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## School Principals' Perception on Their Job Satisfaction

Arti Narayan  
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# Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Arti Narayan

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,  
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the review committee have been made.

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Walden University

2024

Abstract

School Principals' Perception on Their Job Satisfaction

by

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MA, California State University, Stanislaus, 2007

BA, California State University, Stanislaus, 1999

Proposal Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Educational Administration and Leadership for Administrators

Walden University

February 2025

## Abstract

The school principal's roles have become quite complex and strenuous causing an impact on school principals' job satisfaction. The problem that was addressed through this basic qualitative study was the low job satisfaction of school principals at a school district in California. The framework used for the study was the job demands and resource theory. The purpose of this research study was to examine the perceptions of TK-12 school principals regarding their job satisfaction based on the job demands and resource framework. Using a basic qualitative research design, data were gathered through semistructured interviews with nine school principals out of 20. The research revealed nine themes that influence principals' perceptions on job satisfaction and job resources: managing the "entirety" of their job; fulfilling the role of instructional leaders rather than operational managers; maintaining a positive school culture; managing stress levels, proactively, balancing between professional and personal life, supportive district personnel and resources; availability of professional development, clarity and organization of expectations, and the presence of trusting relationships with supervisors, coupled with a sense of being valued. The suggestions from this study serve as a guide for establishing healthy job demands and providing essential job resources for school principals and district leaders. The results of this study might bring forth positive social change as principals who are satisfied in their jobs are likely to do their job well which, in turn, might influence teachers' well-being and ultimately students' well-being and academic success.

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## Dedication

To my parents, whose unwavering support and boundless love have been my guiding light. Your sacrifices, encouragement, and belief in me have been the foundation upon which I have built my dreams. Your wisdom and resilience continue to inspire me every day.

Additionally, this work is dedicated to every student I have encountered during my time as a teacher and a school leader. I have been blessed to work in this profession and to have a small impact on the lives of so many students. Your dreams and aspirations invigorate my dedication to this profession and to the pursuit of creating better educational environments for future generations.

Finally, I dedicate this work to current and future school leaders everywhere. I hope this study can be a resource to you as we continue to learn and grow in this vocation for the betterment of the school communities and students we serve. This is a challenging yet rewarding and fulfilling profession we have chosen. Your dedication and commitment to education are vital, and I am honored to stand alongside you in this noble pursuit.

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## Section 1: The Problem

### **The Local Problem**

Valley Unified School District (VUSD), a pseudonym for the school district examined in this study, is a Transitional Kindergarten (TK)-12 public school district located in California's Central Valley. Like many districts nationwide, VUSD principals are confronted with substantial pressure to meet student academic achievement benchmarks while navigating the myriad challenges inherent in school administration (Doss, 2022). Principals typically enter the field of education driven by a passion for fostering student success both academically and socially. However, over the past two decades, the role of the school principal has evolved, becoming increasingly complex and demanding, characterized by a broad spectrum of responsibilities and challenging situations (Elomaa et al., 2023). It is no surprise that burnout and high rates of attrition of school principals are a growing problem (Sutton, 2021)

Within VUSD, state assessment scores indicate significant room for improvement in student achievement, which should be the focal point for school principals. According to the 2023 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) data, students in the all-student category scored in the low range for English Language Arts (ELA), falling 48 points below the standard. Particularly concerning are the three subgroups—English Learners (EL), Homeless students, and Students with Disabilities (SWD)—who scored in the very low range. In mathematics, students in the all-student category scored in the medium range, 86 points below the standard, with African American students, English Learners (EL), and Homeless students performing in the very

low range (California Department of Education, n.d.). These results underscore the critical need for focused efforts by principals to enhance student achievement within the district. Data-informed leadership is the impetus for effective practices in school leadership (Ezzani, 2020).

School principals express a strong desire to concentrate on their passion for fostering student success, particularly in the academic realm. Principals play a critical role in the functioning and improvement of schools, wielding the second-largest influence on student achievement, surpassed only by teachers (Doss et al., 2022). Principals in VUSD frequently report a lack of satisfaction with progress in their roles, citing the multifaceted nature of their responsibilities. Some of these responsibilities include directing the school's instructional goals and resources to achieve these goals, being an instructional leader as well as a social justice leader, establishing the overall vision and culture of the school, ensuring the intellectual, socio-emotional behavioral, and physical safety and development of both students and staff, hiring and dismissal of staff, developing healthy relationships and ongoing communication with the union and fostering meaningful engagement with families, and the community (Fosco, personal communication, 2022).

By understanding the specific job demands and resources that impact principals in the local district, this project study was designed to provide actionable insights that can help improve job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and enhance the overall effectiveness of school leadership. Addressing this issue is critical for the well-being of principals and the success and stability of the schools they lead. This project study addressed the local

problem by examining the factors contributing to principals' job satisfaction, specifically focusing on the interplay between job demands and resources. The problem addressed through this study is that despite the school principal's work passion, it is unknown how school principals in a school district in California describe their perception of job satisfaction.

The setting for this project study was a public school district located in California. The study site school district comprised 20 schools with 20 TK-12 school principals. The sample for this study were nine K-12 principals (six from elementary schools, Grades TK-6; two from junior high schools, Grades 7-8; one from a comprehensive high school, Grades 9-12).

### **Rationale**

The following is a project research study on school principals' current role and job satisfaction levels. History has depicted principals as building managers and individuals who ran the schoolhouse; however, these notions could not be further from the current reality of educational leaders such as the principal. The landscape has changed from being mere building managers to aspirational leaders, instructional leaders, data analysts, school safety proxies, disciplinarians, agents of change, and social justice leaders, to name just a few of the school principal's roles. Insufficient training and district support paired with complex job responsibilities have led to principals feeling high burnout levels and decreased job satisfaction (Alvoid & Black, 2023).

School principals' job satisfaction is a complex issue that warrants thorough investigation. One significant problem in education is finding strong and stable school leadership. Strong and stable leadership influences the school's climate, culture, and most

importantly student achievement. Unfortunately, according to Levin et al. (2020), “Nationally, the average tenure of a principal is about four years, and nearly one in five principals, approximately 18 percent, turn over annually” (p. 3). The conditions that create principal attrition fall into five categories: working conditions, compensation, accountability systems and evaluation, decision-making authority, and professional learning (Levin et al., 2020).

In the local school district of this study, there was growing concern about the job satisfaction of school principalship. This issue has significant implications, as school principals play a crucial role in the effective functioning and success of schools. Despite school principals’ importance and their passion, the passion can be a double-edged sword, leading to good (job satisfaction) and bad (burnout) outcomes (Horwood et al., 2021). Despite their passion and dedicated efforts, there has been dissatisfaction among school principal positions, in addition to fear of taking on that role and responsibility, which has raised alarms about the sustainability and stability of school leadership.

School principals in the local district faced many job demands that impacted their job satisfaction. These demands included an ever-increasing workload, the pressure to meet state and federal educational standards, and the need to manage a diverse array of administrative tasks (Dickie et al., 2020). Additionally, principals are often required to problem-solve and address the needs of various stakeholders, including teachers, students, parents, unions, and the broader community, all of whom have different and sometimes conflicting expectations. The intensity of these demands can lead to high

levels of stress and burnout, which are detrimental to the principals' well-being and the overall school environment (Günes, 2022).

The imbalance between job demands and resources directly impacts principals' job satisfaction. When job demands outweigh available resources, principals are more likely to experience job dissatisfaction, which can lead to decreased motivation, lower job performance, and, ultimately, higher turnover rates (Wang, 2018). This turnover can disrupt schools, leading to instability and inconsistency in leadership, which negatively affects teachers and students. Additionally, high turnover rates can be costly for the district, both financially and in terms of lost institutional knowledge.

Addressing the local problem of principals' job satisfaction required a comprehensive approach that considered reducing job demands and enhancing job resources. Solutions may include policy changes to reduce administrative burdens, increased funding for support staff, and the implementation of professional development programs tailored to the needs of principals. Also, creating a supportive community among principals through regular meetings, peer networks, and mentorship programs can provide the social and emotional support necessary to cope with the job demands.

This study was initiated in response to concerns articulated by TK-12 school principals within the study district regarding their job satisfaction. To address this issue, qualitative data were gathered through one-on-one, semistructured interviews with nine TK-12 school principals. These interviews explored their perceptions of job satisfaction in relation to job demands and available resources.

## **Definition of Terms**

*Job burnout:* Job burnout is a psychological syndrome characterized by a negative emotional reaction to one's job because of extended exposure to a stressful work environment (Yildirim & Dinc, 2019).

*Job demands:* Physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or mental effort (Skaalvik, 2023)

*Job resources:* Job resources are those physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that help to either achieve work goals, reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs, or stimulate personal growth, learning, and development (Bakker et al., 2014)

*School principals:* Professionals leading a human-service institution to complete job functions and manage the personal and social dimensions of leading an organization designed to support students, teachers, families, and staff (DeMatthews et al., 2023).

## **Significance of the Study**

This project study was significant in that it addressed a critical gap in practice concerning the job satisfaction levels of school principals and the potential implications for future educational leaders. The findings from this study could catalyze further research to identify effective strategies to mitigate job dissatisfaction among school principals. This project study's significance lies in its potential to augment the existing body of knowledge on job satisfaction's personal and professional impacts on school leaders, which affects school culture and student achievement.

Moreover, the findings of this project study held substantial relevance for district stakeholders, including district administrators, TK-12 principals, assistant principals, learning directors, and other administrative personnel. The project study provided strategic insights to support school principals in their leadership roles better, ultimately fostering a more positive and effective educational environment (Kaufman et al., 2022).

### **Research Questions**

In educational leadership, understanding the factors contributing to principal job satisfaction is critical for fostering effective school environments and increasing student achievement. Numerous studies highlight the significant role of principals in shaping school culture, improving student outcomes, supporting high-quality instruction and teachers, and implementing educational reforms (Collie, 2020; Darling-Hammond et al., 2022; DeMatthews et al., 2021; Horwood, 2021). Despite their pivotal role, principals often face high levels of stress and job dissatisfaction, leading to turnover and instability within schools (Levine et al., 2020). Addressing these challenges requires a deeper exploration of the elements that influence job satisfaction among principals. This project study aimed to fill this gap by investigating the various dimensions of principal job satisfaction, examining how administrative support, workload, professional development opportunities, and work-life balance impact their overall job contentment. Therefore, the following research questions were used to guide this investigation:

RQ 1: What are principals' perceptions on their job satisfaction in a California school district?

RQ 2: What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district?

### **Review of the Literature**

Understanding school principals' perceptions of job satisfaction through the lens of the Job Demand-Resource (JD-R) theory offers valuable insights into the dynamic interplay between the demands of their role and the resources available to them. Recent scholarly investigations have highlighted the significance of this theoretical framework in elucidating the factors that contribute to or detract from job satisfaction among educational leaders. For instance, DeMatthews et al. (2021) found that high job demands, such as excessive administrative tasks and accountability pressures, negatively impact principals' job satisfaction, while adequate resources, including professional development opportunities and supportive school environments, enhance it. Similarly, research by Levin et al. (2020) underscores the importance of balancing demands and resources to mitigate stress and promote well-being among school principals. These studies collectively emphasize the critical need for a supportive infrastructure to sustain the job satisfaction and overall effectiveness of school principals in their demanding roles.

In the course of my doctoral project study, I utilized Walden University's Library to search for peer-reviewed journal articles published within the last 5 years aimed at reviewing literature pertinent to this project study. Additional articles were also reviewed through Google Scholar and ProQuest. The following keyword search terms were employed: *K-12 school principals, job demand and resource theory, K-12 school*

*principals' burnout, K-12 school principals' job demand, K-12 school principals' job satisfaction, and role of K-12 school principals.*

### **Job Demands-Resource (JD-R) Theory**

The job demand-resource (JD-R) framework is widely utilized to assess the factors influencing job satisfaction and well-being across various professions, including educational leadership (Schaufeli, 2017). JD-R theory is commonly used to predict employee well-being, behaviors, and performance and has received considerable empirical support in various meta-analyses. The concept of working conditions can be evaluated in terms of demands and resources, which is fundamental to this theoretical framework. Job demands refer to the physical, social, psychological, and organizational components of work that necessitate substantial psychological and physical efforts, thereby incurring significant costs. In contrast, job resources encompass the physical, social, psychological, and organizational aspects of work that facilitate employees in attaining their job duties (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). Job resources enable employees to experience engagement and well-being.

JD-R theory posits that job demands and resources trigger two distinct processes. The health impairment process pertains to the specific impact of job demands (e.g., complex work problems, email overload) on health outcomes by depleting employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive resources (Li et al., 2023). This process is particularly evident over extended periods. Consequently, when employees are persistently confronted with cognitively and emotionally taxing work or an overwhelming number of emails and responsibilities requiring constant attention, their energy reserves are

gradually exhausted, leading to chronic fatigue and potentially severe health issues.

Conversely, the motivational process highlights the unique influence of job resources (e.g., decision latitude, time control) on performance through work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024).

As key leaders in schools, school principals experience unique job demands and resources that significantly impact their job satisfaction. Riley (2019) posited that the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory is instrumental in comprehending stress and psychological risk among school principals. This literature review synthesizes findings from research articles published in the last 5 years, focusing on principals' perceptions of their job satisfaction within the context of the JD-R framework.

### ***Job Demands***

Job demands can be characterized as physical, social, or organizational aspects requiring sustained physical or mental effort (Skaalvik, 2023). Job demands are particularly stressful and may lead to health problems when job control is low. School principals experience job demands in various aspects, including conducting operations and managing schools, being accountable for the performance of teachers and students, ensuring that the school meets high staked accountability measurements, acting as middle management between the district office and school board, executing policies amidst differing staff views, and being responsible for positively marketing their school community (Doyle, 2022).

**Workload and Administrative Task.** Research consistently identifies workload as a primary job demand for principals. A study by Wang et al. (2020) highlighted that

excessive administrative task contributes significantly to stress and reduced job satisfaction among principals. Similarly, Riley et al. (2018) found that the sheer volume of responsibilities, including compliance with educational policies and managing school operations, exacerbates job strain.

**Time Pressure.** Time constraints significantly affect principals' job satisfaction. Elomaa et al. (2023) found that the need to juggle multiple tasks within limited time frames leads to work-life imbalance, contributing to dissatisfaction. The necessity for extended working hours to meet job demands further exacerbates this issue. Reid and Creed (2023) examined the extraneous working hours among school principals. Their findings underscored that principal allocate a significant portion of their time to tasks beyond regular work hours, including evenings and weekends, resulting in workweeks extending well beyond the standard 40 hours. Such extended work commitments are shown to detrimentally affect their health, interpersonal relationships outside of work, and stress levels.

**Accountability and Performance Pressures.** Principals face immense pressure to meet accountability standards and improve school performance. In the United States, principals have historically borne responsibility, to varying extents, for the academic outcomes of both educators and students. This accountability was notably heightened with the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act and, subsequently, Every Student Succeeds Act—cornerstones of the nation's education legislation. Under these mandates, principals assumed a heightened role in ensuring their schools complied with rigorous accountability standards (Reid & Creed, 2023). According to a study by Beusaert et al.

(2019), these performance pressures create a high-stress environment, negatively impacting job satisfaction. The constant scrutiny and evaluation based on student outcomes add to the job's demands (Dickie et al., 2020).

**Emotional Demands.** The emotional labor associated with leading a school is another critical demand. Dealing with student behavior issues, staff conflicts, and parental expectations places a substantial emotional burden on principals, leading to decreased job satisfaction. The pressure to maintain a positive school climate further intensifies these emotional demands (Doyle, 2022). According to Li et al., the objective requirement for school principals to carry positive emotional displays is positively related to exhaustion through perceived emotional demands (2023). These parts of the job cause stress. Stress is related to deep human emotions that involve not only psychological stress but also affect physical health (Jin Kim, 2022)

### ***Job Resources***

Job resources can lead to motivation. Job characteristics theory proposes that five specific job characteristics (skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback) have a positive impact on work outcomes (motivation, performance) through critical psychological states (experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility for outcomes, and knowledge of actual results (Bakker et al., 2023). Job resources can fulfill fundamental psychological needs, such as the need for belonging and engaging in meaningful work autonomously. This fulfillment enhances intrinsic motivation, enabling employees to achieve work-related goals and sustain performance (Lesener et al., 2020). The literature on resources for school principals points to the following as important.

**Autonomy.** The degree of autonomy in decision-making significantly influences job satisfaction. Jentsch (2023) highlighted that principals with greater control over school policies and practices experience higher job satisfaction. Just as teachers who have more autonomy in their classrooms soar and can be creative, such is the case for school leaders. Autonomy allows principals to tailor their leadership strategies to better meet the needs of their schools (Wang et al., 2018).

**Professional Development.** Opportunities for professional growth are vital for job satisfaction. Research by Thessin et al. (2020) indicates that school principals who engage in continuous professional development and training programs feel more competent and satisfied in their roles. These opportunities enable principals to develop skills to manage job demands effectively. The study also shows that principals working together rather than alone find more success. The association with school principals who have greater professional development access has more consistent and stronger student gains and more positive principal, teacher, and student outcomes (Campoli & Darling-Hammond; Darling Hammond et al., 2022).

**Supportive Leadership.** Support from higher administration is a crucial job resource that enhances principals' job satisfaction. Levin et al. (2020) found that principals who receive adequate support and mentorship from district leaders report higher job satisfaction. Effective communication and recognition from superiors also play a significant role in mitigating job demands. According to Schlebusch (2022), most problems occur from a communication breakdown in schools and any organization and relationship. Communication is a critical element in employee's job satisfaction levels.

**Social Support.** Support from colleagues and the school community is another vital resource. According to Shakir et al. (2023), principals who receive emotional and professional support from peers report higher job satisfaction. Collaborative networks and peer mentoring are particularly beneficial in reducing feelings of isolation and stress. School leaders are often left isolated to develop frameworks for understanding sudden, emergent crises, large and small. Formulating a collective support system is an anchor of support for school leaders (Miller et al., 2023).

**Work-Life Balance.** Policies promoting work-life balance contribute significantly to job satisfaction. A study by Jin Kim (2022) emphasized that flexible working conditions and support for personal well-being are crucial in enhancing job satisfaction. Various mindfulness-based practices, which can be implemented in diverse settings, are valuable options for helping school leaders achieve emotional and physical equilibrium. This equilibrium can improve their well-being, enhance work-life balance, and reduce stress levels. To support school leadership and prevent burnout, it is essential to acknowledge the increasingly challenging conditions they face and their consequences. Establishing a nurturing school climate is crucial as we advocate for developing a sound, flexible work-life balance and resilience among educational leaders. Initiatives that effectively help principals manage their professional and personal responsibilities lead to improved job satisfaction (Dong, 2022).

## **The Interaction Between Job Demands and Resources**

### ***Buffering Effects***

Several studies indicate that job resources can buffer the negative effects of job demands. A recent study by DeMatthews et al. (2024) depicted the health impairments and sleep deprivation that principals struggled with, which affected their leadership self-efficacy and intentions to stay in their professions. Wang et al. (2018) found that supportive leadership and professional development opportunities mitigate the adverse impact of workload and time pressure on job satisfaction. Similarly, autonomy in decision-making can reduce the stress associated with accountability pressures (Jentsch, 2023).

### ***Mediating Effects***

Job resources often mediate the relationship between job demands and job satisfaction. Collie et al. (2020) demonstrated that professional development opportunities mediate the effect of performance pressures on job satisfaction, suggesting that when principals feel better equipped to handle their responsibilities, they experience higher satisfaction despite high demands. Researchers in occupational health and psychology have shown that inadequate sleep adversely affects the workforce. Sleep deprivation is linked to increased absenteeism, a higher risk of workplace injuries, diminished perceptions of productivity, and lower job satisfaction (DeMatthews, 2024). Consequently, a significant relationship likely exists between sleep and individuals' intentions to leave their jobs; however, no research has specifically examined this relationship in the context of educator and leadership turnover (Su-Keene et al., 2024).

Like stress, poor sleep quality impairs cognitive functioning, mood, and emotional regulation, which can impact essential skills for effective principals, such as maintaining trust and care, ethical decision-making, conflict resolution, and culture building (Irby, 2022; Rivera McCutchen, 2021).

In addition to the social-relational aspects of effective leadership, principals' internal self-efficacy—a judgment of their ability, capacity, and competency to achieve desired leadership outcomes—is also at risk. Self-efficacy is a crucial predictor of actual leadership behavior and actions and a vital construct to explore because it is susceptible to physiological states (DeMatthews, 2024). Although research on the impacts of sleep on principals' self-efficacy is lacking, studies have shown that stress, burnout, and mental health negatively affect self-efficacy. Given the relational evidence between stress, sleep, and their corresponding impacts, exploring sleep quality in the principalship is warranted as a potential pathway linking stress to negative personal and professional outcomes (Su-Keene et al., 2024).

### ***Balancing Demands and Resources***

The balance between job demands and resources is crucial for maintaining job satisfaction. According to Horwood et al. (2021), principals who perceive a balance between the demands of their role and the available resources report higher job satisfaction. This balance is essential for sustaining motivation and well-being in the long term. A complex interplay of job demands and resources influences principals' job satisfaction. The JD-R framework provides a valuable lens for understanding these dynamics. Excessive workload, time pressure, accountability pressures, and emotional

demands are significant job demands that negatively impact job satisfaction. Conversely, supportive leadership, professional development, autonomy, social support, and work-life balance are critical resources that enhance job satisfaction. Balancing these demands and resources is essential for fostering a positive work environment for principals, ultimately contributing to better school leadership and improved educational outcomes. In addition, balancing work demands and resources contributes to school principals' overall mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Positive mental health, physical well-being, and a good night's sleep are essential for everyone; however, focusing on principals is particularly crucial. Principals must maintain both physical and cognitive health to effectively lead school improvement efforts and manage the mental load of the entire campus (DeMatthews, 2024).

In a recent study, Claes (2023) demonstrated that job demands and resources directly and indirectly affect employees' subjective well-being. Therefore, creating a supportive and healthy work environment is paramount to fostering employees' subjective well-being. Specifically, enhancing job resources may be an effective strategy for promoting employees' overall subjective well-being.

### **Implications**

Based on the literature review and the identified problem of principal job dissatisfaction, several potential directions emerged for the project study. Anticipated findings revealed specific factors contributing to job satisfaction, such as the need for administrative support, manageable workloads, effective professional development, and a healthy work-life balance. Given these insights, a white paper emerged as the most

promising approach to address and potentially mitigate the issues of principal job dissatisfaction.

The white paper focused on innovative and supportive initiatives, such as principal coaching, which could be particularly effective. Principal coaching involves personalized support where experienced leaders mentor and guide current principals, helping them navigate the complexities of their roles. This approach can foster a sense of community and shared learning, reducing feelings of isolation and stress. Additionally, incorporating regular workshops on time management, stress reduction techniques, and leadership skills can empower principals to handle their responsibilities more effectively. The central office is directly tied to the effectiveness of responsibilities. Reducing job demands and increasing resources can help empower principals to be more effective in their role. Furthermore, creating a structured peer collaboration and support network can provide principals with opportunities to share experiences and solutions, fostering a collaborative and supportive environment. The white paper emphasized the importance of work-life balance, offering resources and strategies to help principals maintain their well-being. By addressing these key areas through a comprehensive plan, the project study provided a practical and impactful solution to enhance principal job satisfaction and, consequently, improve schools' overall functioning and success.

### **Summary**

The Valley Unified School District (VUSD), located in California's Central Valley, faced significant challenges with principal job satisfaction. Principals in VUSD, like many across the nation, are under intense pressure to meet academic benchmarks

while managing the diverse and complex demands of school administration. Despite their passion for fostering student success, the role of the principal has evolved into one characterized by high stress and multifaceted responsibilities, leading to burnout and high attrition rates. The 2023 California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) highlighted that student achievement in VUSD is notably low, particularly among subgroups such as English learners, homeless students, and students with disabilities. This underscores the critical need for principals to focus on improving student outcomes, yet their job satisfaction remains low due to the overwhelming demands.

Addressing the issue of principal job satisfaction in VUSD was vital for both the well-being of the principals and the overall success of the schools they lead. This project study aimed to provide actionable insights by examining the factors contributing to job satisfaction, specifically focusing on the interplay between job demands and resources. The imbalance between these demands and resources often leads to high stress levels and burnout among principals. Therefore, a comprehensive white paper plan was proposed that included principal coaching, regular workshops on time management, stress reduction, and leadership skills, as well as a structured network for peer collaboration and support. This plan aimed to enhance job satisfaction by providing the necessary support and resources, ultimately leading to improved school functioning and student achievement.

## Section 2: The Methodology

### **Qualitative Research Design and Approach**

The problem for this study was that school principals are experiencing job dissatisfaction. The purpose of this basic qualitative research study was to examine the perceptions of TK-12 school principals at a school district in California regarding their job satisfaction based on the job demands and resource framework. The project study comprised interviews with nine TK-12 school principals within the district; therefore, it is an empirical research project with specific data (Butin, 2010). A qualitative research design and approach is to obtain detailed, unique, and context-rich accounts from the participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The qualitative approach to research is to make sense of people and phenomena in their natural settings; in this study, the setting was the TK-12 schools of the principals who were interviewed.

A qualitative research approach was deemed most appropriate for this study because it focuses on understanding how individuals interpret their experiences and derive meaning from them (Burkholder et al., 2020). The study did not involve collecting or analyzing numerical or statistical data; had it done so, a quantitative or mixed-methods approach would have been more suitable (Burkholder et al., 2020). Furthermore, the sample for this study was purposefully selected based on specific experiences and roles, which limited the generalizability of the findings to other populations and confined them to the context under analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Qualitative inquiry involves narrating individuals' lived experiences and using these narratives to construct meaning.

This approach was particularly fitting for this study, which aimed to explore principals' lived experiences in their jobs and their job satisfaction.

### **Participants**

The setting for this project study was a public school district located in California. The target population was TK-12 school principals, explicitly chosen for their roles and positions. A sample size of nine individuals was selected from the elementary, junior high, and high school levels. The number of candidates interviewed was based on the number of responses to the email request to participate and when the study had reached saturation. A sample size of nine participants was sufficient to answer the research questions as the participants were selected based on the selection criteria for experiencing the phenomenon of the research (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Purposeful sampling was employed to identify TK-12 school principal participants, enabling the researcher to deeply explore the phenomenon under study. Purposeful or purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique commonly used in qualitative research. This method involves selecting participants based on specific characteristics, experiences, or criteria that align with the research objectives. The aim was to gather in-depth and rich information by choosing individuals most likely to provide valuable insights into the research topic (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Upon IRB approval (Approval no. 09-24-24-1198698), participants were invited to participate in the study through an email request using their school district email (see Appendix A). Email requests were sent to TK-12 principals who had been in the district and principal for over 3 years. School principals should also have had experience with

some level of job dissatisfaction. Participants interested in participating in the study had to respond to the email with their consent. Once participants expressed interest in the project study, they were contacted to schedule an in-person or Google Meet interview. The participants were provided with the study's purpose and goals, an explanation of participant confidentiality, rights, and protection from harm, and a request for participation.

### **Data Collection**

I utilized semistructured interviews to conduct my research for this project study. When using in-depth qualitative interviewing, researchers talk to those with knowledge of or experience with the problem of interest. Researchers can explore details of experiences, motives, and opinions of others and learn to view the world from their perspectives. Researchers who use quantitative data techniques to gather information are called positivist. Those who prefer qualitative techniques, such as interviews, observations, and questioning, are called naturalists (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Interviews were conducted professionally, articulating that participation was voluntary and that all responses were confidential. Interviews were collected using an interview protocol (see Appendix B) that I developed based on the job demands and resource framework produced (Bakker, 2014). I gathered information from TK-12 school principals on the elements of their jobs versus those that are not satisfying. I also utilized the interview protocol to gather information on the demanding parts of their job versus what resources were provided. Interviews were held via Google Meet.

## Data Analysis

In this project study, I used the naturalist approach to interview TK-12 school principals to learn of their experiences and knowledge. The naturalistic researcher explores complex situations using observations, documentary, and conversational analysis, and interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). I used interview questions to discuss the topics with the participants. Qualitative researchers use inductive analysis to code the interview transcript to identify emergent themes (Saldana, 2021). Once the information was gathered, I used thematic data analysis to read the interview transcripts and code the data for emergent themes (Saldana, 2021). Once data were collected, coding was utilized to analyze the qualitative data. A qualitative analysis code is often a word or short phrase that summarizes or captures the essence of the language-based data (Saldana, 2021). Coding was conducted to identify patterns. Patterns are repetitive, consistent, and regular occurrences of data that appear more than twice (Saldana, 2021).

Thematic analysis is essentially a flexible method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data to report experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I transcribed all interview responses and saved the transcripts before the analysis began. I organized the interview transcripts and read each transcript multiple times to understand the participants' responses.

Thematic data analysis begins with coding (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). There were key themes used from the job demands and resource framework in the interview protocols that drove the coding techniques. To enhance my coding process using Saldaña's methods, I referred to *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* by

Johnny Saldaña. This book provides comprehensive guidance on various coding techniques, such as initial coding, pattern coding, and theoretical coding. Following Saldana's suggestions, I incorporated multiple coding cycles to refine and deepen my understanding of the data. I compiled the participants' responses by using an Excel spreadsheet and recorded their responses. As I read the transcripts, I looked through the responses to search for keywords and phrases that stood out in relation to the interview and research question. I copied these onto another column in the Excel spreadsheet and then added a specific code in the next column. Some words or key phrases were coded similarly. After completing the first coding round, I went back through each transcript for any other pertinent words or phrases in a more open coding process employing Excel in the same way (Saldaña, 2021). I highlighted sections of the interview transcripts during open coding and used labels (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Once all initial coding was done, I used Axial coding to combine initial codes into categories. To do this, I reorganized the Excel spreadsheet by using the data filter process, moving all identical codes together, and using the count feature to see which codes were used the most. Next, I used the inductive logic of Axial coding to reassemble data into categories by determining which codes fit together. In the coding phase, I grouped the open codes into categories to identify themes, revising and refining the categories and themes until no new information was found (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). Through reviewing and re-reviewing common words and phrases, categories and subcategories emerged, and themes developed from these subcategories and categories (Saldaña, 2021). Once categories were determined, I renamed the categories and then

reworded the category into a larger sentence or theme format to answer the overall research question. I reviewed all themes for consistency and performed member checking with each participant to ensure the accuracy of the interview transcripts (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Saldaña also emphasizes the importance of reflective memo writing throughout the coding process. To ensure the accuracy, quality, and credibility of my findings, I maintained a research journal to document my thoughts, decisions, and any emerging insights during the analysis. A reflexive journal enhances the credibility and trustworthiness of the study as it is a self-reflective tool used to document thoughts, feelings, biases, assumptions, and reactions throughout the research process. By continuously reflecting on and documenting biases, researchers can better recognize and mitigate how these biases might shape data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It encourages researchers to critically examine their own positionality and how their background, experiences, and beliefs may affect the research. (Ravitch & Carl, 2020).

Member checking involves sharing findings or interpretations with participants to ensure accuracy and resonance with their experiences. This practice is crucial for validating the data and interpretations in qualitative research. According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), member checking can be implemented by allowing participants to read through transcripts to verify that the data are accurately reflected, grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than the researcher's biases or preconceptions and making it an iterative process throughout the study by allowing continuous refinement and validation of the data and interpretations.

By systematically applying Saldaña's coding strategies, I aimed to produce a thorough and rigorous qualitative analysis for my project study. By incorporating reflexivity journals and member checking, I significantly reduced bias and enhanced the validity and credibility of this qualitative research. These practices aligned with the principles outlined by Ravitch and Carl (2021), ensuring that the research was both rigorous and respectful of the participants' perspectives.

### **Data Analysis Results**

The conceptual framework guiding this study was the job demands-resources (JD-R) theory, a widely applied model for assessing factors influencing job satisfaction and well-being across various professional contexts. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine school principals' perceptions of their job satisfaction. The research questions centered on understanding principals' perceptions of their job satisfaction and the resources they deemed necessary to meet the demands within a school district in California.

Electronic invitations were sent to 20 school principals. Initially, 12 principals responded and expressed willingness to participate. However, two of these principals were in their first year and thus did not meet the criteria for inclusion in the study. Additionally, one principal did not respond to a scheduled interview appointment. Consequently, the final participant group consisted of nine principals: six from elementary schools, two from junior high schools, and one from a high school. The interviews were conducted via Google Meet over a three-week period.

The principals who were interviewed served in various capacities throughout their career in the local district. Positions served by principals include roles such as teachers, coaches, administrative assistants, learning directors, and assistant principals for a culmination of 200 years served in education by the nine participants. Between the nine school principals, they served a total of approximately 6,800 students and 720 staff members, including both certificated and classified staff, in schools with a large number of English Learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Each school principal was interviewed individually using semistructured questions aligned with the JD-R theory and the interview protocol (see Appendix B). Before the start of the interviews, participants provided informed consent for the virtual format, including recording and transcribing the sessions via Google Meet.

During the interviews, it became evident that the principals within this district exhibited a deep sense of commitment and dedication to their roles, often likened to “soldiers” driven by an intense passion for their work. Their investment in student achievement and success was profound, as they regarded student performance data as a direct reflection of their instructional practices and leadership capabilities. These principals consistently articulated the challenges they faced in balancing their responsibilities as instructional leaders with the operational demands of school management. Notably, all principals demonstrated a serious and unwavering sense of responsibility for their schools’ safety, culture, and academic outcomes.

Following the analysis of the semistructured interview responses, the development of themes emerged through a reflective and systematic process. I began

with open coding, meticulously reviewing each transcript and identifying recurring phrases and concepts. This initial phase facilitated the emergence of early themes rooted directly in the school principals' narratives. As patterns became evident, I transitioned to axial coding, linking related concepts and uncovering connections between them. Throughout this process, I remained attentive to contradictory or distinctive perspectives to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the data. This methodical approach of coding, categorizing, and continuously comparing data segments ultimately led to the construction of nuanced and representative themes that encapsulated the school principals' perceptions and experiences, addressing the research questions and aligning with the purpose of the study. Table 1 demonstrates the themes developed during the coding process and how they align to the research questions.

**Table 1***Research Questions and Themes*

| Research Question  | Themes  |
|--|---|
| What are principals' perception on their job satisfaction in a California school district?             | <p>Theme 1: School principals report high satisfaction when they are able to manage the "entirety" of the job</p> <p>Theme 2: School principals feel the most satisfied when they are in the role of an instructional leader vs. operational manager</p> <p>Theme 3: School principals are satisfied when there is a positive school culture</p> <p>Theme 4: School principals are satisfied within their jobs, when they have decreased stress levels</p> <p>Theme 5: School principals seek balance between their professional and personal life to maintain job satisfaction</p> |
| What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district | <p>Theme 6: District personnel and resources impacts school principals' job satisfaction</p> <p>Theme 7: School principals view professional development, leadership and time with colleagues as a resource to reduce job demands</p> <p>Theme 8: School principals want clarity and organization on district and site expectations</p> <p>Theme 9: School principals state that trusting relationships with supervisors' and feeling valued effects job satisfaction</p>   |

**Research Question 1**

What are principals' perception on their job satisfaction in a California school district? The interviews were used to answer both research questions. There were five themes that emerged for the first research question as shown in Table 1. Table 2 outlines the codes for themes 1-5, resulting from Research Question 1.

**Table 2***Themes 1-5 and Codes for Research Question 1: Perception on Job Satisfaction*

| Theme  | Code  |
|--|---|
| School principals report high satisfaction when they are able to manage the “entirety” of the job            | Managing many moving parts at once<br>Expectations<br>Deadlines<br>Parent, staff and student concerns<br>Decision-making<br>Student achievement<br>Vision |
| School principals feel satisfied when they are in the role of an instructional leader vs operational manager | Data conversations<br>Student learning<br>Multi-tasking<br>Ubiquitous capabilities<br>School safety<br>Emergency responder<br>Unpredictable variables     |
| School principals are satisfied when there is a positive school culture on campus                            | Staff opinions<br>Teacher Teams<br>Staff changes<br>Admin changes<br>Morale   |
| When school principals are satisfied within their jobs, they have decreased stress levels                    | Oversight<br>Metrics & Indicators<br>Personnel situations<br>Time of year<br>Student safety<br>Coping<br>Mindset  |
| School principals seek balance between their professional and personal life to maintain job satisfaction     | Intentional balance<br>Guilty<br>Boundaries<br>Physical and health impairment<br>Left overs<br>Balance<br>Rumination                                      |

**Theme 1: School principals report high satisfaction when they are able to manage the “entirety” of the job**

While all nine school principals are passionate about their work and deeply committed to their schools, they reported the complexity of trying to manage the “entirety” of the job due to the overwhelming scope of their responsibilities. The school principals expressed their desire to do their entire job and do it well. The sheer volume of tasks—ranging from instructional leadership and school management to addressing staff requests, student needs, parent demands and navigating policies—can make it difficult for principals to effectively manage every aspect of the job in the way that they would like. This can lead to frustration, as their passion for improving school outcomes is often hindered by time constraints and competing priorities. As a result, school principals may feel that they are unable to dedicate sufficient attention to the areas they care most about, contributing to decreased levels of job satisfaction.

P1 noted, “There’s moving pieces, many things happening at once, and you have oversight of all of that.” Part of the reality also is

...that schools may primarily be built for students to learn, but they serve all types of functions. Some of which are very far removed from learning, but they are still a community-based organization and you have to adhere to those parts too.

P3 discussed that the highest amount of the job demands include managing “all the things”.

Whether that is everything coming at you, all the expectations, deadlines, meetings and things popping off such as student needs and staff behaviors...the hardest part is juggling and trying to make everything function.

P2 shared how the enormity of a school principal's job differs from that of an assistant principal.

As an assistant principal, I felt my main goals were to support the programs and site-based needs of what my principal needed. As the principal, I definitely feel the demands of the district office. I am trying to meet the needs of my staff, students and families, and the buck stops here. I am the main decision maker with all of that.

P4 talked about the need for principals to be "everywhere at once", being in classrooms, planning for staff meetings, IEP meetings, covering classrooms while meeting all the expectations of attendance, interventions programs, and leading the charge with initiatives.

P6 emphasized that the principal's role has shifted to be more focused on the broader systemic objectives, "More driven by the big picture, and overarching themes such as student learning and achievement" rather than being primarily concerned with routine operational tasks, such as managing discipline. P7 highlighted those key demands of the role encompass facilitating professional development for teachers and closing the student achievement gaps. P8 expressed a deep emotional connection to student outcomes, stating that when students fail to perform or show growth, "It literally hurts me to my core." This statement underscores the profound personal and professional

investment educators often feel in the academic success and development of their students. Principals are viewed as central figures in shaping the strategic vision of both the school and the district.

**Theme 2: School principals feel satisfied when they are in the role of an instructional leader vs operational manager**

School principals experience greater satisfaction when functioning as instructional leaders rather than as operational managers. As instructional leaders, they can focus on enhancing teaching and learning, fostering professional development, and driving academic achievement, which aligns more closely with their core educational mission. In contrast, managing operational tasks, while essential, can feel less rewarding because it pulls them away from their primary mission of improving learning outcomes. For many principals, the ability to focus on instructional leadership brings a deeper sense of fulfillment.

In a reflective account, P2 described a day dedicated to meeting with teachers, during which the primary focus was reviewing educational data. P2 expressed a deep sense of fulfillment, noting that the interactions throughout the day were particularly meaningful. She highlighted the quality of conversations with the teachers, characterizing them as both engaging and insightful. The teachers, in turn, expressed gratitude for P2's commitment to spending the day with them, acknowledging the value of their time and expertise. P2 concluded by stating, "I was very inspired," underscoring the personal and professional impact of the experience.

P4 described one of the most significant challenges in their role is the constant demand to be present in multiple locations simultaneously. Much of their time is consumed by addressing the operational aspects of management, which, while essential, can detract from their primary focus. P4 noted the difficulty in balancing these responsibilities, stating, “The challenge is trying to be everywhere and still trying to keep instructional focus as the main part of my job.” P5 expressed, “School safety needs a lot of attention, and schools often go through seasons depending on student situations such as big issues, fights, gangs, and racial tension”. P7 articulated the responsibility of a school principal being the responder to emergency situations when they arise at a school. This could include health related situations, threats, crisis situations and personnel situations. “Instruction has always been on the forefront of my focus, but I feel like the demands of the job change based on variables that that are out of your control”.

I think the biggest thing honestly, if we really want to impact student learning is to do less. Everybody’s running around so fast... as fast as they can trying to figure out how they can get everything done. They are multi-tasking, cutting out somethings and doing somethings just good enough and still cannot get it all done.

The tension between the managerial and instructional components of school principals’ role, where the latter often requires deliberate attention amidst competing demands.

### **Theme 3: School principals are satisfied when there is a positive school culture on campus**

School culture plays in the overall success and satisfaction of school leaders. A positive school culture, characterized by strong relationships, collaboration, shared values, and a supportive environment, not only fosters student and staff well-being but also enhances a principal's sense of fulfillment and effectiveness in their role. When the school community embraces a culture of trust, respect, and open communication, principals are more likely to feel empowered and satisfied with their leadership, as these elements contribute to smoother operations, better student outcomes, and a sense of professional accomplishment. This theme underscores the intricate connection between school culture and the job satisfaction of principals, making it a vital area of focus in educational leadership research.

As a school principal there are people who agree with your decisions and at times there are people who disagree. P1: "You have to get comfortable with the idea that not everybody's going to like you. You try to build a strong culture. It is about doing the right thing." P5: Teachers working in isolation or teachers working as a team and collectively impacts culture".

When there are changes in a school such as staffing changes, or if leaders exit then the morale changes. The impact of not having that leader, takes a toll of different departments or different people. So, then culture becomes a concern and it's the same thing with academics, if you have a new department, a couple of new teachers or struggling teachers. All of these things impact school culture.

A positive school culture not only enhances principals' job satisfaction but also drives sustained commitment to fostering an environment where students and staff can thrive.

**Theme 4: When school principals are satisfied within their jobs, they have decreased stress levels**

School principals face significant stress due to the multifaceted demands of their roles, which can greatly influence their job satisfaction. The pressures of managing academic performance, staff dynamics, student behavior, and parental expectations create a complex working environment. Additionally, principals often deal with administrative tasks, budget constraints, and policy implementation, which contribute to the cumulative stress. P1 described the path of leadership as such:

The higher you go, the more oversight you have, the more stress it is. I have noticed the higher you go the more you have to put into healthy living otherwise, the stress of the job could kill a person and drive them to an early grave. You have to develop tools to manage stress.

They shared that the more students you have, the more metrics and indicators; therefore, the more you are responsible. The more offset you have, by nature, the job will get more stressful. "The stress in this job can be really bad. I've learned to manage it over the years, but it took some real serious dedication." P3 portrayed the following:

The biggest stressor is when there are staffing issues. It gets really frustrating trying to manage adults. Sometimes that causes me the greatest stress and frustration because I feel like that shouldn't be where any of my time or minimal time should be spent. It pulls me away from making sure students are doing well

in the classroom, the teachers have what they need and my energy is focused somewhere else where it should not be.

P6 shared that stress definitely has an impact on school principals. It lessens once you have a few years in the job because you know what to expect. Stress levels also vary depending on the time of year and when you have big activities or projects. During those times you have more things on your plate than you normally would.

If there is a student safety concern such as a threat or fight that day is very intense. I am on edge, but I do the best to keep myself calm and my team calm. Internally, I am feeling overwhelmed. We have an emotional response to what's happening in our school that we are responsible for.

P4 defined her role as a leader of the school and stated, "I know I don't need to know everything, but I feel like I need to know enough about everything in order to make decisions and sometimes things are moving so quickly". This impacts their stress levels tremendously. P2 shared that "I have to get myself into a better space because if I live in that stress and don't find way to cope with it, it's harder for me to function and see clearly what my vision is for my site and as a principal". P3 had to learn to manage her stress as it was significantly impacting her health. P7 shared that,

There are times that it is more stressful than others depending on whatever situation you're in, but I feel I have shifted my mindset this year. I am not letting things get to me as much as I would in the past. I am also probably more confident in my job; therefore, making decisions feels more consistent throughout time and people see who you are throughout time and it makes it easier.

**Theme 5: School principals seek balance between their professional and personal life to maintain job satisfaction.**

School principals often face the challenge of balancing their professional and personal lives, a crucial factor in maintaining job satisfaction. The demands of leadership, including managing staff, addressing student needs, meeting district goals, and navigating administrative responsibilities, create high levels of stress and time commitment. This can lead to burnout if not managed effectively. School principals who prioritize work-life balance are more likely to experience higher levels of job satisfaction, emotional well-being, and professional longevity. Strategies such as delegating responsibilities, setting boundaries, and practicing self-care are essential for sustaining both personal fulfillment and professional effectiveness.

In their pursuit of a healthy work-life balance, both P2 and P3 shared personal strategies to maintain well-being amidst the demands of their roles as school principals. P2 emphasized a proactive approach, “I try to hit the gym three to four days a week”. Incorporating regular physical exercise into their routine by going to the gym three to four times a week, while also intentionally making more time for family and engaging in enjoyable activities. P3, on the other hand, confronted health challenges that forced them to reevaluate their boundaries. They made a conscious decision to fully dedicate weekends and evenings to their family, even though it initially came with feelings of guilt. “I knew I couldn’t sustain so that was my turning point”. By minimizing work outside of regular hours and learning to prioritize tasks more effectively, P3 recognized that setting these limits was essential for sustainability, remarking that it was a turning

point in their ability to cope. Both participants highlighted the internal struggle of guilt when prioritizing personal time, yet acknowledged that carving out this space is necessary for long-term balance and job satisfaction.

P4 and P 8 expressed a deep passion for professional development activities, such as attending conferences, engaging with colleagues in meaningful conversations, and participating in professional organizations. These experiences contribute to their professional fulfillment and sense of connection within the field. However, P4 also revealed an ongoing struggle in balancing these professional commitments with their personal life. They acknowledged that despite their enjoyment of these activities, they often feel that their personal life receives what remains of their energy after work, rather than the best of their attention. “I always feel that I don’t give my personal life the best. I give them whatever is left over.” P1 deliberated on the thought,

I think that it is on us as each individual to learn to deal with the problems of the job that start to bleed over into the personal life. If you get stressed out at work, then you’re stressed out at home. I do wonder sometimes that maybe there is something that could be offered to the staff that are struggling, particularly, the administrative staff as lots of them seem to be struggling.

This tension highlights the challenge many school principals face in attempting to give their full effort both professionally and personally, as they navigate the demands of leadership while striving to maintain meaningful connections and fulfillment outside of work. This is a constant struggle for them as they try to make sure that they give their best both at work and at home in their personal life.

P7 described the intense demands of their role as a school principal, noting how the stress of the job began to manifest physically and emotionally. The pressure resulted in sleep disturbances and emotional turmoil, prompting them to pay close attention to the signals their body was sending. A key factor in managing this stress was the support of their spouse, who provided emotional backing during these challenging times. Despite these efforts, the demands of the position became overwhelming, ultimately leading P7 to switch jobs in order to reclaim a healthier work-life balance. Their experience underscores the importance of both external support systems and self-awareness in recognizing when professional responsibilities begin to encroach on personal well-being.

Both P1 and P9 shared similar experiences regarding the challenge of constantly taking work home, describing their roles as a 24/7 responsibility that makes it difficult to “turn their brains off.” The demands of their jobs as school principals, contribute to a relentless work cycle that encroaches on their personal time. They recognized that while the workload can feel overwhelming, working around the clock is unsustainable and ultimately detrimental to their well-being and job performance. Both participants emphasized the importance of prioritizing tasks, seeking balance, and intentionally stepping back from work in order to maintain health and become more effective in their professional roles. Their reflections highlight a shared realization that overworking can hinder their ability to be their best selves, underscoring the need for conscious boundaries to achieve both personal well-being and professional success.

## Research Question 2

What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district? The interviews were used to answer both research questions. There were four themes that emerged for the second research question as shown in Table 1. Table 3 outlines the codes for themes 1-4, resulting from Research Question 2.

**Table 3**

*Themes 6-9 and Codes for Research Question 2: Perception on Job Resources*

| Theme  | Code  |
|--|---|
| District personnel and resources impacts school principals' job satisfaction   | Responsive<br>Supportive<br>Boots on the ground<br>Supports<br>Staff additions<br>Collaboration |
| School principals view professional development, leadership and time with colleagues as a resource to reduce job demands | Conferences<br>Collegial support<br>Professional Development                                    |
| School principals want clarity and organization on district and site expectations  | Communication<br>Purpose<br>Clarity   |
| School principals state that trusting relationships with supervisors' and feeling valued effects job satisfaction        | Trust<br>Valued<br>Recognized<br>Personal<br>Connection   |

### **Theme 6: District personnel and resources impacts school principals' job satisfaction**

The job satisfaction of school principals is a critical factor in the effectiveness of educational leadership and overall school success. Among the various factors influencing this satisfaction, district personnel and resource allocation play a pivotal role. Effective support from district staff, including clear communication, professional development opportunities, and timely responses to school needs, can significantly enhance a

principal's ability to manage school operations, improve student outcomes, and foster a positive school climate. Conversely, inadequate resources or insufficient district-level support can lead to job dissatisfaction, burnout, and higher turnover rates among principals. Understanding the dynamic between district support systems and principals' job satisfaction is essential for developing strategies that promote leadership stability and improve educational environments across school districts. This research seeks to explore how district personnel and resources influence school principals' satisfaction based on resources, with implications for policy, leadership development, and resource management.

All school principals reported a high degree of satisfaction with the resources provided by the district office. They emphasized that the support and resources significantly enhance their overall job satisfaction. School principals shared that the district office is responsive in a timely manner on calls. P1 shared that, "The individuals, at the district office are real boots on the ground, and they'll get out there and call you back right away to meet with you and provide guidance. They treat students really well."

Correspondingly, P2 mentioned that, "They say call us when you need them, and they really mean it because when I have reached out, I've always felt very supported."

The school principals mentioned their appreciation for the variety of resources that are available for both students and staff such as the following: MTSS supports, PBIS supports, Student Support Assistants, Community Liaisons, Coaches, Program Specialists, Coordinators, Directors Assistant Superintendents, and just the overall leadership. Several participants also noted that they had previously left other districts to

join the one in which this study was conducted, citing the superior levels of support provided as a key factor in their decision. P3 mentioned the following:

I think our district is really supportive, and I feel very fortunate because I know that's not the case everywhere. This helps lessen the stress. The district personnel are also good at not only offering support when called upon; however, I feel like they are good about even asking us what we need all the time. We provide feedback, they hear it because there's changes that happen. So, I feel very supported.

P7 communicated, "I feel like there's a lot of people, and if I call someone or I email someone, I can get help quickly with something that I may need. I really it because it's the people that matter". The amount of help and timely response makes one feel that they are valued and that their concerns matter.

While the resources provided by the district office contribute positively to the school principals' roles and enhance their productivity, two specific areas of need were identified. Several school principals emphasized that the addition of an assistant principal would alleviate their workload and improve overall school operations. As P2 explained, "If there's an assistant principal, they could help share whatever is going on when I'm in meetings all day." Another principal echoed this sentiment, stating, "Just having another person to hear out and collaborate with would be nice, to have that connectedness with another person." P7 further elaborated:

If you have more people, your workload would lessen a little bit. I would say even additional counseling support, more than anything, and mental health support in

real-time. If I'm wanting to be in classrooms more, than having more support with students in lifetime issues would help.

As the district allocates additional resources, there are accompanying responsibilities that school principals must navigate. "The resources put me in a better place to know that the students have their resources, but then there are all sorts of demands around those resources". These demands include requirements such as surveys, feedback collection, progress check-ins, and pressure to meet set expectations, which can mitigate the positive impacts of the provided resources. The respondent further elaborated, describing the situation, "It is a mixed bag" acknowledging both the benefits and challenges associated with these resources.

**Theme 7: School principals view professional development, leadership and time with colleagues as a resource to reduce job demands**

School principals often view professional development, leadership, and time with colleagues as essential resources to help reduce the job demands they face. When principals have access to these resources, they are better equipped to manage stress, improve school culture, and achieve positive outcomes, contributing to reduced job demands overall.

P1 expressed appreciation for the district's efforts in supporting professional development by sending the administrative team to a conference. "I do think that our school district, does a bit more than some others". Similarly, P8 discussed their commitment to personal and professional growth, stating, "I want to do better, so I'll reach out and connect with colleagues so that I am able to grow professionally and

support my staff and students. The pressure of student performance is there, and I want to do better for my students”. P8 emphasized the ongoing pursuit of professional development opportunities for teachers reflecting a proactive approach to enhancing instructional effectiveness.

School principals recognize that access to professional development, collaborative leadership, and collegial support are vital resources in mitigating job demands. These elements not only empower principals to manage the pressures associated with their roles but also reinforce their commitment to personal growth and improved instructional practices, ultimately benefiting both staff and students.

### **Theme 8: School principals want clarity and organization on district and site expectations**

School principals consistently seek clarity and organization regarding district and site expectations, as these are foundational to effective leadership and the efficient operation of their schools. Clear, organized directives enable principals to align their actions with district goals, prioritize tasks, and allocate resources more strategically, ultimately enhancing school performance. When expectations are communicated in a structured and consistent manner, principals are better positioned to lead with confidence, reduce ambiguity for their teams, and focus on instructional and operational priorities. This clarity not only strengthens principals’ ability to fulfill their roles but also supports a cohesive and collaborative environment that benefits both staff and students. P5 discussed,

When you don't have enough communication or enough training, those things impact my stress level. If I can't get a hold of someone, someone's not forthcoming, or we haven't really understood a new process, but we're expected to use it right way, they end up becoming stressful and not useful. Sometimes when we change direction or when we're not clear that impacts my stress level.

P9 highlighted, "When I think of my resources, I'm really thinking of people, clarity, time and trust. If I have those things, it directly impacts my job satisfaction". Similarly, P6 emphasized the value of structured supports through district-led principal meetings, describing various meeting formats and their distinct purposes. For instance, "We have our lunch and learns where we can actually look at data and do the work in real time".

The clear objective and focused goals of these meetings make them invaluable resources, proving school principals with actionable insights and reinforcing their capacity to lead effectively. When district and site expectations are communicated with clarity and structured organization, principals can lead with greater confidence and focus. This alignment not only enhances their effectiveness but also strengthens the school's capacity to achieve shared goals, creating a more productive and supportive environment for staff and students alike. These supports not only increase job satisfaction but also empower principals to lead their schools with greater clarity and focus, ultimately benefiting the entire school community.

**Theme 9: School principals state that trusting relationships with supervisors' and feeling valued effects job satisfaction**

School principals report that trusting relationships with their supervisors and a strong sense of being valued are resources that are pivotal to their job satisfaction. These relationships provide a foundation of support, enabling principals to navigate the complexities of their roles with greater assurance and confidence. When principals feel recognized and respected by district leadership, their commitment to their schools and their capacity for effective leadership are significantly enhanced, contributing to a positive and sustainable work environment.

P2 remarked, "I appreciate our leadership at the district office level. They're very personal; they say call us when you need us and they really mean it". Likewise, P4 acknowledged, "My peers are amazing, my other principal friends, as well as our district office". P5 highlighted the support system available through both the district and their fellow principals. "I have my principals that we meet and gather for connection and resources." Establishing good, trusting relationships with supervisors fosters a comfortable environment during meetings, which is essential for open communication and collaboration. Conversely, a lack of trust can lead to feelings of isolation, preventing individuals from expressing their concerns or seeking resources. As P5 articulated, "When it doesn't exist, you isolate. You keep your feelings inside or you don't ask for help. If I enjoy my supervisor, it directly impacts my job satisfaction", underscoring the significant role those positive relationships play in enhancing overall job satisfaction among school principals.

### **Discrepant Cases**

In qualitative research, discrepant cases refer to instances where participants' responses deviate from or challenge the dominant themes emerging from data analysis. Although no such cases arose in this study, the research methodology was designed to address any potential discrepancies by examining and integrating all participant perspectives, should they arise. This approach ensures that unique responses are not overlooked and that the analysis remains thorough and unbiased. If any responses had been markedly different from others, they would have been included in the findings, with detailed analysis provided to understand how and why they diverged from prevailing patterns. This process highlights the importance of accounting for diverse perspectives, as discrepant cases can offer valuable insights, potentially enhancing the robustness of the study's conclusions by exposing alternative viewpoints. While no discrepant cases were present, the study's framework upheld rigorous standards for transparency and inclusivity in data interpretation.

### **Limitations**

This study was limited to the perspectives of school principals within a single TK-12 school district in California. The relatively small sample size, consisting of six elementary (TK-6), two junior high, and one high school principal, further restricts the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, variations in the length of tenure among principals posed a limitation, as differing levels of experience may influence perceptions and responses. The timing of data collection within the academic calendar presents a potential limitation to this study. Variations in workload and stress levels across different

months of the school year may influence participants' responses. For example, periods associated with high-stakes testing, end-of-term reporting, or significant administrative tasks may yield different insights compared to less demanding times. These fluctuations could impact the generalizability of the findings, as responses may reflect the temporal demands of the academic calendar rather than broader, consistent experiences of job satisfaction and resource availability. These factors should be considered when interpreting the findings, as they may impact the extent to which the results can be applied to other contexts or school districts.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this research study was to gain a deeper understanding of school principals' perceptions regarding their job satisfaction. To achieve this, semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit insights from the principals about the factors that contribute to their job satisfaction and the components they identify as essential job resources. The nine participating school principals provided valuable perspectives and reflections on their experiences related to job satisfaction and available resources within their roles.

Research Question 1 was: What are principals' perception on their job satisfaction in a California school district? The data indicated that several specific factors significantly influence these perceptions. The five key aspects of job satisfaction identified are: managing the "entirety" of their job; fulfilling the role of instructional leaders rather than merely an operational managers; maintaining a positive school

culture; managing stress levels and proactively seeking a balance between their professional and personal life to maintain their job satisfaction.

Research Question 2 was: What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district? Four themes emerged. School principals declared that the support of district personnel and resources; the availability of professional development provided by the district, effective leadership, time spent with colleagues; clarity and organization of expectations at both the district and site levels and the presence of trusting relationships with supervisors, coupled with a sense of being valued were key contributing resources for their job satisfaction.

## Section 3: The Project

### **Introduction**

Based on the findings, I created a white paper (see Appendix C) for school principals and district administrators that will assist in increasing job satisfaction and job resources for school principal retention and occupational health and safety. The purpose of a white paper is to present well-researched, authoritative information on a specific issue, often to inform decision-making and provide solutions. Typically aimed at an audience of stakeholders, policymakers, or leadership, a white paper:

1. **Explains a Complex Issue:** It provides background and insights into a particular problem or topic, breaking down complex information into an understandable format.
2. **Proposes Solutions:** A white paper often includes recommendations or actionable steps to address the issue, aiming to drive informed decision-making.
3. **Persuades or Advocates:** Through a structured argument, it aims to persuade the audience about the importance of the issue and why the proposed solutions are viable.
4. **Supports Decision-Making:** By presenting data, research findings, and expert insights, a white paper serves as a resource for leaders or decision-makers to develop informed policies.

## **Rationale**

This qualitative study examined school principals' perceptions of job satisfaction and the resources they deem necessary to meet their roles' demands within a California school district. Using a semistructured interview approach, nine school principals offered valuable insights into the factors impacting their job satisfaction and resource needs. Findings from this research highlight the challenges school principals face in their professional responsibilities and identify resources that could enhance principal retention, occupational health, and overall safety. A white paper was chosen as the format for presenting this study's findings to district administrators, as it allows for a focused and persuasive presentation of the issue's significance, offers research-supported insights, and provides actionable recommendations aimed at improving support for school principals. The content of this white paper will be presented to TK-12 school principals and district administrators with the objective of informing strategies to effectively support school principals in their efforts to enhance student outcomes.

## **Review of Literature**

In this literature review, I sought to support a high-quality research project by incorporating scholarly, peer-reviewed articles. Databases such as ProQuest and ERIC, accessed via the Walden University online library, as well as Google Scholar, were used to locate current and relevant studies. Keyword search terms and phrases included *principal job satisfaction, leadership resources, leadership efficacy, principal retention, organizational support, and work-life balance*. These terms were selected to capture

research focused on factors influencing school principals' perceptions of their roles and the resources necessary to support their professional demands.

### **Turnover Reasons**

There has been national attention to the crisis of teacher retention, in addition, principal turnover is also high. The average turnover for principals is 18%. The more concerning fact is that 35% of principals have been at their schools for less than two years. Turnover with school leadership disrupts school improvement efforts, staff climate, staff morale, teacher retention, and student achievement (Cieminski & Asmus, 2023).

The role of the school principal has grown increasingly intricate, evolving into a position that demands a high degree of expertise from those who serve to fulfill it effectively. This shift has intensified the complexities of leadership, with principals now expected to function not only as instructional leaders but also as business managers, community engagement specialists, data analysts, and promoters of their schools. Despite this expanded scope, the structural design of the position and the level of institutional support provided have remained largely unchanged from previous decades (Buckman & Sloan, 2022).

### **Potential Solutions**

There are five mechanisms for improving principals' job satisfaction and, in turn, the retention of principals that can add necessary resources to principals: improve principals' working conditions, increase their decision-making autonomy, ensure

sufficient compensation, decrease counterproductive accountability practices, and provide meaningful and high-quality professional development (Sutton, 2021).

### **Professional Development**

By implementing robust professional development, developing leadership preparation programs (such as “grow your own” initiatives), and establishing comprehensive support structures, school districts can enhance principals’ retention prospects (Donley et al., 2019). Moreover, access to internships, mentorship, and well-structured preparatory programs significantly lower principals’ intentions to leave their roles. Programs that specifically prepare principals for the demands of high-need schools, coupled with ongoing support and professional development for those in leadership, are shown to increase the likelihood of retaining effective principals in these challenging environments (Buckman & Sloan, 2022). According to a study conducted by Hussain et al., (2021), higher quality principals are less likely to leave their schools. Principal turnover is not driven by higher quality principals.

### **Self-Care**

School principal’s jobs are increasingly complex, demanding, and high-pressure positions in which decision-making is critical to success. With this in mind, self-care and self-preservation are necessary to counterbalance the load administrators place on themselves in pursuit of success for their schools. Biological and emotional states affect decision-making (Ray et al., 2020). The findings of a study with 473 Arkansas principals in the workforce revealed that 40% are sleep deprived, 62% are at least 15 pounds overweight, over 80% go one day a week or more without any meals during their

workday, 80% are not getting enough water, 86% get less than the recommended amount of exercise, 47% never engage in meditative practices, and 80% spend less than three hours a day with their family (Ray et al., 2020). School leaders confront a multitude of complex, cognitively demanding decisions, without their basic personal care of optimum cognitive functioning, this can be very challenging. According to Levin and Bradley (2019), principal supervisors or district administrators should collaboratively lead principals in facilitating and supporting the improvement in teaching and learning.

Work intensification among school principals is evidenced in their increased workload, work demand and expectation to improve student achievement. The health and well-being of school leaders is an issue of growing concern around the world (Cousin et al., 2021) School principals are working longer and averaging 55 hours per week and perceive these demands to be normal. Walker (2019) examined a case with a principal's workload and well-being issues. There are four best practices that a school's doctor recommends to create a better work-life balance to successfully manage school and better health well-being: understanding the issues, identifying the challenges and solutions, being proactive, and identifying and implementing best practices (Walker, 2019). Restoring and replenishing energy is crucial to best practices.

### **Working Conditions**

Organizational culture plays a crucial role in management, significantly enhancing employees' working conditions and thereby contributing to overall organizational effectiveness. It is important to note that quality improvement is closely linked to the nature of organizational culture. Flexible organizational cultures, in

particular, foster the adoption of participatory management models, which, in turn, promote quality improvements within the organization (Bernardes et al., 2020). For school districts to foster an effective organizational culture, it is essential to recognize that leaders with high emotional intelligence are better equipped to guide their teams toward positive cultural development within the workplace.

### **Leadership**

Both organizational culture and transformational leadership are closely linked to organizational effectiveness. Transformational leaders effectively motivate their staff toward shared goals, and those who also demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence have an added advantage in cultivating a workplace culture that values emotional well-being. This approach strengthens organizational cohesion and enhances the organization's overall effectiveness (Diamantidou et al., 2024).

Falls and Allen (2020) highlight how middle managers, such as school principals, often occupy complex, dual roles that demand flexibility and self-awareness. Positioned between upper management and frontline staff, principals frequently serve as intermediaries, balancing the implementation of top-level mandates with the need to build and maintain trust with their teams. As agents of change, they are responsible for translating strategic objectives into actionable steps, requiring them to alternate between leading and following fluidly. The authors underscore that this dual role can be particularly challenging, as it necessitates the ability to prioritize institutional goals while addressing the immediate concerns of staff. Successful navigation of these roles is contingent on the leader's capacity to engage in active listening, demonstrate humility,

and foster a responsive, communicative environment. Falls and Allen ultimately advocate for professional development that enhances leaders' ability to engage in these transitions, as such skills are critical in fostering organizational cohesion and adaptability (Falls & Allen, 2020).

### **Project Description**

The purpose of this white paper project was to provide district administrators with a comprehensive overview of the key themes related to school principals' job satisfaction and job resources, as identified through qualitative interviews with current school principals. Additionally, the white paper offers evidence-based recommendations for developing and implementing strategies that can effectively support school principal retention at school sites and within the district.

A debrief session will be scheduled with district administrators to serve as a foundational overview of the project study. During the session, district administrators will explore the school principal's perspectives on job satisfaction and job resources and essential support needed for their continued commitment to their roles. This initial session will provide a foundational overview of the study's findings, exploring the primary themes contributing to principal satisfaction, such as leadership purpose and autonomy, positive school culture, manageable stress levels, and a balanced work-life interface. District administrators will also review essential resource needs, including district-level support, role expectations clarity, professional development access, and collaborative opportunities with peers and supervisors. Following this overview, district

administrators will receive actionable insights aligned with the study's identified retention factors.

### **Project Evaluation Plan**

After presenting the white paper recommendations, school district leaders will complete a reflective survey (see Appendix D). The survey will include four questions. Question 1 asks district leaders to assess the relevance of the themes presented in this study. Question 2 asks district leaders to identify which themes they believe to be most critical to address in offering to improve principals' job satisfaction. Question 3 asks district leaders to specify the recommendations they are considering or have already started implementing. Question 4 allows district leaders to identify any challenges they foresee in implementing the recommendations.

### **Project Implications**

The implications of this project are significant for the field of educational leadership and school administration. By addressing the critical factors affecting school principals' job satisfaction and identifying essential resources to reduce job demands, the white paper provides actionable strategies for district leaders to create a more supportive and sustainable work environment for principals. Implementing these recommendations can lead to improved job satisfaction among school principals, reducing burnout and turnover rates, fostering greater stability and effectiveness within schools. Furthermore, by emphasizing the importance of a positive school culture, clear expectations, professional development, and trusting relationships, the project promotes a holistic approach to leadership support that can ultimately enhance student outcomes and

contribute to long-term positive social change in education systems. Additional research will be needed in order to determine what recommendations were effective and which were ineffective in improving school principals' job satisfaction.

## Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore school principals' perceptions of their job satisfaction in a school district in California. As a result, I gained deeper insight into their job satisfaction and what drives school principals to do what they do each and every day. In section 4, I present my reflections and conclusions. In addition, I present the project's strengths and limitations and recommendations for alternative approaches, and I conclude with implications, applications, and directions for future research.

### **Project Strengths and Limitations**

The development of this white paper serves as a significant strength of this project, as it is grounded in research aimed at addressing the pervasive issues of school principal burnout and fatigue in the educational field. The paper provides evidence-based insights to help TK-12 school principals and district administrators foster supportive environments that may contribute to improved student outcomes. A key strength of the paper lies in its potential to support positive social change by equipping district leaders with strategies to enhance principal retention. Furthermore, the white paper includes a comprehensive list of recommendations for administrators to better address the emotional strain, physical health concerns, and mental fatigue that school principals often face, thereby fostering a more sustainable work environment for these leaders.

The first limitation of the white paper is the timeframe for presenting its content to TK-12 school principals and district administrators in a single setting in the district of study. The second limitation is the availability of the attendees to be present at the

scheduled time of reflection. The third limitation is the applicability of the content in other public-school districts.

### **Recommendations for Alternative Approaches**

A white paper was selected as the preferred deliverable for this project due to its succinct effectiveness in equipping school and district administrators with critical skills and knowledge necessary for impactful leadership and educational management. While an evaluation report was considered, it was ultimately deemed unsuitable. Evaluation reports, defined as structured, systematic assessments of a program's effectiveness and impact (LaDonna et al., 2021), were inappropriate given that the study's focus was not on analyzing current trends in a designated program. Instead, the study aimed to build administrative support systems that foster job satisfaction among school principals. Similarly, a curriculum plan was rejected as a deliverable, as the study did not involve curriculum development. Finally, a policy recommendation, defined as transforming research findings into actionable recommendations for policymakers (Mukherjee et al., 2021), was considered inappropriate, as this study did not seek to propose a new policy for the school context.

### **Scholarship**

Through a rigorous scholarly process, I gained substantial expertise in research methodology, particularly in conducting interviews and employing active listening techniques to capture authentic participant perspectives. I acquired valuable knowledge about qualitative research practices, particularly in conducting interviews with school principals and actively listening to capture their nuanced perspectives on job satisfaction

and job resources, and their well-being. This experience deepened my understanding of principals' need to maintain a healthy balance between professional and personal life to be more effective as a leader. Additionally, I developed competencies in designing and implementing a research-based white paper tailored to district leaders, incorporating key principles of andragogy. This process gave me a nuanced understanding of effective adult learning practices, which I am committed to applying professionally.

### **Project Development and Evaluation**

When I began my academic journey at Walden University, I was driven by a passion to explore ways to support school principals through rigorous research. With 24 years of experience across diverse roles in education—including teacher, learning director, assistant principal, and principal—I have witnessed profound shifts in the field. Once regarded as highly desirable, school administration roles now face increasing challenges, diminishing their popularity among educators. Nevertheless, confident and empowered school principals are crucial for establishing environments that underpin effective 21st-century teaching (Dube, 2023).

In addition to recognizing these changes within the educational landscape, my interactions with school principals highlighted their dedication and passion and a common struggle to maintain work-life balance and healthy well-being. School principals today are tasked with navigating a rapidly evolving educational environment and implementing equitable practices that prioritize student learning (Neeske Van Den Bool-Muilenburg, 2024). Principals are often caught in the complexities of their roles, balancing time and resources to optimize student outcomes. School principals report

spending substantial time outside traditional school hours addressing administrative responsibilities, maintaining visibility at school and community events, and staying accessible via email and social media platforms (Reid & Creed, 2023). Achieving a sustainable work-life balance is critical for principals to maintain effectiveness and longevity in their leadership roles and their own well-being.

### **Leadership and Change**

I designed this project to foster a deeper understanding among educational stakeholders on how collaborative efforts can enhance school principal retention, ultimately leading to improved student outcomes. Through this study, my understanding of effective organizational leadership and change management has evolved considerably. These newfound insights will enhance my leadership capabilities, enabling me to integrate research findings into initiatives designed to improve and address a variety of educational challenges. My approach to leadership will be transformed as I continue to share and apply the knowledge gained from this research project.

Throughout the research process, I engaged in ongoing reflection and revision of my methods, recognizing the importance of critically examining and refining my problem-solving strategies. As I disseminate the research-based solutions and apply the new skills acquired, the transformation in my leadership will be evident. This continuous process of sharing insights and applying evidence-based practices will undoubtedly shape the direction of my future educational initiatives and support of colleagues. Moving forward, I am committed to utilizing these research skills to identify, analyze, and address

challenges within education, positioning myself as a proactive advocate for evidence-based solutions that support sustainable leadership and positive school culture.

### **Reflection on Importance of the Work**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore school principals' perceptions of job satisfaction and job resources within a California school district. Understanding these perceptions is crucial, as it may contribute to improved retention rates, thereby reducing costs associated with hiring and training new personnel. Additionally, fostering a positive work environment for principals can enhance school culture and ultimately, improve student outcomes. By examining the factors that influence principals' job satisfaction and the resources they deem essential for success, this project study seeks to provide actionable insights for district leaders aiming to support and retain effective school leadership.

### **Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research**

Since 2016, the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics has reported that over 270,000 teachers leave the profession annually, a trend that may persist through 2026 (American University, 2021; Howe, 2021). This attrition poses a significant challenge for school districts and early childhood education environments, which require adequate staffing to accommodate the growing number of children enrolling in these institutions and facilities (De Los Santos, 2023). In addition, the issue of principal attrition raises significant concerns regarding the diminishing number of individuals entering school administration. This project study highlights the potential for social change by examining school principals' perceptions of job satisfaction and job resources. The focus was on

understanding the concerns of principals and identifying strategies to enhance principal retention. The action plans developed from this study's findings hold promise for positively impacting both school principals and district administrators by addressing key issues related to leadership sustainability.

Future research could expand on this study by exploring how principals' perceptions of job satisfaction and resources vary across different school districts, and whether these perceptions align or differ in comparison to the study site. Additionally, future studies could assess the implementation of this project's action plans and strategies to evaluate their effectiveness, feasibility, and adaptability in diverse educational contexts. This would provide valuable insights into the broader applicability of the findings and the potential for systemic improvements in principal retention and leadership development.

### **Conclusion**

This study delves into school administration's complex and multi-dimensional landscape, shedding light on the diverse factors that shape school principals' job satisfaction and access to job resources within a California school district. The findings underscore the pivotal role of job resources as motivators, consistent with the job demands-resource theory, in enhancing job satisfaction and retention among principals. School principals value supportive leadership, clearly defined expectations, a collaborative school culture, and professional development opportunities aligned with their unique needs and aspirations. Furthermore, they find fulfillment in their roles as instructional leaders within their schools.

The study also emphasizes the importance of respect, feeling valued, managing stress, and achieving a balanced work-life dynamic in fostering job satisfaction. These insights point to the need for school and district administrators to adopt targeted strategies that strengthen school principal retention and, in turn, support student success and a sustainable educational environment. By contributing to the existing body of knowledge, this study lays the groundwork for actionable improvements in educational practices and policies at both local and broader levels.

Building on these insights, the implementation plan from this study encourages school and district administrators to employ evidence-based strategies with increased intensity to address school principal job satisfaction, ultimately promoting enhanced student outcomes. As a facilitator of positive change, my role will involve presenting this project to the school and district leadership teams to foster informed, strategic action.

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## Appendix A: Recruiting Email

Subject line:

Interviewing K-12 School Principals

Email message:

There is a new study to explore the perception of K-12 school principal's job satisfaction to better understand and help their role. For this study, you are invited to describe your experiences as a school principal as related to job satisfaction and job resources. About the study:

- One approximately 60 minute Zoom or in-person interview that will be audio recorded (no videorecording)
- To protect your privacy, the published study will not share any names or details that identify you

Volunteers must meet these requirements:

- K-12 School Principal
- 3 years of service

This interview is part of the doctoral study for Arti Narayan, an Ed.D. student at Walden University. Interviews will take place during Sept - Oct. If you are interested in participating in this study, please email privately to let the researcher know of your interest. Please include your phone number so that the researcher can then contact you to set up a meeting time for the interview.

Thank you for your time and considerations,

Arti

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

## Preliminary Information

1. What is your name and title?
2. How many years have you been a principal?
3. Tell me about your school.
4. Tell me about your career.

## Job Satisfaction

5. What are the highest demands of your job?
6. How have your demands changed over time?
7. How does the job demands impact your stress level?
8. How does the job demands impact your health?
9. How does the job demands impact your professional and personal time?
10. How does your job demands impact your job satisfaction?

## Job Resources

11. What resources are you provided with for your job demands?
12. What 1-2 resources would help reduce your job demands?
13. How does your job resources impact your stress level?
14. How does your job resources impact your health?
15. How does your job resources impact your professional and personal time?
16. How does your job resources impact your satisfaction and motivation for your job?
17. Do you have any last thoughts of any of our questions?

## Appendix C: White Paper

### **School Principals: Addressing Job Satisfaction and Resource Needs**

#### **(a) Executive Summary**

School principals are critical to the success of schools, impacting both student outcomes and school culture. Their roles often encompass a wide range of responsibilities that can affect their job satisfaction. This white paper provides insights from a qualitative study into school principals' perspectives on job satisfaction and job resources necessary to manage their roles effectively. Guided by the research questions outlined below, the findings identified core themes that provide insight into what drives job satisfaction among school principals and the job resources they consider essential to meet the demands of their positions.

#### **(b) Background**

The qualitative study explored TK-12 grade school principals' perceptions on job satisfaction and their perceptions on job resources in a California school district. The conceptual framework referenced through this study was the Job Demands-Resource theory (JD-R). The job demands-resources framework is widely applied in assessing factors that influence job satisfaction and well-being, including in educational leadership roles (Schaufeli, 2017). JD-R theory, supported by meta-analyses, predicts employee well-being, behavior, and performance by examining working conditions as job demands or resources. Job demands—such as physical, social, psychological, and organizational components—require significant mental and physical efforts, often leading to adverse outcomes. In contrast, job resources, which include supportive physical, social,

psychological, and organizational aspects, help employees fulfill their responsibilities, fostering engagement and well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017). The JD-R framework describes two primary processes: the health impairment process, where high job demands (e.g., complex problems, email overload) deplete cognitive and emotional resources over time, leading to fatigue and potential health issues, and the motivational process, where job resources (e.g., decision latitude, time control) enhance engagement and improve performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2024).

Nine primary themes were identified by the nine participants who highlighted both what contributes to principals' job satisfaction and the job resources they believe are essential to meet the demands of their roles.

**(c) Research Questions**

This study seeks to understand school principals' perceptions of:

Job Satisfaction – What are principals' perception on their job satisfaction in a California school district?

Job Resources – What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district?

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**Research Findings and District Recommendations**

1. Research Question 1: What are school principals' perception on their job satisfaction in a California school district?
  - Theme 1: Satisfaction through Managing the “Entirety” of the Job

- Finding: Principals report satisfaction when they manage the “entirety” of their role effectively.
  - Recommendations: Streamline responsibilities by providing administrative support to handle non-instructional tasks, allowing school principals to focus on holistic leadership (Jackson et. Al., 2021).
  - Prioritize critical responsibilities for school principals.
  - Emphasize essential functions that school principals must undertake.
  - Provide support, policies, and best practices that could help meet the demands for increasing visibility while also protecting principals’ time (Reid & Creed, 2023).
  - Minimize administrative roadblocks and allow more autonomy.
  - Assess recruitment processes to verify that hires demonstrate the qualifications and skills required to meet job demands proficiently (Buckman & Sloan, 2022).
- Theme 2: Instructional Leadership vs. Operational Management
- Finding: Principals feel fulfilled when functioning as instructional leaders rather than focusing primarily on operational tasks.
  - Recommendations: Prioritize professional development in instructional leadership (McBrayer et al., 2020).
  - Adjust job descriptions to balance instructional and operational duties.
  - Reduce operational demands on school principals and create structures that allow them to focus on instructional leadership.

- \*Allocate additional administrative support to manage non-instructional tasks.
  - Prioritize the hiring of personnel who possess the essential competencies for critical thinking, effectively navigating conflict management and performing in the 21st-century workforce.
- Theme 3: Positive School Culture
- Finding: Job satisfaction is heightened in environments with a positive, collaborative culture.
  - Recommendations: Facilitate initiatives like regular community-building activities, shared decision-making committees, and recognize school-wide achievements to strengthen school culture (Holzberger & Schiepe-Tiska, 2021).
  - Involve school principals in district-level decisions that affect school culture could strengthen their commitment to fostering positive environments.
  - Encourage school principals to meet staff demands and prioritize school culture-building activities and provide resources to support efforts such as team-building workshops and diversity training.
  - \*Allocate dedicated time and resources, including access to consultants, to support initiatives focused on building and sustaining a positive school culture.

- Prioritize the recruitment of individuals with high levels of emotional intelligence, empathy and interpersonal skills to foster and sustain a positive organizational culture (Diamantidou, 2024).
- Theme 4: Stress Management
  - Finding: Lower stress levels are directly correlated with greater job satisfaction.
  - Recommendations: Offer stress management resources such as counseling services, wellness programs (Pollock et al., 2019).
  - Provide a realistic scope of responsibilities to minimize burnout.
  - Establish regular feedback sessions with school principals to identify sources of stress and collaboratively develop targeted solutions.
  - Promote workload management strategies by offering training on task prioritization and effective time management.
- Theme 5: Professional and Personal Life Balance
  - Finding: Balancing professional and personal lives is key to maintaining job satisfaction.
  - Recommendations: Consider flexible scheduling options where feasible and advocate for reasonable work hours to promote a balanced lifestyle (Dong, 2022).
  - Implement policies that respect boundaries for after-hours communication.
  - Offer personal leave options and promote a culture of self-care (Walker, 2019).

- \*Evaluate the potential for hiring additional staff to achieve a more equitable distribution of workload among existing personnel.
2. Research Questions 2: What are principals' perceptions on required resources to meet demands in a California school district?
- Theme 6: Access to District Personnel and Resources
    - Finding: District-provided resources are fundamental to job satisfaction.
    - Recommendations: Ensure consistent access to necessary resources to reduce school principals' stress and support school operations (Capp et al., 2022).
    - Ensure the provision of timely and constructive communication and guidance from district leadership.
    - Incorporate feedback, ideas, and input from school principals into decision-making processes, thereby demonstrating responsiveness through meaningful organizational change.
    - Lead as transformational leaders with high levels of emotional intelligence to effectively motivate school principals toward shared goals, and in cultivating a workplace culture that values emotional well-being (Diamantidou et al., 2024).
  - Theme 7: Professional Development and Peer Collaboration
    - Finding: School principals' benefit from development opportunities and networking with peers.

- Recommendation: Establish structured professional development, leadership retreats, and regular meetings to foster learning and collaboration among school principals (Wells et al., 2021).
- Provide training, support and mentorship for school principals (Doss et al, 2022).
- Theme 8: Clarity and Organization of District and Site Expectations
  - Finding: Clear, organized expectations from the district improve job satisfaction.
  - Recommendations: Develop an organizational framework that defines district and site expectations (Richard & Cosner, 2024).
  - Establish regular and clear, accessible channels for communication.
- Theme 9: Trust and Value in Relationships with Supervisors
  - Finding: Trust and appreciation from supervisors are crucial to school principals' job satisfaction.
  - Recommendation: Encourage supervisors to build trust with principals through transparent communication and regular check-ins (Van Nieuwerburgh et al., 2020).
  - Recognize and celebrate principals' achievements, providing motivation for continued excellence and growth.

## Conclusion

School principals make a difference in student outcomes, and turnover is detrimental to not only the school culture but student achievement as well. District

administrators should build a strong foundation for stronger schools and principal retention from a supportive and learning-focused approach (Cieminski, 2023). The recommendations in this white paper are aimed at enhancing support, reducing stress and providing the necessary resources for school principals to thrive. Implementing these suggestions will not only increase job satisfaction among school principals but also positively impact the schools they lead and, ultimately, the educational outcomes of students

*\*Anything with a financial obligation\**

## Appendix D: Reflective Survey

## Survey Questions:

1. How relevant do you find the themes and findings presented in this white paper to the current challenges faced by school principals in your district?
2. Which themes do you believe are the most critical to address to improve school principals' job satisfaction?
  - Theme 1: Managing the entirety of the job
  - Theme 2: Instructional leadership vs. operational management
  - Theme 3: Positive school culture
  - Theme 4: Decrease stress levels
  - Theme 5: Professional and personal life balance
  - Theme 6: District personnel and resources
  - Theme 7: Professional development, leadership and peer collaboration
  - Theme 8: Clarity on district and site expectations
  - Theme 9: Trust and value in relationships with supervisors
3. Are there any specific recommendations you are considering or have already started implementing?
4. What challenges do you foresee in implementing the recommendations?

Thank you for completing this survey! Your feedback is crucial for enhancing our support for school principals.