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An Exploration of the Longevity of High School Principals Tenure in California

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MA, National University, 2003

BS, Westmont College, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Research has focused on the various reasons why high school principals leave their positions, yet minimal research has been done on the reasons why they stay. The problem of inconsistency of high school principals' tenure within the first 4 years of service was addressed in this study. Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory was used in this exploratory case study to explore the perspectives of eight high school principals in one region of California who continued to serve for 4 years or more through a strengths-based approach to the problem. Research questions were focused on the motivators that high school principals perceived as having influenced their decision to remain in the position, the challenges they overcame, and their recommendations to increase the consistency of service. Data were collected with semistructured interviews and analyzed in a multicycle thematic analysis. Findings indicated that principals continued in the position by (a) building strong relationships with stakeholders, (b) retaining a strong belief that they could make a difference despite having a sense of lack of control, and (c) overcoming challenges within the position that affected their lifestyle. The principals recommended various supports to increase consistency such as principal autonomy and a supportive superintendent. This study contributes to social change by addressing the problem of principal continuity to support school district leaders by providing recommendations to increase high school principals' tenure.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Research has indicated that school principals are important contributors to the success of teachers and students (Babo & Petty, 2019; Hansen, 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020). The school principal serves in a variety of roles from instructional leader, curriculum developer, policy implementer, disciplinarian, financial decision maker, marketer, and builder of positive campus climate (Burkhauser, 2017; Ni et al., 2018; Nitta et al. 2019; Oplatka, 2017; Swen, 2020). The many decisions made by a school principal and the complexity of tasks associated with the job have led researchers to study principal turnover and burnout, workload limitations, workplace motivators, emotional well-being, longevity, and retention (Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Pendola & Fuller, 2018; Pollack et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2018). Dicke et al. (2018) also concluded that the school principal experiences significant job insecurity and family-work conflict that contribute to varying degrees of psychosocial risk factors. Research findings have indicated increasing turnover and emotional fatigue resulting in decreasing the longevity of a principal's tenure (Arar, 2018; Chen & Walker, 2021; Levin et al., 2019; Mahfouz, 2020; Nitta et al., 2019). This is evidenced in the target state of this study, California, that documented 15% of principals leaving the profession all together, with the most common length of service as 1-year of experience in a school (Sutcher et al., 2018).

Principal turnover has been found to have a negative effect on student achievement scores in reading and mathematics and contributes to higher rates of teacher turnover (Bartanen et al., 2019; Henry & Harbatkin, 2019). Heffernan (2021) found that principal turnover in "difficult to staff" communities, such as high poverty areas, have

increased levels of principal turnover and recommended that schools and districts should be examining new ways of thinking to retain principals for longer periods of time. Yan (2020) found that school principals with access to beneficial job contracts, a tenure system, and higher salaries were less likely to leave the principalship. A school principal who is in place for 5-7 years of service at the same school has been found to have a significant and positive impact on overall school outcomes (Burkhauser, 2017; Tran, 2017), student attendance (Bartanen, 2020), faculty well-being (Grissom et al., 2021), and student achievement (Chiang et al, 2016; Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Jambo & Hongde, 2019; Wu et al., 2020).

This study addressed the issue of principal continuity to support school districts by providing recommendations, specifically to increase the high school principals' tenure, thereby contributing to positive social change. An increase in a principal's length of service at the high school level has been found to maximize the positive effects these principals can make in their schools and communities, as noted in research, when there is continuity in leadership at the high school level (Burkhauser, 2017; Daniel & Lei, 2019; Levin et al., 2020).

In Chapter 1, the background, problem statement, purpose of the study, research questions, and the conceptual framework are presented. This is followed by the nature of the study, definitions of terms that apply to the study, and assumptions. The chapter concludes with the scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, and a summary of the chapter.

Background

In Rousmaniere's (2013) work describing the social history of principals in the United States, Rousmaniere found that the school principal, over the last 2 centuries, remains at the center of the organizational structure of the school system. Although there have been multiple initiatives that continue to evolve such as federal and state policy updates, economic shifts, and revised instructional practices, the position of school principal has preserved many of the same job characteristics over this time. The principal is still largely a middle manager who implements educational policies mandated from federal, state, and district offices, while engaging in a balancing act between external and internal pressures to improve student learning (Rousmaniere, 2013). The school principal works amid central office demands and day-to-day school demands that come from students, teachers, and parents. The role of acting as a middle manager contributes to a range of emotions in school principals such as feeling a lack of independence and freedom to develop a unique vision for their schools, which results from working in a bureaucracy that closely monitors its school leaders (Rousmaniere, 2009, 2013).

Judd's (1918) classic study emphasized the role of the high school principal that is still reported in studies today. As described by Judd, "The high school principal is often distracted by a thousand local and incidental calls of his time, and people sometimes wonder what his duties are" (p. 651). The high school principal, as described by Judd (1918), is isolated, distracted, a coordinator of all things for the purpose of aligning teachers as a working unit to "do whatever is necessary to keep the pupils in a teachable attitude" (p. 642). Though over 100 years old, the study of the high school

principal by Judd, resonates today with the findings of studies from Reid (2021), Reyes-Guerra et al. (2021), Snodgrass-Rangel (2018), and Yildirim and Dinc (2019). Today's high school principals are tasked with supporting both students and teachers, are expected to be both agile and adaptable to changing legislation and public demands and are required to have the leadership ability to unify diverse members of a campus staff, while managing multiple demands (Reid, 2021; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2021; Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018; Yildirim & Dinc, 2019).

A participant from Maxwell and Riley's (2017) study on the emotional demands on the school principal stated, "As a leader [principal] I am expected to be everything to everyone-trying to be positive all the time when I just want to scream is [sic] hard work!" (p. 10). A participant in Arar's (2018) study on novice principals stated, "If I could go back two years, I would not undertake a role [principal] like this. It's a complex, thankless job" (p. 590). These feelings and pressures reflect similar findings in research that have focused on the role of the principal, the emotional demands of the job, and reasons for principal turnover (Bauer & Silver, 2018; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; De Jong et al., 2017; Pendola & Fuller, 2020). The emotional demands placed on principals to be all things to all people contribute to principal burnout.

Further in-depth studies indicated that the role of the principal directly and indirectly influences students and staff (Bartanen, 2020; Leibowitz & Porter, 2019; Maponya, 2020). There is an effect of principal turnover on school conditions academically (Walsh & Dotter, 2018), socially (Hanselman et al., 2016), and financially (Edwards et al., 2018; Kearney, 2012; Tran et al., 2018). In studies of principal longevity,

existing research largely focused on personal reasons for longevity such as work life balance, working conditions, and salary (Heffernan, 2021; Horwood et al., 2021; Wells & Klocko, 2018). Professional reasons for longevity were found to be directly related to principals' feelings of professional support from supervisors and leadership development and networking opportunities with other principals (Cieminski, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2019; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Grissom et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020). While research has focused on the reasons for principal turnover and professional reasons for longevity, there has been minimal focus on the success of high school principals who have continued in their schools, resulting in a gap in practice.

Problem Statement

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (Levin et al., 2019) reported that there is a serious issue of principal turnover across the nation. The national average of the tenure of school principals is 4 years, with 35% of principals remaining less than 2 years (Levin et al., 2019). Only 11% of principals remained at their school for 10 or more years, while 18% of principals left the principal position after their first year of employment (Levin et al., 2019). Pendola and Fuller (2018) presented further concerning evidence by indicating that 20% of principals in public schools leave their school each year. Grissom and Bartanen (2018) reported that the average length of longevity of service at the same school dropped from 10 years of service to 4 years.

According to Sutcher et al. (2018), this problem is more pronounced in the study's target state of California, with 15% of principals in California, on average, leaving yearly the profession all together. Principals in California were also found to have

less experience than most principals in other states, with the most common length of service being 1-year of experience in their school (Sutcher et al., 2018). Total turnover accounted for 23% of principals in California leaving the profession, or moving to a different school (Sutcher et al., 2018). High school principals were found to have a turnover rate that exceeded principals at the elementary level (Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Davis & Anderson, 2020; Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Yan (2020) conducted a study on the influence of working conditions on school principal turnover and found that the high school principal is leaving the position 1.5 times greater than the elementary school principal. While research has focused on the reasons for principal turnover, such as burnout, stress, and workload (e.g., Burkhauser, 2017; Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Levin et al., 2019; Mahfouz; 2020; Mitani, 2018; Yildirim & Sait Dinc, 2019), there has been a gap in practice focusing on the success and continuity of high school principals that can inform practice (Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Liu & Bellibas, 2018). The problem I addressed through this study was the inconsistency of high school principals' tenure within the first 4 years of service in one region of California.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of the high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more through a strengths-based approach (Maton et al., 2004). Rather than approach the problem through a deficit lens, as most studies have, strengths-based research focuses on positive emotions, cognitions, behaviors, traits, and outcomes (Maton et al., 2004). This approach to the phenomenon is like that of Blaum and Tobin (2019) and Liu and Bellibas

(2018), who applied the theory of motivation and job satisfaction to identify factors that retained principals to avoid high rates of principal turnover.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are the motivators that high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ2: How do high school principals describe the challenges they have overcome to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ3: What recommendations do the high school principals have to increase the consistency of their service?

Conceptual Framework

The theory for this study is the self-determination theory of human motivation (see Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Self-determination theory (SDT) is grounded in three basic psychological needs: (a) autonomy—where the individual has a sense of ownership in their actions, (b) competence or a personal feeling that one can grow and succeed, and (c) relatedness or the sense of belonging and connection that are innate (Ryan & Deci 2020). The SDT framework was used to identify motivational factors that met principals' basic psychological needs to lead to a better understanding of why some high school principals persisted in their role. Previous research findings indicated that increased principal autonomy with latitude given in decision making with the superintendent's support contributed to decreasing stress and burnout rates and increasing higher levels of job satisfaction (Beausaert et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2015; Liu & Bellibus, 2018).

SDT was used in this study to uncover the reasons underlying the principals'

motivations to stay in their positions and their responses to the daily challenges faced as

high school principals that caused conflicts with their autonomy, competence, and

relatedness. These attributes of SDT guided the data collection and data analysis

processes to determine the motivators and disclosed by the participants. A thorough

explanation and analysis of the SDT of human motivation are explained further in

Chapter 2 of this study.

Nature of the Study

Qualitative case study research was chosen as the methodology for this study as it

allows a researcher to observe, gather, and interpret data to develop themes and patterns

to better understand the phenomena (see Creswell, 2014). Due to the nature of the

research questions being focused around "what" (RQ1 and RQ3) and "how" (RQ2)

questions, the type of research questions justified an exploratory case study (see Tellis,

1997). Yin (2014) explained that "how," "why," and "what" questions are exploratory

and lead to the use of case study research as a preferred design to investigate a

phenomenon in depth within a real-world context and rely on prior theoretical

frameworks, in this case SDT, to guide data collection and analysis. This exploratory case

study was within a bounded system, as it was a contextual study of a single phenomenon

experienced by the participants. Eight high school principals who served for at least 4

years at the same high school in one region in California were purposely selected to

participate in the study (see Creswell, 2014). The use of purposeful sampling ensured that

participants would contribute to the case study because of the anticipated relevance of the

information they could provide related to the research questions (see Yin, 2014). The

selection criteria for inclusion in the study was participants who served for 4 or more

years as a high school principal (Grades 9-12) at the same school site in the study region

with at least three school districts represented. Participants in the study currently served

as principals, were recently retired from the profession as high school principal or were

recently promoted to a central office position after serving at their high school for 4 or

more years as principal.

The use of a case study design allows a researcher to conduct research in a natural

setting where participants feel comfortable to answer open ended questions to investigate

a local problem from a real-world perspective (Yin, 2014). To address the problem and

research questions in this study, semistructured interviews were audio recorded and took

place in a convenient location that ensured a measure of privacy (see Guest et al., 2006)

and considered safety considerations following local and regional COVID-19 protocols

that were in place at the time of the interviews. The use of a virtual video

videoconferencing platform was offered to participants who did not feel comfortable

participating in a live face to face interview. The semistructured interviews allowed for

the collection of data for triangulation of data sources (i.e., current, recently retired, or

recently promoted high school principals from three different districts) to identify

emerging themes that addressed the research questions and conceptual framework of

SDT. I used thematic analysis to code and then categorize the transcribed data into

categories and emerging themes that addressed the research questions and conceptual

framework of the study (see Bengtsson, 2016). Manifest analysis, describing what the

participants said using their exact words, was used to substantiate the themes (seeBengtsson, 2016).

Definitions

The following terms and definitions were used through the study:

Amotivated: People who lack a sense of competence or perceived competence (Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020).

Burnout: The occupational hazard that impacts the personal and professional wellbeing, associated with feelings of hopelessness, and other negative emotional reactions (Yildrium & Sait Dinc, 2019).

Continuity: Existence of the principal in the position, lack of continuity would mean that there is not continuous (for length of time) leadership in place (Liu, 2020).

High school principal: Principals who serve Grades 9-12 (Davis & Anderson, 2020).

Novice Principal: Principals in their earliest stage of career as a principal, usually years 1-3 (Arar, 2018).

Principal Turnover: School principals leaving a school to go to another school or district office position or leaving the field of education all together (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Burkhauser, 2017; Levin et al., 2019; Sutcher et al., 2018).

Assumptions

I assumed that the responses from participants were open, honest, and truthful regarding their motivations for remaining in the position as a principal and the challenges they have faced. Voluntary participation was sought from potential participants.

Principals who agreed to participate were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time so those who agreed to take part in the study did not feel coerced. This increased the likelihood that the data obtained were accurate and a true account of the participants' experiences. These assumptions were necessary to gather meaningful data to achieve the intent of the study, which was to explore the participants' reasons for continuing as high school principals. It is also assumed that there was established trust with participants for them to speak freely about their challenges as a high school principal and how they overcame those challenges.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of the study was bounded by participants from one region in the target state of California who have served as a high school principal for at least 4 years at one high school site. One delimitation was the inclusion of principals who were at the high school level (Grades 9-12). The reason for this was to ensure that the study remained focused on participants who would fulfill the purpose of the study to better understand the problem of retaining high school principals. Participants were also delimited to current or former high school principals (principal within the last 10 years) located in one region of California to ensure the case study was bounded by site and by participants sharing a common experience as a high school principal. To ensure that data from the participants addressed the purpose of the study, participants were also delimited to those high school principals in the study region and target state who served for 4 or more years at the same school site. Assistant high school principals were excluded as were high school principals who had not been in the position for 4 or more years at the same site.

Because this case study was bounded by the study site and by participants who met the inclusion criteria, transferability of the study's findings is limited to similar contexts; however, the research findings can be valuable to similar settings to address the continuity of service with principals at the high school level.

Limitations

Limitations included accessing participants in the study region who had 4 or more years of service in the role of high school principal. Case studies encompass several limitations and methodological weaknesses as described by Yin (2014). Case studies risk rigor when researchers fail to follow a systematic procedure to ensure that all evidence is reported fairly to remove bias (Yin, 2014). Case studies are only generalizable to their theoretical propositions, thereby expanding on generalized theories and not statistical generalizations (Yin, 2014). To assure a valid and rigorous case study, I interviewed multiple participants to collect sufficient data for the case to illuminate the answers to research questions and to triangulate data sources, since multiple sources of evidence allow for converging lines of inquiry (see Yin, 2014).

As a central office administrator in the school district where some of the principals were employed, professional relationships with participants were a potential source of unintended bias; however, I did not serve in a supervisory or evaluative role with any of the participants. To ensure the integrity of the research process, I audio recorded the semistructured interviews and used reflexive journaling to account for any biases, experiences, and values I brought to the qualitative research process, as recommended by Creswell (2013).

Significance

This study is significant in that motivators to build success in the role of the high school principal were identified as potential strategies to overcome challenges faced by high school principals. The study's findings contribute to positive social change by addressing the issue of principal continuity and supporting school districts by providing recommendations to increase the high school principals' tenure. This study addressed the gap in practice (see Kearney, 2010; Levin et al., 2020; Sutcher et al., 2017) by using a strengths-based lens (see Maton et al., 2004) to gain an understanding of the reasons that contributed to high school principals' consistency of service (see Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Liu & Bellibas, 2018). The results contain recommendations for the development of professional learning programs specifically to support high school principals' consistency of service in the study region and target state. An increase in the length of service of principals at the high school level maximizes the positive effects principals can make in their schools and communities as noted in research when there is continuity in leadership (Burkhauser, 2017; Daniel & Lei, 2019; Levin et al., 2020). Using a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit-based approach serve as a foundation for policy advocacy recommendations. A strengths-based approach addresses reform and positive social change efforts that are "more likely to be successfully implemented, and to be sustained over time, if they emerge from a process that is empowering, capacity building, participatory, and collaborative" (Maton et al., 2004, p. 8). With historical research on principal longevity being examined in a deficit model, the strengths-based approach allows for studying what is positive.

Summary

Exploring the reasons that motivate high school principals to remain in the role as principal resulted in a focused effort to support current and future school principals (see Blaum & Tobin, 2019). Chapter 1 explained the unique role of the school principal, provided an overview of the problem of principal turnover, and outlined the local problem of principal turnover in California. The framework of SDT was explained to provide context for principals' motivation to remain in their position for 4 or more years and as lens to better understand the challenges facing the high school principal. The methodology of a qualitative exploratory case study was examined to explain how data were collected and analyzed to uncover themes of principals' motivations to remain in the position of high school principal. Chapter 2 of this study contains a thorough review of the literature to provide the context for this study on principal turnover and longevity in the position as principal

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Current literature shows the school principal is challenged with meeting the needs of students, staff, and parents to lead the school in areas of reform focused on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2020; Sutchet et al. 2017). Yet, the school principal is faced with many challenges that have resulted in turnover across the United States (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018; Pendola & Fuller, 2020; Pietsch et al., 2020). This turnover leads to negative effects on student learning (Adams et al., 2017; Bartanen, 2020; Ozdemir, 2019). Previous studies have determined some of the challenges and pressures put upon school administrators (Cieminski, 2018; Hefferman, 2021; Horward et al., 2021; Pendola, 2021). The purpose of this study is to explore the perspectives of the high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more using a strengths-based approach (see Maton et al., 2004).

The intent of the review of the literature was to provide context for the study. Literature and research were reviewed in the following areas: (a) SDT, (b) the role of the principal, (c) reasons for principalship turnover and departure, (d) effects of principal turnover, and (e) reasons for principal longevity.

Literature Search Strategy

A review of the literature was achieved through a systematic search of the high school principal, primarily with an emphasis and narrowing on the key roles and responsibilities of the school principal, the history of the school principal, and the reasons and issues surrounding principal longevity and burnout. The search was narrowed to pinpoint key aspects of the school principal for a natural organization in the literature

review with a focus on reasons why principals remained in the position as principal.

There was a focused approach to explore literature that was published within the last 5

years using the following databases: Google Scholar, EBSCO host, ERIC, and extensive

use of the Walden University Library. The search terms included: *principal turnover,*

high school principal, principal longevity, principal persistence, principal role(s), effects

of principal turnover, effects of principal leadership, principal motivation and

challenges, history of the school principal, school administrator(s), and *principal*

burnout.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

The conceptual framework guiding this study was the Self-Determination Theory,

proposed by Deci and Ryan (2000). Self-determination of an individual is their ability to

experience a sense of choice in initiating and determining their own actions and has been

found to positively "affect creativity, conceptual learning, emotional tone, and self-

esteem" (Deci et al., 1989, p. 588). SDT is a theory of basic psychological needs of

human motivation (Deci et al., 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000b) and was

the specific lens for this research that was used to examine the motivations that led to

high school principals' longevity. The psychological needs of SDT are autonomy,

competence, and relatedness; these needs are foundational in human development,

adjustment, and overall wellness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Vansteenkiste et al., 2020).

Though humans express natural intrinsic motivational tendencies, the

sustainability and enhancement of intrinsic motivation requires concerted efforts in

supportive conditions (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Conditions that nurture autonomy,

competence, and relatedness can lead to increased human potential whereas excessive

control, nonoptimal challenges, and lack of connectedness can thwart satisfaction of these

needs and result in diminished growth and well-being of individuals (Deci & Ryan, 2000;

Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

SDT emerged in the early 1970s through research of intrinsically and extrinsically

motivated behaviors to describe the social conditions and tasks that enhance each type of

motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In Deci's (1971) seminal work, research was conducted

in a laboratory setting to investigate the effects of externally mediated rewards on

intrinsic motivation. Deci found that when money was used as an external reward, test

subjects lost intrinsic motivation for a task they once performed without financial

motivation. Deci also found that when verbal reinforcement and positive feedback were

introduced on the test subjects, intrinsic motivation increased, even without providing

monetary reward.

Now considered a macrotheory, a theory that relates to large scale issues and large

groups of people (Deci & Ryan, 2008), SDT is made up of six microtheories addressing

aspects of motivation that include: (a) cognitive evaluation theory, (b) organismic

integration theory, (c) causality orientations theory, (d) basic psychological needs theory,

(e) goal contents theory, and (f) relationships motivation theory with each microtheory

used to explain phenomena in areas of psychological and organizational domains

(Olafsen & Deci, 2020). More than 20 years later, Ryan and Deci (2020) have applied

SDT to educational settings as SDT supplies an open framework for promoting what

really matters to students, teachers, and administrators; specifically, the understanding of

conditions that increase intrinsic motivation: (a) autonomy, (b) competence, and (c) relatedness. Ryan and Deci (2000b) defined intrinsic motivation as doing activities for their enjoyment and level of interest and performed by an individual's own volition or spontaneously without the need of any incentive to do the activity and captured in the figure below.

Figure 1

Self-Determination Theory

Note. Self-determination theory is the center focus of the three basic human needs Ryan, R. M., & Deci, E. L. (2000b). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *25*(1), 54–67.

Autonomy

Autonomy is essential to intrinsic motivation and is often described as a relative autonomy continuum, where motivational internal regulations guide an individual's behavior (Howard et al., 2020). The term of autonomy can also be described as an

individual's agency over one's own actions, versus the concept of lacking autonomy or the sense of being controlled by something or someone (Howard et al., 2020). Ryan and Deci (2000b) explained intrinsic motivation as behaviors done from the self that are inherently interesting and enjoyable rather than from external sources. Thus, intrinsic motivation is sustained by the basic psychological need for autonomy (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Ryan and Deci (2020) stated that the greater relative autonomy for students and teachers contributes to positive educational outcomes such as greater academic achievement for the student and greater student-teacher engagement with less emotional fatigue. Principals were also studied by other researchers to examine their feelings and perceptions on autonomy.

Maxwell and Riley (2017) surveyed over 1,300 school principals from Australia using an online survey to measure emotional demands, workload demands, levels of burnout, and the well-being of the school principals. Maxwell and Riley found that school principals were able to function better when they received encouragement from their supervisors to be autonomous. Knapp et al. (2017) found similar results when surveying 196 non-profit employees using a Likert Scale to assign an autonomy measure based on three questions. One of the questions, "Does the job give me considerable opportunity for independence and freedom in how I do my work," allowed for the analysis of the participants' feeling of autonomy. Knapp found that autonomy is a consistent significant predictor that has a direct relationship with job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Competence

White (1959) described competence as an organism's capacity and motivation to interact effectively with its environment, and the organism's internal powerful drive to progress toward competence. Increased competence leads to feelings of mastery and a sense that one can succeed and grow within structured environments, and therefore be better able to increase internalized motivation (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2020). Adams et al. (2017) and Ryan and Deci (2000a, 2000b) described this feeling of competence as perceived competence or a level of self-efficacy for a particular activity. When individuals lack a sense of competence or perceived competence, they are termed *amotivated*, or without self-efficacy, in respect to a desired outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020).

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET), one of the subtheories within SDT, focuses on the need for competence, whereby positive performance feedback, communication, and rewards produce increased feelings of competence and intrinsic motivation in an individual when coupled with autonomy (Deci, 1971; Deci et al., 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). However, within a social environment that affords competence in partnership with autonomy but does not nurture relatedness, all the psychological needs of SDT are not met to encourage intrinsic motivation in an individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Relatedness

The sense of belonging, as well as meaningful relationships and connection with others, are innate and provide a sense of security to the individual, fostering growth

towards intrinsic motivation and internalization (Deci & Ryan, 2000). The subtheory of

SDT, organismic integration theory (OIT), relates to increased internalization that is more

evident when there are feelings of attachment and belongingness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Niemiec and Ryan (2009) stated that people will internalize and accept, as their own

values, the values of whom they feel connected to and from whom they experience a

sense of belonging. In the classroom setting, specifically for teachers, relatedness is met

through interactions and relationships with their students (Kokka, 2016), and for students,

relatedness comes from the feeling that the teacher genuinely likes and respects them

(Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Patrick et al. (2019) suggested that relatedness under SDT must

consist of meaningful connections, not superficial or inauthentic connection.

Feelings of autonomy, competence, and relatedness may influence principals'

intrinsic motivation to stay in the position as principal (Blaum & Tobin, 2019; Kokka,

2016; Kanat-Maymon et al., 2020). Blaum and Tobin (2019) specifically mentioned that

school principals' relatedness increases as they received praise from students, staff, and

community, which increases the principals' motivation from external sources and

contributed to feelings of job satisfaction. This study further investigated the reasons

principals remained at their high schools and how they fulfilled the needs of competence,

autonomy, and relatedness, as described in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variables

The Role of the Principal

The school principal is considered the leader of the school and responsible for

instructional improvement in the classroom, promoting collaboration between faculty,

and providing leadership development for teachers (Bagwell, 2019). To accomplish these tasks, a principal spends an average of 58.6 hours each week on school related duties, which may include hours spent during the school day, before and after school hours, and weekend hours. (Taie & Goldring, 2017; Yan, 2020). The expectations placed upon the school principal are multidimensional. Principals are expected to meet the day to day demands of promoting teaching and learning while engaging with staff, students, and parents to address their needs (Oplatka, 2016), as well as manage budgets and uphold federal and state policies (Ni et al., 2018). The expectation is that principals will shape the school vision and climate, maximize the academic success of students, and manage people (Krasnoff, 2015; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). Because of these expectations and tasks, Leithwood et al. (2020) and Wahlstrom et al. (2010) claimed that school leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on student learning.

Beyond instructional expectations, the school principal is responsible for decisions to manage student behavior, maintain the mental health of both students and teachers, address the absenteeism of staff and students, garner parent support, and address issues related to student poverty (Fuller et al., 2018; Ni et al., 2018). Gibson and Simon (2020) conducted a multiple case study of 10 former principals who experienced job dissolution to discover what had originally motivated them to become leaders of their school. Principals in the case study indicated that they felt a strong pull of belonging to the community and an intense pride in being the leader that led not only to an attachment to the school, but also to the actual position of the principal. Swen (2020) interviewed 35 new principals in Chicago Public Schools to discuss what was termed as a "calling

narrative" of principals. The calling narrative for the school principal was described as the reasons why principals did what they did under a sense of duty to serve people around them (Swen, 2020). Swen found that this calling enabled principals to make sense of why they became a principal despite the challenges they encountered on the job. The responsibilities and demands of the role may also affect the well-being of the principal.

Maxwell and Riley (2017) examined the emotional demands of 1,320 school principals from Australia through an online survey. The principals reported highly charged emotional interactions with many stakeholders throughout the day resulting in the poor well-being of the principal (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). Maxwell and Riley found that school leaders faced significantly increased emotional demands compared to the general population. The principals also reported relying heavily on hiding emotions to execute the role of principal in response to these emotional demands (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). A related study on the emotional demands of the position of principal was conducted in Canada using a case study design by Pollack et al. (2019) who termed the emotional demands as "work intensification" where "highly charged" events become emotionally draining experiences. Pollack et al. specifically examined high school principals who reported they must simultaneously address student discipline, defuse parent issues, conduct classroom evaluations, and work with teachers. Pollack's et al. findings were consistent with previous research in that the role of the school principal is complex and important to the school, with a competent school principal promoting the success of students while caring for the staff, but often at the expense of the principal's emotional well-being (Babo & Postma, 2017; Ganon-Shilon & Schechter, 2019; Maxwell

& Riley, 2017; Pollack et al., 2019). The emotional demands placed on principals is a cause to principal turnover and burnout.

Importance of the School Principal

The importance of the school principal ranges from direct to indirect influences on student achievement and school success. Extensive research found that the actions of a school principal matter in different ways and contexts through setting the school's direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and leading instruction (see Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019; Maina & Valencia, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2020).

Indirect Influence of the Principal

Grissom and Bartanen (2019) contributed important findings related to student achievement by studying principals' indirect influence in the school surrounding the shaping of the teacher workforce through teacher evaluation. Through the analysis of longitudinal administrative data from the Tennessee Educator Acceleration Model (TEAM), Grissom and Bartanen found that effective school principals were able to selectively counsel out ineffective teachers from the workforce and employ strategies to influence the retention of highly effective teachers thereby increasing student achievement.

This indirect influence was also seen in the way school principals supported professional development, specifically through how the principal supported the professional learning communities of 11th grade math teachers' expectations in a study by Park et al. (2019). Data were analyzed by Park et al. from the High School

Longitudinal Study of 2009 by the U.S. Department of Education. Park et al. identified a school level approach by using a multilevel indirect effect model, which improved student achievement in math, and could transfer to other subjects in the high school. In addition, it reinforces the principal's emphasis on the creation of professional learning communities and collective responsibility to raise group-level teacher expectations. The principal's support of the PLC had significant indirect effects on students' math achievement and a direct influence on increasing the collective responsibility of the teachers (Park et al., 2019). The school principal through their leadership strategies can indirectly support student achievement.

Ozdemir's (2019) two-level quantitative study in 36 secondary public schools in Turkey also supported the indirect influence of the school principals' leadership behaviors with students' math achievement through the principals' management of professional learning communities. Ozdemir concluded that the principals' leadership behavior had a significant positive and direct effect on teachers' shared responsibility and willingness to accept help in classroom practices, in observations in their classrooms, and in accepting feedback from others. These deprivatized teaching practices, meaning one who is not teaching in isolation but welcomes other teachers to provide feedback and influence their teaching practices, led to an indirect positive influence on student math achievement (Ozdemir, 2019). By encouraging teachers to be collaborative and willing to accept feedback the principal had an indirect positive influence on student math achievement.

Maponya's (2020) phenomenological study conducted in five secondary schools (Grades 7-12) in South Africa further supported the idea of the principal as an indirect influencer of student achievement. The premise of Maponya's assumption was that principals, as instructional leaders, have a certain influential role in student achievement. Interviews were conducted to understand points of view and lived experiences from five principals, five assistant principals, and five department heads from five schools. Maponya's findings demonstrated that the principal was the sole instructional manager and had a crucial role in motivating students and teachers by creating a positive learning environment. This was accomplished by the principals bringing all stakeholders together to work toward one common goal, student achievement, with the principals serving as the chief motivators (Maponya, 2020).

These studies provided evidence of the principals' indirect influence on student achievement by working closely with the teachers who directly impact students' achievement in the classroom (see Grissom & Bartanen, 2019; Maponya, 2020; Ozdemir, 2019; Park et al., 2019). In other words, when principals support teachers' instructional practices and well-being (Leibowitz & Porter, 2019; Adams et al., 2017) teachers, in turn, improve student achievement.

Direct Influence of the Principal

There is some research on a principal's direct influence over both students and teachers in the school (Babo & Postma, 2017; Chian et al.,2016; Dhuey & Smith, 2018), though indirect effects appear to be more prevalent in the literature. When examining the principal's direct impact on student achievement, Babo and Postma (2017), Dhuey and

Smith (2018), Chian et al. (2016), and Wu et al. (2020) found statistically significant

results on the direct positive effects of the principal on student achievement. In the study

by Dhuey and Smith (2018) conducted in North Carolina, third through eighth grade

student achievement test scores were analyzed with a value-added model approach. The

value-added method was used to estimate each principal's value added to student

achievement. Value added examples included principal education level and principal

length of service (Dhuey & Smith, 2018). Dhuey and Smith found that the effect sizes of

principal leadership in math and reading increased student learning by 7 percentile points

in math and 5 percentile points in reading.

Babo and Postma (2017) also examined math and language arts and reported an

association between the elementary school principal's length of service and student

performance on state mandated assessments in language arts and mathematics with just

over 1% in gains. One hundred and seventy-two elementary principals were randomly

selected from diverse public-school districts in New Jersey to participate through

telephone inquiries. Hierarchical multiple regression analysis was used to measure the

independent variable of principal tenure and dependent variables of student performance

in math and language arts. Though the gains were small, there was still a direct effect on

student achievement resulting from the influence of the school principal (Babo & Postma,

2017).

Beyond academic achievement, Sebastian et al. (2019) collected teacher and

student survey data over a 7-year period from Chicago schools, with more than 20,800

teachers and approximately 264,000 student respondents. Sebastian et al. found that the

school principals had a significant direct effect on students and teachers in regard to the

learning environment that led to greater student outcomes, since an effective principal

was found to place strong emphasis and structure on the learning environment as well as

school safety. Most significant in the findings of Sebastian et al. was that when principals

provided clear structures for teachers to improve the learning climate and monitored the

success of the teachers' efforts, those leadership practices had the greatest potential for

improved student achievement.

Bartanen (2020) also examined principals' direct impact on the student's learning

environment through student attendance. Bartanen analyzed administrative data from the

Tennessee Department of Education that spanned the years 2006 through 2017. Data

from 3,800 principals were analyzed from 1,700 schools to account for both principal and

school effects in the distribution of the principal value-added model. Bartanen (2020)

found that quality principals had a substantive effect on decreasing student absences and

raised student attendance rates by 1.4 additional instructional days for each student.

Principal quality, as described by Bartanen, was the systemic over or underperformance

of the students under the direction of the school principal, and not a fixed standard, but

rather principal quality may vary depending on the student outcomes (Bartanen, 2020).

This means that a school principal may be considered quality regarding one specific

student outcome and not quality in relationship to another student outcome.

Researchers have identified the important direct and indirect influences of the

school principal on students. Indirect influences consisted primarily of how the school

principal supported teachers in improving their teaching craft to improve student learning

outcomes (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019; Maponya, 2020; Ozdemir, 2019; Park et al., 2019). The principal had a direct and positive influence on student achievement in academic areas (Babo & Postma 2017, Chian et al., 2016, Dhuey and Smith 2018; Wu et al., 2020), as well as a direct positive influence on the student learning environment (Sebastian et al., 2019), and positive influence on student attendance (Bartanen, 2020). Research has indicated the importance of the school principal, yet the rate of principalship turnover and departure must be explored to understand the relationship between this study's problem and purpose.

Principal Turnover and Departure

There are various professional and personal reasons that contribute to principalship turnover. Principal turnover can best be described by Snodgrass-Rangel (2018) as principals who transfer to other schools, districts, change positions from being a principal, or exit from the career as an educator. Because principals feel such a strong sense of purpose to their work, they tend to be fully invested in every aspect of the school contributing to many stressors (Mahfouz, 2020) leading to higher levels of burnout, compared to other professionals who serve in management roles (DeMattthews et al., 2019; Nitta et al., 2018).

Burnout, defined as an occupational hazard that impacts the personal and professional wellbeing, is associated with feelings of hopelessness and other negative emotional reactions (Yildrium & Sait Dinc, 2019). Emotions, particularly those connected with burnout, were examined through the development of a multidimensional instrument that enabled the measurement of school principals' emotions (Chen, 2020).

Through a mixed-methods study, Chen (2020) validated the use and measurement of what is termed the Principal Emotion Inventory (PEI). Chen (2020) developed this theoretical and empirical measurement tool that could be used to determine principals' emotions such as enjoyment, pride, frustration, anxiety, and hopelessness as they are connected to the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI). The PEI proved consistent in external validity with connecting unpleasant emotions to greater chances of burnout and in showing that principal emotions can be assessed in various situations and can contribute to the development of interventions addressing principal emotions (Chen, 2020).

Boyce and Bowers (2016) further explored principals' emotions and potential interventions to address negative emotions. Boyce and Bowers used nationally representative data to determine if there were specific types of principals who exited a school. Those data, from 1,470 principals who exited their schools between 2008-2009, were analyzed in combination with a national survey, administered to principals in 2007-2008, asking them to report on their perceived influence on various areas of leading a school. Boyce and Bowers found there was no one specific type of principal who exited their schools, instead, there were three types of influences on principals' decision to exit: (a) personal, (b) behavioral, and (c) environmental. Boyce and Bowers also identified two groups of principals who exited their schools; those who are "pulled" out, and those who are "pushed" out by any or all of the above influences. Boyce and Bowers characterized this push-pull theory as principals who leave their current position, by primarily positive

pulls into a new position, or as a negative push out of their current position from external or internal negative experiences.

Hansen (2018) recommended identifying a clear understanding of why principals leave their schools to purposefully create systems of support to encourage effective principals to stay. Hansen identified types of influences on principals' decisions to exit: personal factors within the control of the principal, institutional factors within the control of the school district, or environmental factors outside the control of both the principal and the district. Through a multisite case study, Hansen investigated the factors that influenced principals' decisions to leave. Aligning to the push-pull factors of Boyce and Bowers (2016), Hansen's principal respondents described family needs, community expectations, workload, lack of professional support, and their relationship with the school board or superintendent as reasons they left their schools.

In a related quantitative study, Dejong et al. (2017) gathered feedback from 176 secondary principals at the middle and high school levels in a Midwestern state using an electronic survey instrument to identify themes of job dissatisfaction. Dejong et al. found that 89% of the 176 respondents felt inundated with high job demands and unreasonable and increasing expectations; 49% of the 176 respondents reported feeling challenged by difficult staff; and 77% of the respondents indicated there was a lack of balance between their personal and professional responsibilities. DeJong et al. noted that secondary principals, as compared to elementary principals, had a larger number of extracurricular events they were obligated to supervise, which led to burdensome professional responsibilities and overall dissatisfaction with their jobs as secondary principals.

In an attempt to predict the future role of the school principal, Reid (2021) used an exploratory qualitative design to examine principals' perceptions and predictions of the future role of the principal with K-12 New Jersey principals who had at least 5 years of experience. Ten principals were interviewed through purposive sampling, three times over the course of a year. Nine out of the 10 principals believed that the future role of the principal will involve increased emphasis on the mental and emotional health of students and teachers. Eight out of the 10 principals stated they would likely leave the profession prior to the age of retirement because of their belief that the future role of the principal will become even more time consuming. While the transferability of Reid's study is limited due to the small sample size, Reid posited that the beliefs conveyed by the principals of increasing job responsibilities may likely lead to a lack of qualified and willing candidates to become school principals.

A study conducted by Sutcher et al. (2018) in partnership with the Association of California School Administrators surveyed California principals from 2015 to 2017. Of the 450 principals who responded, 15% of principals left the profession during the duration of the study leading to the qualified principal shortage. The most common scenario was principals having only 1-year of experience at their school. Out of those respondents who did remain, only 1 in 3 of the 450 respondents reported that they felt prepared to lead their school (Sutcher et al., 2018).

Compounding this situation in California, schools with the highest poverty rates had an annual principal turnover rate of 21% and 70% of principals in low achieving schools had less than 3 years of experience. The principals of schools in California that

had low achievement, low test scores, and high socially economic disadvantaged student populations were 35% more likely to leave the profession all together (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018), and only 48% of California principals planned to remain in their job until retirement compared to 67% of principals nationwide (Kearney, 2010). When comparing secondary principals to elementary school principals' longevity in Texas, Snodgrass-Rangel's (2018) review of 36 empirical studies reported that Texas elementary principals were 52% more likely than Texas secondary principals to remain at the same school for a 3-year period.

Personal Influences on Principal Turnover

Personal factors that influence the school principal are, among others, age group, gender, marriage status, education level, individual values, internal conflicts, and workload (Yildrium & Dinc, 2019). Bauer and Silver (2018) added to existing literature on principal turnover by surveying 203 first year K-12 school principals from a southeastern state using quantitative methodology to determine the role of isolation in predicting self-efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout, and intention to leave the role as principal. Bauer and Silver (2018) found that school principals experienced a great deal of isolation, which is predictive of the quality of work life of school principals. Bauer and Silver also found that isolation is a predictor of self-efficacy in relationship to job satisfaction, burnout, and intention to leave the position for all principals, but the impact of isolation was particularly significant on first-year principals' sense of self-efficacy.

Postma and Babo (2019) also used self-efficacy as the primary independent variable in a quantitative study to examine job satisfaction of 715 school principals in

New Jersey. Postma and Babo found that the job satisfaction of the principals increased as their belief in their own abilities to succeed in instructional leadership, management, and moral leadership increased. This finding aligned to this study's lens of SDT as a component of competence (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

De Jong et al. (2017) electronically surveyed 176 secondary school principals across a state in the Midwest United States using a quantitative approach to identify themes of job dissatisfaction among secondary school principals. De Jong et al. found that job satisfaction among principals decreased from 68% to 59% in the last 5 years due to increasingly high job demands; the number of difficult conflicts between parents, teachers, and students; a lack of work-home life balance; and a feeling of overall lack of support in their position. Overall, participants' sentiment was a belief that the job expectations of a secondary principal were unreasonable (De Jong et al., 2017).

These trends of job dissatisfaction and unreasonable workloads were also found in studies of principals internationally. Nitta et al. (2018) found similar results related to negative feelings associated among unreasonable workloads, role ambiguity, and high rates of depression. Nitta et al. conducted a cross-sectional study gathering data from 262 principals and 268 vice principals in Japan using the Zung Self-Rating Depression Scale to find the relationship between depressive symptoms and occupational stress. From the results, Nitta et al. confirmed the relationship between high depressive scores and occupational stress in both principals and vice principals and that the quantitative workload, or the amount of work, coupled with role ambiguity were predictive of depression in principals.

Using semi-structured interviews with 22 elementary and secondary principals in Israel, Dor-Haim and Oplatka (2021) explored how school principals' perceived feelings of loneliness negatively affected their emotional well-being and work performance. The researchers found that the emotional and mental effects of loneliness on school principals increased levels of frustration, stress, and nervousness that led to disrupted sleep and poor eating habits (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2021).

There are a variety of personal influences that impact principal turnover (Yildrium & Dinc, 2019). Research indicates that school principals are affected by the isolation that comes with being a principal (Bauer & Silver, 2018), that a lack of belief in their own abilities to do the job decreases job satisfaction (Postma & Babo, 2019) as does the imbalance in personal and professional lives resulting from unreasonable demands on time due to the overall workload (De Jong et al., 2017). These personal influences contribute to principals' negative feelings about the job and can contribute to high rates of depression (Nitta et al., 2018) and loneliness that affect school principals' overall mental and physical health, leading to poor work performance (Dor-Haim & Oplatka, 2021).

Ray et al. (2020) poignantly summarized the overall well-being of school principals in the area of personal influences contributing to turnover. From their mixed methods approach, 473 surveyed practicing school principals within the state of Arkansas provided key findings on the personal lives of the principal. Ray et al found that overall, when compared to other jobs in the public, school principals were working longer hours and sleeping less, rarely exercised, and were missing quality time with loved ones.

Behavioral Influences on Principal Turnover

Behavioral influences affecting principal turnover included areas such as level of education, the quality of the principal preparation program, on the job training with induction and mentoring, the roles and responsibilities of the job, and the overall working relationships with central office administrators and stakeholders (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Bush (2018) analyzed international research findings to construct a model for principal preparation and induction consisting of a normative 6-step model that took into consideration principal preparation and induction. The premise of Bush's model was that principals were trained to be teachers and gradually received less professional development in teaching as they become a principal, requiring skills in leadership, for which many were not prepared without any specialized training in being a principal. Bush's 6-step model included: (a) succession planning, (b) leadership preparation, (c) recruitment and selection, (d) induction, (e) mentoring, and (f) in-service development. Bush posited that without the combination of both preparation and induction, principals' effectiveness will be delayed.

The work of De Matthews et al. (2019) shed light on turnover rates related to the experience level of the principal. Through a mixed-methods design, De Matthews et al. collected quantitative data from 92 principals using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) and Professional Quality of Life Survey (ProQOL), then expanded the study with follow up, in-depth interviews of 2 of the 92 principals to investigate burnout and secondary trauma in principals from an El Paso, Texas school district. De Matthews et al. (2019) found that veteran principals had lower levels of burnout compared to early career

principals with less than 5 years of experience. During the analysis of the qualitative

portion of the study, De Matthews et al. (2019) captured trends where the absence of

principal resilience, coping strategies, and experience working with traumatic events led

to higher rates of principal burnout and rates of departure.

Tekleselassie and Choi (2019) also examined how individual workplace

conditions, emotional aspects of the job of principal, and individual school district

characteristics contributed to principal departure. National data were collected from the

2007 to 2008 School and Staffing Survey that contained data from over 89,000 K-12

principals. Quantitative results were calculated through logistical regression, and three

principal demographic characteristics were identified as significant to principal turnover:

(a) age, (b) experience, and (c) doctoral degree attainment. Tekleselassie and Choi found

that principals with more years of experience had lower levels of burnout and were more

capable of handling the stressors of the job, though older aged principals were more

likely to leave the profession all together due to retirement as compared to younger aged

principals (Tekleselassie & Choi, 2019).

The behavioral stressors listed by Tekleselassie and Choi (2019) leading to

principal burnout and turnover were further examined by Hancock et al. (2019). Hancock

et al. conducted a qualitative comparative study of principal stressors with 19 principals

from a southeastern region of the USA and 24 principals from Germany who replied to

eight open-ended survey questions. Participants responded that principal stress was

caused by excessive administrative tasks, high responsibilities, accountability from

supervisors, pressure and expectations to maintain composure and professionalism during

highly stressful situations, stress from having to communicate decisions made to all stakeholders, and a lack of time to accomplish all the tasks associated with being a principal (Hancock et al., 2019). De Matthews et al. (2019), Hancock et al. (2019), Tekleselassie and Choi (2019) revealed that although the school principal experienced highly stressful situations and a great deal of responsibility that contributed to increased levels of burnout and turnover of the position, principals with more experience were able to persist through those challenges and developed significant coping strategies.

When looking at turnover rates based on gender and school level, Davis and Anderson (2021) examined the patterns of alluvial diagrams to analyze and visualize differential turnover among 1,113 first time Texas principals for when and how principal turnover occurs. The purpose of using the alluvial data visualization was to provide a picture to local school boards and district leaders to better understand complex data trends of principal turnover through a visual format (Davis & Anderson, 2021). Davis and Anderson found that half of all first-time principals' turnover left their position as principal within their first two years, and that elementary school female principals' turnover rate was less than middle and high school principals, more of whom were male (Davis & Anderson, 2021).

Environmental Influences on Principal Turnovers

Environmental influences are comprised of a multitude of working conditions within the school or the district largely beyond the control of the school principal and include the perceived autonomy within the role of principal and the overall school's social, economic, and political conditions (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012). Tekleselassie and

Choi (2019), in addition to findings related to how the age of the principal corresponded

to turnover, discovered through their analysis of national data that the number of hours

spent on the job and overall number of days in the school year increased the risk of

principal turnover by a factor of 1.016 times. The need to spend many hours on the job

was also examined in a previous study by Mitani (2018).

Mitani (2018) examined principal working conditions under the *No Child Left*

Behind Act (NCLB) and the assumption that NCLB sanctions imposed on schools

incentivized principals to raise student performance. Mitani used data from the Schools

and Staffing Survey data (SASS) and school level Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP)

collected from 45 states to research principal turnover behaviors and job stress level

through two sample *t tests.* Mitani found that NCLB sanctions against schools were

associated with greater job stress, higher turnover, and higher transfer rates for school

principals facing those sanctions. Mitani indicated that policy makers need to provide

support to those specific principals facing sanctions from NCLB and under Every Student

Succeeds Act to address turnover and job stress levels.

Other research has been conducted on environmental influences on the

principalship and overall school system characteristics. Pendola and Fuller (2020)

examined the relationship between demographic changes and principal turnover. The

study, conducted in Texas over a 17-year period using time hazard modeli*ng*, was to

estimate the risk of turnover over a given time period. Pendola and Fuller termed these

demographic changes as "shocks" associated with an increased risk of principal turnover.

Findings showed that the decrease in White student numbers and the increase in students

of color, greater proportions of limited English proficient students, and increased numbers of economically disadvantaged students were associated with a higher risk of principal turnover (Pendola & Fuller, 2020). Suburban principals demonstrated increased sensitivity to nearly all types of demographic changes, while rural principals were more sensitive to the overall shock of increased enrollment. As a result of the findings, Pendola and Fuller recommended that if principals are to be successful facing these demographic changes within their schools, support must be provided to school leaders to meet student needs in schools where there have been significant demographic changes.

In earlier studies by Grissom and Bartanen (2018) and Grissom et al. (2019), similarly high rates of principal departure were found among schools with larger "marginalized" populations as did Pendola and Fuller (2020). Grissom et al. (2019) explored the idea of inequitable "principal sorting," where there was an inequitable distribution of educator quality across schools in California by surveying over 700 school principals and using publicly available data on the California Department of Education website. The findings from Grissom et al. (2019) indicated that the most disadvantaged schools had the least experienced principals and the lowest average tenure for principals. The average tenure for school principals in low-poverty schools was 5.1 years, while the average tenure for school principals in high-poverty schools was 4.1 years. The gap in tenure was even greater among schools with high achievement levels as compared to schools with low achievement levels, whereby nearly 70% of the principals in schools with low achievement were in their positions for less than 3 years (Grissom & Baranen, 2018).

Grissom et al. (2019) later examined 10 years of longitudinal administrative data from the Tennessee Department of Education to determine the degree of principal turnover contributing to gaps in principal quality among various types of schools. Grissom et al. found that schools with higher proportions of low achieving students and urban schools with high-poverty levels had a substantially higher rate of principal turnover as compared to low-poverty suburban schools. Grissom et al. also found that disadvantaged schools, defined as high-poverty and low-achieving, were led by principals with weaker qualifications and lower performance ratings. Both Tennessee and California were found to have inequitably distributed educator quality across schools based on school characteristics (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018).

Beckett (2018) used seven independent variables--school type, school size, percentage of students of color, percentage of free and reduced lunch, percentage of students with disabilities, percentage of English language learners, percentage of gifted and talented students, and the interrelationship of these variables to determine principal turnover and the average tenure of principals in 139 schools in a Colorado urban district. Beckett (2018) analyzed publicly available data from the Colorado Department of Education collected over the course of 5 years. Using descriptive statistics and multiple regression, Beckett found that only 23% of the principals stayed at their school for at least 5 years, while 58% left the principalship all together. On average, Beckett determined that schools in the Colorado urban district experienced principal turnover every 2.5 years and turnover increased in schools with high percentages of students of color and students eligible for free and reduced lunch. In contrast, the schools where the

principals stayed for at least 5 years had lower percentages of students of color, fewer students with limited English proficiency, and lower numbers of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch (Beckett, 2018).

The National Association of Secondary School Principals and The Learning Policy Institute released a comprehensive report authored by Levin et al. (2019) that contained an analysis of the findings from 35 major studies on principal turnover from more than 350 secondary principals across the nation The report cited five key reasons that principals leave their job: (a) inadequate preparation and professional development; (b) poor working conditions; (c) insufficient salaries, also found by Hansen (2018), Pendola (2021), and Tran and Buckman (2017); (d) lack of decision-making authority; and (e) high-stakes accountability policies, similar to the findings of Levin et al. (2019).

Researchers have reported there are various reasons for principal turnover and departure such as burnout (Yildrium & Sait Dinc, 2019) and negative emotions that can lead to burnout (Chen, 2020). There are also personal, behavioral, and environmental factors that influence principal turnover (Boyce & Bowers, 2016), and an overall belief that the job of being a principal is too time consuming (Reid, 2021), stressful (De Jong et al., 2017), isolating (Bauer & Silver, 2018), and frustrating due to the increasing number of government-directed initiatives and policy changes (Wang et al., 2018). Turnover has also been found to be influenced by "shocks" resulting in changing school demographics that are beyond the control of the principal (Pendola & Fuller, 2020). Regardless of the reasons for principal turnover, the turnover of principals affects the school, staff, and students in multiple ways.

Effects of Principal Turnover

Researchers have found that a principal's impact on students is second only to that of a classroom teacher (Edwards et al., 2018; Leithwood et al., 2020; Wahlstrom et al., 2010). It is important to review the potential effects when the principal of a school leaves. In synthesizing the current research concerning the effects of principal turnover, the word *costly* emerged as an overall theme.

Replacing the school principal has been found to be costly, financially, in terms of the human personnel effort required to replace a school principal (Tran et al., 2018) and costly to student achievement (Edwards et al., 2018; Kearney, 2012). Tran et al. (2018) conducted a systematic cost analysis among high school principals and turnover in South Carolina and determined it took 37 personnel members and over 207 hours to replace a high school principal. After the new principal was in place, it took an additional six people working over 78 hours across the district to support the new principal. Tran et al. noted that the study in South Carolina, with a lower overall cost of living, still resulted in the average financial replacement cost per principal at nearly $24,000 for each principal's replacement.

Hanselman et al. (2016) examined the effects of turnover related to the social conditions of the campus regarding principal-teacher relationships and found evidence that when principal turnover occurs, there was a destabilizing effect on relationships. Hanselman et al. termed this as a "reset" to this relationship, meaning it returns the principal-teacher relationship to the overall average. In theory, this reset may not have a negative effect during principal turnover, since the school itself may benefit from the

social conditions of the school returning to a pre-condition of the exiting principal (Hanselman et al., 2016). Meaning, the exiting school principal may have created a social environment that had deteriorated, and a new principal entering may allow the school to reset and rebuild the social environment.

In a 4-year study by Walsh and Dotter (2018), new principals in their first year had no impact on student achievement until they had persisted through their third year of leadership at the same school. Statistically significant student achievement gains between 8 and 9 % were observed and gains persisted through the fourth year of observation of the new principal. Findings from Walsh and Dotter reinforced the disruptive effect of principal turnover, and the length of time needed to add consistency to the school for both social culture and student outcomes.

Further research indicated that the social composition of the school is significant in determining the degree of the effects of principal departure and the consequences on classroom instruction (Pietsch et al., 2020). As a secondary follow-up study to Snodgrass Rangel's (2018) research on principal turnover, Pietsch et al. conducted over 10,000 classroom observations through random sampling of 101 primary schools at 2 points in time. Principal turnover that took place during the time period between the 2 random observations was documented to measure if turnover was a significant factor in teaching quality. The schools with more marginalized student populations showed greater levels of principal turnover resulting in inconsistent instructional leadership and negative effects on teaching quality, particularly in low-socioeconomic-status schools (Pietsch et al., 2020). This finding was further supported in the findings of Beckett (2018), Edwards et

al. (2018), Grissom et al. (2019), Grissom and Bartanen (2018), and Pendola and Fuller (2020) who also found that schools with higher levels of marginalized student populations felt the consequences of principal turnover to a greater extent.

One promising finding from Tran and Buckman (2017) showed that high school principals were more likely and willing to move to lower performing schools. However, the reason for this transition was the belief that there would be greater support given to them on the campus of a low performing school, and the belief they would have less direct influence on the overall school performance. This reason provided a less than optimal view of the in-coming high school principal when those are the reasons for moving.

Frequent principal turnover also fuels a simultaneous turnover of teachers (Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Edwards, 2018; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2019). This compounding effect of principal turnover, followed closely by teacher turnover, led to a lack of collegiality and overall staff buy in of campus initiatives from those teachers who remained after the principal and teachers left the campus (Edwards et al., 2018). Because the principal can enhance teachers' practices and motivate staff, a consistent principal is necessary (Levin et al., 2019). However, Babo and Petty (2019) identified the opposite in terms of principal longevity tied to teacher retention in New Jersey middle schools, where principals who served the longest in middle schools in middle-class communities had the lowest teacher retention, with the suspected reasoning that the working conditions at schools were a factor that contributed to teacher attrition. Babo and Petty were not able to

determine any clear reasons that attributed to this unique finding as to why teacher attrition was greater in these schools with a longstanding principal.

Principal turnover affects students, teachers, and school communities. While the studies reviewed in this section identified reasons for principal turnover, it is of importance to examine the potential reasons that may contribute to principal longevity at particular school sites and why a school principal remains a principal.

Reasons for Principal Longevity

When examining the literature there are largely two overall themes that contributed to principal longevity: personal reasons and professional support. Personal reasons can be those factors that are within the control or influence of the principal (Hansen, 2018). Professional support reasons are relationships that the principal is involved in such as induction, professional development, mentoring, and meaningful connections contributing to longevity (Cieminski, 2018).

Personal Reasons

Heffernan (2021) sought to examine the role of principal longevity through a case study of eight principals from one district in Australia using semi structured interviews. Heffernan (2021) used the lens of *mooring factors,* which are largely personal reasons that keep people within a school community for extended periods of time and that outweigh professional factors. By categorizing *mooring factors* as either push or pull, insight into the reasons why principals remain was determined. Push factors were identified as areas that impacted principals' personal lives such as work life balance and the impact on principals' families. Principals shared that a push factor was a potential

blur between the profession and personal life. Because principals were well known in the public, this often contributed to the principals and their families withdrawing from public and social events within the community; however, when principals and their families felt supported within the community, it contributed to principal retention resulting in a greater overall sense of community for the principal (Heffernan, 2021).

Promoting the work-life balance was a key policy implication resulting from the study by Horwood et al. (2021). In a longitudinal study of nearly 4,000 principals from Australia, over 2 years of research, Horword et al. found that principals were typically passionate about their jobs, and while this passion can lead to positive job satisfaction, it increased the likelihood of job burnout. Recommendations made by Horwood et al. advocated that a work-life balance must exist. Kaufman (2019) also addressed the work-life balance when investigating coping strategies to handle the effects of the stress associated with being a principal that were used by 320 public school principals from 14 districts in an upper midwest United States region. Personal efforts to handle stress included engaging in physical activity; purposeful engagement with family, friends, and colleagues; contemplative mediation practices; and professional therapy sessions. Kaufman stated that the findings contained examples of principals who had overcome stress through personal efforts yet did not result in determining how the principals developed such effective means of coping.

Wells and Klocko (2018) presented a conceptual study to parallel the workplace stress of a school principal and a physician. Through an examination of research from 2009 to 2012, Wells and Klocko identified that the principal and physician are both under

considerable amounts of stress with similar work hours, legal threats, judgements from public opinion, and lack of time for a personal life. Wells and Klacko provided recommendations for practice, such as mindfulness training as beneficial for physicians; however, the researchers did not provide evidence to support that mindfulness training and overall attention to self-care practices led to resilience in other professions, specifically the principalship. The researchers posited that the results could be used to inform school principals' resilience and longevity. Further recommendations from Wells and Klacko included a dedicated principal preparation program that focusses on overall well-being to support principals with resources to deal with stress that support resilience.

Considerable amounts of research on personal reasons for longevity have focused on salary as a condition of principal longevity (Kearney et al., 2012, Pendola, 2021; Tran, 2017). Kearney et al. (2012) conducted an analysis of factors that could extend a principal's longevity and indicated that principals were influenced by the same psychological factors that influence teachers and students--to feel valued and supported. Financial incentives may just one way to improve principal retention so principals feel valued through attractive pay policies.

Tran's (2017) study on California high school principals' pay satisfaction examined principals' turnover intentions through archival and survey data from 156 respondents who indicated that if they were less satisfied with their pay then they were more likely to quit their job. For high school principals, comparing their salaries to principals outside their district, was found to be a significant factor in their retention, meaning, their pay satisfaction was influenced by peer salaries at other high schools in

surrounding districts. Tran surmised that if retaining principals beyond the third year of service is important, then designing an attractive pay policy could contribute to longevity.

Pendola (2021) built upon the work of Tran (2017) to examine the exact type of pay structure needed to reduce principal turnover. Through the utilization of statewide longitudinal data from 1988 to 2012 in Texas, Pendola sought to estimate the risk of leaving a given school based on wage comparisons to other principals and the dispersion range of salaries. Data analysis was conducted through discrete time hazard modeling to estimate the risk that a turnover event will occur during the period of a principal's employment. Results indicated that a one standard deviation increase in absolute salary, or nearly $15,000, aligned with a 10% reduction in the ratio of a turnover event. Pendola recommended that school districts should bind principal salaries with tighter ranges and reasonable steps to reduce turnover with salary increases aligned to principal quality and productivity. In addition, Pendola recommended that frontloading a salary schedule may ensure new principals remain as principals.

Bauer and Silver (2018), Liu and Bellibus (2018), Postma and Babo (2019) all suggested that principal retention depends on the extent to which the principal is satisfied with their job. Postma and Babo (2019) conducted a quantitative study of over 2,500 elementary and secondary principals in New Jersey to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and job satisfaction. Principals completed an online survey to examine the dependent variable of job satisfaction and the independent variable of principal self-efficacy. Babo and Postma used multiple regression analysis of three dimensions of principal self-efficacy, or their belief in their abilities in instructional leadership,

management, and moral leadership. According to Babo and Postma, job satisfaction increased as the principals' self-efficacy in these three dimensions increased.

Similar to Postma and Babo (2019), Liu and Bellibus (2018) used survey results from 6,045 principals from 32 different countries to examine job satisfaction and organizational commitment. The most significant finding from principals in all 32 countries indicated that job satisfaction was associated with positive social interactions and relationships built with staff. Positive relationships built with staff were also aligned with the findings of Bauer and Silver (2018) when examining predictors of principal persistence and reducing the role of isolation for new principals. Two hundred and three first-year principals were surveyed using path analysis to test the relationships between the attributes of self-efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and persistence with the role of isolation as a precursor to each attribute. Findings indicated that isolation was the most significant predictor of new principals' intentions to leave (Bauer & Silver, 2018), which mirrors the findings of Liu and Bellibus (2018), and the importance of positive relationship building to curb isolation. Additional research was recommended to provide information on relationship building at the professional level to support principal longevity.

Professional Support

Professional support to promote longevity as it relates to relationships are those more formal, purposeful encounters that principals experience through high quality principal preparation programs, professional development, relationships with mentors, and meaningful connections with fellow colleagues at the same career stage (Cieminski,

2018; Cunningham et al., 2019; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Grissom et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020).

Williams et al. (2020) explored the successful partnership between a large urban school district and a university principal preparation program to invest in the development of new and aspiring school principals. A case study design was used to explore how successful partnerships can be designed to support principals serving student populations made up of primarily Hispanic students, English language learners, and low-income students. Key findings indicated the importance of placing experienced university faculty with new and aspiring principals in a system of support built upon leadership development, establishing a positive school culture, and mentoring new school principals. Though Williams et al. (2020) stated that changes in university and district personnel can be problematic to building longstanding relationships, principal candidates who completed the university partnership program were retained in their school sites at significantly higher rates when compared to principals who were not part of the university cohort partnership. Of the 100 program completers, 88% were found to still be principals at their original school site 2 years after completion of the program. This high retention rate of principals influenced both the superintendent and school board to continue the partnership for ongoing preservice and in-service support of school leaders. Programs of this nature were described by Leithwood et al. (2020) as "essential leadership practices" for school principals. Williams et al. (2020) recommended providing early career principals with a minimum of 2 years of on-the-job support to increase retention.

Similar to Williams' et al. (2020) recommendations of on-the-job training, Grissom et al. (2020) explored principal longevity by examining the assistant principals' progression to become a principal with an emphasis on preservice support as an assistant principal. Grissom et al. (2020) used longitudinal administrative data files from the Tennessee Department of Education from 2001 to 2016 to construct prior job experience measures as an assistant principal. Seventeen hundred schools from 147 school districts were analyzed using a rubric derived from the Tennessee Instructional Leadership Standards that measured principal outcomes in years 1-3 on the job to ensure accuracy of the job specific measures. Findings from Grissom et al. indicated that those new principals who were rated high by their supervisors were also rated high as school assistant principals. Assistant principals who implemented successful leadership practices were more successful as a school principal. Significant to the new principals' success and longevity was the relationship and mentoring that happened between the assistant principal and the principal prior to the assistant principal becoming a principal (Grissom et al., 2020). Evidence showed that future principals learned from working with their supervising principals by either emulating the leader or identifying factors of their supervising leader they would not implement. In either case, matching high potential future leaders with mentor principals was found to be valuable in the leadership development of aspiring principals to improve retention (Grissom et al., 2020).

Engaging in professional networks while on the job also encouraged principals to remain on the job, according to Gimbel and Kefor's (2018) phenomenological study of four mentor-mentee pairs of principals participating in the Vermont Mentoring Initiative.

Semi structured interviews were conducted to explore the perceptions of new principals and their assigned mentors. The program provided formal mentoring where an experienced school principal was paired with a novice principal to help the novice principal make better decisions, encourage self-reflection, and talk through difficult faculty challenges. The experiences of the mentors and mentees demonstrated that through this 2-year mentorship process, the principals had an opportunity to connect with job alike mentors who encouraged them to stay in their positions. Novice principals also fared better when their initial preparation or induction (Bush, 2018) to the school principal position was paired with strong pedagogy and administrative and managerial training, particularly in interpersonal relationships (Arar, 2020). The work of Gimbel and Kefor's study on mentorship of new principals was supported in the work of Cieminki (2018) when examining principal retention.

Cieminski (2018) used a basic interpretive qualitative design to explore the perspectives of participants through a constructionist lens to explore the succession practices of principals in five Colorado school districts with high rates of principal retention. Using purposeful sample strategies, Cieminski surveyed 18 participants from large schools with over 5,000 students in the district. Respondents consisted of veteran principals with 10 or more years of experience, principals with 1- 4 years of experience, and district administrators. Cieminski found that respondents from school districts with high principal retention rates stated that differentiated and individualized support was provided to them as leaders using current district administrators or retired or current principals who served in a role as a coach and mentor. Cieminski reported that every one

of the 11 principals who participated in the study stated that their relationships with their

fellow principal mentors in the school district were invaluable to their growth as leaders

and provided them with mutual support. Supportive relationships between principals and

their supervisors were also cited as a factor in principal retention in Cieminski's findings.

The relationships described by Cieminski were found to result in meaningful connections,

whereby the novice leader was provided with critical support and space for personal

reflections to ensure success in the complex job of a school leader (Cunningham et al.,

2019; Young & Spicer, 2019). These findings can be aligned to the components of

relatedness, sense of belonging, and connection in SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2020); however,

in the target state of this study, there is no requirement for professional development after

a principal is fully licensed (Kearney, 2010; Sutcher et al., 2018) as compared to other

states (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018).

The psychological need of autonomy, aligned to the framework of SDT where the

individual has a sense of ownership in their actions (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Wang, et al.,

2018), was found to contribute to principal retention in the studies of Chang et al. (2015),

Donley et al. (2020), and Yan (2020). Yan (2020) accessed restricted-use data from the

Principal Questionnaire and School District Questionnaire in the Schools and Staffing

Survey (SASS) in conjunction with national data from the National Center for Education

Statistics to examine the dependent variable of principal turnover and independent

variable of principal characteristics. Multinomial logistic regressions were used by Yan in

the analysis of the data find that, on average, principals had 7.2 years of experience as a

principal and 4.3 years of experience as a principal at their current school. Yan

determined that principals who had more influence on determining teacher professional development, budget spending decisions, and the ability to set performance standards were more likely to remain in their position as a principal.

Among public school principals surveyed in the Public-School Principal Status Data file of 2016, representing K-12 schools in 50 states, Goldring and Taie (2018) found that 82% of principals remained at the same school for an additional year if they felt they had a major influence on evaluating teachers. These findings support principal autonomy and the need to have a sense of ownership in actions and decisions, as described by Ryan & Deci (2020) to increase principal continuity.

Chang et al. (2015) specifically used the SDT framework to understand the role of perceived autonomy-support in principals' organizational commitment and job satisfaction, with autonomy-support defined as principals feeling they had the support of their superintendents to make autonomous decisions. Chang et al. surveyed 1,560 K-12 public school principals' perceptions of autonomy-support from their superintendents in relation to their commitment to their school districts in several large Midwestern states. School principals often felt the weight and pressure of responsibilities yet lacked the power to make any of the changes based on the lack of autonomy. Principals' perceived autonomy-support from their superintendents was found to be a significant predictor of principals' job satisfaction (Chang et al., 2015).

Chang et al. (2015) also found that when principals perceived that they could make significant policy decisions due to the support and confidence of the superintendent in their abilities, the principals were more likely to make strides in improving student

outcomes. The principals were also found to feel more emotionally attached to their schools and more satisfied with their jobs and were less likely to leave their school districts. This perceived autonomy-support from the superintendent was found to be important for all principals but even more so for novice principals (Chang et al., 2015).

Levin et al. (2019) and Herman et al. (2017) pointed to the importance of principal autonomy when making decisions, which contributed to increased principal retention. As recommended in Levin and Bradley's (2019) findings, the principals who perceived they had greater autonomy over personnel decisions and power to lead and to address complex issues experienced on the school site were less likely to leave the principalship. Herman et al. (2017) stated that providing increased autonomy in making decisions regarding budget, personnel staffing, and curriculum oversight enhanced the retention of principals. Herman et al. surmised that providing autonomy as an intervention for retaining school principals is free of cost and supports continuity.

Tekleselassie and Choi (2019) conducted research in identifying other areas contributing to principal retention through additional investigations of the data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS). Though the SASS results are from 2008 and 2009, there were several areas worthy of consideration for principal retention and continuity due to the sample size of 89,920 public school principals. Hierarchical Linear Models were used to analyze the relationships of variables between the school principals and the school districts. The findings of Tekleselassie and Choi indicated that the presence of school social workers decreased principals' departure for 52% of the 89,920 principals and increased their job satisfaction within the district and their school. Having a tenure

system for principals and an administrative union also reduced the odds of departure for 95% of the principals in the data set. This finding prompted Tekleselassie and Choi to recommend additional research on the topic of principal tenure and administrative unions to address principal retention.

Levin et al. (2019), in conjunction with the National Association of Secondary Principals, further summarized five key reasons why principals continued based on evidence from over 350 secondary principals. Principals remained in their positions when there were high quality professional learning opportunities, improved working conditions to increase principal self-efficacy, adequate and stable compensation packages to show value in the principals' work and abilities, decision making authority to meet the specific needs of their schools, and reformed accountability systems to encourage principals to remain in more challenging schools (Levin et al., 2019).

Summary and Conclusions

The school principal should be in place for 5-7 years of service at the same school to have significant beneficial impact on the school (Burkhauser, 2017; Tran, 2017), yet in several studies (Davis & Anderson, 2021; Levin et al., 2019; Grissom & Bartanen 2019a; Krasnoff, 2015; Taie & Goldring, 2017; Yan, 2020), the average length of service barely reached 3 years. Various reasons contribute to principal turnover such as stress and burnout (Beausaert et al., 2016; DeMatthews et al., 2019; Mahfouz, 2020; Nitta et al., 2019; Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018), negative feelings of self (Chen & Walker, 2021), poor working conditions (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019b; Levin et al., 2020; Oplatka, 2017), and an overall lack of preparation for the demands of the job (Levin et al., 2019; Taie &

Goldring, 2017; Williams et al., 2020; Yan, 2020). Researchers' findings also indicated

the importance of the school principal to student attendance (Bartanen, 2020), student and

faculty well-being (DeMatthews, 2016; Grissom et al., 2021; Liebowitz & Porter, 2019),

instructional leadership (Maponya, 2020), and positive student achievement (Chiang et

al., 2016; Dhuey & Smith, 2018; Jambo & Hongde, 2019; Stockard, 2020; Walsh &

Dotter, 2020; Wu et al., 2020). These studies provided insight into the reasons why

principals leave their position with some recommendations to increase retention. Chapter

3 provides the details of the methodology that explored the reasons high school principals

served consistently for 4 years or more at their school sites through the lens of the SDT of

human motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000, 2020).

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perspectives of the high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more through a strengths-based approach This chapter includes a discussion of this study's research design, methodology, participant selection, and an overview of ethical considerations that were followed throughout the study. The chapter also includes the data analysis strategies and the steps that were taken to ensure trustworthiness of the results.

Research Design and Rationale

In this qualitative study, the following questions were answered:

RQ1: What are the motivators that high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ2: How do high school principals describe the challenges they have overcome to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ3: What recommendations do the high school principals have to increase the consistency of their service?

A qualitative research approach was selected for this study because it allowed me to observe, gather, and interpret the data in a natural setting and to develop an in-depth analysis of the motivators that influenced high school principals to remain in their position and the challenges they overcame (see Creswell, 2014; Kohlbacher, 2006). Quantitative methodology was not selected as it is an experimental approach using

variables to determine results presented in a numerical form from a prediction of a

hypothesis (see Creswell, 2014). The quantitative approach uses an experimental or

quasi-experimental design to test the impact of a treatment on a particular outcome

(Creswell. 2014). In contrast, qualitative research allows for the collection of data based

on observations, interviews, documents, and artifacts then, through detailed data

processing, enables a researcher to make sense of people's lived experiences (Miles et al.

2014). A qualitative method lent itself to this study that was designed to uncover the

meanings participants placed on events, processes, and structures in their lives related to

the research problem and purpose (see Miles et al., 2014). For those reasons, qualitative

research was selected rather than a quantitative approach.

An exploratory case study design was chosen for this study; it is used for

exploratory, empirical inquiry through interviews of the individuals involved in events to

understand the human condition in different contexts of a situation (see Bengtsson, 2016;

Yin, 2014). A case study design allowed me to pose "how," "what," and, "why"

questions in the investigation of the phenomenon within a real-world context in the study

region (see Yin, 2014). As stated by Yin (2017), case studies are used to explore the

phenomenon under investigation that has no clear, single set of outcomes. Case study

design allowed me to explore a decision or set of decisions made by high school

principals and how those decisions were made and their subsequent results (see

Schramm, 1971). A case study was appropriate as this design lent itself to confirming,

extending, and challenging prior conceptual frameworks, in this case SDT, to guide data

collection and analysis (see Yin, 2014). Through this study, I sought to gain a better

understanding of the motivators that influenced high school principals to remain in their positions, and the challenges high school principals overcame to continue beyond four years of service, as well to glean recommendations from the principals to increase the consistency of service at the high school level.

Rather than a phenomenological design, a case study design is chosen to develop an understanding of complex experiences of individuals bound a common phenomenon that is then synthesized to provide a general description of the experience of the individuals (Creswell, 2014; Goulding, 2004). Case study allows for the evaluation of a particular case rather than an analysis of the transformation of lived experiences as is characteristic of a phenomenological design (Creswell, 2014). The high school principals served as the unit of analysis. The established boundaries of this case study encompassed high school principals from the study region who served at least 4 years at one high school. Placing boundaries on a case study prevents a researcher from attempting to answer a question that is too broad or pursuing a study topic with too many objectives (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Grounded theory is an inquiry qualitative design from sociology with the purpose of building and developing a theory or an understanding of a process that has changed over time, leading researchers in an iterative approach to achieve data saturation (Creswell, 2014; Goulding, 2004). Due to the grounded theory approach of developing theory, 20-30 participants are recommended to reach data saturation that results in no additional or new insights (Creswell, 2014). This study was not intended to develop new

theory; therefore, a grounded theory design was not applicable to the study of the problem.

Because I was not attempting to understand shared patterns of behaviors, language, or actions of a cultural group in a natural setting over a prolonged time period (see Creswell, 2014), an ethnographic design was not employed. Ethnographic studies involve direct contact with a group of members over a prolonged period to find explanations and is typified through fieldwork (Goulding, 2004).

An exploratory case study design was chosen over phenomenological, grounded theory, and ethnographic designs as this design enabled me to approach the problem by exploring the participants' perceptions that were related to positive emotions, cognitions, behaviors, traits, and outcomes that led to their consistency of service as high school principals rather than through a deficit lens (see Maton et al., 2004). The deficit-based approach tends to focus on policies and individuals who are viewed as deficient and in need of fixing rather than active participants in the formation of solutions to observable problems in society (Maton et al., 2004). Oades et al. (2017) framed the strengths-based approach to guard against negativity and bias when attempting to explore what is working well in systems. Strengths-based approaches lead to the recognition of the value of turning to the positive when addressing complex issues through a reflexive and thorough process that leads to the empowerment of individuals (Fenton et al., 2015; Fenton & McFarland-Piazza, 2014), which was the underlying premise of this study.

Meaning was constructed from the participants' responses as I engaged with current and former high school principals to uncover the participants' understandings of

their experiences as school leaders (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research questions

clarified the boundaries of this case study in terms of time of service and the group of

participants who shared demographic similarities as high school principals in one

designated region (see Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2014). The evidence collected was used

to determine the motivating factors that kept the high school principals in their position

and to understand the challenges the participants faced. Additional priorities for the data

collection were to obtain recommendations to increase the consistency of high school

principals' years of service from the participants.

<div align="center">**Role of the Researcher**</div>

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is to collect and analyze the data

by accessing the thoughts and feelings of the participants (Creswell, 2014). As the

researcher, I engaged in reflexive practices throughout the study, using journaling and

field notes to minimize personal assumptions and biases as I sought to answer the

research questions (see Roger et al., 2018). As the sole researcher for this study, I

conducted all interviews and was solely responsible for the analysis of the data and the

findings.

My relationship with the principals who participated in the study included

actively employed principals in the same district where I have been employed as a district

administrator in a director role; however, I serve in a role that has no supervisory or

evaluative capacity over the principals who agreed to participate in the research. The

remaining participants were principals outside the district who serve in the region that

bounded this study.

Detailed written records of the study's data collection and analysis process, participant member checks to review results and preliminary findings, and triangulation of data sources were used to avoid confirmation bias. Confirmation bias is described as the intentional or unintentional seeking of evidence to validate a researcher's existing beliefs or expectations and the denying or ignoring of evidence that is contrary to a researcher's expectations (Bierema et al., 2018). To mitigate any potential confirmation bias, openness to contrary evidence was explored to substantiate the findings of the study (Yin, 2014).

Ethical issues were addressed and considered throughout the study. While conducting the study, the identity of the participants, their schools, and their school districts was protected using numeric and alphabetic identifiers to uphold confidentiality. There were no incentives given to participate in the study; however, a follow up thank you note was sent to each participant. Eligible participants were informed of the purpose, procedures, and potential risks and benefits of participation, in terms understandable to the participants, through the informed consent process.

Methodology

Participant Selection

To gain insight into the local phenomenon to identify the motivational factors that have contributed to high school principals' consistency of service, the participants for this exploratory case study were high school principals from one region in California. Purposeful sampling enabled me to recruit participants who meet the specified criteria for inclusion in the study and were able to provide detailed information about the

phenomenon under investigation (see Creswell, 2014). While random sampling is

typically a characteristic of quantitative research, purposive sampling, as used in this case

study, was strategic to achieve the study's purpose on the unique context of high school

principals' reasons for longevity (see Miles et al., 2014). Inclusion criteria consisted of

the number of years of service that the high school principal served at one school site,

determined to be 4 or more years, based upon literature citing the importance of principal

longevity for an extended duration of time (see Burkhauser, 2017; Daniel & Lei, 2019;

Grissom & Bartanen, 2018; Levin et al., 2019; Pendola & Fuller, 2018). The participants

in this study all served as high school principals for 4 or more years at the same high

school site. Participants were included from at least three different high schools within

one county comprising the region of study to gain multiple perspectives. A total of eight

participants provided the data needed to sufficiently address the research questions and

generate similar answers that signaled saturation of data (see Guest et al., 2006).

The Partner Organization Form (see Appendix A) was provided to the sponsoring

school district and provided to the IRB as required for students in the EdD for

Administrators (AEAL) program. After receiving IRB approval (#04-29-22-1008747), I

emailed the Leader Interview Consent Form to high school principals in the region to

solicit participation based upon the inclusion criteria of 4 or more years of service as a

high school principal at the same school. Contact emails for all principals were obtained

from public records in the county office of education in the study region. The body of the

email included the Leader Interview Consent Form and a question regarding the length of

service as a high school principal in one school. Those principals who self-identified as

serving at least 4 years at one high school were invited to participate in this study. The Interview Consent Form contained the purpose of the study, interview procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, potential risks and benefits, as well as protections of privacy, and contact information for Walden University should there be any questions or concerns.

Instrumentation

The data collection instrument used in the study was a semistructured narrative interview protocol (see Appendix B); interview reflective notes were also maintained throughout the duration of the data collection process. According to Ortlipp (2008), the process of reflective notes allows a researcher to create transparency in the research process by providing a research trail documenting data generation, analysis, and interpretation. I made detailed notes using a reflective commentary to record the various nuances of the participants' responses such as pauses between questions and facial responses, in addition to making note of the researcher's own feelings, reactions and initial interpretations, as suggested by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). These reflective notes were maintained through an organized strategy of data gathering (see Appendix C) in conjunction with the interview process, as suggested by Marshall and Rossman (2016).

A researcher using qualitative methodology is acknowledged as the instrument through which data are collected and analyzed (Rager, 2005; Ravitch & Carl, 2016); therefore, I was the sole instrument to collect data. Each interview followed a self-designed interview protocol aligned to the three research questions. I took the position as participant by actively participating in creating conversation with the participants with

the goal of focusing on their accounts and encouraging and provoking participants following a Socratic practice, described as the practice of engaging in active discussion with the participants (see Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

The study's interview protocol was comprised of semistructured interview questions inviting narrative responses. The questions were closely aligned with Yin's (2014) recommendation to use "how," "what," and "why" questions in a unified structured design for case study research, as compared to a case study interview protocol aligned to a more flexible design (see Yazan, 2015). The semistructured interviews consisted of specific questions that guided the interview process with a protocol to organize the data collection with an introductory and concluding script. Prior to its use, the interview protocol was reviewed by principals who were not potential participants in this study, to establish instrument credibility by ensuring the questions were clear and comprehensive to address the purpose of the study and the research questions. The review of interview questions established credibility by ensuring that the questions were representative of all the relevant parts of the study (Connell et al., 2018). Because this was a single case study, no prior instrumentation was considered since the intention of the interviews was to yield data from individuals in their everyday situation as high school principals (see Miles et al., 2014).

The purpose of the interview protocol was to provide a guide for the interviews by ensuring that lines of questioning were aligned to the research questions and SDT, as well as the related literature (see Yin, 2014). The interview protocol refinement (IPR) framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016) was used to ensure that interview questions were

aligned with research questions and to create an environment of inquiry-based

conversations with participants that elicited information related to the study's purpose.

Data were collected in a relational approach, where I was an active listener and showed

empathy and openness to participants' responses (see DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019;

Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Interview reflective notes were used as a complementary perspective of the

participants' data collected through the interviews. Reflective notes added meaning to the

data as they were collected by documenting facial responses and potential external

conditions that faced each participant (Deggs & Hernandez, 2018; Miles et al., 2014; Yin,

2014). Reflective notes were documented during the video interview that build a coherent

justification for the developing themes (Creswell, 2014). Building this coherent

justification of themes meant that the data associated with each theme made sense and

worked within the context of all the data where patterns were uncovered beyond surface

meanings to explore underlying ideas (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The video conferencing

tool allowed for the collection of captions during the virtual interviews, which were used

to facilitate the transcription of the data.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Interview data were collected using a video conferencing tool (Gray et al., 2020).

Interviews were considered what Yin (2014) called shorter case study interviews where

the event occurs in a focused setting of approximately 1 hour, rather than prolonged case

study interviews occurring over extended periods of time. Though some participants were

available for in person interviews, I wanted to remain receptive to the varying levels of

comfortability during the COVID-19 pandemic and interviewed all participants through virtual means for consistency. Video conferencing allowed both the participant and I to hear and see each other although not occupying the same physical space (Gray et al., 2020). By remaining consistent using virtual interviews, rather than a combination of both virtual and in person interviews, I was able to safeguard content reliability, meaning the instrument used consisted of the same subject matter that it was intended to explore and that the interview approach employed in this study was consistent (Creswell, 2014; Miles et al., 2014).

Recruitment of the participants began with an initial invitation email contained within the body of the Leader Interview Consent Form (see Appendix B) that was sent to high school principals in the study region. Email addresses were obtained directly from the county office of education website. The email outlined the purpose and scope of the study and the criteria to participate in the study. The informed consent in the initial email provided an explanation that participation was voluntary and that participants could withdraw from the study at any time. The informed consent also provided the participants with information of their right to privacy and protection of confidentiality throughout the process. To ensure confidentiality, all interview documents and recordings were housed on a password protected device and will be retained for 6 years after the completion of the study, then will be destroyed.

Participants were asked to express their consent to participate in the study by digitally responding, "I consent," to the email containing the Leader Interview Consent Form. Participants were asked to provide their availability for an interview after giving

consent. Each semi structured interview was approximately 1 hour in length. Because all

interviews were virtual, participants were in a location of their choosing that was

comfortable for them (Gray et al., 2020). At the conclusion of the interviews, each

participant was asked to provide their future availability to review the preliminary

findings at the conclusion of the data analysis to verify the accuracy of the findings

(Creswell, 2014).

Two means of audio recording were used: (a) the audio recording feature within

the video conferencing tool and, (b) and a cellular phone audio recording application as a

back-up. Participants were asked to consent to the recording of the interviews prior to

commencing the interview. Participants were later provided with a transcript of their

interview to verify the accuracy of the transcription and to add or amend any information

provided. The data collected from the participants were used to construct the narrative of

the experiences of the high school principals (see Schramm, 1971) to arrive at the

findings related to increasing the longevity of high school principals' service.

Data Analysis Plan

All audio records were transcribed verbatim, using an audio transcript application,

and verified for correctness against the interview recordings. The transcripts were

organized with each line numbered and sorted by word, phrase, and sentence with memos

added to the transcriptions (Green et al., 2007). The data sources were analyzed using

both the transcripts and the observations written both during and right after each

interview. Data analysis was completed manually. Thematic analysis phases were

followed to understand the aspects of the phenomenon that participants shared in the

interview process. Thematic analysis was comprised of the following phases: (a)

preparing and organizing the data for analysis, (b) transcribing verbatim the interviews,

(c) becoming familiar with the data, (d) making memos of the data to describe initial

feelings, (e) coding of the data into short descriptive words or phrases, (f) creation of

categories and themes through the inductive process, and (g) the presentation of

information about the process through the use of an audit trail of data by using reflexive

journaling to document decisions made during the research (Lester et al., 2020 pp. 98-

101).

Saldaña (2016) and Castleberry (2018) described coding as the raw data gradually

converted into usable data that are connected to one another. Two cycles of coding were

conducted prior to transitioning to categories (Saldaña, 2013). Recoding allowed for the

data to be more refined, rearranged and reclassified into different categories requiring the

researcher to conduct a more thorough synthesis and prioritization of potential themes

(Saldaña, 2013). Codes were connected to units of data that ranged in size from a phrase

to a sentence to a paragraph (Castleberry, 2018). It was during this analysis that I began

the process of coding, which led to categories and ultimately themes within the data.

Categories provided a description and organization of data sets to define groups of codes

related to the participants' opinions, experiences, and perceptions (Graneheim et al.,

2017).

Inductive coding led to the development of codes as the data were being analyzed

and to build the coded data into broad categories; therefore, inductive coding was used.

The categories were formed as groupings of coded segments that reduced the number of

pieces of data (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The categories were then grouped into themes that were compared with the accounts provided by the participants that were later aligned to the existing literature on the subject (Creswell, 2014; Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

Themes were actively constructed after all the pieces of data were assembled into a bigger picture of what was being portrayed while interacting with the data by placing themes into hierarchies and clustering similar codes that produced higher order codes and unified the themes to answer the research questions (Castleberry, 2018; Graneheim et al., 2017). Each theme that was developed was defined with a narrative description as to its relationship to the research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Theme development was based upon the framework criteria of Castleberry and Nolen (2018) to (a) identify a theme, (b) determine the quality of a theme, (c) identify the boundaries of the theme, (d) determine if there were enough data to support the theme(s), and (e) determine if the data were too diverse and wide ranging. During the data analysis process, discrepant cases that were identified were purposefully analyzed to look for variation, so codes, categories, themes, and concepts could be rethought (Saldaña, 2015). Data analysis concluded with a synthesis of the data to summarize the findings and report on those findings in a meaningful way (Yin, 2014).

Trustworthiness

The elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) form the components of trustworthiness that represent how a researcher will convey authenticity, acceptability, accuracy, and usefulness of the research process to the audience (Graneheim et al., 2016; Nowell et al.,

2017). Trustworthiness is the researcher's responsibility to demonstrate to themselves

and the readers that the research findings are legitimate and meet standards of rigor

(Nowell et al., 2017). The sections that follow contain the strategies used to ensure

trustworthiness in the research process.

Credibility

Credibility addresses the confidence that can be placed in the findings of the

research to establish if the findings may be plausible (Anney, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017).

Shenton (2004) stated that the researcher should be able to demonstrate that presented

findings are an accurate representation of the phenomenon, meaning that the study fulfills

its intended purpose, known as internal validity. Miles et al. (2014) explained that

credibility in research findings should make sense to readers so that there is an authentic

and accurate portrait of the phenomenon in question. To establish this study's credibility,

triangulation of the data and member checking was used to achieve a credible study.

Triangulation of the data involved collecting and analyzing the evidence of the

data sources to build a strong justification for the established themes within the study

(Creswell, 2014; Yin, 2014). Triangulation may involve the use of different methods,

investigators, sources, and theories to obtain corroborating evidence for the researcher,

reducing bias and increasing the integrity of the study (Anney, 2014). There are three

types of triangulation techniques: (a) investigator triangulation, (b) data triangulation or

informant triangulation, and (c) methodological triangulation (Anney, 2014). Investigator

triangulation involves the use of multiple researchers or investigators to investigate the

same problem and strengthens the integrity of the findings (Shenton, 2004; Yin, 2014).

Investigator triangulation was not appropriate in this case study as I was the sole researcher. Methodological triangulation involves the use of differing research methods to study the phenomenon to allow for more comprehensive data and study validity (Anney, 2014), also not appropriate to the design of this case study. The use of participants from three different high schools in the study region was included in this case study to achieve data or informant triangulation (Anney, 2014). Informant triangulation, with participants from at least three different high schools in the study region, added credibility to the findings, as described by Shenton (2004), by obtaining a variety of perspectives and experiences from participants serving at different high school sites throughout the study region.

The use of member checks was used to ensure the accuracy of the findings from this study by having participants review, check, and confirm the accuracy of their statements as well by reviewing the emergent themes to comment on the interpretation of the data (Creswell, 2014). Member checking is seen as a crucial component to address threats to validity with the researcher sharing power by involving the participants in reviewing the findings to affirm and/or revise the interpretations of the data (Motulsky, 2021). In alignment with Walden University's commitment to positive social change, member checking addressed transformational validity to give the participants a meaningful voice and involvement in an authentic relational, collaborative, and critical process in the study (Motulsky, 2021).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the extent that the results of a qualitative study are transferable to other contexts (Anney, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017). The premise of transferability is that the results can be applied to a wider population beyond the participants involved in the study (Shenton, 2004). It is a researcher's responsibility to be able to provide enough detailed descriptions so future researchers may be able to transfer findings to their own phenomenon of study (Nowell et al., 2017). To ensure transferability, thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation were provided to give readers the ability to understand and compare the findings and instances to their own situations (Shenton, 2004). The findings of this study may be transferable to similar school districts and administrative positions in the field of k-12 education.

Thick description provided a detailed and realistic representation of the perceptions and experiences of the principals interviewed in this study (Raufelder et al., 2013) by including excerpts from the participants' interviews that substantiated the themes of the study. Geertz's (1973) concept of thick description is to identify the interpretive and meaningful structures that lead a researcher to formulate sociological principles. The use of thick description provided a detailed account of the entire research process to enable other researchers to be able to replicate this study in different settings with similar conditions (Anney, 2014). Transferability and external validity were achieved in this study using thick descriptions about the research process and in the reporting of the findings (Anney, 2014).

Dependability

To ensure dependability, a researcher must maintain consistency of the data and ensure the research process is "logical, traceable, and documented clearly" (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 3). Shenton (2004) described dependability as the ability of future researchers to reproduce the work because the process within the research is reported in such detail, it is viewed as a "prototype model" (p. 71). A study can be reproduced by other researchers through the use of detailed processes using an audit trail (Anney, 2014; Nowell et al., 2017; Shenton, 2004). Using an audit trail provides a detailed, visible, and transparent record of how the study was carried out and how conclusions were made to establish confirmability in this study (Carcary, 2020). A thorough audit trail includes raw data from interviews and field notes where themes are shown to emerge directly from the data (Carcary, 2020). A study is considered auditable when another researcher can follow the decision trail of the researcher and arrive at the same conclusions (Nowell et al., 2017).

By listening to the participants' interview responses multiple times and comparing them with the transcript and keeping field notes during both the interview and transcript reading, a reliable audit trail of the data collection was documented. Transcripts were also sent to each participant to ensure transcript validity of the content. Detailed accounts of how data were collected, themed, and interpreted as well as how decisions were made to arrive at the findings were noted in the audit trail.

Confirmability

Confirmability is the final criterion to establish trustworthiness. To achieve confirmability, strategies to achieve credibility, transferability, and dependability must all

be accomplished (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Confirmability is the

qualitative counterpart to objectivity whereby results of the study are confirmed and

corroborated by other researchers rather than by the researcher's own biases, motivations,

or interests (Anney, 2014; Shenton, 2004). The audit trail and the practice of reflexivity

achieved confirmability in this study by keeping detailed records of the research path and

transparently describing the research steps taken throughout the study (Anney, 2014;

Carcary, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017).

Reflexivity requires a researcher to engage in self-awareness and critically assess

all the evidence and assumptions by keeping a self-critical account of the research

process (Carcary, 2020; Nowell et al., 2017). A reflexive journal was used to record and

document the research process, decisions made, and personal reflections and perceptions

throughout the research process (Anney, 2014). The reflexive journal was also used to

record and monitor any biases and personal values, and how they could have affected

decisions during each aspect of the research process to challenge my assumptions

(Carcary, 2020). The findings of this study were shaped by the participants' responses

and their member checks on the emergent findings and not my biases, motivations, or

interests (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Procedures

The ethical procedures that guided this study were set forth under the auspices of

Walden University as described for advanced education administrative leadership

(AEAL) dissertation studies. This study was aligned to the focus of the AEAL

dissertation of problem solving in real contexts through a case study approach to effect

positive social change. Through the IRB approval parameters for AEAL studies, this case study fell within the data guidelines to conduct interviews with school leaders and to obtain public data through public websites. I adhered to all IRB requirements to recruit and engage participants in this study and masked the name of the schools and participants in all documents and materials. The Partner Organization Agreement (see Appendix A) between Walden University and the study site was obtained to confirm my participation in conducting this study and the Leader Interview Consent Form (see Appendix B) was used to comply with AEAL case study research parameters. The Leader Interview Consent Form was sent in an email to provide the interviewees with disclosures regarding how the data would be used and assurances as to the ethical procedures related to recruitment, consent, and data collection; privacy during data collection; data storage and disposal; participant identity protection; organizational masking; descriptions of potential risks; management of potential conflicts of interest; and appropriate informed consent procedures.

Though eight participants were required, an additional 2-3 participants were identified should a participant withdraw early from the study. Participants did not experience undue influence or motivation to participate in the research. Participation was voluntary, and each participant was informed of their rights and provided interview times convenient for them. Participants were informed of the use of a voice recorder and consented to be recorded. Each participant had an opportunity to ask questions and had any concerns addressed before consenting to participate.

Research procedures ensured the protection of research participants, maintained the integrity of the research process, and guarded against any research misconduct (Creswell, 2014). The identities of the participants and the schools within the study region were masked with numeric and alphabetic identifiers. Any identifying information was redacted to ensure there was nothing that could lead to the identification of the participants or their schools or school districts. To ensure privacy during data collection, participants were interviewed at a date and time that was convenient for them in a location of the participants choosing. I attempted to establish a trusting relationship with the participants and addressed their privacy and maintained the confidentiality of their views and perceptions that were shared during the interview (Creswell, 2014).

All data were stored on a password protected computer and stored for at least 5 years, then all files will be permanently destroyed. Data collected during the interviews is considered confidential rather than anonymous, as I know the names of the participants in the study. Demographic details were provided in the case study narrative when relevant to the study as long as it did not breach the confidentiality assured to the participants. Sensitive or confidential information was not collected in the interviews or disclosed in the dissertation. Participants had the opportunity to validate their responses, as recorded in the transcripts, before data processing to ensure accuracy of data, and participants had access to review findings before they were written in the final report to confirm that their privacy was secured (Creswell, 2014).

Researchers who seek to use a case study as a manner to substantiate a preconceived position or particular orientation concerning an issue negate authenticity

and scholarly professionalism (Yin, 2014). Rather, a researcher should strive for the

highest ethical standards without plagiarizing or falsifying information all the while being

honest and being responsible and responsive to one's own bias (Yin, 2014). This was

accomplished by analyzing the data accurately and honestly and by practicing reflexivity.

During the analysis of data, all data collected from the participants were analyzed

including data that emerged unexpectedly and were contrary to the identified themes

(Creswell, 2014). As a result, there were no conflicts of interest or power differentials

related to this case study.

Summary

In Chapter 3, the research methodology was described to explore the reasons high

school principals in the study region served consistently for more than 4 years. The use of

case study as the qualitative design was exploratory in nature to gain an understanding of

the principals' motivators and the challenges they overcame to continue in their positions.

This chapter included the rationale for the qualitative study design, identified the

population, the purposive sampling strategy, and instrumentation consisting of semi

structured interviews and field notes. The role of the researcher was described as one

responsible to collect and analyze the data by accessing the perceptions and experiences

of the participants in a reflexive approach to answer the research questions (Creswell,

2014; Roger et al., 2018). Procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection

were described, and a data analysis plan was identified following the steps of thematic

analysis with emphasis on the specific strategies that were used to ensure trustworthiness

and uphold ethical considerations. The data from this case study are presented in the next

chapter that led to the study's findings.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to explore the perspectives of high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more. A qualitative case study approach was used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the motivators that high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ2: How do high school principals describe the challenges they have overcome to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ3: What recommendations do the high school principals have to increase the consistency of their service?

In this chapter, I describe the setting where data collection took place and participant demographics relevant to the study. I then report the data analysis process, results, and evidence of trustworthiness by answering the claims of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Setting

The location for this study was a region in a county of California. Information gathered by the county Office of Education identified the study region making up over 1,400 square miles with 73,000 students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade. There are 126 schools in the region of study, 15 of those schools are public comprehensive high schools, which served as the grade level for this study. The districts where the participants served as high school principals serve approximately 25,000 high

school students. The student demographics of the high schools in the study region consists of 58% White students, 21% Hispanic students, 7% Asian, 3% Filipino 2% African American, 1% American Indian, 6.8% Two or More Races, and 2% not reported with 27.6% of the students in the region identified as socially economically disadvantaged (SED). The data collection began as regional and statewide Covid-19 pandemic restrictions ended, and principals were preparing for graduation and celebratory events that had not taken place in the region for 2 years. As with the nation, school personnel and students were affected by Covid-19 regulations for the last 2 years prior to this study.

The study region area cost of living was listed as 139.8, nearly 40 points higher than the United States. average. The study region has a median household income of $89,691 and a median home price of $616,500. The median age of residents is 41.6 with a population of 398,329 in the study region. The unemployment rate of the study region is 2.5%, where the state of California is just below 5%. Regions A, B, and C within this study region show some statistics that reflect positively in comparison to the overall state of California. California reports the poverty level to be 13.4%, region A is listed as 5.6%, region B is 7.9%, and region C as 8.4%. California reports the average home property value as $568,500, region A is listed as $481,900, region B is $515,800, and region C as $444,000. The state of California reports the average annual income as $80,440, region A is listed as $98,566, region B is $89,082, and region C is $89,082, each region above the state average of annual income.

Participants

The participants consisted of eight high school principals from seven of the 15 high schools in three different districts in the study region (see Table 1). The length of service of all eight principals averaged 8.9 years. One high school was represented twice, with the former principal and the current principal as participants. All eight principals were White males; the participants' length of service ranged from 6 years to 14 years at the same high school. Table 1 reflects the years of service for each participant and local demographics at the time of their service. Four of the participants were acting principals at the time of the study; two were former principals who had since been promoted to central office positions, and two were retired principals. All participants began their educational careers as classroom teachers in the high school setting and were progressively appointed or encouraged to pursue opportunities that resulted in leadership roles. All eventually became high school principals after being teachers, then assistant principals.

Table 1

Participant Demographic Data

Region	Participants	Years at School	Enrollment	White	Black	Latino	Other	SED	Graduation Rate
A	A1 *	7	2228	65%	2.0%	14.5%	18.5%	16%	97%
B	B2 *	7	180	77.6%	0%	14.5%	7.9%	25%	94%
A	A3 *	6	2065	56.9%	2.0%	16.6%	24.5%	15%	96%
B	B4 ^	10	1714	78%	<1%	11.5%	9%	15%	96%
B	B5 ^	14	800	81%	<1%	9.7%	8.3%	23%	98%
B	B6 +	9	1340	68%	<1%	21.3%	10.3%	33%	94%
C	C7 +	10	1840	48%	2.4%	23.3%	26.3%	28%	93%
B	B8 *	8	640	81%	<1%	11.5%	8.3%	23%	100%

Note: Key to symbols --*Current principals, ^ Retired principals, + Principals now promoted to central office

Participants A1, B2, A3, B8 were currently acting principals at high schools at the time of the study with student enrollments ranging from over 2,200 students to just under 200 students. School size was not a factor that was found to have any effect on the participants' responses or in their longevity, as reported by the four acting principals.

Participants B4 and B5 retired directly from their position as high school principals. Participant B4 retired approximately 4 years ago and stated that even though there were options for promotion to a central office position, he did not desire to leave his position as principal prior to retirement; however, B4 continues to support regional districts by filling short-term interim principal positions that come about through unexpected events leaving a vacancy.

Participant B5 was the longest serving principal participant in the study with 14 years of service at the school site in the study region. This was Participant B5's second high school principal position who had served over 4 years at a high school outside the study region. Near the end of his career, B5 attempted to obtain a superintendent position but did not find a suitable fit.

Participants B6 and C7 served as high school principals and then were promoted to central office positions as assistant superintendents in the districts in which they served. Both participants stated that those promotions occurred at the right time in their careers, and they accepted the promotion so they could continue to have a greater impact in their districts. Participant C7 stated, "I knew it was time to move on, as I was not feeling as effective anymore as principal, and sometimes a fresh new look on the school [new principal] can give it a charge." Participants had a sense of their impacts on their school sites and knew when it was time to move away from the position.

School Site Demographics

Participants A1 and A3, are serving as principals at high schools in a suburban middle to high income region where the participants' high schools ranked in the top tier of school performance in the areas of test scores, graduation rates, parent education levels, and overall affluence. Participants A1 and A3 also serve in two relatively "young in age" high schools, compared to the other high schools in the study region, founded 30 years ago (A1) and 20 years ago (A3), with the largest student enrollment in the study region. The schools in which Participants A1 and A3 serve are in a region with strong economic and population growth.

Participants B2, B4, B5, B6, B8 serve in the largest district in area size, marked by a sprawling footprint covering nearly 190 square miles. Schools in this region range from under 200 students in B2's high school to over 1,700 students in B4's high school. Each school in this region is marked by a unique community identity and historic pride, with four of the participants' schools—B4, B5, B6, B8—over 60 years old. Participant B6, now an assistant superintendent in the district, came from a high school that is 125 years old with the most diverse student population in region B of the study. Participant B2 is an acting principal at the smallest, comprehensive high school in the study region. The high school is in a rural and remote part of the study region with a relatively high SED student population. Region B schools contain, on average, 26% of students qualifying for free and reduced lunch programs. Participants B5 and B8 are from the same high school, where B8 was the succession principal to B5 upon his retirement. Their high school has experienced significant decreases in enrollment, which was identified as a challenge by both participants.

Participant C7, now an assistant superintendent, served as a principal in the most ethnically diverse high school in the study region, where less than 50% of the student body is White. Participant C7 identified the diversity as being one of his most positive experiences and felt the community and student diversity was a strength of the school, though not without challenges of uniting a campus.

Data Collection

For this study, eight principals were interviewed over the course of 2 weeks using a researcher-created interview protocol. In compliance with the Walden University IRB

ethical standards (#04-29-22-1008747), the Partner Organization Agreement for AEAL, and the Leader Interview Consent Form were collected from each participant, then semistructured interviews were scheduled. Eight participants responded to my initial email with their consent to participate. I responded to these emails and scheduled virtual interviews with each participant based on their preferred timeframe. The participants were interviewed between 35 and 40 minutes in a virtual interview using the Zoom video conferencing tool. After obtaining permission to record each participant, the interviews were audio and video recorded using an audio recording device and the video conferencing tool, which recorded raw audio and transcript files from the interviews. The interview consisted of 11 questions with some probing questions asked to elicit further responses from some participants. I encouraged participants to speak freely and followed with probing questions for clarification or asked for further elaboration if needed. No follow-up interviews were needed, and there were no variations in the data collection process as outlined in Chapter 3 nor were there any unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection portion of the study.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and analyzed using inductive coding of the data following the steps of thematic analysis (see Castleberry, 2018; Granheim et al., 2017; Lester et al., 2020; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). During the coding of the transcripts, participants' responses were manually highlighted and coded for keywords with notes added to margins. Careful attention was paid to words and phrases that were repeated. The participants' responses were read multiple times to ensure a thorough review of the

data during the inductive coding process. This process involved adding additional codes

as the data were reviewed and then coded data were transferred to a spreadsheet. The

coded data were then reviewed for reoccurring pattens to determine the relationship

among the codes that resulted in the identification of categories and then the development

of themes. Tables 2 and 3 below contains the codes, the grouping of codes into

categories, and the resulting themes that emerged during the data analysis process.

Table 2

Codes, Categories, and Themes Part 1

Codes		Category	Themes
Lack of power		Culture	
Autonomy			
Student mental health	Challenging parents/community/staff	Outside forces	
Lack of parental support	COVID		Sense of lack of control
School board challenges	Feeling lack of control from board directives	System hierarchy	
Being middle management	Labor unions		
Tenure	Middle management		
Doing what I'm supposed to be doing	Want to shape/change/carry vision of school	Calling	
The way I'm wired	Knowing true north		
Not feeling effective	Solving problems	Competence	
Taking it personal			
Make a difference	Don't take it home		
Impact	Commitment to vision		Strong Intrinsic beliefs
New challenges	Still something to achieve or do, see change	Determination	
Sense of obligation to stay/a burden/to be all things	Desire to improve		
Motivated			
Belief in self		Efficacy	
Focus on what really matters	Find the positive	Personal reflection	
	Self-reflective		

Table 3

Codes, Categories, and Themes Part 2

Codes		Categories	Themes
Natural progression to be a principal		Advancement	
Personality fit		Fit	
Life balance	Stress		Lifestyle
Have fun	Don't get too high or low	Mental health	
	Going through cycles and seasons		
Personal health	Alcohol use or not	Physical health	
Exercise			
Mentored	Communication	Communication	
Differing opinions from supe	Listening skills		
Enjoy HS students	Overcoming through positive relationships		
Staff motivates me	Human investment/ instead of isolation		
Students motivate me	Build relationships	Engagement	
Community motivates me	Key relationships		
Union challenges	Positive reinforcement		Building strong relationships
	Building trust		
Early career opportunities in leadership		Leadership	
Encouraged to lead			
Lack of a team			
Principal network		Team	
Teamwork			
Don't isolate	Get out of the office		
Be involved	Attend events	Visibility	
Engage with staff & community			
Budget help		Central office support	
Lack of district support			
Ability to hire a good team			
Good secretary		Site Support	Internal Support
Importance of having assistant principal			
Supportive superintendent	Available for support		
No micromanaging from supe	Coaching	Superintendent qualities	
Available for support	Initiative overload		

The data analysis was an iterative process with data reviewed several times and ordered into a chart to determine how each theme and the corresponding data codes and categories aligned to each research question. Through this iterative data analysis process, there were no discrepant data that conflicted with the themes as they emerged.

All data was digitally preserved in drive containing each participant's video interview, raw audio of the interview, the transcript of each participant, and a scanned document of interview reflection notes made during the interview. Codes, categories, and themes were generated through physically documenting codes on colored Post-It notes then organizing on a wall chart. The use of physically manipulating each code on a separate post-it note allowed for internal self-reflection and an opportunity to visually see codes and developing themes for long periods of time. Often, codes were physically moved into various categories and themes throughout the course of a week or more, and this method provided a highly structured but flexible strategy to organize emergent themes.

Results

Three tables of codes and themes related to each research question were developed from Tables 2 and 3 to visually organize the data that corresponded to each of the three research questions. This section is organized by the research questions, and the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Following the analysis are excerpts of interview data from the participants that substantiate and capture the essence of the themes. Tables containing the descriptive codes that formed each of the themes are in Appendix D.

RQ1: What are the motivators that high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as principal beyond four years of service?

Two themes synthesized the data that addressed this research question: *building strong relationships* and *strong intrinsic beliefs*. The motivators high school principals perceived as having an influence in their decision to continue in their position as principal centered on staff, students, community, and involvement, among other related descriptors formed the theme *building strong relationships.* "Making an impact", "doing what I'm supposed to be doing", and "focusing on what is important" were a few of the main data codes that formed the second theme titled *strong intrinsic beliefs.*

Theme: Building Strong Relationships

Building strong relationships involved the active and purposeful fostering of collegial relationships with staff, students, principal colleagues, and community members. Building strong relationships, as described by participants, was intentional and required human investment on their part as principals to actively engage with these individuals. All eight participants indicated that students and staff motivated them to remain in their role as a high school principal. Participant A1, a current principal, stated, "They [staff] drive me because when I look at their commitment that they have for student learning, that gives me energy and purpose; it fills my cup." Participant A3, also a principal, shared that to build relationships with key individuals on the staff, "You have to understand the hierarchy of the school, who are the actual influencers of your school

culture and build relationships with them." Buiding relationships was important to each participant.

When interviewing the participants, all eight of the principals mentioned the importance of relationships among all groups of people in a school site at least once. Those relationships consisted of positive relationships with students, teachers, parents, and community members. Participant B4, who retired after serving for 10 years, explained his feelings about building relationships with students on his campus:

It takes a bit of effort and energy to build really good relationships with students, but that is needed to be able to last a long time, and for me, that was the place where I was most happy. It's corny to say it, but [when] I was around students, that's what motivated me.

Participant B2, who was promoted to a central office position, reinforced the importance of relationship building with students and its impact on his decision to remain, "When I was out every day talking with students, that was the best part of my job, and kept me there." Participant B2 demonstrates that building relationships involves being physically present with students.

Participant A1 reinforced the need for relationship building, "It's all about the relationships that we develop, especially with our students and staff." Participant A3 also spoke about building positive relationships with staff but that "it's not just about building positive relationships but building those relationships with key influencers on your campus that are really important." Relationship building with the community was also discussed by Participant B4, who is now retired, but recollected, "I loved being in the

community, showing up to events in the elementary and middle schools, building relationships with families of kids who are going to be in my high school. It shows them I care. It also keeps me connected."

Relationship building occurred when participants made conscious efforts to be physically present with staff for on-going communication. Participant B5 shared his belief that face-to-face communication was important in building relationship with teachers, "I don't send them an email; I get out of my office and go directly to the teacher's classroom and talk with them, it's easy to stay in your office." Participant B2 reinforced the importance of being physically present with staff, "I went to every department and tried to personally develop a relationship with the teachers, in a positive way, because it is a lot easier to have hard conversations when the time comes with those positive encounters first." Participant B2 continued to explain why developing relationships was important for his motivation and offered some advice, "If I did not get out of my office, I would get caught up in office stuff, and problems that would bring me down. I'd isolate. Just get out there, talk with kids and teachers."

Theme: Strong Intrinsic Beliefs

Based on the overall data, strong intrinsic beliefs were those natural psychological inclinations that participants identified as motivators in their principal position. In other words, strong intrinsic beliefs were explained by the participants as being somewhat innate and not dependent on external incentives or pressure, as described in Ryan and Deci's (2020) self-determination theory. All eight participants stated that, as principals, they wanted to have an impact and make a difference in their high schools. Participants

A1, A3, B8, and C7 shared that they felt an enormous sense of burden or obligation to take care of all things. Participant A3 used this obligation as a drive to remain, "There is no way I could leave. I have this obligation to these teachers." B6 felt more of a drive to make a difference as part of the obligation in the role of principal, "I realized that if I was going to make an impact on students, I couldn't just be a teacher." Participant C7, who now serves in a central office position, explained his strong internal sense of belief that, "There is a drive piece in me that I was positively impacting both students and teachers." Participant A1, who is in his 7th-year as a principal, explained the intrinsic belief that drives him to remain. "I'm kind of wired for high school; I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. I live under the illusion that someday I'm going to be able to master this position."

When the principals had strong intrinsic beliefs, it influenced their decisions to remain as principals. Six of the 8 participants mentioned the sense of wanting to make a difference or having an impact on the lives of students and staff. For example, Participant B2 was motivated to remain because "working with high school age students, you can really feel like you are making a difference in their life." Participant B6, who was promoted to a central office position explained an intrinsic belief in himself; "I was able to believe in myself as a leader, and even though it is hard to never take things said or done to me personal, that's how I made it." Participant C7, who was also promoted to a central office, stated his intrinsic belief to make a difference formed out of his strong sense of competition, "I have a really natural competitive side, and I wanted to positively impact teachers and students."

RQ2: How do High School Principals Describe the Challenges They Have Overcome to Remain in the Position as Principal Beyond Four Years of Service?

The participants' responses focusing on the challenges they overcame to continue as high school principals related to lacking power and control; being middle management; dealing with labor unions; and addressing challenging parents, community, and staff. These descriptors related to the challenges principals felt were beyond their control. These codes were categorized and formed the theme of a *sense of lack of control.* The codes of life balance, personal health, alcohol use, and stress were discussed and grouped for the theme of *lifestyle.* The theme of lifestyle in this study can be described by Ray et al. (2020) as the overall well-being of the principal encompassing physical health, mental health, and self-care practices.

Theme: Sense of Lack of Control

Considering the participants' responses, sense of lack of control, pertains to the feeling or belief that things were being done to them, beyond any control or say the principals might have. Though principals are considered the heads of their high school, making multiple decisions and problem solving each day, the sense of lack of control was the belief that they, as the principal, had little control over many of the issues and challenges to which they were responding.

Each principal who participated in this study mentioned the parts of the job that gave them a sense of lack of control. Teacher challenges were mentioned by every principal as a challenge that often felt were beyond their control. Participant B5, who was

promoted to central office, summarized his perspective on experiencing a sense of a lack

of control in dealing with teachers:

> The number one challenge that drives the principal out of the job is entrenched
>
> teachers; it's so hard to get teachers to move, to make changes. Tenure is a big
>
> part of that, they [teachers] know there is nothing you can do. They really have
>
> more power than you do. That, I think, is the number one thing that drives
>
> principals out of the job.

> Participant A3, as well, described his challenges with teachers that were outside

his sense of control stating that, "We seem to have whatever brand of crazy you can name

[with teachers]; we've had it." Participant B3 echoed this sense of a lack of control, "You

have to recognize that you can't control every factor and can't fire anybody; you have to

find ways to work with people." Participant B8 expanded on the lack of control he

sensed in his role as principal, "Principals are the ultimate middle management; you are

trying to please both the school site and the district and don't really have the control to do

want you think is best." Participant A3 expanded on the lack of control that he sensed as

a middle manager when caught between the decisions of district leaders that clashed with

expectations from staff:

> The union relationship with the district office is a challenge, then it spills over
>
> onto campus. They [teachers] are not mad at you [the principal]; they are mad at
>
> the [school] board for whatever decision they made, and you're just caught in the
>
> middle sometimes. Our board is split on some issues and that makes things a
>
> challenge too, they have their own agendas sometimes it feels. Also, in a school

size so large as ours [over 2,000 students], you can't control every factor of your

job. There are so many job responsibilities, you have to recognize that most of

those job responsibilities are out of your control, that's where I guess you

sometimes burnout.

Participant A1 and B6 explained their challenges with things beyond their control

when dealing with students. Participant A1 felt challenged by student deaths that were

out of his control, "The social emotional wellness of students is so hard, in my time as

principal here we have, unfortunately, experienced five student deaths by suicide, that

was even [Covid-19] pre-pandemic." Participant B6, now in central office, stated how

challenging it was to adequately meet the needs of students faced with difficult family

situations and experiences:

> It's still those 40 to 50 kids, when they go home, you know it's not good. I would
>
> have loved to build a campus dormitory. It's hard to see students not get support
>
> from home, or the stuff they have to deal with at home, and you know what they
>
> go home to, and you can't change that. That's really hard.

Participant C7, also in central office, mentioned the challenges within the

community that were beyond the control of the principal:

> Especially now, the community is polarized, and it creeps into the school, and
>
> then the community blames the school because they think you're not doing
>
> enough or don't care. In reality, I can't control what they think about me as a
>
> principal, even though I really care and am trying.

Theme: Lifestyle

All participants mentioned physical or emotional challenges. Alcohol consumption was discussed by 7 of the 8 participants. In three specific responses, when asked the question about ways they found to cope with challenges two participants responded in a joking tone, "besides drink" or "lots of alcohol," and another participant stated, "You know there are just difficult teachers that drive you to drink." Participant B4 now retired, specifically called out abstaining from alcohol, stating "I've seen too many principals drink too much. I tried not to drink because I see a lot of that with other principals."

Seven of the eight principals mentioned areas connected to their personal and professional lifestyle challenges that each had to overcome to remain in the position as principal. Personal health challenges, specifically physical and emotional wellness were mentioned. Participant A1 struggled with the emotional demands of dealing with student mental health, "I think more than ever, students need us more than ever, and they need us to invest in their wellbeing, while dealing with our own emotional health." Participant C7 also stated the impact being a principal had on his personal lives, stating, "I told my wife, with this job, you just need to know I'm going to miss certain things with the kids, we kind of made that deal, but it was hard."

Participants A3, B6, and C7 referenced their need to take care of their physical bodies to maintain their health and wellness with the stressors of being a high school principal. Participant C7 stated, "I really like to exercise. When I go home, it replenishes me to allow me to be present with the people I work with." Participant B1 explained his

wellness routine, "I started doing yoga and focusing on my mind, body, and spirit, and

focusing on those three has allowed me to stay for the last 5 years." Finally, Participant

B5 recalled the toll on his physical body from stress:

> I'd have these episodes with my back and neck where I'd be out of work for a
>
> week; I couldn't move. I'm a pretty easy-going guy, and don't get real high or
>
> low, at least I thought that. Since I've retired, I have not had one of those
>
> episodes, I guess I was stressed.

RQ3: What Recommendations Do the High School Principals Have to Increase the Consistency of Their Service?

The final theme that emerged from the data was *internal support.* Internal support

can be described as supports from colleagues, mentors, supervisors, and support staff

within the organization. The codes of coaching, supportive superintendent, and the ability

in hiring a good team led to identifying this theme.

Theme: Internal Support

The theme of internal support was directly stated from each participant with

support primarily coming from the superintendent and the school board. The statements

from participants indicating the need for "support" took the follow up question of, "Can

you explain what support looks like to you" to decipher specific supports needed for each

participant. Participants B2, A3, B5, B6, C7 and B8 indicated the importance of having a

superintendent who is available to support and coach principals. Participant B3 stated,

"There has to be a consistent way to coach and give feedback to principals in a way the

principal feels supported." Participant 8B explained his vision of support from a supervisor:

> You and your superintendent have to have an open line of communication and build a level of trust in the midst of really challenging decisions. That means if you really believe your principal is a leader, you [superintendent] have to support them by giving them a sense of autonomy.

> Participant A1 expanded on how communication can serve as a source of internal support, "There has to be full communication loop, where it's not just top-down decisions, but we are able to engage with our own staff, making sure we are giving them what they need. Everybody feels empowered and engaged."

Participant A1 also shared a similar thought about the importance of principal being able to make their own decisions, "There can't just be top-down communication. Principals need to be given everything they need and part of the decision-making process." Participant B4 described support from the superintendent as being given the autonomy to accomplish tasks at their own pace, "Let me get it done on my timeline; implementation is even more important than the goal." Participant B4 continued with his view of support:

> New principals typically don't get any training for this position, and no offense [indicating our age difference] principals seem to be getting younger and younger, they need a seasoned mentor that has been in the role to help them succeed.

> Participant B5 reinforced the need for internal support to create a sense of autonomy, "You have to have a certain amount of autonomy to make your own decisions

because every school is different. I don't think they [superintendents] should stick their nose too far into every issue. Trust us, that's support." Participant B6, now in central office, reiterated those sentiments, "The superintendent has got to be supportive. You've got to be supportive of them [principals] and don't get in the middle of it. You can't micromanage; let the principal do their job with the parameters you [the superintendent] provide." Participant B8 shared similar thoughts about the need for internal support:

Districts and superintendents are there for supporting the sites, financials, personnel support with difficult staff, giving them the freedom to hire their own staff, and being there to talk with for advice, helping us work through stressful situations without feeling judged or worried about their competency as a principal.

Participants had somewhat differing views of the concept of support, as it is a subjective term. Perceptions of support, specifically from the superintendent, were not the same from participant to participant in terms of meeting their needs. For example, Participant A3 viewed principal evaluations and frequent communication with their superintendent beneficial to their success as support; however, B5 and B8, viewed the same actions by their superintendent as micromanaging and not supportive. The participants, in accordance with self-determination theory, had different perceptions of support that aligned to meeting their basic psychological needs.

The data revealed specific motivators that encouraged high school principals to remain in the position such as building positive relationships and having strong intrinsic beliefs. The information provided by the principals also contained the challenges they

had to overcome to persist such as their sense of a lack of control and various challenges to their lifestyles. The principals interviewed in this study made recommendations synthesized in the theme of internal support, primarily from the superintendent, giving principals the autonomy to make site-based decisions that contributed to their increased consistency of service.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were used in this research to convey authenticity, acceptability, accuracy, and usefulness (Graneheim et al., 2016, Nowell et al., 2017). The research findings in this study are legitimate and meet the standards of rigor following the methodology plan as outlined in chapter 3. There were no adjustments to the strategies as stated in the research plan.

Credibility

To establish this study's credibility, triangulation of the data and member checking were used to achieve a credible study. The use of participants from three different high school regions as identified in Table 1 resulted in a variety of perspectives and experiences from principals in regions A, B, and C, validating the use of informant triangulation. Data triangulation was accomplished by combining different data sources, (a) participant transcripts from interview protocol (see Appendix C), and (b) interview reflective notes (see Appendix D). Both sources of data were analyzed, annotated, and coded. The interview reflective notes were personal notes made during each interview, where key phrases and topics were noted. Through comparing both the notes made during the actual interview and the transcripts, a redundancy of information was observed

achieving a triangulation of data sources, as described by Anney (2014) and Shenton (2004).

The use of member checking was also used to determine the accuracy of the findings from this case study by asking participants to review, check, and confirm the accuracy of their statements. Preliminary findings were shared with all participants to solicit feedback. Each participant was given access to their transcript to validate their comments and provided with the emergent themes to confirm the interpretation of the data. Participants were provided the raw transcript of their interview to validate original statements made and provided the overall preliminary findings in table format. Participant A3 was particularly helpful in the member checking process, having previously earned a Doctor of Education degree 2 years ago. Participants validated the transcripts and emergent themes through email communication and did not propose any changes or deletions.

Transferability

The extent to which the results of this study are transferable to a wider population beyond the participants involved in the study were achieved through thick descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. The steps of the research process were documented so other researchers might transfer this study's findings to related research studies. The findings of this study may be transferable to similar school districts and administrative positions in the field of K-12 education besides high school principals as there are commonalities among principals regardless of the school level. Excerpts from the participants' interviews were collected that substantiated the essence of the themes of the

study. A detailed account and realistic representation of the participants' perceptions and experiences was provided through thick descriptions using interview excerpts detailed in the results section of this chapter to achieve transferability and external validity.

Dependability

Participants' interview responses were read and listened to multiple times comparing them with the interview transcripts and making reflective notes during both the interview and during the transcript reading. The use of transcribed interview reflective notes (Appendix D) was used for each participant creating a reliable audit trail of the data collected. Transcripts were sent to each participant to ensure transcript validity of the content. Detailed accounts of how the data were collected; coded, categorized, and themed; and then interpreted were noted in the audit trail. Each participant's data contains an annotated transcript, annotated reflective field notes, and audio recording stored in a digital file for reference and documentation purposes.

Confirmability

The practice of reflexivity was used to achieve confirmability by keeping detailed records of the research path and describing the research steps taken through the research. Throughout the interviews, I was able to engage in self-awareness and critically assess all the pieces of evidence while keeping a self-critical account of the process. During interviews as participants were answering questions, a series of coded symbols were used to identify commonalities shared across the participants. If participants were repeating words throughout their interview, a simple circle of the word was done. Confusing statements or topics unrelated to an interview was given a question mark and a comment

entered in my reflexive interview notes. However, during successive interviews, if the same topic was mentioned again by an additional participant, that was marked with an asterisk, signifying a potential theme in my notes.

One such example of this was the discussion of alcohol use mentioned by participants. During an interview, alcohol use was mentioned in response to "how you have managed to cope with challenges." Though the response was given in jest, I noted that response with a question mark in my notes, as I was not expecting it. However, that same response was repeated in other interviews, again as a joke, thus my question mark became an asterisk and my beliefs and perspectives about the response changed as noted in my reflexive interview notes. This specific example led me to identify the use of alcohol as a code that later was part of the theme, *lifestyle.*

In contrast, a response I expected to hear related to support was the external support from a family or loved one contributing to longevity. The data did not support this, and responses were exclusively focused on internal support from within the organization. After serving as a principal for 5 years at one high school, my source of support was largely my spouse and family. I was surprised by participants not mentioning this in their interviews, and I noted this with question mark in my reflexive interview notes.

This example is also illustrative of how I used my reflexive journal to record personal reflections and perceptions through the research process and to monitor any challenges to my assumptions as well as biases during the research process. During the reflexive journaling, I used reflexive thematic analysis, as described by Kiger and Varpio

(2020), to note my own subjective experience to discern knowledge from the participants' data from my experiences as a high school principal. This process enabled me to construct the findings of this study using the participants' data and to monitor that my experiences and monitor my biases toward the role of high school principal through reflexive journaling.

Summary

Chapter 4 contains the setting of the study, demographics of the participants and region of study, data collection process, data analysis, results of the study, and the trustworthiness of the study. Data were analyzed and themes were developed from the body of evidence from participants' semi structured interviews. The data collected by interviewing high school principals shows the motivators high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position; (a) building strong relationships, and (b) having strong intrinsic beliefs; the challenges they have overcome to remain in the position; (a) overcoming the sense of lack of control, and, (b) overcoming lifestyle challenges; and the recommendations high school principals have to increase the consistency of service; (a) receiving internal supports. Chapter 5 provides an in-depth interpretation of the findings confirming and extending the knowledge surrounding the motivators for principal longevity and the recommendations to increase consistency of principal service, the limitations of the study that arose during the execution of this case study, the recommendations for further research of the current study grounded in the strengths and limitations, and the implications for practice that describe the potential impact for positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the perspectives of high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more through a strengths-based approach. To address this gap in practice, a qualitative case study design was used. Qualitative case study research was chosen to gather and interpret themes to understand the phenomenon within a real-world context of eight high school high school principals, purposely selected and interviewed to answer the research questions of this study. The focus on high school principals who have remained in the position for four or more years was the study focus, aligned with the conceptual framework of the self-determination theory (Deci et al., 1989; Deci & Ryan, 2000, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2020). The following questions were used to explore this phenomenon:

RQ1: What are the motivators that high school principals perceive as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ2: How do high school principals describe the challenges they have overcome to remain in the position as principal beyond 4 years of service?

RQ3: What recommendations do the high school principals have to increase the consistency of their service?

Each research question was designed to gather data regarding high school principals' perceptions and descriptions related to their decisions to remain in the position as high school principals and their recommendations to increase the consistency of service.

The themes that emerged from the data related to the three research questions were (a) high school principals perceived that building strong relationships and having strong intrinsic beliefs were considered as having an influence in their decision to remain in the position as high school principal, (b) principals perceived having a sense of lack of control and lifestyle challenges as areas to have overcome to remain in the position, and (c) principals perceived support as a recommendation to increase the consistency of their service. In this chapter, the interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications will be shared followed by a conclusion.

Interpretation of the Findings

Previous research recommended that a principal should be in place for 5-7 years at the same school to have a significant impact on the school (Burkhauser, 2017; Tran, 2017), yet the average length of service for principals has been documented at just under 3 years (Davis & Anderson, 2021; Grissom & Bartanen 2019a; Krasnoff, 2015; Levin & Bradley, 2019; Taie & Goldring, 2017; Yan, 2020). The findings of this study confirm and extend the knowledge supported in literature regarding why principals remain in the position and the recommendations to increase the consistency of service for the high school principal.

In this exploratory case study I used a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of high school principals in one region of California who have served consistently for 4 years or more. Current literature supports the continuity in the length of service of high school principals, contributing to positive effects principals can make in their schools (Burkhauser, 2017; Daniel & Lei, 2019; Levin et al., 2020). The themes

identified in this study closely aligned to the findings contained in the peer-reviewed literature as described in Chapter 2. In this section, the findings of my study are discussed in relationship to the SDT framework to further identify the reasons that contributed to high school principals' consistency of service.

High School Principals Perceive Building Strong Relationships as Having an Influence in Their Decision to Remain

The concept of relatedness in SDT allows for individuals to make meaningful relationships and connections which provides for a sense of security and fosters increased intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Though the research of Kokka (2016) primarily examined the concept of relatedness between teacher and student interactions and positive relationships formed, the findings of this study extend to high school principals by applying the concept of relatedness to the principals' increased intrinsic motivation when engaged in meaningful connections with staff, students, and supervisors (Partrick et al., 2019). Making meaningful connections throughout the principals' day influence their decision to remain.

The first theme to emerge in this study was the high school principals' perceptions that building strong relationships influenced their decision to remain in their high schools. Like the findings of Bauer and Silver (2018), Liu and Bellibus (2018), and Postma and Babo (2019), participants stated that building positive relationships, particularly with staff, through positive social interactions contributed to their job satisfaction and persistence in the position. Positive relationship building was not only described between principal and staff, but principal and the superintendent. A positive

relationship and trust developed between principals and their superintendents was like the findings of Gimbel and Kefor (2018), where the relationship with the superintendent was built upon frequent and impactful dialogue where there was encouragement and supportive problem solving.

Positive relationships with the community were also described as a motivator for remaining in the position. Similar to the findings of Pendola and Fuller (2020), the principal may face community pressures as they are in the boundaries between external policy and the local community, so it is important to build community rapport. Participants mentioned attending community wide events and outreach to showcase their school as a way to build positive relationships, and participants were aware when their external community was in a reciprocal relationship that encouraged principals to continue in their role.

Participants B4 and C7 were particularly aware of this dynamic with the community and cited their continuing efforts to work with the community. Participant C7 was clear in his responses acknowledging that though the community dynamic can be a challenge sometimes, the community was a motivator for him to remain in the position. The theme of positive relationships came about after each participant shared the frequent and largely constant encounters with people internally and externally. Encounters with people were woven into almost every situation shared by the school principals. Those encounters, both positive and negative, shaped the attitude of the principals leading to a belief in their ability as a school leader and the value they added to the school and community.

This reflected the research of Bauer and Silver (2018) and Postma and Babo (2019) who found that positive encounters help shape the principal's belief in themselves and validate their work; whereas, negative encounters, or not being purposeful to engage in positive encounters, can lead a principal into isolation as well as lead to a decrease in job satisfaction. The isolation and dissatisfaction can lead to a downward cycle, further disrupting any progress toward forming positive relationship between a principal and stakeholders.

The simple act of physically getting out of the principal's office and engaging in positive encounters gave participants in this study the positive charge they needed to see things more positively and not isolate themselves. Each participant demonstrated a sense of confidence, strong interpersonal skills, and an engaging personality that contributed to their ability to build positive relationships. The participants conveyed a general enjoyment with being around people and engaging with them. While one participant stated they were more of an introvert person in their personal life; professionally, the participant engaged extensively in community wide events and purposeful relationship building with staff. All participants explained that relationship building took a tremendous amount of effort and purposeful engagement, and even more so when they had a lack of desire to do engage with others. The findings in this study led to the conclusion that building positive relationships can positively influence a high school principal's decision to continue in their position. This finding is transferrable to other high school principals beyond the study region.

High School Principals Perceive Strong Intrinsic Beliefs as Having an Influence in Their Decision to Remain

Increased self-efficacy and a belief in self or perceived competence increases intrinsic motivation in the individual (Deci, 1971; Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci et al., 1989; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). The second theme to emerge from the data was that high school principals with strong intrinsic beliefs were able to persist in the position. Participants stated that when they felt positive and continued to believe in the impact they were making, their desire to remain in the position persisted. This was like the findings of Gibson and Simon (2020) and Swen (2020) where principals reported they wanted to make an impact on their school or a difference in the lives of students. The word "calling," as used by Swen (2020), was used by some of the participants in this study to describe the strong sense of duty to serve people around them that enabled them to make sense of why they became a principal. The participants also shared the intense pride they felt in being the leader of a school. This strong intrinsic belief in their purpose allowed participants to handle the emotional demands of the job and be fully invested in all aspects of the school, as also found by Mahfouz (2020). The feeling of wanting to make a difference and a belief in the ability to make a difference was found to increase job satisfaction and self-efficacy, which can contribute to a principal's decision to continue in their position

The concept of belief in self is difficult to quantify in a qualitative study and would require further research to determine a gradient or continuum of self-efficacy that is measurable in school leaders, as was found in Bauer and Silver's (2017) study. The

concept of whether the participants' belief in themselves was based upon student achievement, teacher retention, or the community's belief in the school, as described by Bauer and Silver, was unable to be determined in the results of this study. It was clear, however, that the participants sensed something within them that reinforced a belief in themselves through their abilities and their sense of calling as a leader. One participant was able to clarify the importance of this concept as related to continuity when he recounted reaching a point in his tenure as a high school principal where he perceived he was not making the impact he wanted and subsequently decided it was time to move on. The process of self-reflection, as well as self-actualization demonstrated by this participant, reinforces the importance of possessing and maintaining a strong intrinsic belief in an ability to make a positive impact on their school to remain in the position as principal.

High School Principals Had to Overcome of a Sense of Lack of Control to Remain in the Position

High school principals had to overcome a sense that they often lacked control, which enabled them to cope with the challenges and pressures of their role to remain in their position, was like the findings of Cieminiski (2018), Heffernan (2021), Horwood et al. (2021), and Pendola (2021). The feeling of a lack of control and the desire for autonomy arose from the data and is a key tenet supported by the conceptual framework of SDT, where autonomy is one of the basic psychological needs. Participants shared their sense of lack of control in areas such as power struggles with unions, increasing job responsibilities, challenging school boards, and autonomy in managing their schools.

This was also found by Reid (2021) where principals stated that job responsibilities were increasing largely beyond their control contributing to increased pressure in an already stressful position.

All participants highlighted the importance of autonomy, which was also presented by principals in Wang's et al. (2018) study who shared a need for a stronger sense of control, greater professional autonomy, and an increased voice in decision making at the district and school level to increase job satisfaction and motivation for persistence. Participants in this study shared that autonomy in hiring and decision making contributed to their overall sense of control and ownership in their actions, like the findings of Chang et al. (2015), Goldring and Taie (2018), Ryan and Deci (2020), and Wang et al. (2018), where principals' perceptions of autonomy in hiring and decision making increased their persistence to remain in their positions.

Levin et al. (2019) and Herman et al. (2017) made specific reference to the importance of principal autonomy when making decisions as a contributor to increased principal retention. Similarly, participants in this study stated they often felt they were being controlled by something or someone and most often by their superintendent. Findings from this and previous studies strongly support the importance of autonomy in decision making that leads to a stronger sense of control. These findings support the recommendations made by Wang et al. (2018) and Mahfouz (2020) that autonomy in decision making increases a principal's job satisfaction, which is also a recommendation supported by the data in this study that can then contribute to increased continuity of service.

High School Principals Have Overcome Lifestyle Challenges to Remain in the Position

Previous researchers noted that principals are generally unhealthy individuals with emotional stress and burdens, physically inactive lifestyles, professional isolation, and less quality time with loved ones (Bauer & Silver, 2018; Chen, 2020; Dicke et al., 2018; Heffernan, 2021; Maxwell & Riley, 2017; Nitta et al., 2018; Ray et al., 2020). The high school principals in this study also shared lifestyle challenges that have resulted by remaining in their position. Participants shared many of the same lifestyle challenges recounted in the existing research, and most found coping strategies to deal with those challenges to develop emotional resilience that was noted in Wells and Klacko's (2020) study of resilience through mindfulness practices. The difference between participants in this study and those in Wells and Klacko's study was that participants in this study developed their emotional resilience through self-determined wellness practices rather than participating in a formal program. Participants in this study noted that they exerted tremendous amounts of physical and emotional energy toward students and staff but often at the expense of their own well-being, similar to the findings of Ray et al. (2020) who examined the self-care practices of school principals. Participants in this study repeatedly mentioned they were able to overcome these challenges by exercising regularly as part of self-care. The participants also noted that an appropriate work-life balance was important to remain in the position, like the findings of Horwood et al. (2021) related to physical activity where participants noted that they engaged in purposeful practices to overcome these challenges such as physical activity, meditation, or mindfulness activities.

Due to the number of hours spent on school campuses managing the many needs of students and staff, as well as the mental exertion needed to focus on the multiple tasks inherent in their role as school principals, the participants lifestyles were negatively affected. Details of school culture, personnel issues, student behavior, union and school board challenges take up residence in the brain of the school principal extending beyond a regular 9 to 5 job, and like the findings of Horwood et al. (2021), those issues sometimes impact the thoughts and emotions of the principal in their homes, impacting sleeping patterns, healthy activity, and disrupts personal relationships. For principals to overcome these lifestyle challenges, participants recommend efforts must be made to provide overall wellness activities and personalized training in resilience strategies to assist principals in coping with these challenges aligning to the finds of De Jong et al. (2017), Ray et al. (2020), and Wells and Klacko (2020). Each participant, in their tenure as a high school principal in this study, discovered the importance of developing a mindset of positivity, having an internal support network, and being aware that their physical, mental, and emotional needs must be met through a variety of activities that allowed them to renew and take care of themselves.

High School Principals Recommend Support to Increase the Consistency of Their Service

The final theme that emerged was that high school principals recommended various types of support to increase the consistency of service. When support is given in the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, these components influence principals' intrinsic motivation to stay in the position supporting the conceptual

framework of this study and found in the research of Blaum and Tobin (2019), Kanat-Maymon et al. (2020), and Kokka (2016). Though participants did not specifically mention the term self-determination, the components of autonomy, relatedness, and competence were all mentioned directly or indirectly through the interviews and noted in the reflexive interview notes, as recommendations of support to increase consistency of the service. Participants identified professional support from their superintendent as a recommendation to increase their consistency of service. This support related to regular communication and coaching through informal meetings and, for one participant, more formal observations that were perceived as meeting their needs by the former principal. Like the findings of Bush (2018) related to the lack of principal pre-service training, providing new principals with a veteran principal as a mentor is viewed as a necessary support for novice principals.

Participants stated they had various forms of support directly from their superintendent. However, participants' perspectives on support differed where some participants explained an identical form of "support" as beneficial while another participant viewed this as not supportive. Like the findings of Chang et al. (2015), the way in which the principals perceive the support they receive and want may differ according to each principals' perceptions—what one principal perceives as support may not be viewed as support or even as interference by another. The idea of support appears to be on a continuum in alignment with SDT, particularly around autonomy, where a principal feels a need for support and autonomy based on their needs. It can be concluded from the participants' data related to support that a coaching role rather than a controlling

role from the superintendent was viewed more positively, which is supported in research where the superintendent acts in the role of mentor or coach (see Bush, 2018; Cieminski, 2018) while supporting principals to make autonomous decisions (see Chang et al., 2015). The theme of support is in direct alignment with and extends the findings of Beausaert et al. (2016), Chang et al. (2015), and Liu and Bellibus (2018) whereby autonomy, competence, and relatedness are at the core of why principals continue in their role.

When examining the demographics of the study region, taking into consideration median home values, cost of living, socioeconomic status, and ethnicity, all participants in this study are principals in regions that are generally composed of middle to upper class students with less than 50% of the families being designated as low income and with educated parents. For these demographic reasons, principal longevity in the region is observed to be consistent supporting the findings of Grissom and Bartanen (2018), where schools with smaller enrollments of students designated with low socioeconomic status have principals who remain in the position longer.

Participants in this study had a sincere desire to make a difference in the lives of students and a belief in themselves as leaders that they were making a difference. This drive was found to increase job satisfaction and their self-efficacy, which can contribute to a principal's decision to continue in their role. Findings indicated that participants had the ability to self-reflect and self-actualize, reinforcing the finding of the importance of maintaining strong intrinsic beliefs. The self-awareness demonstrated by participants enabled them to recognize the importance of building and maintaining strong

relationships, and their ability to recognize that there were many challenges to overcome in the role as a principal. Those challenges included lifestyle challenges that were overcome by developing coping strategies and ways to address and manage stress and find ways to overcome their sense of a lack of control.

Alcohol use as a coping mechanism was an unexpected finding that merits further research on the effectiveness of programs to manage stress that can be transferable to other administrative positions in the school setting. Support received from the principal's internal organization was viewed favorably and considered a recommendation to promote principal longevity when the support offered matches the need and desire of the principal. When the support is not in alignment with principal need it is viewed as a hinderance to longevity. Finally, school and regional demographics appear to contribute to principal longevity when schools are in an area with middle to upper class student populations.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations are contained in all research and case study research is no exception and may include methodological weaknesses and risk rigor (Yin, 2004). There were limitations in this study that included a small sample size, potential researcher bias, computer assisted interviews, and lack of diversity among the participants (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2019). Though the sample size of eight purposefully selected participants was consistent with case study, according to Guest (2006), to sufficiently provide enough data to address the research questions, a greater number of interviews may have allowed findings to be more transferable. Participants were selected who met the specificity of the scope and design of the study being high school principals who have served at one high

school site for 4 or more years in the study region. However, due to the response from the initial recruitment email, only eight participants responded to recruitment emails to participate in the study, limiting the sample size but providing a sufficient sample size given the design of the study.

As a central office administrator in the school district where some of the participants were employed, professional relationships with the participants were a source of unintended bias. To address this bias, the interview protocol was used with consistency with all participants. Interview reflective notes were used to note observations and to take into consideration my personal thoughts and feelings about participants' responses and to create transparency in the research process, as described by Ortlipp (2008). Researcher bias was reduced using reflexive journaling and member checks to confirm findings during the data analysis process as recommended by Creswell (2014) and Motulsky (2021).

The third limitation was the use of the computer assisted interview teleconference platform where interviews were conducted remotely through Zoom ™. The virtual platform can be considered a limitation as the researcher and participant may be unable to make the same personal connection allowed for by an in-person interview (Brinkman & Kvale, 2019); however, because of recent pandemic restrictions that restricted face-to-face meetings for the past 2 years, administrators were accustomed to conducting conversations and meetings using virtual conferencing platforms. The use of a virtual interview provided participants with the freedom to interview in a location and at a time

that was most comfortable and convenient for them. During the eight interviews, there were no issues that arose due to connectivity or audio or camera use.

The fourth limitation was the lack of diversity of the participants. All eight participants were White males. As indicated in the region demographics, the population of the region is primarily White, so it was not surprising that the participants were reflective of the region demographics. At the time of this study, there were eight sitting male high school principals in the study region and seven sitting female high school principals. Given the small number of sitting principals in the study region, the scope of this study included both current and former high school principals to ensure a minimum sample size was met.

Recommendations

This qualitative exploratory case study led to recommendations for further research related to principal longevity. Future research could consist of quantitative designs to investigate the significance of the types of support provided to high school principals that encourage longevity in the position. A quantitative study could result in prioritizing the type of supports needed to promote longevity of high school principals and principals in general. A quantitative design could also identify a correlation between school type and principal longevity. A quantitative study correlating principal years of service to school demographics could provide useful data to recruit and retain school principals related to demographic variations.

The average length of service for principal participants from Region B district was 9.6 years, more than double the national average for principal longevity, with 8.8

years as the overall average of the three regions comprising the study. Further research in Region B could reveal additional district wide attributes contributing to principal longevity. This may uncover potential systemic programs that could generate additional recommendations for regions outside Region B with principal longevity issues.

Because the scope of this study was limited to high school principals, future studies are recommended to focus on or include elementary and middle school principals to compare the motivators for all principals that contribute to their longevity and to increase the transferability of findings related to this topic. Exploring principals at different school levels may reveal different motivators for longevity and as well as different challenges. It is also recommended to include a larger and more diverse sample, particularly the perceptions of female principals and principals of other races and cultures given the principals who agreed to participant in this study were White males.

Alcohol use as a coping mechanism was an unexpected finding. Further research on alcohol use or abstinence from alcohol by school leaders may serve to inform research on programs to manage stress that may be transferable to other administrative positions such as superintendents. Research in this area may also lead to determining if there is a correlation between years of service, level of stress, and the frequency of alcohol use. Additional research on the effects of internalization of stress could also be important. One participant's account of a serious physical ailment that kept him out of work for weeks at a time and alleviated with retirement lends justification to further research in the areas of internalization of stress and strategies for maintaining a healthy lifestyle as well as programs and positive outlets to handle the stress of the position.

Implications

This research has primarily focused on the reasons for principal turnover. The implications in this study are provided to help close the gap in practice on the success and continuity of high school principals who remained in their schools. The results of this study led to recommendations for practice that include the development of personal wellness programs, specifically in the areas of increasing principals coping and resiliency skills, to improve the health and wellness of principals that could increase their consistency of service.

The findings presented in this study also contribute to positive social change by providing recommendations to school districts, particularly superintendents, with effective ways to provide support to school principals that can lead to increased job satisfaction resulting in longer durations of service tenure in the position. Providing direct support in the way principals believe is most beneficial to their success requires an on-going dialogue with their supervisor or mentor and a willingness to speak openly about their needs to address autonomy, competence, and relatedness that increases intrinsic motivation to remain. Principal autonomy was mentioned most frequently by participants in this study signaling a need that must be provided by the supervisor to distribute power and control in the areas shared and agreed upon by both parties.

Using a strengths-based approach rather than a deficit approach served as a foundation for policy advocacy with recommendations that can guide reform that can lead to positive social change. Through the lens of a strengths-based approach the findings formed the recommendations for practice to districts, and superintendents a path

to implement a participatory and collaborative approach. I recommend the following key components to assist in the high school principal retention:

1) Ensure novice high school principals are prepared and provided with in-service training on coping strategies to prepare individuals for conflict management and strategies to develop coping mechanisms to handle stress that can lead to an overall healthy lifestyle.

2) Institute in-house mentorship and coaching programs for new and existing principals focusing on the areas of autonomy, competence, and relatedness targeting the individual needs of each principal to increase intrinsic motivation.

    a. Effective mentoring should be provided from experienced principals who have demonstrated success as principals.

    b. Quality coaching should be provided from the principals' supervisors that encourage autonomy and opportunities to make local decisions.

3) Provide opportunities for professional development that consists of training and strategies to build positive relationships related to effective communication and relationship building with the community and how to engage with challenging staff and/or union representatives in positive and proactive ways.

Findings from this study resulted in information that can be put into practice to support principals' tenure. Increasing the length of service of principals at the high school level will maximize the positive effects principals will make in their schools and

communities, as found by Burkhauser (2017), Daniel and Lei, 2019, and Levin et al. (2020), thereby contributing to positive social change.

The findings revealed that principals who build strong relationships, have strong intrinsic beliefs, overcome the sense of a lack of control, address lifestyle challenges through positive outlets, and receive support based on their needs, principal longevity beyond four years of service can be achieved. The research that was cited supports many of the findings resulting from this study that are aligned to the self-determination theory from Ryan and Deci (2020) where principals have increased motivation to remain in the position when basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness are met (Chang et al., 2015; Cieminski, 2018; Cunningham et al., 2019; Donley et al., 2020; Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; Grissom et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020; Yan, 2020).

The findings from this study support that principals should be purposeful to invest time and effort in establishing positive relationships with staff, students, and community members. Further, principals need to develop coping strategies and practices that enhance their resiliency in handling stressful situations and developing strong intrinsic beliefs. Principals and other school district administrators should practice healthy lifestyles that are well rounded to address mental and physical wellness with an appropriate work life balance as seen in the research of Bauer and Silver (2018), Heffernan (2021), Horwood et al. (2021), Kaufman (2019), Liu and Bellibus (2018), Postma and Babo, (2019), and Wells and Klocko (2018).

Conclusion

School principals have a demanding position that is important to the academic

progress of students while providing leadership and guidance to a diverse staff. The high

school principal position is multi-faceted and includes responsibilities for managing the

campus culture, the school vision and mission, budget, facility and operational logistics,

school safety, professional development of teachers and support staff, supervision of

curriculum and teaching, state and federal requirements, and the demands of internal and

external stakeholders. Previous researchers have focused on the challenges and stressors

that lead principals to leave their position thereby reducing the continuity of service at a

school site. There has been more limited research on the reasons why high school

principals continue at a school site beyond 4 years of service. This study was designed to

listen to the voices of those high school principals who overcame challenges and

remained motivated to continue.

The high school principals in this study continued in the position by building

strong relationships with staff, students, and the community by purposely engaging with

staff, students, and community members at key events and by being visible on the high

school campus. The principals interviewed in this study all concurred that their positive

relationships with various stakeholders was a key motivator to their consistency in the

position. Participants also stated that their sense of belief in themselves to make a

difference was important in their decision to remain at their respective high schools. One

participant described this as being able to identify their "true north" and to stay on that

path by following the vision and belief that they were called to the position to truly make an impact on the lives of their students.

Principals must overcome the challenge of their feeling of a lack of control and being able to overcome the challenges that can affect their lifestyle- physically, emotionally, and mentally. As one participant stated when capturing the essence of these challenges, "You can't take any of it too personally, [so] have thick skin and a good pair of running shoes." In concluding this study, principals recommended a need to provide a range of support based on an individual principal's situation such as increased autonomy from supervisors, more coaching when assuming a new position, and the encouragement of a mentor that can increase job satisfaction and self-efficacy leading to greater consistency in the position.

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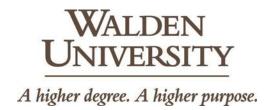   the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning-Executive-Summary.pdf

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Appendix A: Partner Organization Agreement

WALDEN
UNIVERSITY

A higher degree. A higher purpose.

Partner Organization Agreement for AEAL Dissertation

February 1, 2022

The doctoral student, Steven Caminiti, will be conducting a dissertation study as part of the AEAL (Education Administration and Leadership for experienced administrators) EdD program. The student will be completing Walden IRB requirements *and our organization's research approval processes*.

I understand that Walden's IRB has given the student tentative approval to interview leaders (supervisors, board members, PTA leaders, community partners, state department personnel, and similar decision-makers) with whom the student has no power relationship. Details will be created for the final proposal, and the informed consent letter attached will be used. Depending upon the details of the student's study, deidentified organization data* may be requested.

> *At the discretion of the organization's leadership, the student may analyze deidentified records including: aggregate personnel or student records that have been deidentified before being provided to the doctoral student, other deidentified operational records, teaching materials, deidentified lesson plans, meeting minutes, digital/audio/video recordings created by the organization for its own purposes, training materials, manuals, reports, partnership agreements, questionnaires that were collected under auspices of the partner organization as part of continuous improvement efforts (SIPs, for example), and other internal documents.

I understand that, as per doctoral program requirements, the student will publish a dissertation in ProQuest as a doctoral capstone (withholding the names of the organization and participating individuals), as per the following ethical standards:

a. The student is required to maintain confidentiality by removing names and key pieces of evidence/data that might disclose an organization's or individual's identity.

b. The student will be responsible for complying with policies and requirements regarding data collection (***including the need for the organization's internal ethics/regulatory approval as applicable***).

c. Via the Interview Consent Form, the student will describe to interviewees how the data will be used in the dissertation study and how all interviewees' privacy will be protected.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research activities in this setting.

Signed,

This template has been designed by Walden University for the purpose of creating a partnership agreement between an education agency or district/division and a Walden doctoral student in support of that student's dissertation. Walden University will take responsibility for overseeing the data collection and analysis activities described above for the purpose of the student's doctoral dissertation.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. I have several questions to explore

why you remained in the position of high school principal. Your participation will

provide valuable information into a strengths-based research study that explores why

high school principals stay in one school site for four or more years of service. In

addition, your responses will serve as recommendations for superintendents to consider

when attempting to retain high school principals. Do you have any questions before we

begin?

Interview Questions	RQ1	RQ2	RQ3	SDT
1. What was your career path that led you to your position as a high school principal?				
2. What motivated you to become a principal, specifically, a high school principal?	X			X
3. Can you describe your high school in terms of its demographics and staffing?	X	X		
4. The national average for high school principals to remain at one school is less than 4 years. You have been a high school principal for _____ years. What has motivated you to stay?	X			X
5. What were some of the challenges you have faced as a high school principal? Probe: Are some on-going?		X		X
6. Are there specific strategies or ways you have found to cope with or manage these challenges?		X		X
7. What motivated you to stay in the position during those challenges?		X		X
8. Have you ever thought about leaving the position? If yes, what motivated you to stay?	X			X
9. What recommendations would you give to novice high school principals other principals to remain in their position?			X	X

10. What recommendations would you give to superintendents or district supervisors to support principals? Probe: Are there any specific examples of support that you experienced that contributed to your longevity in the position?			X	X
11. What would you say are the particular supports or needs a high school principal might have to remain in the position? Probe: Should participants mention words associated with SDT (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, competence, self-determination, needs) probe for elaboration.	X		X	X

Closing statement

Thank you for your time today participating in this interview process. Should there be any follow up questions need, would you be willing to answer those at a later time convenient to you? I will provide you with your transcript of your interview for your approval on its accuracy of the transcript.

Appendix C: Interview Reflective Notes

Interview Questions	Interview Reflective Notes
1. What was your career path that led you to your position as a high school principal?	
2. What motivated you to become a principal, specifically, a high school principal?	
3. Can you describe your high school in terms of its demographics and staffing?	
4. The national average for high school principals to remain at one school is less than 4 years. You have been a high school principal for _____ years. What has motivated you to stay?	
5. What were some of the challenges you have faced as a high school principal? Probe: Are some on-going?	
6. Are there specific strategies or ways you have found to cope with or manage these challenges?	
7. What motivated you to stay in the position during those challenges?	
8. Have you ever thought about leaving the position? If yes, what motivated you to stay?	
9. What recommendations would you give to novice high school principals other principals to remain in their position?	
10. What recommendations would you give to superintendents or district supervisors to support principals? Probe: Are there any specific examples of support that you experienced that contributed to your longevity in the position?	
11. What would you say are the particular supports or needs a high school principal might have to remain in the position? Probe: Should participants mention words associated with SDT (i.e., autonomy, relatedness, competence, self-determination, needs) probe for elaboration.	

Appendix D: Descriptive Codes from Interview Data

Table D1

Motivators Influencing Participants on Their Decision to Continue as High School Participants

Themes	Descriptive Codes from Interview Data				
Building Strong Relationships	Mentored	Overcoming through positive relationships	Staff motivates me	Early career opportunities in leadership	Don't isolate
	Differing opinions from superintendent	Human investment	Students motivate me	Encouraged to lead	Be involved
	Communication	Build relationships	Community motivates me	Lack of a team	Engage with staff & community
	Listening skills	Key relationships	Building trust with superintendent	Principal network	Get out of the office
	Enjoy HS students	Positive reinforcement		Teamwork	Attend events
Strong Intrinsic Beliefs	Doing what I'm supposed to be doing	Make a difference	Desire to improve	Solving problems	
	The way I'm wired	Impact	Motivated do	Still something to	
	Want to shape school	New challenges	Belief in self	A burden	
	Knowing true north	Sense of obligation to stay	Focus on what really matters (Students)		
	Not feeling effective	Don't take it home	Find the positive		
	Not taking it personal	Commitment to vision	Self-reflective		

Table D2

Challenges Participants Overcame as High School Principals

Themes	Descriptive Codes from Interview Data	
	Lack of power	Being middle management
	Autonomy	Tenure
Sense of lack of control	Student mental health	Feeling lack of control from board directives
	Lack of parental support	Labor unions/difficult staff
	Challenging parents/community/staff	Middle management
	COVID	Job duties
	School board challenges	
	Natural progression to be a principal	Going through hard cycles and seasons
	Personality fit	Personal health
	Life balance	Exercise
Lifestyle	Have fun	Alcohol use or not
	Stress/pressure	Criticism
	Don't get too [emotionally] high or low	

Table D3

Recommendations High School Principals Have to Increase Consistency of Service

Theme	Descriptive Codes from Interview Data	
	Budget help	No micromanaging from superintendent
	Lack of district support	Superintendent available for support
	Ability to hire a good team	Coaching
Internal Support	Good secretary	No Initiative overload
	Importance of having Assistant principal	Good communication
	Supportive Superintendent	