education. Several participants felt this scarcity of applicants was due to more job options for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. Several participants mentioned the location of the schools as an issue in finding applicants. P10 felt the geographic location of his school limited the number of individuals wanting to work at his school. P1, P2, P8, and P9 reflected on the current nation's struggle to find employees and felt this problem was exacerbated at a specialty school.

Other lesser-known responsibilities were also considered very demanding. One of these additional responsibilities for P6 was being the incident commander for emergencies. While P10 mentioned the need to get people excited for new initiatives was taxing. P1 and P9 talked about running a school within a profession that is constantly navigating an ongoing philosophical battle about how to educate deaf and hard-of-hearing students as a concern.

Other issues that at least one participant mentioned included lots of meetings; the difficulty of balancing work life, personal aspirations, and health; managing legal issues; and the intense scrutiny by the public for these positions. P11 expressed it this way, “You make one wrong hiccup, and you are hanging on a cross.”

A few of the participants mentioned the loneliness of the position. Because these schools and programs are so unique, participants felt that few people understand the requirements and responsibilities of the job and since there is no equivalent within the school, there are limited individuals in which to share experiences. P5 shared, “This job can be very lonely.” P5 expressed that, “The Deaf community is so small, so you need to be careful what you share, or it could kill your career in this position.” P1 shared that it feels like being on an island. P9 offered “If you don’t have an inner circle of people you can trust, you will burn out.”

Retention Issue Theme 3: Inadequate Preparation

Almost every participant reflected upon their training to become an educational leader and expressed that the training was too generic for their current responsibilities. Many stated that current training for educational leaders is focused on the general

practitioner and not for a leader at a school or program serving deaf and hard-of-hearing children. P5 stated, “There are great programs for general education leadership training with coaching, but we do not have a training for superintendents of the deaf.” Without the proper training, some participants felt that executive leaders leave these positions to pursue other ambitions or are forced out of their positions because they do not possess the necessary training for the position.

Each executive leader had completed training to become an educational leader from various higher education institutions. A few of the executive leaders expressed that their programs did not focus much time on interacting and working with a governing board, which many of these executive leaders felt would have been helpful. A few participants felt that knowing how to work with a governing board would be beneficial because boards do not always agree. Sometimes there are disagreements between the executive leader and the governing board. P3 expressed, “I never had any training on how to work with a governing board.” They felt it would have been nice to know how to balance these difficult situations while accomplishing their school goals. Although there is training on dealing with stakeholders, P8 recognized, “No program specifically addresses how to work with the Deaf community.” This is unique to the schools and programs for the deaf. “Training on how to handle that would have really been appreciated,” P7 shared.

Retention Issue Theme 4: Defending the Worth of the School

Several executive leaders mentioned the ongoing challenge of ensuring others understand the purpose and mission of the school and the value it adds to society.

Explaining the role of the school and how it functions to others with limited background knowledge was shared as an ongoing problem. The fact that hearing loss is considered a low incidence disability (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019) means that most of the society doesn't understand the unique needs of this population or the educational background of these schools. Therefore, educational leaders at schools for the deaf have many opportunities to explain the purpose the schools for the deaf and why they are necessary for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Within the current climate of IDEA and the push to mainstream students with their typical peers, there is often question about the value of self-contained schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. P8 expressed this frustration by saying, "Constantly defending and articulating the value of deaf schools can become exhausting."

Retention Issue Theme 5: Governing Boards

Several executive leaders mentioned positive and negative interactions with their governing boards. Although the governing board of each school for the deaf varied in structure, number and required members, all participants in this study shared they report to a governing board of some kind. Some boards were large in number and others were less than ten. The frequency of reporting to each governing board varied widely, and the required members of each board were different for each executive leader. Every executive leader reported at least monthly to a governing board. Some expressed some contention with their governing board that was unpleasant. Another participant expressed there could be some frustration if the board was uninvolved. Each participant's key focus was the connection, understanding and interaction with the governing board. If there was

a positive relationship with the governing board the executive leader had little concern. All acknowledged that a negative relationship with a governing board could really impact the executive leader's role. P7 stated, "If the board or hiring body doesn't understand the needs of the school for the deaf then it is going to be very difficult for them to find and hire someone with the proper background knowledge for the position." P3 expressed concern that if an individual had a bad experience with one governing board, they no longer considered themselves fit for the same role at another school for the deaf and were therefore "gun shy" to apply at other schools for the deaf. This participant quickly recognized that this is a personal reflection by the person of internal self-doubt, but it impacts the individual's interest in applying for a similar position again. P11 made the argument that if the "board doesn't understand their school and isn't asking the right questions, then they won't get the leader that the school needs."

Understanding the complexity of reporting to a governing board instead of one supervisor as described by Grissom and Andersen (2012) is an important consideration for executive leaders applying for these positions since the makeup of the board can alter frequently. A board will hire a superintendent, but then in a period of three to five years, the board turns over and that superintendent is not the one they hired and there isn't the same loyalty to the executive leader (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Maintaining a positive relationship with as many board members as possible was described by the participants as critical to the success of the executive leader at schools for the deaf.

Another aspect of this discussion was that since a board consists of a group of individuals with varying thoughts and opinions the governing boards often overlook the need for succession planning.

Retention Issue Theme 6: Compensation

Compensation was addressed by several of the participants. There seemed to be a concern over the disparity in pay when comparing the compensation of executive leaders at schools and programs of the deaf to what other executive leaders of public schools receive as compensation. P9 and P11 felt that superintendents of the deaf should be honored for their work and achievement if we are to keep people in these positions. P9 felt that executive leaders need "incentives and bonuses" to acknowledge their work. P7, P10 and P11 expressed that their pay was not comparable to other executive leader positions because of the smaller number of students at their school. They believe this was the result of the perception that others believe the work of an executive leader at a school for the deaf to be less arduous because of the smaller student body. Still, the participants of this study felt the unique nature of the schools for funding, budgeting, and managing specialized staff, along with the unique student needs under IDEA are very complex tasks that warrant comparable compensation. They expressed the need for the pay to be commensurate with the complexities and expertise of these positions. P3 expressed it this way, "People should be paid for the level of executive leadership that they provide." P6 felt that a monetary benefit wasn't the reason he did the job and that other rewards were gained "when seeing the students graduate and knowing that I was a part of making that

happen." Therefore, he was not upset about the lower pay. P9 also felt he was compensated well for his position.

Responses regarding the factors contributing to issues of recruitment of executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf, six themes emerged as impacting the recruitment of candidates to be executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf, which are shown in Table 2. These included a lack of qualified applicants, preparation for these roles, negative perceptions about education and the position of an executive leader at a school for the deaf, change in the current employment culture, location of the school, and having a governing board that cares and understands the needs of the school.

Recruitment Issue Theme 1: Lack of Qualified Applicants

The most frequently mentioned challenge for recruiting people for an executive leadership position was not enough qualified applicants because not enough people have developed the skills or have the training and experience to assume these roles. P10 stated, "I don't have enough people with the right credentials and an interest in this role to apply for the superintendent position." P5 shared, "We can't recruit teachers, let alone a superintendent." P6 felt that "Few individuals in leadership roles are ready to move up." P8 stated, "There are just not enough people with the appropriate credentials." P2 attributed this to the stressors an executive leader must face considering the pay for the position. "There are more opportunities for other higher paying positions with less stress," P3 stated. Several felt that although there are intrinsic rewards to the position of executive leader, the compensation may not be enticing enough for the level of stress and commitment required.

All the executive leaders mentioned a diminished pool of teachers of the deaf that impacted the number of individuals developing the right kind of background for leadership positions. As they reflected on the reduced number of eligible applicants for teaching positions, many would also comment on the reduction of higher education programs for training potential teachers of the deaf. P1 expressed that once they are admitted into these programs the required assessments limit the number of students who graduate from these programs. A few participants lamented that some of the teaching training programs for becoming a teacher of the deaf have been closed. Because of these reasons P2 felt that "People not coming up through the system anymore."

Recruitment Issue Theme 2: Preparation

As with retention, many leaders felt that the lack of adequate preparation limits the number of individuals recruited for these positions. "There are lots of educational leadership programs but nothing really for superintendents and programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing," P3 shared. P2 stated, "I have never seen an internship for this level of leadership." P5 felt that "Many people are passionate to do these positions but lack the education and experience." Most also felt anyone assuming the executive leader role needs to be experienced in a deaf education classroom and as a leader in deaf education should have passion for the field and position. P6 was concerned with the over confidence of individuals lacking the appropriate knowledge and experience wanting these roles. He stated, "Many of the young people think they can do these positions without that experience or education. They think they can lead a school without the

necessary knowledge or background and that is simply not true." Many executive leaders repeated the thoughts sharing, "We need to grow our own leaders."

Recruitment Issue Theme 3: Compensation

Although compensation wasn't the focus of most executive leaders, they did acknowledge some disappointment in the compensation for leaders at schools for the deaf. P8 shared that the incentives in these positions have diminished and made them less desirable for interested applicants. When schools for the deaf were initially established, the executive leader was given a home on campus, but that is no longer a common practice. In fact, it is rare for a superintendent to be offered on campus housing. P8 felt that it would be a nice incentive for assuming these roles if this was reintroduced.

P11 felt that because there has been such an intense focus on increasing the salaries of educators that pay for the leaders has not kept pace. He shared, "Teachers don't want to become a leader because the hourly pay is less. They work all year round and must deal with angry parents for only a little more pay. It's not worth it." P9 shared that there are no incentives for most executive leaders to perform well since they are not offered bonuses in the public system.

Recruitment Issue Theme 4: Negative Perceptions

Others expressed that the smaller pool of teachers is more general. "The education field is often the target of a lot of negativities and there is a lack of support for education," P1 stated, which was reiterated by P5. P2 felt that this negativity surrounding education was enough to reduce the number of individuals interested in any positions within education. P3 felt that if a school had a poor reputation on social media platforms

this could be very detrimental to recruiting applicants for executive leadership positions. She said, “There are some schools that I would never apply for an open position because of the negativity I discover through social media or hear about from other Deaf community members.” Several executive leaders shared this concern about the negativity poor social media can have on the ability of a school to recruit for these positions and often discourages people from applying for these positions. P7 shared, “When there is nothing positive to say about a school or the field then applicants avoid applying for those positions.” P10 felt that the geographic location of his school did not draw others to his open positions. “Our state is not as appealing to people wanting to work at a deaf school. Other states have more things to attract them.” Others felt that the contention among the field of deaf education and lack of experience at the actual school with an opening kept individuals from applying for the positions. “People are frightened to apply for these positions because they don’t have historical longevity with a school,” P7 expressed.

Finally, some mentioned a lack of respect for leadership positions and poor treatment of executive leaders as a reason people may avoid these positions. Many felt that some parents and staff members choose to express their displeasure aggressively instead of constructively. P6 expressed concern for this behavior being accepted so readily by society by saying, “We can’t continue to say we have thick skin. We can’t just do that anymore.” Knowing that there are strong opinions in the deaf education philosophical debate, some participants recognized that could deter potential applicants

for an executive leadership role. “If there is a struggle about the philosophy that can have a great impact on recruiting leaders to step into the battle,” P7 expressed.

Recruitment Issue Theme 5: Change in Employment Culture

The commitment by employees to stay in one career field has changed. Many executive leaders expressed that the newer generation of employees do not concern themselves with longevity in a career field. “People don’t stay in any position as long anymore. There is a different culture about employment now,” shared P2. P1 expressed it this way, “Fewer people are getting into education and staying long in any position, including deaf education.” P9 felt that “People don’t typically choose to stay in positions a long time. They want a new challenge and leave.” A few executive leaders felt that now that Deaf individuals have more options for jobs that they are no longer seeking these types of positions. They praised this advancement in society that deaf people have more job options but lamented that this reduced the number of people working at the school for the deaf. Another issue specific to schools for the deaf is that sometimes to advance, individuals must be willing to relocate to a different state. P6 explained, “Deaf schools are so spread out that if you want to advance, you may have to move to an entirely new state.” A few participants shared this sentiment.

Recruitment Issue Theme 6: Location

Several executive leaders mentioned location as an issue for recruiting individuals to their schools. In the field of deaf education, schools for the deaf are divided into regions of the country created by Gallaudet University, the only university developed for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. These regions are listed in Table 1. Most states have

between one to three distinctive schools and programs for the deaf, developed by each state in accordance with number of deaf and hard-of-hearing student in the area and the prevailing philosophy for educating deaf students. In a few states there are no schools for the deaf. Some of these schools are in rural areas of the state that require a commitment by the applicant to live within a community with limited options for deaf and hard-of-hearing people. P10 said, “My geographic location is not appealing to people who want to live around a vibrant Deaf community.”

Each school for the deaf has its own structure and culture. “Most professionals like to stay where they are comfortable and know the system instead of moving to another school far away that they do not understand the system,” P9 shared. P7 stated it this way, “Since schools for the deaf are not close to one another, someone applying for an executive leadership role must be willing to move across the country to assume one of these roles.”

One outlying recruitment issue mentioned by P3 was that there are different state requirements for superintendents from state to state. In some states there is a required state certification to act as a superintendent which is not the same from state to state. This could be problematic if a person is unwilling to take the required course to become qualified in a new state.

RQ2

RQ2 was: What solutions do executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US believe would help resolve issues involving retention and recruitment in these

executive leadership positions? Several suggestions were made in a variety of ways that lead to four themes for resolving issues with retention (see Table 2).

Four recommendations for mitigating the issues related to retention of executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf were provided by the participants of this study. Each of these recommendations were repeated by almost every participant in the study. Each participant recommended more support, continuing education, mentoring, and most recommended enhanced compensation.

Retention Theme 1: More Support

Every participant strongly emphasized the need for more support to keep executive leaders in their positions. This included a close circle of friends, staff, other executive leaders, and support from their governing boards to understand the unique needs of their state school for the deaf. All the participants expressed the need to frequently chat with others in similar positions. All the participants expressed that talking with other superintendents is helpful because these individuals are more likely to understand the situations and stressors they encounter. P7 felt, “This helps me to see the challenges other schools have and to dialog with them about how to solve the issues.” P5 shared, “Meetings with other executive leaders at schools for the deaf helps me feel calm and sane as possible.” P11 stated, “They help me with challenges and struggles by giving me feedback.” Knowing this was important, P6 created a support group by setting up a coalition with other executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf in his area.

The ideal support group was other executive leaders in deaf education, but some expressed appreciation for the ability to network with other superintendents within their

state not part of deaf education. P3 expressed that, “We probably need a support system outside of the normal support system for other superintendents.” Some of the participants have monthly meetings with other executive leaders and expressed gratitude for the opportunity to participate in these meetings. P8 shared, “These meetings provide me with an outlet to dialog with others about current stressors. It is also an opportunity to share great things that are happening at my school with others.” P3 was grateful for the opportunity to participate with other superintendents of public schools through a book chat. Others also stressed the need for a good support team within the school. P9 stated, “You need a strong relationship with your executive team to be successful.” Lastly, P4 expressed the need for a supportive Deaf community to be effective and feel successful in these roles.

Retention Theme 2: Continuing Education

All the executive leaders expressed a need to have the appropriate education to be effective in this position. Participants shared different types of training they felt would be beneficial to retaining executive leaders. Some felt that training on how to work with a board would help them be more successful in their roles and keep them in their positions longer. Specifically, P9 felt, “Educating executive leaders about the issues they can anticipate encountering is integral for being effective in these positions and helping the school succeed.” All expressed a desire for training to develop the necessary skills to be an executive leader at a school for the deaf. Since these positions often must interact directly with legislative bodies, several of the participants recommended training on how to approach and work with legislators. Knowing that the better adept an executive leader

is in advocating with legislature, P9 recommended a training for superintendents on how to market their schools to legislatures. P11 felt this connection was important for other reasons, “You must understand how your school fits into the broader landscape of education.” P6 suggested a learning module on how to motivate people would be helpful. P5 recommended that workshops and presentations from other superintendents in these positions would be helpful. Others recommended some more personal education such as balancing the personal and the professional and even courses on self-care for executive leaders. From the technical aspects of the job, like budgeting, or learning how to disagree kindly with others, there are a broad range of topics that would benefit an executive leader. P1 expressed that the idea that learning should not stop upon hire, “It is important to be a continual learner.”

Retention Theme 3: Mentors

Another often recommended solution to retaining executive leaders in their positions was mentoring. Many felt this type of support was important to becoming a better executive leader. Having a person to confide in and advise when the stressors become challenging was reiterated by every participant. Each participant expressed it slightly differently. P11 felt, “Having a person to talk to about all the stressors is huge.” P7 expressed that, “Chatting with other superintendents at like schools helps me to make decisions for own school.” P3 felt, “It is nice to talk to someone who is dealing with the same issues.” P5 shared, “Finding people that you can commiserate with and collaborate with is very important to not burn out in these positions.” P6, said, “We need to work with others with similar authentic experiences.” P1 stated, “It is important to interact with

others that are walking in the same shoes." P2 said, "Superintendents need someone to turn to when things get difficult." P9 expressed that, "A mentor helps us to know we are not alone and to provide a safe place to vent." This relationship with another person that understands the stressors an executive leader is experiencing was recommended by all the participants. They craved the individualized feedback and support. They wanted the road map and a guide to navigate the unfamiliar issues that arise. P3 expressed gratitude for her mentor because, "I always have someone available to me to ask questions."

Retention Theme 4: Enhanced Compensation

Although not the most pressing issue presented by the participants in this study, compensation was discussed by several of the executive leaders. A few of the participants did not mention pay as an issue for them personally but recognized it could be an issue for others. The obvious recommendation by the executive leaders was to increase the pay for these positions and more people would stay in these roles. P8 and P9 suggested that benefits and incentives be increased to retain people in these roles and increase the interest level of candidates for an executive leader position. "I think we need to go back to offering housing on campus for the executive leader. Some schools have stopped doing this and it was a great perk for assuming the role of superintendent," P8 explained. P9 appreciated bonuses he received for accomplishing various goals at the school. He recommended that other governing bodies consider bonuses or incentives to encourage the executive leader to achieve beyond the school's status quo. "If the pay cannot be improved, then acknowledging the other personal rewards for doing this position is important," he recommended. The participants felt an increase in compensation and

incentives, or other benefits would produce positive outcomes and motivate leaders to stay in their positions.

Recommendations for mitigating the challenges with recruitment are like solving the issues with retention and are listed in Table 2. The notable themes for resolving these issues with recruitment included, a focused effort on leadership training, succession planning within a school, mentoring individuals to become an executive leader, and focus on the positive. Each area will be expanded upon and then outlier data will be presented.

Recruitment Theme 1: Leadership Training

Participants of this study emphasized more training for current leaders will lead to more options for these executive leaders in the future. This will help people develop the necessary skills to assume the role of an executive leader at a school or program for the deaf. Several of the participants mentioned the CEASD Leadership Academy. This a leadership training supported by the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf. The goal of the training it to provide more support and training to new leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Candidates are selected from schools and programs for the deaf across the US and are partnered with an experienced superintendent or a retired superintendent during a three-day retreat held annually. Each candidate is assigned a superintendent or retired superintendent to act as a mentor for two years to the candidate. Several participants applauded this leadership academy effort and felt that the training should be expanded.

Each expressed a need to have a training specific to leaders of deaf and hard-of-hearing schools and programs that is centralized. There was a recommendation to

leverage retired superintendents of the deaf to train upcoming leaders. As P4 shared, "This could be used to teach people to avoid the mistakes that have caused other executive leaders to be fired." Participants recommended that the trainers possess the experience to train on issues encountered at schools and programs for the deaf such as human resource, communication, dealing with stakeholders that lack understanding about a school or program of the deaf, finances at schools for the deaf, the influence and involvement of the Deaf community, budgeting at a school for the deaf, and a full understanding of IDEA as it applies to deaf and hard-of-hearing students. P6 recommended internships for superintendents before assuming this type of role. P10 felt it important for executive leaders at schools for the deaf to "partner with their local colleges and universities to develop more teachers of the deaf and educational leadership programs."

Recruitment Theme 2: Succession Planning

To recruit quality applicants for these positions, participants expressed a need to develop good relationships with people to help them develop into a strong leader. Every participant shared that they are currently trying to grow your own leaders in their schools. This can be done by building in opportunities for leadership experiences, as P4 shared. P10 felt it was important to give people leadership opportunities and follow a distributive leadership model to develop more leaders at the school. He felt this was necessary to, "Build the capacity and knowledge base of professionals to assume these positions." P6 recommended, "Give them projects to help grow them professionally." P9 encouraged other executive leaders to, "Find people with an open mind that are willing to learn and

grow and cultivate that." P3 encouraged other executive leaders to send people to leadership training to develop their skills. This was not limited to higher education courses, but also included local leadership training. P6 felt that, if it was possible, individual training by the current executive leader on a variety of skills would be helpful. He stated, "If you see someone with potential, give them opportunities to learn and grow. Demonstrate you believe in them and give them confidence." This encouragement to nurture and develop leadership skills in staff members was promoted by all participants.

Recruitment Theme 3: Mentoring

Within the context of supporting the learning of current leaders of the school to assume an executive leadership role, a mentor was repeatedly mentioned. Most felt mentoring was key to any succession planning developed by an executive leader. Different participants expressed this in different ways. P2 emphasized the importance of being a good model for the position and showing respect to all staff, teachers, and administrators. She felt that the mentoring began even before we hired staff as educators, "We need to support more people becoming educators which will give us options for leaders." This included mentoring paraprofessionals to become an educator and then educators to become leaders at the school. P7 stated, "We need care about who will be assuming these roles and personally mentoring principals to become superintendents is key. This can be done by setting up a mentoring program for leadership in your school." As P11 shared, "This begins with identifying people who are interested in becoming a leader and then caring enough about the school and the person to mentor them to become an executive leader." When mentoring a leader, P3 shared it is important to talk about

how decisions are made, and the thought process involved in making that decision. “This allows potential leaders to learn about how you came to certain decisions and why.” P7 shared, “Show them how to problem solve in these roles. Help people to think like a superintendent and come up with those ideas.” This personal involvement by the current executive leader can have a lasting impact on succession planning at a school.

Recruitment Theme 4: Focus on the Positive

Several participants mentioned the great pleasure they derive from these positions and felt this perspective is not shared very often. P4 encouraged other executive leaders to “start talking more about the good aspects of this position, instead of focusing on the stressors of the job.” P8 counseled, “We need to share the good stories and talk about what inspires and motivates us.” She also recommended we communicate these positive things on social media. P3 felt we should “start sharing the fun parts of the job.” P1 felt that simply ending the attack on public education would positively effect on recruiting people for these positions. Using parents as ambassadors was encouraged by P4 to build the positive about the school and community. As P5 expressed, “We need to highlight the positive aspects of the job.”

Some recommendations were singular to one participant. One outlier in the data was more support from the Deaf community and parents. P8 felt this may help recruit applicants for the positions, or that parents engaged with the school could be used as an ambassador to help find more leaders. P2 thought that more applicants would seek these positions by ending the attack on public education. Finally, P1 felt that anyone seeking a

degree in education should be able to get these degrees at no cost and this would increase the number of applicants for all positions of education.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As a more than 23 years in deaf education professional using an ASL/English approach and a leader for more than ten years at a school for the deaf, I was uniquely qualified to conduct these interviews. Since interviews needed to be conducted in American Sign Language and spoken English depending on the participants, fluency in spoken English and American Sign Language was important for robust conversations in both languages. I have been evaluated using an American Sign Language proficiency interview known as an ASLPI with a rating of four on a scale of zero to five, a near native-like proficiency in ASL. Therefore, I demonstrated sufficient fluency with the language to be credible conduct these interviews.

The engagement by the participants demonstrated credibility for this study. The participants willingly engaged in an interview lasting close to an hour demonstrating a long-lasting engagement in the topic. Investing this amount of time provided sufficient time for me to become familiar with the setting and context, test for misinformation, build trust, and gather rich data. Each interview was focused on the issue of retention and recruitment of executive leaders of schools and programs for the deaf. As the researcher, I observed the interview for the characteristics and elements most relevant to my problem of study. I took notes on the responses by the participants. Each participant was given the opportunity to revisit the topic if they wanted to add more information after the interview. The video recording of the interviews and the notes taken directly on the GoReact

platform confirm that the participants' narratives reflect the data gathered from the interviews.

The data were triangulated as the interviews were conducted with executive leaders from varying school sizes and locations throughout the US over the course of 3 months. This representative sample provided a sufficient data saturation of schools and programs for the deaf across the nation to meet the parameters established for this study. Interviewing multiple people is sufficient for the data being collected and accomplishes triangulation for the purposes of this study. A qualitative case study method was followed as it best fit the research questions. Executive leaders from varying backgrounds and experiences were interviewed. All translations were confirmed by a peer who was familiar with the topic of study and possessed an ASLPI rating of 4 or higher to reduce any potential researcher bias and support agreement of the findings. The peer was not a participant of the study. This professional provided critical feedback on descriptions, analysis, and interpretations of the data. The peer debriefer advised on possible descriptions as we discussed the analysis of the data. This included discussions with me about the interpretations of the data from his perspective. These changes were only slight deviations from what I had initially noted. This discussion of the data validated the findings I had discovered.

Transferability was accomplished by consistent internal checking of notes during the analysis of the interviews and checking with the participants for clarification during the interviews. Using the GoReact platform the transcription of the data was able to be noted at the time of the statement with detail. This provided a very candid narrative

analysis of the information being shared by the executive leader. The executive leaders were very sincere in aiding in this research study. This case study specifically explored a unique group of executive leaders at schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Given the characteristics of the participants and settings, transferability would only be possible with participants serving in similar settings with similar characteristics. This study could easily be replicated with other executive leaders at differing schools and programs for the deaf meeting the criteria for participation to confirm the findings.

The context of the interviews and description of the questions posed to the participants allow for the study's transferability. An audit trail of the research process articulated how the study was conducted at each stage and included a record of the steps taken at each point in the study. Manually coding of the interviews helped ensure the objective interpretation of the data. Notes and memos were used in the reflection and comparative analysis of the data during the research process. This analysis allowed for a credible interpretation of the data. Using the interview questions and a detailed description of the interview process another individual can replicate the process, and member checking to confirm the findings. Reflexivity was accomplished by maintaining a diary to understand my conceptual lens and to reduce any potential biases that could have occurred throughout the study.

Summary of Challenges Faced by Executive Leaders at Schools for the Deaf

Understanding factors contributing to the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf throughout the US required personal in-depth discussions with the individuals filling these roles. These executive leaders were forthcoming about

their experiences and perceptions of the factors impacting this role and the ability of schools to hire and retain quality people into these positions. The backgrounds and experiences varied with each participant and the skillset required by the governing board differed as well. At most schools for the deaf a strong connection with the Deaf community is valued by the governing board while others didn't emphasize this connection. Several of the executive leaders mentioned the importance of education and the types of training that would be helpful. Skills that the participants felt important for training included budgeting for these types of schools, working with the legislature to secure funding, working with a governing board, working with the Deaf community, dealing with human resource issues, and fluency in American Sign Language. An executive leader at a school for the deaf must have well developed skills in each of these areas.

The factors affecting retention included six themes. The first theme was working with people, inadequate preparation, scope of responsibility or stressors of the position, educating others about the worth of the school, difficulty with a governing board, and compensation not commensurate to the responsibilities. Most participants reflected on working with people as a constant stressor of the position. This was experienced when dealing with individuals inside and outside of the school. It included staffing issues, working with stakeholders and other districts, along with negotiating with unions and working with legislative bodies. Almost every participant discussed inadequate preparation. Retaining and recruiting executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf requires more training for these unique positions since most educational

programming for educational leaders is designed for general types of educational leadership. There is no specific training for leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Another theme included concerns over the scope of responsibilities for the position that are stressful to the executive leaders. These stressors were extensive, and most participants spent time during each interview articulating a particular stressor that was most prevalent on their mind at the time. These ranged from personnel issues, budgeting, social media concerns, and following procurement rules. Another unique stressor for these positions was the need to educate others about the worth of a school for the deaf. This was unique to these roles since society does not typically question the need for public schools, however schools for the deaf are often in question by other educational professionals. Another retention issue was related to dealing with a governing board. Each participant had a governing board for their school, and all reported directly to that board. Although the structure of each governing board was different the participants of this study stressed the importance of maintaining a strong relationship with the governing board and the importance that the governing board understand the needs of the school. Lastly, many participants were concerned that the compensation was not commensurate to all the responsibilities and stresses encountered by these executive leaders at schools for the deaf. Although there may be fewer students in these schools the duties and responsibilities require a unique set of skills and duties that are complex and need to be recognized.

Six themes emerged surrounding the contributing factors impacting recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf throughout the US. The themes

included the lack of qualified applicants, inadequate preparation for these roles, negative perceptions about education and the position of an executive leader at a school for the deaf, change in the current employment culture, location of the school, and having a governing board that cares and understands the needs of the school. The most mentioned concern addressed by the executive leaders was the lack of qualified applicants. Various executive leaders attributed to different reasons. Concerns were primarily focused on the lack of qualified applicants in entry level positions that can lead to these executive level positions. Many saw this lack of educators as the greatest concern for succession planning to achieve the executive leader role.

Lack of appropriate education or experience was also discussed as a factor affecting recruitment since fewer individuals are seeking educational leadership training that influences succession planning. This discussion included the need to prepare younger leaders through experience and education and the need for mentoring current leaders to begin to think like a superintendent and learn the skills necessary to one day assume the role.

The third theme was negativity for the position and field of education, specifically deaf education. Negativity towards education, deaf education, and the position of an executive leader was presented by several participants as affecting the desirability of these positions on potential applicants. To increase the number of applicants for these positions, there needs to be a positive branding on the roles. Others were concerned with the change in the employment climate. Several participants mentioned that the culture does not promote longevity in a position and therefore there is a lot of movement

between careers. Some felt the change in the employment culture was reflected in the lack of applicants and the ability to recruit qualified applicants. Since modern generations of applicants have a different perspective on work, many do not stay with one career field for a lifetime as has been the pattern in the past.

Many participants felt the governing board of a school can dramatically influence who is recruited and selected for the executive leadership position of a school. Having governing board members who care and understand the needs of the school is integral to finding the right executive leader to run a school for program for the deaf was recommended by several participants. If the governing board is not involved in understanding the purpose and value of the school, the right candidate may not be selected.

Finally, several participants felt that although monetary compensation is not the most important factor affecting retention and recruitment, enhanced compensation would drive more individuals to consider these roles. Suggestions for reinstating some benefits such as housing and bonuses was recommended. If this cannot be achieved, it is recommended that institution personnel emphasize the positive aspects of these positions.

Participants share recommendations for mitigating problems with retention. From these recommendations four themes emerged. These themes included more support, continuing education, mentoring, and enhanced compensation. All participants underscored the importance of providing more support to individuals in these roles. They recognized that these positions can be very lonely and taxing. The support from others in the same role at another school for the deaf can be very helpful in achieving success in

these positions and retaining current superintendents. Several participants also mentioned the need for continuing education since the current training for educational leaders is focused on general educational leadership training and not on specialty skills required of an executive leader at a school or program for the deaf. Mentoring was a key factor for sustaining current executive leaders in these roles. Participants shared experiences of finding and relying upon a mentor and the benefit that had for working in these roles. This support was key in making decisions and providing an outlet for understanding what they experience. Finally, some recommended enhanced compensation or benefits to entice people to stay in these positions longer.

The four themes executive leaders shared for resolving issues with recruitment included a focused effort on leadership training, succession planning within a school, mentoring individuals to become an executive leader, and a focus on the positive. Participants recommended an increased focus on leadership training specific to deaf education. This included support for the CEASD Leadership Academy and a centralized leadership training program for educational leadership in deaf education. There was also a heavy emphasis by the participants on succession planning within a school. Knowing that there is a shortage of applicants, several participants felt a need to grow their own leaders. This included providing personal mentoring to other principals or supervisors at the school with the potential to assume an executive leader's role. Many also felt that there needs to be a shift in how these roles are presented. Instead of emphasizing the negative, a focus on the positive could recruit more individuals to consider these roles.

In Chapter 5, I interpret findings of the data to address the gap in practice and problems involving retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf across the United States. Limitations of the findings are shared, along with recommendations for mitigating these issues and for further study.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate factors that challenge retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the United States. By understanding perspectives of executive leaders, I aimed to address why these challenges exist and recommendations for mitigating these issues. Key findings of this study included six themes involving retention of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf and four themes involving recruitment of candidates for these positions. These included working with people, inadequate preparation, scope of responsibility or stressors of the position, educating others about the worth of the school, difficulty with governing boards, and compensation that is not commensurate with responsibilities. There were six identified themes involving factors impacting recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. These were lack of qualified applicants, inadequate preparation for these roles, negative perceptions about education and positions of executive leader at schools for the deaf, changes in current employment culture, location of schools, and presence of a governing board that understands needs of the school. Four themes involving mitigating problems with retention were more support, continuing education, mentoring, and enhanced compensation. Focused efforts on leadership training, succession planning within schools, mentoring individuals to become executive leaders, and a focus on the positive were the four themes involving recommendations for resolving issues regarding recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf.

Interpretation of the Findings

Barriers to retaining and recruiting executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf were viewed using Grissom and Andersen's (2012) conceptual framework. Although each executive leader has oversight of a school for the deaf, results of findings were used to give insight into their experiences and not suggest that findings are the only factors impacting retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf. Findings from the literature review and this case study provided valuable information regarding retaining quality executive leaders in their current roles and recommendations for preparing the next executive leaders. This case study needs to be considered based on the labor market and overall cultural dynamic of educational shortages of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf nationwide.

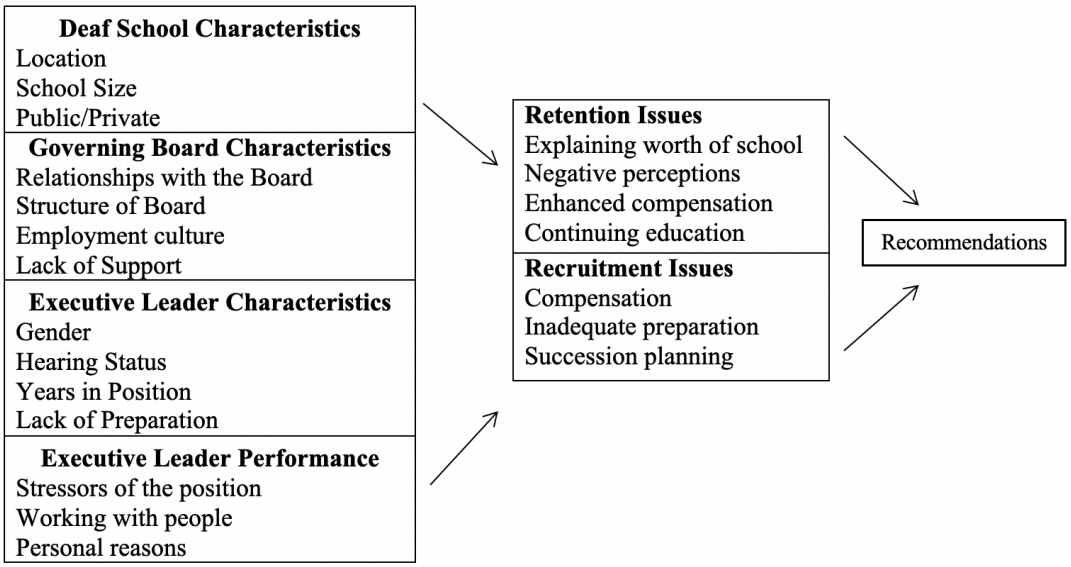
While superintendent turnover has not received as much focus from researchers or policymakers as teacher or principal turnover, stability in this position has been linked to a greater likelihood of success for new education initiatives (Hussey et al., 2019). Knowing that superintendent attrition is associated with challenging environments, the economic labor market model for superintendents developed by Grissom and Andersen (2012) served as the conceptual lens for this study to understand factors impacting attrition of executive leaders in these roles. Grissom and Andersen (2012) described four characteristics that can affect turnover of executive leaders of schools. These include district characteristics, school board characteristics, superintendent characteristics, and superintendent performance, both actual and perceived. In this study, the main advantage of conceptualizing superintendent attrition through this lens is that it helped to identify

factors that impact turnover of these positions by identifying which factors were likely to affect decisions related to retention and recruitment. Applying this conceptual framework helped me understand how some of the challenges impacted retention and recruitment of these positions and how executive leaders' recommendations could potentially help solve these issues.

Previously identified themes contributing to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf in the US were separated into retention and recruitment themes and discussed in the study. Themes for retention (see Table 2) included working with people, explaining the value of the school, stressors of the position, inadequate preparation, governing boards, compensation and personal reasons. Human issues were the most identified challenge. This included work with staff, stakeholders, and even legislative bodies. The need to explain the value of the school was unique to executive leaders at schools for the deaf and not typically a stressor for superintendents in typical school districts. Some participants mentioned the difficulty of having a board of individuals with unique personalities as supervisors. Lastly, some felt compensation was not comparable to other superintendent positions

Figure 2

Framework for Understanding Executive Leader Retention and Recruitment at Schools/Programs for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing



Themes for recruitment (see Table 2) included lack of qualified applicants, preparation for the position, compensation, negative perceptions about the position or school, current employment dynamics, and school locations. Lack of qualified applicants was related to a dearth of educators and leaders with adequate training and experience to assume these roles. Each participant identified several stressors in their current roles that could challenge individuals assuming these roles. Leaders prepared to assume these unique roles were lacking. Compensation was disappointing to some participants due to the complexity of the position.

High stakes testing can burden executive leaders at any school. At schools for the deaf, this stressor can be heightened, because tests used for high stakes testing can often be inaccessible to students, or not normed for deaf and hard-of-hearing students. Thus,

results of these assessments do not adequately reflect performance of the student, which can reflect poorly on the superintendent.

Themes related to RQ2 (see Table 2) for solving challenges with retention included more support for individuals in these positions, continuing education, specific support from a mentor, and enhanced compensation. Executive leaders offered solutions to problems with retention; the most identified theme was support for individuals in these positions by their governing boards, community, and staff. Participants specifically identified a need to find a mentor, whether from within the state or another school for the deaf. They also believed that executive leaders should continue to seek opportunities for further education. Some participants said enhanced compensation would encourage executive leaders to stay in their positions.

Themes involved with solving issues regarding recruitment included leadership training, succession planning, mentoring potential leaders, and a focus on the positive (see Table 2). To mitigate difficulties encountered when recruiting individuals to assume these roles, participants felt a strong emphasis on succession planning and internal leadership training, including mentoring current leaders, would have the greatest impact on developing quality replacements for executive leaders. Additionally, school location can limit applicants for roles since several of these schools are not housed in metropolitan areas may not be enticing for that reason alone. Some participants mentioned that they needed to promote these schools better to entice individuals to seek these positions. With negative media attention directed at schools, there should be a focus on the positive. Research questions provided a framework for the discussion that follows.

RQ1

RQ1 focused on challenges contributing to retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the Deaf as perceived by those currently in those positions. These challenges were viewed through Grissom and Andersen's (2012) conceptual framework of the economic labor market for superintendents. From the literature the description of these problems included a long history of debates in deaf education that has been impacted by current laws that promote environments of integration with other students instead of schools for the deaf (Lane et al., 1996).

The shortages in education personnel are felt keenly in special education and deaf education. A shortage of educators has led to a shortage of leaders that has reduced the number of available applicants for positions in executive leadership (Bryant, et al., 2017). Those individuals currently in executive leader roles experience challenges that influence decisions to maintain these positions (Ashton, 2012). These challenges were mentioned by the participants and included the themes identified. Other researchers have articulated some of these challenges in the following research articles related to retention:

Leadership challenges at a school for the deaf (Ashton, 2012).

Experiences of deaf individuals seeking administrative positions (Ballard, 2019).

Issues with social justice (Cambron-McCabe, & McCarthy, 2005).

High stakes job demands. (Collie, et al., 2020).

High conflict or negative relationship with the governing board (Grissom & Andersen, 2012).

Intensive special education workload responsibilities (Hussey, et al., 2019).

Working with the Deaf community in a leadership role (Kamm-Larew, & Lamkin, 2008).

Stressors for superintendents of the deaf. (Keller, 2015).

Stressors of a school superintendent. (Kelly, 2018).

Superintendent duties at American residential schools for the deaf (Knudson, 2003).

The importance of deaf culture (O'Brien, & Robinson, 2017).

Challenges Impacting Retention

The literature review and this study demonstrate specific skill sets are necessary to succeed in these positions and articulate the challenges impacting the retention of executive leaders at schools for the deaf. These leaders have similar stressors to other superintendents of district programs and other challenges that are unique to an executive leader at a school for the deaf. Human resource issues are common to superintendents at a public school district (Kelly, 2018). However, superintendents at schools for the deaf must deal with language and cultural conflicts between Deaf and hearing staff that district superintendents do not experience (Keller, 2015). Both groups must manage large budgets, but the funding mechanisms for the schools for the deaf differ from the traditional budgeting process for districts. Shortages for staff is common to both groups. However, owing to the specialization of educating deaf and hard-of-hearing students requiring an increased level of higher education, the number of individuals with the appropriate education is further lacking (Ashton, 2012). Additionally, the blessing of additional job options for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals has reduced the number of

DHH people seeking roles in education, thus reducing this potential applicant pool. Finally, the location of deaf schools is another limiting factor that was not mentioned in the literature review but was prominent on the minds of the participants of this study. Schools for the deaf are not close to one another and if someone is interested in an executive leadership position this will most likely require a significant move. Additionally, many participants shared that the location of several of the schools for the deaf are not in prime locations within their state, thus this can impact the desirability of the school for the deaf.

Challenges Impacting Recruitment

Some of the challenges addressed by the executive leaders in retention are like those impacting recruitment. Some of the research specifically addressing recruitment were the following:

Preparation of educational leaders of the deaf (Andrews & Covell, 2006).

Stability in leadership positions (Baker, et al., 2010).

Preparing future school leaders (Bryant, et al., 2017).

Leadership succession and principal retention (Cieminski, 2018).

Preparing for future needs at school for the deaf (Fischgrund, & Tucker, 2018).

Principal shortages (Pijanowski, et al., 2009).

Trends in special education leadership (Smith, et al., 2011)

Pipelines for educational leadership at deaf schools (Taylor, & Youngs, 2018).

The literature review and the study included very consistent concerns with current shortages of educators and educational leaders. Most research attributed the lack of

potential candidates for educational leadership roles to the shortages of educators (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019; Cieminski, 2018; Pijanowski, et al., 2009; Smith, et al., 2011). Limited training for individuals seeking a leadership role at a school for the deaf was an additional concern expressed by the participants of this study. Although compensation was briefly discussed, it seemed to be a greater issue for the superintendents of the deaf since they felt these positions were not paid similarly to other superintendents at other educational institutions. Since there are very few schools for the deaf nationwide and a small community, there can be a heightened focus on the school's stability that is shared broadly. If that attention is negative, this can reduce the recruiting power of the school. Several participants felt that these platforms often highlight the negative and do not shine light on the positive.

RQ2

RQ2 focused on possible solutions to these challenges with retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf as perceived by those individuals in the positions. The research and the case study were in alignment for most recommendations for solving issues with retention and recruitment of executive leaders. However, there were some things mentioned in the research that were not articulated by the participants of the case study and the reverse was also true. Participants recommended creating strong succession pipelines.

Recommendations to Mitigate Issues with Retention

The four themes for mitigating problems with the retention of executive leaders included more support, continuing education, mentoring, and enhanced compensation.

These themes are supported in the literature review (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Although executive leaders are at the top of the organization, they need the same level of support that people in other positions need. Just as new teachers and leaders need mentors, executive leaders need people they can trust and rely on for advice when they make decisions. These mentors can come from another superintendent in a local district, but the better mentor would be another superintendent of the deaf or a retired executive leader from a school for the deaf. Some of the executive leaders shared that the most helpful and cherished support came from attending monthly meetings with other superintendents currently working at a school for the deaf. These monthly meetings provide a current resource of support that allows the leaders to share their concerns and ideas while validating that they are not alone.

As some of the participants recommended, continuing education can help retain executive leaders. As several of the participants stated, the current training in higher education did not teach educational leadership skills specific for deaf education. Therefore, continuing education can fill in these gaps. By encouraging continuing education, the executive leader has an opportunity for continued growth that will benefit the school.

Since a few of the participants shared concerns about the compensation and that the pay in these positions were frequently less than superintendents in other districts, a quantitative study may be helpful to determine if these assertions are true. Although a few of the participants believed this to be true, a study of the salaries of superintendents of the deaf as compared to superintendents in nearby school districts would provide

valuable information about the validity of these claims. This could also be conducted in conjunction with a study that directly compares these two positions.

Recommendations to Mitigate Issues with Recruitment

The literature review and the case study offered very consistent recommendations. Both the literature review and the participants of this case study discussed the need for succession planning (Baker, et al., 2010). The executive leaders and the literature review indicated nurturing educators into leadership roles. Those leaders should be trained and mentored to assume the executive leader role. Succession planning, internal leadership training, including mentoring of current leaders are recommended in the literature and by the participants to create a viable pipeline to these executive leadership positions (Baker, et al., 2010; Bryant, et al., 2017). All succession plans should be comprehensive and actively involve the current executive leader to be successful. To solve issues with negativity, the participants recommended a positive outlook and response on social media about these executive leadership roles.

Personal characteristics of executive leaders at schools for the deaf impact attrition; however, studies have been limited in their findings. Some studies have suggested that more desirable traits will cause a leader to stay longer and yet these individuals are often sought after for more desirable opportunities and therefore have shorter tenure in these positions. According to Grissom and Andersen (2012), the characteristics of the superintendent are the strongest predictor in retention of individuals in these roles. They reported that the strongest predictor of attrition in superintendent positions was age since individuals in these positions are typically closer to retirement.

Other factors included student poverty, subjective superintendent evaluations and conflicts with the governing board. As the findings for this study suggest, the perception of the individual in each situation and context can have a bearing on how the executive leader chooses to respond. Everyone is unique and responds differently to challenges when they are presented. Some individuals in this study looked at the same information and came to a different conclusion. All the participants mentioned the disparity in pay between a superintendent at a district school and the superintendents at schools for the deaf, but some felt they were intrinsically rewarded by the students' performance and that compensated for the lower pay. Many participants identified similar themes that could cause a superintendent to leave the position. These included dealing with human resource issues, repeated explaining to others about the purpose and value of the school for the deaf, pressure from the Deaf community, securing funding for the school, excessive meetings, additional unexpected duties, a harsh social media response and loneliness in the position. Dealing with these stressors daily was considered very taxing by the participants. Dealing with these stressors may cause an executive leader to leave the position or retire, which Grissom and Andersen (2012) described as a significant contributor to the attrition of superintendents. Involuntary superintendent attrition is often a political or controversial affair.

These stressors cause for the recommendations suggested by the participants of this study for retention. To overcome these stressors, all participants recommended more support including mentoring from another executive leader in the field, time with other executive leaders at other schools for the deaf in support groups and support needed from

internal staff that can be trusted. More time studying the things that are relevant to the position was recommended.

Solutions to the problems of recruitment were focused on leadership training. Many of the participants applauded CEASD's leadership training program but felt it should be expanded. Others recommended a central resource for developing the skills of potential leaders at schools for the deaf. A focus on succession planning within a school was described as critical to solving the issues with recruitment. This included mentoring individuals to become an executive leader by taking an interest in current staff and talking to them about the duties of an executive leader and why decisions are made. Another recommendation was to focus on the positive since a negative perception of a school can cause difficulties with recruitment.

These findings confirm many of the findings described by Grissom and Andersen (2012) in their conceptual framework of economic labor market for superintendents relating to issues with governing boards, executive leader characteristics and performance. In addressing location, this issue was intensified by the great distance between schools for the deaf in the US. In this qualitative study the interviews uncovered more personal concerns that cause a superintendent to want to vacate the position of executive leader at schools and programs for the deaf. Many of these concerns prompted the executive leaders to recommend more support, training and mentoring as a solution. These personal aspects of the positions have not been explored in the literature with executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf.

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited to executive leaders of schools and programs for the Deaf within the United States using American Sign Language as the language for instruction that have been in operation over 100 years. The findings are more appropriately applied in those settings by focusing only on schools that use ASL to teach preschool through 12th grades and schools with a longer operational history. In addition, this was a case study of a highly specific population. Therefore, some findings are unique to these settings since other educational settings do not have to work within the constraints of this specialization, such as eligibility requirements for students to enter these specialized schools. Additionally, American Sign Language as the language of instruction to teach all the subject areas is not common to other schools. One conflict unique to schools for the deaf is two distinctly different opinions on how to teach deaf and hard-of-hearing children. These issues coupled with the political pressures to justify the purpose of these educational entities is difficult within the context of the landscape of inclusion of students with disabilities within the least restrictive environment (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., 2004).

Since interviews were the primary tool for gathering information, the current personal situations of each participant may have influenced the responses. Due to the time constraints associated with this position some participants may have limited their responses. However, most participants extended their responses to explain their perception. Some participants referred to issues they were experiencing that placed an emphasis by individuals on particular issues by participants. The interviews' timing could

have impacted the findings of the study since all the interviews were conducted at the start of a school year.

Although I am a hearing person with native-like proficiency in American Sign Language, involved in the Deaf Culture with Deaf people and experienced as an executive leader in deaf education, there was potential bias when interviewing culturally Deaf executive leaders, as they may refrain from fully expressing their concerns to a hearing person. However, because I am currently an executive leader at school for the deaf, many of the responses from the participants were more detailed since I could potentially understand the issues better than someone outside of this role due to the potential feeling of collegiately with a fellow executive leader at a school for the deaf and hard-of-hearing. My researcher notes helped to analyze any biases and recognize limitations existing from this bias.

Furthermore, some participants in this study used American Sign Language (ASL) as their primary language, necessitating translation considerations and the potential for unknown translation issues. To prevent translation issues, another fluent user of American Sign Language and English verified with me the translation of the interviews for accuracy. The perceptions of executive leaders in these positions regarding retention and recruitment shared during this study supported concerns for this gap in practice. Alternate explanations were considered to create a clear understanding of the study's factors. Nevertheless, the findings recognized challenges and factors potentially impacting the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf.

Recommendations

The literature review highlighted the history of deaf education and what has led to the current barriers at schools and programs for the deaf. The literature surrounding the purpose and function of schools for the deaf helps frame the participants' responses. Shortages identified in the research helps us to understand the current labor market and how this impacts attrition and filling these positions. Though the participants in this study pulled from their personal experiences, these perspectives are relevant to the current dynamic created by critical shortages in other areas. The executive leaders acknowledged the concern for stability in the field if qualified individuals do not fill these positions. This genuine concern for this issue prompted more in-depth discussions about this study.

This case study piques interest in other ways to study the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf across the nation. Owing to the limited studies conducted on the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf, more studies about the factors impacting the attrition in these positions warrants further study. There would be great benefit from a quantitative study of this problem that includes information from as many schools for the deaf as possible. Schools and programs for the deaf could use the results from this study and the quantitative study to find correlations and to improve retention of executive leaders by focusing attention or resources on its antecedents.

Recommended themes discovered during this study of the executive leaders could be studied to determine if the legitimacy of their solutions and potential to resolve these problems. This could include pre and post assessments after implementing one or more of

these recommendations. Further research could also include a quantitative data of past vacancies and the reasons each executive leader left those positions. A longitudinal study of executive leaders and why they left their roles would be helpful to truly understand what is causing executive leaders to leave their positions. A study of the reasons for vacancies would be helpful to understanding this gap in practice.

Regarding recruitment, by studying open positions and the types of individuals that apply for the position would provide more understand as to why potential candidates are not seeking these positions or not getting an opportunity to be hired into these positions. Information could be garnered from the governing board members at schools for the Deaf as to the type of characteristics they are looking for in their executive leaders and the characteristics they prioritize.

A study of the leaders in current leadership roles at schools for the deaf could yield more information about what is preventing these individuals from seeking these positions. To further this study, interviews with more executive leaders of more schools and programs for the deaf would be helpful. These data could be triangulated with a survey of all superintendents at schools for the deaf in the nation and compare these data with information gathered by those individuals with potential for pursuing these positions. A study of recent turnover of superintendents at schools for the deaf could also provide valuable information regarding retention.

Implications

The inferences drawn by answering the research questions are based on the identified themes and analysis. Although specific to this study, the data findings support

the literature on leadership shortages particular to executive leaders. The sample population included a variety of genders, years of experience, size of the school for the deaf and location of the school; and is based on their unique experiences and not generalizable to other executive leaders in the general education field.

After a thorough review of the findings, common themes emerged regarding the significance of their experiences with retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Consistently, the participants experienced stressors that could cause an executive leader to vacate these positions.

Social Change Implications

There is potential for these recommendations to have a long-lasting impact on the individual executive leaders and the organizations they serve. These recommendations can improve the executive leaders serving in these roles by providing them the support to improve themselves and receive feedback that will improve their skillsets. And, as they improve their skillset, the school for the Deaf that the executive has oversight for should reap the benefit of a better leader. These changes will ultimately have a positive social change on society as schools for the deaf improve the quality of the education provided to deaf and hard-of-hearing students.

Methodological, Theoretical, and Empirical Implications

This case study involved using the Grissom and Andersen (2012) economic labor market as a suitable theory for explaining and understanding retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. However, additional factors applied to superintendents at schools for the deaf. These included interacting with the

Deaf community dealing with language barriers and explaining the worth of their schools to others.

These findings have the potential to benefit governing boards of schools for the deaf as they select and evaluate the executive leaders of these programs. It could also be helpful information for those individuals considering these executive leader positions as they determine if they possess the appropriate education and experience and learn about the stressors of the position. Subsequent research would benefit a study that reviewed why previous superintendents vacated their positions and why current positions have remained open. This could include finding out why some candidates were not selected. A survey of current educational leaders at schools for the deaf would be beneficial to understand why some individuals are not assuming an executive leadership role. This should include the education and experience level of each of these individuals.

Recommendations for Practice

The stability of the top position at a school for the deaf strengthens the school. By finding ways to support leaders in these positions the school and ultimately the students thrive (Bryant, et al., 2017; Knudson, 2003). To support this goal, it is important to sustain the leader in the role by creating a strong network of support internally and externally of the school. A confidant or mentor would be an asset to these leaders. Since these positions can be very isolating, having someone that the executive leader can trust will retain these leaders while improving their skills. Each leader should have an internal team where the leader can discuss current issues and receive trusted feedback before deciding how to resolve an issue.

There should be consideration given to honoring the individuals who assume these roles. For example, does compensation, including benefits, match the level of expertise required for these roles. As several of the participants suggested, by elevating the pay or providing additional incentives, the value of the role is communicated to those in the position and for those who may consider these executive leadership roles.

Conclusion

This study involved identifying and exploring the experiences of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. Literature specific to executive leaders at schools for the deaf is limited or dated. This has continued to concern professionals in the field (Fischgrund, & Tucker, 2018; Vernon, & Estes, 1975). Shortage of educators has led to a shortage of leaders, limiting individuals ready to assume executive leadership roles (Kamm-Larew & Lamkin, 2008).

Many factors have affected the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf. This history of deaf education has played a significant role in establishing these schools (Lane, et al., 1996). Laws have been enacted that have both helped and hurt these unique schools for deaf and hard-of-hearing students (King, 2014). Although Public Law 94-142, now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, U.S.C. 1400 Stat., (2004), raised the standard for special education, the focus on the least restrictive environment has caused people to question the value of schools for the deaf. The unique function of the deaf schools is a reason for some of the challenges these school leaders face. This history has impacted where these school are located, how they are funded, their governing structure, and the language and culture of

the schools. When this is coupled with shortages in educators and leaders, the issue is truly at a tipping point.

The executive leaders included in this study acknowledged these challenges and offered ideas for resolving these issues. Although they acknowledged the difference in the training they received, the recommended more training. This advice was consistent with the findings of other studies of educational leaders.

The retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf are at a crossroads. Stakeholders cannot continue to ignore the challenges faced by these leaders. Without strong leadership of these schools, they will struggle, and students will suffer. There should be more support for the executive leaders serving in these positions. Knowing the stressors they encounter each day, mentors and other supports are key to sustain these executive leaders. Continued learning is a key element for successful executive leaders, particularly to improve communication with governing boards. Additionally, improved compensation or incentives may communicate to these leaders their value to the school.

There is little to be done to alter the location of a school. The best that can be done is to focus on the positive aspects about the school and its location. Social media may be able to help share the positive with other qualified candidates that may want to consider a new location. This focus on the positive should improve the interest level of potential candidates for the executive leader role at a school for the deaf.

Measures to improve recruitment share similarities to improving retention. This begins with a clear plan for succession that includes mentoring potential leaders. Training

that is specific to becoming a leader at a school for the deaf would help prepare future leaders for the specific skills that would be helpful to them in an executive leadership role. The key is that these programs train for a leadership role at a school for the deaf and for the top job at any school for the deaf. Although enhanced compensation would be a helpful incentive, other motivators could also be enticing.

Schools for the deaf should attempt to implement at least one recommendation because continuing to ignore the problem will not solve the problem. Since schools for the deaf are only able to make changes within their own schools, making plans to improve retention and recruitment can have a tremendous impact on whether this problem continues to grow or if administrations can provide stability to schools with sustained and strong leadership. This would also provide more research and understanding to resolve these issues.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol of Executive Leaders

The following questions will be asked of each executive leader with other questions asked to clarify or lead to further understanding:

What is the leadership structure at your school?

Describe the governing body of your school.

Describe the path that led you to this position?

What responsibilities of this position do you find professionally rewarding?

What responsibilities or situations are your greatest challenges as an executive leader at a school for the deaf?

What factors do you believe impact retention of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf across the nation?

What factors do you believe impact recruitment of executive leaders at schools and programs for the deaf across the nation?

What recommendations do you have for mitigating problems with retention of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the nation?

What recommendations do you have for mitigating issues with recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf across the nation?

Is there any other insight you would like to add about the retention and recruitment of executive leaders at schools for the deaf?