

Hiring for Success: The Hiring Practices of Site-Based Principals in One District in Virginia

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## **ABSTRACT**

The goal of our educational system is to create successful students. Research has found that instruction from a high-quality teacher has more impact than other factors, and students taught by those high-performing teachers experience a range of long-term ongoing benefits (Marzano, 2003; Chetty et al., 2011). Understanding this impact, one of the most important roles of educational leaders is to ensure that they are hiring teachers who will be effective at instruction. This hiring effectiveness has a direct impact on the efficacy of their school (Donaldson, 2011; Loeb et al., 2012). Despite the importance of using effective hiring practices, there has been a scarcity of research on determining what practices have been found to be successful in hiring high-quality teachers (Klassen & Kim, 2019; Bruno & Strunk, 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they found to be successful. Through the framework of a basic qualitative study, several principals were interviewed regarding their hiring practices. Through the study, the lessons that they learned from their hiring experiences were examined. By analyzing these practices, commonalities were explored that might be applicable to a broader group of hiring administrators. With teacher shortages hitting school districts nationwide (Walker, 2019), this study sought to provide assistance to those making those hiring decisions to help them secure the most effective teachers who will have a positive impact on student success. The findings discuss the importance of having common hiring practices, the ways that administrators develop those hiring practices, the factors currently prioritized when making hiring decisions (candidate

experience and the perception of candidate interpersonal skills), and the impact that a smaller available pool of candidates has had on the hiring process. The implications suggest that districts should focus on including research-based hiring practices into their professional development opportunities and should provide more opportunities for discussion around hiring practices. Finally, the current hiring conditions should encourage leaders to adjust their approach to the hiring process in order to recruit and retain effective teachers in this competitive educational job market. As principals work to grapple with hiring challenges, continued research on effective practices will be needed to help guide them towards making the best choices. The success of their school and students requires nothing less.

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## **GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be effective. Research has found that instruction from a high-quality teacher has more impact than other factors, and students taught by those high-performing teachers experience a range of long-term ongoing benefits (Marzano, 2003; Chetty et al., 2011). This hiring effectiveness has a direct impact on the efficacy of their school (Donaldson, 2011; Loeb et al., 2012). Through the framework of a basic qualitative study, several principals were interviewed regarding their hiring practices. Through the study, the lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. The study's findings align and diverge from research studies on hiring practices. The findings discuss the importance of having common hiring practices, the ways that administrators develop those hiring practices, the factors currently prioritized when making hiring decisions (candidate experience and the perception of candidate interpersonal skills), and the impact that a smaller available pool of candidates has had on the hiring process. The implications suggest that districts should focus on including research-based hiring practices into their professional development opportunities and should provide more opportunities for discussion around hiring practices. Finally, the current hiring conditions should encourage leaders to adjust their approach to the hiring process in order to recruit and retain effective teachers in this competitive educational job market. As principals work to grapple with hiring challenges, continued research on effective practices will be needed to help guide them towards making the best choices. The success of their school and students requires nothing less.

## **Dedication**

I would foremost like to dedicate this to my family. My mom, Barbara, dad, Craig, and sister, Christina, have been there every step of the way. They have provided endless encouragement and support. We are not a family of educators, but I have received an education from my family. Most importantly, they believed in me. Thank you, Worcesters, for your love and support, and for helping me become who I am.

I would also like to dedicate this to my educational family. I have been an extraordinarily blessed educator working with phenomenal teachers, counselors, and staff. I hired very well. While my principal heart belongs to Nokesville, I have appreciated every school along my journey going all the way back to the first school I worked at in the last millennium in Bratislava, Slovakia. I am currently blessed to work with gifted, amazing people in Professional Learning. To those who have been part of my admin teams - Geoff, Candace, Laura, De'Rain, Barbara, and Kim – I learned much from you and hope I returned that favor. To my former boss and colleague, longtime friend, bandmate, and honorary brother, Nathaniel, you have been an inspirational part of my educational journey. You have helped me keep my philosophical knives sharp. You're next up, pal.

Finally, this is dedicated to all those who have made an impact on me through these years of famine, feast, and fire. You make me better. Why should the fire die? Thanks to Jamie, Chris, Carolyn, Greg, Marvin, Kelly, Sarah, Jeff, Jake, Peter, and Elizabeth, and all those involved in the music of my days, strumming chords in the key of E. The early 2000s was the first time a friend started calling me Dr. W. It took around 20 years, Matt, but the name finally became a reality.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

Henry Adams wrote that “A teacher affects eternity; he can never tell where his influence stops.” (Adams, p. 242, 1918). This quote depicts the impact that teachers can have upon the future of a society. Although the quote generally acknowledges the positive impact of a great teacher, it also holds true for those teachers who negatively impact students. Knowing the impact that a teacher can have on the life of a student, both positively and negatively, those making hiring decisions must choose wisely (Chetty et al., 2011; Marzano, 2003).

### **Study Background**

To understand the importance of school leaders in using effective hiring practices it is necessary to understand a variety of areas that contribute to this topic. These topics will be addressed in further detail in the literature review. The first important element is the impact that teachers have on the effectiveness of a school. The next area of discussion is the implications, both academic and financial, that result from hiring practices. Finally, there will be a brief overview of different hiring practices and the effectiveness of those practices.

### ***The Impact of Teachers***

Hiring effective teachers is essential for schools to be successful. Teacher quality has been found to be the most important factor in the variation of student learning at school (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Marzano (2003) also found clear evidence that the work of the classroom teacher impacts the level of student achievement. He noted that instruction from a high-quality teacher has two to three times the impact of any other factor, including the school leader. Chetty et al. (2011) highlighted the long-term value of teachers with their finding that students taught by

high performing teachers were found to achieve higher earnings growth rates in their 20s, experience greater annual earnings, raise their retirement savings rates, and receive a variety of other social benefits. For school leaders to promote student success and overcome the challenges that can be created by poor teachers, it is necessary to ensure effective hiring practices. One of the most important roles of the school principal is hiring effective teachers (Donaldson, 2011).

### ***Hiring Implications***

Hiring practices by school leaders play a critical role in the quality of the school with academic and financial implications. Tracey (p.8, 2016) states, “Ninety-five percent of the success of any enterprise is determined by the people chosen to work in the enterprise. If you select in haste, you will repent at leisure.” Loeb et al. (2012) stated that hiring teachers who are high quality is an important facet in how school leaders manage the overall quality of their school. They noted that hiring practices impact student learning and the organization. Kimbrel (2019) discovered that the cost of hiring ineffective teachers can create academic and financial hardships on the school community. Watlington et al. (2010) noted a range of potential costs from \$4,631 to \$26,502 for teacher replacement depending on the district with an estimated national cost between \$2.2 billion and \$4.6 billion. Despite the impact on students and schools, Klassen and Kim (2019), found that, “little systematic attention has been focused on how we make decisions about choosing teachers for the classroom or how we select prospective teachers” (p. 32). Bruno and Strunk (2019) also noted a scarcity of research on how school districts should hire effective teachers.

## *Hiring Practices*

Because of the impact of the hiring process, it is therefore necessary for school administrators to develop a teacher selection process that can be efficient and successful in employing the best teachers possible (Whitworth et al., 2016). Research has discovered that the best predictor of teaching success is previous teaching experience (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). However, with a teacher shortage hitting school districts nationwide (Walker, 2019), administrators cannot rely on successful previous experience as their only guide to effective hiring. Looking at practices from the business world can provide some direction for educational leaders to pursue.

There are various methods used in the business world to try to hire effective employees. Schmidt and Hunter (1998) performed a meta-analysis of 85 years of research on business personnel selection. For their study, they assessed 19 different techniques that could be used to predict future job performance in a new position. They discovered that unstructured job interviews were not a great indicator of success. These interviews predicted about 14% of an employee's future performance. Other factors including reference checks and years of experience also were not incredibly predictive. The best predictor of future job success came from the ability of the candidate to successfully perform a work sample test. The power of this prediction was 29%, almost double the success rate of information gleaned from an interview. The next best measures were general cognitive tests (something usually not administered during an education hiring situation) and structured interviews (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

School districts have pursued various means to try to hire effective teachers. Carefully constructed job descriptions (Moore, 2017), screening questions (Harris et al., 2010), reference checking (Perry & Haluska, 2016), and the interview process (Clement, 2013; Fry, 2000) are all

methods that have been used to help school leaders select the most effective candidate. Some school districts are expanding their hiring methods to include additional techniques. These techniques, including portfolios, eportfolios, observations, and narratives have shown promise and require further study (Jetter 2016; Kelly & Hancock, 2018; Nodoye et al., 2012). While there is agreement that hiring effective teachers is essential for students to succeed, there remains a lack of clarity across the country on what practices should be in place to hire those teachers (Will, 2019).

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problem being studied is the effectiveness of hiring practices in selecting teachers. School systems must hire quality teachers because of the impact that teachers have on their students. Sanders and Rivers (1996) discovered very different outcomes for students with similar abilities and achievement levels depending on the sequence of teachers they had. Additionally, their analysis found that, “teacher effects are both additive and cumulative with little evidence of compensatory effects of more effective teachers in later grades. The residual effects of both very effective and ineffective teachers were measurable two years later, regardless of the effectiveness of teachers in later grades” (p. 8).

Hiring effective teachers is needed because teacher quality has been found to be the most important factor in the variation of student learning at school (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Studies have found that the impact of the elementary experience extends into middle school. Konstantopoulos and Chung (2011) stated that teachers at the early grades significantly impacted success at later grade levels. Their study found that “cumulative teacher effects were substantial and highlighted the importance of effective teachers for multiple years in elementary grades” (p. 385). Finally, the research of Lee (2018) extends upon this finding. Her research

found that students with a succession of high-performing teachers (based on years of experience, level of education, content-expertise, and effectiveness) were more likely to experience short- and long-term educational success. The succession of high-performing teachers was also found to result in an increase in secondary school student achievement and the likelihood that they would earn a bachelor's degree. Knowing the impact that teachers have on future student achievement, the need to hire highly effective teachers is important for all principals and personnel decision-makers (Lee, 2018).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be successful. In this Mid-Atlantic school district, principals practice site-based management, and they are given latitude in their hiring procedures. The lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. Through analyzing these practices, commonalities were explored that might be applicable to a broader group of principals to help support future hiring decisions.

### **Research Questions**

This study investigated the processes that principals use to facilitate their hiring decisions. The following research questions were used for the study.

- 1) What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?
- 2) What do school leaders indicate are the most important qualities that they look for when making hiring decisions?
- 3) What hiring practices have school leaders changed based on their experience of hiring teachers who were either effective or ineffective?

## **Overview of the Study**

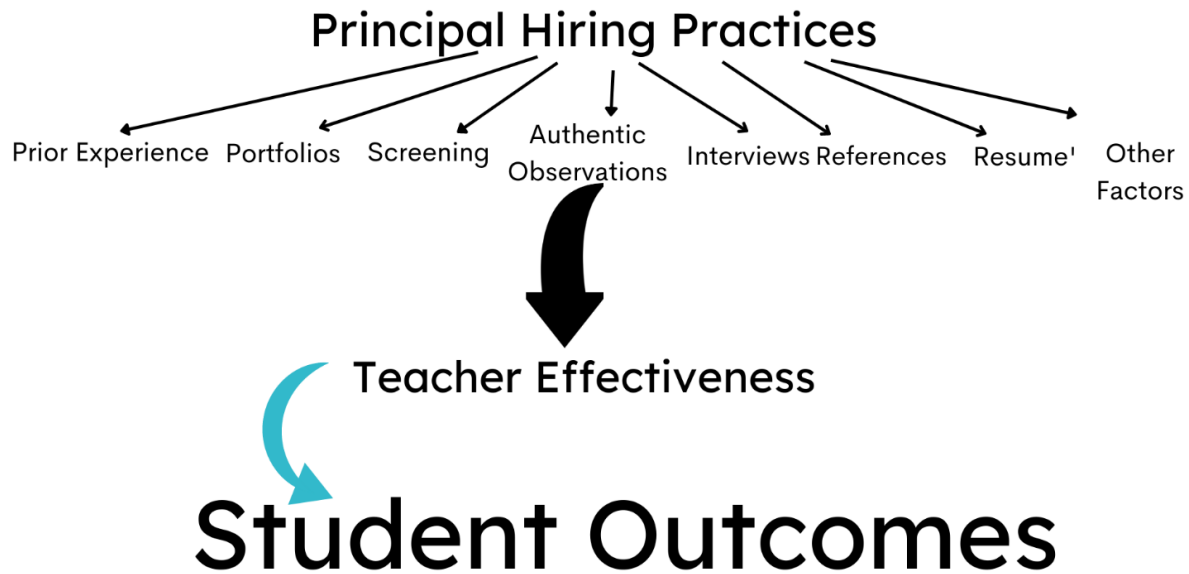
To discover answers to my research questions, I will conduct structured interviews with multiple principals from a large Mid-Atlantic school district. These principals will be selected by central office supervisors and peers as individuals who show successful decision-making for hiring effective teachers. Through a basic qualitative study, I will discover themes that inform the purpose of the study.

## **Conceptual Framework**

This conceptual framework provides a visual illustration of the major concepts that are addressed throughout this dissertation. The primary focus is on the hiring practices that principals use as they strive to hire effective teachers for their schools. There are a variety of tools that are used by school administrators to facilitate their hiring. Those tools include examining a candidate's prior experience, portfolios, screening results, authentic observations, interviews, references, resumés, and other factors. The goal is that through using these processes, a principal will hire effective teachers. The ultimate endpoint, by hiring effective teachers, is to ensure student success. By studying on the tools that principals use to hire effective teachers, this research aims to promote positive school outcomes.

**Figure 1**

*Personal Hiring Practices*



**Personal Hiring Philosophy**

As a former principal, it is important for this study for me to self-identify my personal beliefs about hiring. My personal hiring practices are greatly influenced by the leadership theories to which I most closely ascribe. Authentic leadership theory and distributed leadership theory form the basis for most of my leadership processes.

***Authentic Leadership in Hiring***

Kaplan and Owings (2017) state that authentic leadership is built upon a leader who provides their staff with consistency, integrity, and a willingness to be vulnerable and accept input from a variety of perspectives. In hiring, this means I wanted teachers who arrived with a solid construction of their educational philosophy and a history of success with their students and families. Through observation and walkthrough, I developed a thorough understanding of the techniques and methods that my teachers were implementing in their classrooms. When hiring, I

looked for teachers who approached teaching in a different way from the current people on that team but had still been experiencing a high level of success. There are different paths to success and having different examples of that on a grade level helped the team broaden their perspectives and increased their pedagogical methodology. In addition, having teachers with different perspectives helped to push and challenge the administrative team to think about educational issues from a variety of viewpoints and ultimately helped create a better educational product for the school. An authentic leader values reflection and an ability to rethink. This same quality helps make for a successful classroom teacher. I always interviewed with a panel of other teachers, and I wanted to ensure that not only the new candidate but also my current team, saw me acting with character and integrity. By approaching hiring staff through this framework, I tried to realistically portray our method of leadership at the school along with the rewards and challenges that they would face. We consistently retained a high percentage of our staff and received many applications from teachers at other schools in our county.

### ***Distributed Leadership in Hiring***

In addition to authentic leadership, I was also heavily influenced by distributed leadership theory as described by Kaplan and Owings (2017). I appreciated contributions and perspectives from a variety of teachers and stakeholders and believed that multiple voices can make for a better final decision. When I began hiring as a new leader, I targeted teachers who had been either department chairs or grade level leads. I knew that these educators had worked in leadership positions at their school and would be willing to take on additional challenges at our new school and provide me with honest, even critical, feedback. I was not disappointed.

In interview questions, we asked candidates what initiatives or developments they had helped lead in their classrooms or in their schools. We were forthright and honest with aspiring

candidates that we would not be micro-managing, highly prescriptive leaders. Instead, we would be counting on our teachers to continue to build on the successful practices from their previous experiences. By selecting this kind of candidate, I expected to utilize them for distributed leadership processes that resulted in positive, well-reasoned, and well-measured decisions that supported the success of the school.

### **Definition of Terms**

Throughout this dissertation, I will attempt to use common terms that are readily understandable. Some terms, that may fall under the description of educational jargon, are defined below.

***Churn*** – employee turnover that happens at organizations when they need to hire new workers to fill new positions or to replace those who have left the organization (Lazear & Speltzer, 2012).

***Rating scales*** – a measure that can be used to assess an applicant’s responses to interview questions. Scales should have a minimum of three levels, using labels like unsatisfactory, proficient, and exemplary. The rating scale should be applied consistently across candidates (Kimbrel 2019).

***Screening*** – a process to uniformly pre-assess if an applicant meets the minimum job qualifications for the position that they are seeking. These qualifications may include teaching certification, relevant education experience, mandatory application components, and submissions that demonstrate the appropriate use of grammar, punctuation, and spelling (Kimbrel 2019).

***Site-based management*** – A school-based improvement model that allows each school a level of autonomy to make important decisions for their school site. This model is typically based on three assumptions: 1) Improvement is most likely to happen at the school level as opposed to the district level; 2) In order for that change to occur, schools need a level of flexibility to determine

the best way to implement those changes; and 3) there is representation a variety of school stakeholders in the decision-making process for determining and implementing school improvements (Kowalski, 1994).

***Structured Interview*** – a set, consistent format where the same questions are asked of all applicants. The questions are usually tailored to the specific job requirements. Responses may be evaluated on a rubric or set of guidelines/expectations (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

***Unstructured Interview*** – a situation without a set format or consistent questions asked to the applicants. In this format, the interviewer may ask different applicants to respond to different questions. There is also typically no method for scoring responses, but instead the use of a general overall impression or summary to evaluate the employee (Schmidt & Hunter, 1998).

### **Limitations and Delimitations of the Study**

When conducting research, it is critical to analyze the limits and delimitations of the study. These elements help frame important components of the research study. Below is a description of each area as applied to this research.

#### ***Limitations***

As noted by Merriam and Tisdale (2015), this study has some limitations due to the nature of it being a qualitative case study. As such, it may be difficult to duplicate the information gathered by the study. The case study format, by design, analyzes a few specific situations in order to discover information that can help create a broader general understanding. The results of this study may not apply to every school's hiring practice but may provide insight that might be useful to the profession.

### ***Delimitations***

This study contains a few delimitations set by the researcher while creating the design. This research will take place in a mid-Atlantic school district. The researcher will choose participants based on the subjective opinions of central office supervisors and school leaders, who each will be asked to provide a list of two or three principals who they found to have effective hiring skills. The researcher will interview a selection of the principals identified by the central office officials and other school leaders.

### **Organization of the Study**

In Chapter one, an overview of the study was provided, including the purpose statement, research questions, conceptual framework, key terms, and limitations and delimitations. Chapter two includes a literature review that provides background on critical topics surrounding the hiring process. Chapter three describes the methodology that will be used to carry out the basic qualitative study. In Chapter four, the researcher provides the data, analyses, and a discussion of those areas. Finally, Chapter five lists the major findings, implications of the findings, a discussion of how the results fit in the context of the relevant body of literature, and suggestions for future research.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

Education has always had high stakes. It can be the difference between poverty and prosperity. Education in the United States continues to have barriers to achieving higher levels of student success, with no easy solutions to these challenges. In *The Nation's Report Card* (2019), while discussing the results of the most recent NAEP testing in 2019, Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics stated,

Over the past decade, there has been no progress in either mathematics or reading performance, and the lowest-performing students are doing worse. Those readers who struggle the most, have made no progress from the first NAEP administration almost 30 years ago (Sparks, p.1, 2020).

To ensure that the right teachers are in place to create the conditions that provide pathways of opportunity for all students, it is important to examine the processes used to staff our schools. Having effective teachers provides one of the best ways to help students succeed.

Ongoing research demonstrates the impact that a teacher has on effective learning. While school leaders play a critical role, teachers directly impact students and cause positive outcomes. Analyzing a range of studies, Marzano (2003) found clear evidence that the work of the classroom teacher impacts the level of student achievement. He found that instruction from a high-quality teacher has two to three times the impact of any other factor, including the school leader. It is critical for the school principal to hire teachers who will create a brighter future for their students. Understanding this tremendous impact, one of the most important roles of the school principal is hiring effective teachers (Donaldson, 2011). Loeb et al. (p.271, 2012) contended that, "School leaders can control the quality of the teaching force at their school by

hiring high-quality teachers.” Kimbrel (2019) pointed out that the cost of hiring ineffective teachers can create academic and financial hardships on the school community. Watlington et al. (2010) wrote that while the cost to hire a teacher differs from district to district the price is always high. They noted a range of potential costs from \$4,631 to \$26,502 for teacher replacement depending on the district with an estimated national cost between \$2.2 billion and \$4.6 billion.

This proposed dissertation aims to look at hiring practices to determine how principals at successful schools make their employee selection. The literature review will provide an overview of general hiring practices, discuss some of the problems attributed to ineffective hiring, highlight research regarding effective hiring practices in education, and provide information on common factors taken into consideration in hiring effective teachers.

### **Search Process**

To conduct this literature review, the Virginia Tech Online library was searched using the following keyword search topics: “hiring practices” “education” and “school.” The original search included sources from the last 25 years and returned 301 results. These results were not all relevant to the topic, so the titles were analyzed to ensure relevance to the specificity of my topic. An additional search was conducted on Google Scholar using the search topic, “hiring practices in education” and included articles from the last ten years. This returned thousands of results and the first several pages were searched for the articles most relevant to the current study. For this literature review, 65 studies and scholarly articles were reviewed.

## **Hiring Overview**

“Picking a person is the most important business decision you’ll make.” (Perry & Haluska, 2016, p.7). Indeed, the success of any organization depends on the effectiveness of its hiring. Tracey (2016) stated, “The selection process is the key to your success...Ninety-five percent of the success of any enterprise is determined by the people chosen to work in the enterprise. If you select in haste, you will repent at leisure. When you have to hire, therefore, the best rule is to hire slowly and to select carefully” (p. 8).

Business guides to the hiring process acknowledge the incredible importance of hiring the correct people for an organization to thrive. It is therefore critical for school administrators to develop a teacher selection process that can be efficient and successful in employing the best teachers possible (Whitworth et al., 2016). To achieve maximum success, the hiring process requires time-intensive specific procedures to guide those making these important decisions. Whitworth et al. (2016) recommended components include a specific job description aligned with the expectations of the job, a structured multi-tiered interview process, and thorough reference checks. The ultimate goal is to hire someone well-suited for the position who will add value to the organization. Successful hiring practices promote the company objectives and reduce the deleterious impact of churn and undesirable employee behaviors (Tracey 2016).

## **Impact of Ineffective Hiring**

While effective hiring boosts the organization, ineffective hiring can create problems. Two areas of negative impact will be discussed in greater detail below. The first topic that will be discussed is the impact of ineffective hiring on building culture. The second area discussed will describe the impact of the phenomenon known as churn. These areas will highlight two of

the challenges that arise from ineffective hiring.

### ***Impact on Building Culture***

Schools, like any organization, function better when team members contribute to a positive environment (Kutsyruba et al., 2015). The converse is also true – schools will function worse when employees create a negative environment. (Dellar, 1998). Tank (2020, The Cost of Toxic Employees section, para. 1) wrote, “Bringing the wrong person into your company’s culture can have catastrophic results...underperforming employees, rampant complaining, high turnover rates, and a general vibe of unhappiness.” A study conducted by Fould et al. in 2016 provided further context for this phenomenon. The researchers, after conducting three studies, discovered that negative behaviors can spread through an organization much like the common cold. They noted though that unlike a cold, negative behaviors and rudeness by staff members can have much greater negative consequences for organizations. They found that workers who were exposed to negative staff members were impacted with a negative attitude, made negative attributions about others, and also exhibited hostile behaviors (Fould et al., 2016). These negative behaviors across an organization can lead to the next topic of discussion, teacher turnover.

### ***Churn/Turnover***

A factor to keep in mind when hiring is the longevity and consistency of the workforce. Churn is defined by Lazear and Speltzer (2012) as “replacing departing workers with new ones.” (p. 2). Excessive churn can be expensive to a company for several reasons. First, the company will lose the time it will take to find and bring a new person into the organization. Second, the company will lose all the investments that had been made in the departing individual as all the

resources spent on their development leave when they go (Tracy 2016). An effective hiring process can reduce churn from preventing an organization from being as effective as possible.

In researching the turnover in education, Ingersoll (2001) found the rate of turnover for teachers was higher than the rate for most other professions. Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (p.16, 2019) found, “at 8% annually, teacher attrition in the United States is noticeably higher than that in some other high-achieving countries where teacher attrition is half that rate or less...In addition to those who leave the profession each year, another 8% of teachers move between schools, creating costs and disruptions in the schools they leave behind.”

High turnover creates instability that makes it challenging to have unified, coherent instruction. It is therefore logical to expect that the turnover of teachers will result in a decrease in student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016). Ronfeldt et al., 2013, examined the link between teacher turnover and student achievement and found that teacher turnover significantly negatively impacted student achievement in both math and language arts. Additionally, they found that “teacher turnover had a great negative impact on the achievement of students in schools with large populations of low-performing and Black students” (Ronfeldt et al., p. 30, 2013). For schools trying to implement reforms, this creates a challenge, as new teachers coming in each year need to receive baseline professional development. Additionally, high turnover creates the need to continuously recruit teachers and that process takes time and effort. (Boyd et al., 2008). That time, effort, and resources cause a significant financial cost to the school (Carver-Thomas, Darling-Hammond, 2019).

### **Effective Hiring Procedures**

Effective hiring procedures frequently include task-specific job postings, candidate screening, interviewing, and reference checking. Those areas will be described in further detail

below. Given the importance of hiring methodology in securing good teachers, research continues to examine the effectiveness of different hiring models. Recent research has looked at the addition of narrative usage and storytelling in getting to know more about applicants (Jetter, 2016). A process created by Washoe County School District integrates interview questions with task-specific exercises that attempt a deeper analysis of a candidate's qualifications. This process also helps them determine if the candidate's core beliefs match those of the district (Huckaby 2012). Both physical portfolios and e-portfolios that contain evidence of teacher ability have also been used increasingly by school leaders to learn more about candidates before hiring (Kelly & Hancock, 2018; Nodoye et al., 2012). These procedures will require future study to determine their effectiveness.

### ***Job Postings***

A critical first step toward success is creating job postings and descriptions that reflect the needs and important requisite skills of the job (Kimbrel, 2019; Moore, 2017;). The posting should list expectations as well as how success in the position will be measured. It is additionally helpful to provide information about the student population, school strengths, district and school vision and mission, and challenges. Perry and Haluska (2016) wrote that a job description is the foundational document for every job and that the qualities that are needed in an applicant should be evident from this document. They state that to hire the right candidate, one must first have a specific understanding of the role and what will be required for the job to be successfully carried out.

## *Screening*

Harris et al. (2010) noted that one common method used to provide a baseline of information on prospective candidates is an initial screening process. The researchers stated that these screenings can take a variety of forms. Screenings include documentation review, standardized questionnaires, human resources interviews, content specialist interviews, and candidate written responses. These screenings provide a baseline of information that hiring leaders can use to make decisions regarding what candidates to interview.

While screening is frequently done during the initial application process, several districts also use ongoing documentation taken from candidate interviews to provide further information about educational candidates. In the early 2000s, over 2,000 school districts used a screening tool such as Teacher Insight developed by Gallup Inc. (Delli & Vera, 2003). These structured screening questions asked candidates about themes such as mission, empathy, and educational beliefs. For those candidates answering the responses that were deemed “correct” based on its research, Gallup stated that there would be high predictability that these candidates would be high-quality teachers, if hired. However, further research cast doubt that this screener was truly effective (Schumacher, Grigsby, & Vesey, 2015).

More recent research has indicated the possibility of a positive relationship between some screening tools and future teacher performance. Bruno and Strunk (2019) studied a screening tool developed by the Los Angeles Unified School District. This screening tool used a two-step process to sort prospective candidates. The first step in the process analyzed qualifications, certifications, and application completeness. Those failing to meet necessary benchmarks for position requirements would not proceed to the second step. In the second step, for those who made it, the screening tool used eight different scored categories - interview, references, sample

lessons, writing sample, GPA, subject matter, background, and preparation. The researchers' analysis found that there were positive, significant associations between screening scores and some of the sub scores and teacher contributions to student achievement, attendance, evaluation, and mobility outcomes (Bruno & Strunk, 2019). This finding could merit further analysis.

### ***Interviewing***

Like most areas of hiring, candidate interviews can take many forms. The traditional interview, at its most basic, consists of a standard list of questions that prospective employees must verbally respond to within a short amount of time. The interview process varies greatly between school districts and even between school leaders. While some principals will interview a candidate by themselves, other school leaders will use a panel of administrators, educators, or other staff members to join them in every step of the decision-making process. Some school leaders hold multi-step interviews with their first level acting as a screener and future steps involving a panel. Some school leaders prefer to watch a teacher give a lesson or ask for other authentic artifacts to show their base of knowledge. Whatever format is chosen, Kimbrel (2019) found that teacher effectiveness is very difficult to predict from the interview process.

Interview questions themselves differ greatly depending on school leaders. Some leaders look more at a candidate's character and personality than at the actual content of their answers. Some use rubrics to try to score responses as objectively as possible. Some use questions that are created in collaboration with human resources, while others may use questions developed with their staff, and some may just use the questions that they wish to ask at the moment. Clement (2013) noted the importance of using the same questions and consistent scales to record responses. She described the use of two mnemonics PAR (problem, action, and result) and STAR (situation, task, action, and result), to provide a framework for crafting questions and

listening for responses. She also noted limited effectiveness in hypothetical questions or questions unrelated to education (such as, “What kind of candy bar would you be?” or, “Tell me about your favorite imaginary animal?”). Clement (2009) further elaborated that effective questions use phrases like, “Tell me about a time when”, “How have you” or, “Describe your experience with” that explore a candidate’s previous experiences. She advocated using a simple scale to evaluate candidate responses by placing them in three categories – acceptable, unacceptable, and target, with target being the highest achievable response level.

Fry (2000) delineated several types of interviews that can be used depending on the needs of a specific position. There is the Behavioral Interview that focuses on a candidate’s prior experiences as they relate to the posted position. In this type of interview, the interviewer tries to learn as much as possible about how a candidate will perform in the actual job setting. In the Competency-Based Interview, the interview will attempt to discover if an applicant has a specific predetermined set of skills that would be needed for success at the job. The Case/Situational interview aims to place the applicant in hypothetical situations to discover their immediate response and learn more about their thought process. There is a Stress interview in which the facilitator creates a stressful environment for the interview setting to see how the candidate responds when presented with a challenging situation, though they caution that this type of interview should only be used when hiring for a job situation that will place the candidate under highly stressful situations. Finally, there is the Brainteaser interview that asks offbeat questions to help gauge the creativity of an individual or their analytical skills. Format-wise, interviews can be conducted once or over several rounds and can be done alone or with a specific team. When doing a team interview, the panel should have an immediate opportunity to review each candidate’s pros and cons (Fry, 2000).

Researchers recommend a job analysis to create questions and then use identical questions for each candidate. They have found it effective to use a variety of question formats including situational questions based on past behavior. They promote the use of individual answers being rated with a predetermined scale and scored against pre-determined preferred answers. They suggest having trained interviewers and using other predictive elements so that decisions are not based solely on the screening and interview (Kimbrel, 2019; Moore, 2017).

### ***Checking References***

Checking references can sometimes seem like an afterthought for a school leader in the hiring process. Most school districts require applicants to provide letters of reference as part of the application process. School leaders may consult these references during their search but may not have additional time to do their own research into a candidate's work history. According to Perry and Haluska (2016), that would be a mistake. Perry and Haluska (2016) write:

References remain the only real means to assess who's got the skills to take your company where you want to go. They represent your opportunity to separate fact from fiction, and the sincere candidate from the professional interviewee...Résumés and interviews, the other two major hiring variables, are unreliable by themselves.

Referencing is the glue that binds the process (p. 156).

Bruno and Strunk (2019) furthermore found professional references to be predictive of teacher evaluation ratings. Several of these hiring practices have shown varying levels of predictive success. The next section will focus on research surrounding the specific hiring practices found in education.

## **Effective Hiring Practices in Education**

Bruno and Strunk (p. 19, 2019) stated, “Despite widespread agreement that teacher quality is important for school systems, very little is known about how school districts should hire teachers.” A wealth of research has discovered that the best predictor of teaching success is previous teaching experience (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011) since previous success often begets future success. Additionally, studies show that principals generally prefer applicants with more experience (Giersch & Dong, 2018). With high-stakes testing, principals are more inclined to select teachers they see as more likely to improve student achievement. The challenge is that it is very challenging to know from the selection process which teachers will be most effective in raising student achievement (Rutledge et al., 2010). Harris et al. (p. 231, 2010) note that, “In addition to the gap between research on teacher quality and hiring, there is an important one between research on the characteristics principals prefer and the tools they use to identify them.”

However, with a teacher shortage hitting school districts nationwide (Walker, 2019), administrators cannot rely on successful previous experience as their only guide to effective hiring. There are certain characteristics that many principals look at when making hiring decisions: 1) Passion; 2) Enthusiasm; 3) Sensitivity and compassion for others; 4) A big heart for kids and a caring attitude; and 5) A good sense of humor. Additionally, principals want teachers who will be able to connect emotionally, socially, and intellectually with students (Hopkins, 2009). A study by Harris et al., (2010) found that principals selected from a mixture of both professional and personal characteristics with caring, content knowledge, teaching skills, and enthusiasm being mentioned most frequently in qualities cited by principals as important

characteristics in their hiring practices. However, these attributes are not necessarily correlated with success.

There are several hiring factors that school leaders might think will lead to teacher success – a variety of professional development experiences, interpersonal connections at the interview, or perhaps a portfolio filled with enriching activities. Research has not found any of these factors to consistently predict teaching success. What does seem more surprising is that research examining teachers at the elementary and middle level did not find a positive impact from degree level (Bachelors' vs. Masters') regardless of the university where a degree was earned (Chingos & Peterson, 2011). Also, Hanna and Gimbert (2011) found that teachers who came to the profession through alternate pathways of certification were not found to be of any lesser quality than those who came through the more traditional approach.

Some research has examined overall areas that might predict teacher success. Alignment of a hiring process to the ten mind frames identified by Hattie and Zierer (2018) could provide administrators with a research-based framework that might identify teachers with the greatest likelihood of success. These beliefs include: teachers are evaluators of student work and understand their impact; teachers are change agents who feel self-efficacy; teachers see assessment as useful feedback; teachers engage in dialogue with students and colleagues rather than monologue; teachers enjoy the challenge; teachers engage in positive relationships; teachers focus on learning rather than teaching; teachers see learning as hard work; teachers collaborate to develop collective efficacy. Bastian, McCord, Marks, and Carpenter (2017) discovered a significant association between conscientiousness and higher teacher value-added estimates, higher teacher evaluation ratings across all five professional teaching standards, and higher rates of teacher retention.

## **School District Hiring Guidelines**

Each school district, while subject to federal and state hiring laws, has its own policies and practices for its hiring processes. Will (2019) did an examination of some hiring practices developed in a variety of districts across the country. In looking at a 2018 survey of 600 school districts, he found that only about 5% had any standard protocols in place to assess applicants.

Schools in Spokane developed a two-stage screening process to discover potential effective candidates. Researchers found that their process had some predictive power for teacher effectiveness. Los Angeles school system has looked at a standardized format for prospective teachers that included writing samples, sample lesson plans, and several other standardized processes. Researchers found that this screening process was predictive of performance, as measured by contributions to student test-score growth, evaluation scores, and teacher attendance (Will, 2019).

In a study of DC schools, Jacob, Rockoff, Taylor, Lindy, and Rosen (2018) found that academic background (undergraduate GPA) and scores on job screening tests were strong predictors of positive teacher performance. To assess teacher value, they examined the following factors: classroom observations of teacher instruction and interaction with students, supervisor ratings, student work, and value-added to students' standardized test scores. They found that these predictors, though shown to predict success, were not frequently being used by principals in making their hiring decisions. They stated that,

Among the nearly 6500 TeachDC applicants not hired, 764 would be predicted to have first-year performance in the top quartile of the hired teacher distribution. In other words, there were more than enough top quartile applicants not hired to replace the bottom three quartiles (737 teachers) of those who were hired. If these predictions are accurate, this

replacement would raise average first-year teacher performance by 0.42 standard deviations. (Jacob et al., p. 95, 2018)

Engel and Curran, (2016) examined teacher hiring in Chicago Public Schools. They noted that principals there have substantial autonomy in teacher hiring (as is the case in many districts). They analyzed interviews with 31 principals in the district to explore principals' hiring strategies and how they aligned with the district's goals. They asked about the strategic hiring practices that principals report engaging in that led to successful hiring at their school. Those practices included:

- 1) always working on teacher hiring;
- 2) having prospective teachers teach a sample lesson;
- 3) including a content area or grade-level specialist on the hiring team;
- 4) stating that content knowledge;
- 5) asking for referrals from current faculty and administrators.

While there is agreement that hiring effective teachers is essential for students to succeed, there remains a lack of clarity across the country on what practices should be in place to hire those teachers (Will, 2019). As noted in this section, several of the largest school systems use different procedures when doing their hiring. Researchers have also found that there continues to be a disconnect between research-based and actual hiring practices (Jacob et al., 2018). The next section will explore some of those specialized factors that educational leaders use when making their hiring decisions.

### **Factors that Impact Hiring Considerations**

There are a variety of factors that educational leaders consider when making hiring decisions. There are several common factors used for hiring consideration, like prior experience

and interview responses (Behrstock & Coggshall, 2009). In addition to those common factors, there are additional factors that may also weigh into hiring decisions for a school (Sekiguchi & Huber, 2009). Two factors that will be discussed ahead include diversity and person-environment fit.

### *Diversity*

Leaders often look for a diversified staff, though the form of that diversity can take many forms. Some factors that might be considered are experience level, educational philosophy, racial diversity, gender diversity, and viewpoint diversity. Research reveals evidence that interacting with individuals with differing viewpoints can contribute to an individual's learning (Hu & Kuh, 2003). If critical thinking relies in part on being able to incorporate and synthesize a variety of information, it is therefore important to provide students, from elementary through graduate school, with information from diverse viewpoints (Goodman, 2017). As stated by Hurtado et al. (p. 166, 2002), "Students who have the ability to develop a societal perspective, exhibit empathy, and acquire a capacity to evaluate alternative perspectives on complex social problems are better prepared to take on social roles as decision-makers and negotiators of different perspectives." Research additionally highlights the benefits of a racially diverse workforce working with a racially diverse population. Achinstein et al., 2010, highlighted research suggesting that teachers of color may produce better academic results on "standardized test scores, attendance, retention, advanced-level course enrollment, and college-going rates for students of color than White colleagues" (p.72, 2010).

### ***Person-Environment Fit***

Hiring may not be governed by static factors. Instead, it is possible that an organization's hiring needs will be constantly changing and evolving based on its current situation. Sekiguchi and Huber (2011) describe three types of job fit to describe how an organization might understand the role of their employee. Ingle et al. (2011) provide a description for each perspective: "The person-organization fit (P-O) highlights the compatibility of employees with the culture and values of the organization. The person-group fit (P-G) is a variation on the P-O theme that focuses on the fit with the smaller group of workers with which the employee will most closely interact. Person-job fit (P-J) focuses on how the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the employee match the specific job requirements." (p. 584)

### **Factors Used to Define Success**

In discussing successful hiring practices, it is important to operationally define what is meant by "success." Success does not look the same in every building. Different schools may have differing needs (Goldring et al., 2008). Therefore, there are different criteria that leaders may look for when they are selecting their staff. In making hiring decisions, leaders frequently consider the characteristics and abilities of their current teaching staff and hire teachers who will complement their current faculty. The context of the school's need and the age group/level of the students makes a difference in the qualities that will be sought after (Ingle et al., 2011; Mee & Haverback, 2017). Jabbar (2018) found that school leaders sought a range of qualities to improve student achievement. School leaders also looked for teachers who were caring and willing to work hard for their students. Jabbar (p. 143, 2018) noted, "principals believe personal characteristics are very important, sometimes more so than teacher quality measures."

But despite differences at the school level, there are several metrics that are frequently used by administrators and school districts to define success. These factors include on-the-job performance, evaluation policies, test scores of students, and sometimes other measures, like the number of discipline referrals written by the teacher (Ingle et al., 2011). Evaluation processes built around rubrics and specific standards have also been found to predict student learning gains and show teacher success (Darling Hammond et al., 2012).

With an ever-increasing focus on accountability, quantifiable results have become intertwined with the governance and oversight of schools (Skedsmo & Huber, 2019). Teacher effectiveness is often quantified based on the relationship between teachers and student outcomes. This perspective is frequently referred to as a value-added analysis. This framework describes a good teacher in simple terms as someone whose students consistently show high achievement. This analysis attempts to use statistical estimation to separate teacher influences from other factors. Trying to attribute specific differences in classroom achievement to teachers is an ongoing complicated task (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2012). Darling- Hammond et al., 2012, highlight the complexity and disagreement regarding this perspective. They found contradictory research stating, “value-added measures of student achievement tied to individual teachers should not be used for high-stakes, individual-level decisions, or comparisons across highly dissimilar schools or student populations.” (Darling-Hammond et al., p.8, 2012). To determine success, a framework that considers multiple factors could be considered. Santilices et al., 2017, provide a framework that suggests that measuring teacher quality requires the consideration of multiple factors in three broad categories: (1) teacher quality based on teacher observable characteristics, (2) the assessment of classroom practices based on professional standards, and (3) teacher effect estimates based on students’ test scores.

## Summary

For any organization, its effectiveness will rise or fall based on the talents and abilities of its workforce (Tank, 2020). For a school, the importance of that workforce is magnified, as educators have a tremendous influence on their students (Kimbrel, 2019). Barber and Mourshed (2007) state, “The quality of a school system rests on the quality of its educators. The evidence that getting the right people to become teachers is critical to high performance is both anecdotal and statistical” (p. 19). Hiring the right people is essential.

Hiring teachers who do not achieve the organizations’ goals can lead to students who do not have the educational tools they need to succeed later in life (Marzano, 2003). Chetty et al. (2011) highlighted the long-term value of teachers with their finding that students taught by high-performing teachers were found to achieve higher earnings growth rates in their 20s, experience greater annual earnings, raise their retirement savings rates, and receive a variety of other social benefits. In addition to the student cost, negative employees can also have an overall deleterious impact on school culture and climate (Dellar, 1998). Churn or teacher turnover from ineffective hiring also brings many negatives to a school and disproportionately impacts the neediest students (Tracy 2016).

There are various methods used to try to hire effective teachers. Carefully constructed job descriptions (Moore, 2017), screening questions (Harris et al., 2010), reference checking (Perry & Haluska, 2016), and the interview process (Clement, 2013; Fry, 2000) are all used to help schools select the most effective candidate. While there is variety among school districts, these common processes are frequently used throughout the country (Will, 2019). To try to increase their hiring effectiveness, some districts are expanding their hiring methods to include additional techniques. These techniques, including portfolios and narratives, have shown promise and will

require further study (Jetter 2016; Kelly & Hancock, 2018; Nodoye et al., 2012). A combination of these considerations might enable those making hiring decisions to select candidates who will be effective teachers.

Understanding the cost of hiring the wrong person makes it even more important to hire the right one. This has proven to be challenging as the only factor consistently aligned with future success is prior success (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). With new teachers consistently being hired without previous experience, there is a need for more research to examine other areas to find links between the hiring process and selecting successful employees. As noted by Klassen and Kim (2019), “Little systematic attention has been focused on how we make decisions about choosing teachers for the classroom or how we select prospective teachers” (p. 32). Bruno and Strunk (2019) similarly noted a scarcity of research on how school districts should hire effective teachers. Given the educational impact, there is a need for further research into effective hiring practices. It will therefore be important to add to the research by aiming to discover connections between components of the hiring process and teacher success.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Method**

#### **Methodology**

In this chapter, the research design will be presented. This chapter will include the purpose of the study, the research design, research questions, needed data, site/sample selection, instrument design, instrument validity and reliability, data collection procedures, data analysis techniques, and a methodology summary.

#### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be successful. In this mid-Atlantic school district, principals practice site-based management, and they are given latitude in their hiring procedures. The lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. Through analyzing these practices, commonalities will be explored that might be applicable to a broader group of principals to help support future hiring decisions.

#### **Research Design – Methodology & Justification**

The research design for this study was the basic qualitative method. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) list several key features of this research method. Some of these defining characteristics are categorized as the focus of the research, the philosophical roots, the role of the researcher, the importance of induction, the necessity of rich description, and other important competencies. These characteristics, as applied to this research, are delineated below.

## **Focus of Research**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that the focus of qualitative research is to discover “an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process...of meaning making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 15). This study aligned closely with that focus. The focus was on how principals manage their hiring process, discover their methodology and rationale for that process, and find patterns in those experiences that might inform others. Throughout this study, the main objective was to develop an understanding of the hiring process from the perspective of those being interviewed.

## ***Philosophical Roots***

This study aligned with the Interpretive/Constructivist epistemological perspective. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that this perspective is used when attempting to describe, understand, or interpret a phenomenon. In this study, the researcher attempted to gain an understanding of effective hiring practices. This perspective aligns with qualitative studies and states that reality is context-bound. Studying hiring practices of multiple principals acknowledges that there is not one set method that is used when conducting this practice.

## ***The Role of the Researcher***

As noted by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), in a qualitative study, the researcher is the “primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (p. 16). They note that in these studies, since the goal of the study is understanding a topic, it is important to have the human component of the study who can respond and adapt to the subject being studied. They note that the researcher is also necessary in qualitative research to be able to analyze verbal and nonverbal responses, process and provide feedback to ongoing data, clarify and summarize information,

and check with respondents for accuracy. They acknowledge that a shortcoming of this methodology is that the theoretical framework of the researcher can play a role in the gathering and processing of the data. While conducting interviews for this topic and analyzing the data, the researcher played an active role in the study. The personal hiring beliefs on the research have been analyzed and discussed in chapter one to ensure that this perspective is provided for the study.

### ***Induction***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that the inductive process is a key hallmark of qualitative studies. In this kind of process, the researcher collects data to build a concept or theory to explain a practice. They state that these concepts are built based on observations or data that are gathered throughout the study. They state that studying an event can help create categories of responses that form themes and tentative hypotheses that can inform a particular practice, in this case, how principals hire effective teachers.

### ***The Importance of Description***

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) note that in qualitative research, it is essential for the researcher to provide rich descriptions. Unlike research that relies on numerical data, qualitative requires information to be transmitted through words and pictures. These descriptors include the context of the study and information about the participants. Rich description also relies on specific quotes from participants, interviews, and other descriptive excerpts. Throughout this research, rich descriptions will be used to capture the situation regarding hiring practices by principals.

## **Research Questions**

This study investigated the processes that principals use to facilitate their hiring decisions. The following research questions were used for the study.

- 1) What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?
- 2) What do school leaders indicate are the most important qualities that they look for when making hiring decisions?
- 3) What hiring practices have school leaders changed based on their experience of hiring teachers who were either effective or ineffective?

## **Needed Data**

For this study, an open-ended survey was used to gather information on the research questions by interviewing five to ten principals from a large, mid-Atlantic school district. This school district uses site-based management allowing for a level of principal discretion in designing their hiring procedures and decision-making. The open-ended survey questions will be structured and closely aligned with my research questions.

## **Site/Sample Selection**

This data were gathered in a mid-Atlantic school district with approximately 100 schools serving approximately 90,000 students. This district uses the site-based management model that provides a high level of autonomy in educational decision making. This includes site-based decision making while making hiring decisions. Due to the funding formula used by this district, principals allocate the same level of funding for each teacher regardless of experience and degree. This process helps to ensure that principals can hire the person who they believe will be the best fit for their school and students. Because each principal has site-based authority for their

hiring decisions, there is some level of difference and discrepancy among their hiring practices. These differences will aid in this research study as it will enable the researcher to look at decision making at the individual level.

The participants in this study were selected through a variety of directed methods to ensure a cross-section of diverse respondents. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that nonprobability sampling is the “method of choice” (p. 96) for qualitative studies. For this study, purposeful sampling was used, identified by Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as sampling that is “based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p.96).

The initial group of respondents were created using a criterion-based selection that correspond with the research questions of the study. This criterion was the reported belief in a specific principal having effective hiring practices. The process began by asking Human Resources supervisors at the elementary, middle, and high school level to provide the name of two to three principals who they feel excel at hiring effective teachers. The term “effective” will not be defined by the researcher, though if prompted for clarification, the researcher will provide some descriptors such as a high level of student standardized test success, high staff/student/parent satisfaction ratings, and/or high levels of staff retention. After receiving the initial group of six to nine principals, two principals at the elementary, middle, and high school level were contacted to see who was willing to complete the survey questions for this study (see Appendix A). After gaining the initial group of respondents, snowball sampling was used to identify potential additional survey respondents. The researcher continued conducting surveys with ten respondents.

## **Instrument Design**

Online interviews with a number of school principals in charge of the hiring process at their schools were conducted. The interview questions were based on the research questions. Before finalizing the survey, several respondents responded to the interview questions to gain feedback on the clarity and viability of the questions. The questions were designed to be closely aligned with the research outcomes and were created with the criteria raised by Patton (2015) regarding good interview questions. Patton noted the importance of generating questions that tease out a respondent's experience and behavior regarding a topic, in this case, their hiring practices. Patton also noted the value in posing questions that measure a respondent's opinions, values, feelings, and knowledge. Many of these competencies are included in the questions that were created. The initial questions, and their correlation to the research questions, are listed in Table 1.

## **Instrument Validity and Reliability**

Creswell and Poth (2016) describe the term validity in qualitative research as an attempt to discern a finding's accuracy as it can best be described by the researcher, the participants, and the readers. They stated that validation is a distinct strength of qualitative research because the variety of information gained through fieldwork, rich description, and the interactions between the researcher to participants all add to the value or accuracy of a study. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) noted that research studies need to be rigorously conducted to have an impact. They noted that validity and reliability can be approached in qualitative research by close attention to the conceptualization of the study and the way data are collected, analyzed, and interpreted. They described three categories to be considered when determining instrument validity and reliability. These categories, internal validity, reliability, and external validity will be discussed below.

**Table 1**

*Alignment of Interview Questions with Research Questions*

Research Questions	Interview Questions
What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?	Please provide an overview of your hiring process starting with your selection procedures up through choosing a candidate to hire. How did you develop your hiring process?
What are the most important qualities that school leaders look for when making hiring decisions?	Throughout the hiring process, are there specific traits or qualities that you look for when making your hiring decisions?  What qualities do you think are the most important when making hiring decision?
What practices have principals found to be effective and ineffective for successful hiring when reflecting on their hiring decisions and looking at educational outcomes?	Thinking of some of the effective teachers that you hired, do you recall any indicators during the hiring process that led you to hire this teacher? Thinking of teachers you have hired that have not been as effective, do you recall and indicators of that during the hiring process?  How has your hiring process evolved over time?  Do you have anything else that you would like to share about your hiring practices?

***Internal Validity***

Internal validity is defined by Merriam and Tisdale (2016) as “how research findings match reality” (p. 242). They stated that since qualitative researcher relies on human beings as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, internal validity is gained through careful

depictions of observations and interviews. They also noted that there are several strategies that can be used to help increase the credibility of research findings. One of the prominent strategies listed is triangulation.

Creswell and Poth (2016) describe triangulation as a process by which a researcher uses information from a variety of sources to better understand the problem being studied. They state, “when qualitative researchers locate evidence to document a code or theme in different sources of data, they are triangulating information and providing validity to their findings” (p. 413).

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) state that triangulation involves gathering several sources of data to compare and cross-check the findings. To aid in triangulation for this study on hiring practices, relevant observations and documentation were analyzed in conjunction with the interviews.

An additional tool for ensuring internal validity, as noted by Merriam and Tisdale (2016), is the use of member checks or respondent validation. This required the researcher to gather feedback on preliminary findings from those who were interviewed. This was accomplished by following up with some of the interview candidates while the data were being analyzed and grouped into categories. Gathering this feedback from some of the candidates will help ensure that the findings are being portrayed with accuracy.

Content validity for the survey questions developed for this study was ensured by asking others who have been trained in qualitative research to review the research questions and interview questions and make recommendations to ensure their alignment and clarity. This process was also conducted with peers and those fitting the characteristics of the actual survey respondents. After gathering feedback from those groups, the questions were refined and finalized for use with the subjects of the study. Throughout the interviews, questions were checked for clarity and comprehension by the respondents.

## ***Reliability***

Reliability, as described by Merriam and Tisdale (2016) is “the extent that research findings can be replicated” (p. 250). However, they noted that due to conditions of qualitative studies, replication of a study may not always yield the same pattern of results. To aid in reliability, they recommended some of the characteristics documented in the internal validity section (like triangulation) as well as the usage of an audit trail. They described this as documentation of “how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (p. 252). The researcher kept an electronic journal that served as this audit trail. In this electronic journal, the researcher kept a record of reflections, thoughts, questions, and decisions that were made regarding problems and ideas that occurred during data collection and data analysis.

## ***External Validity***

Merriam and Tisdale (2016) described external validity as the level to which the findings of one study can be applied to other cases. They noted that generalizability, statistically, does not usually occur in qualitative research. However, reader, or user generalizability can be garnered from qualitative research as the person reading a study can decide how the findings may apply to their situation. Merriam and Tisdale (2016) stated that maximum variation in sample and purposeful selection in sample can enhance transferability. This is defined as selecting a variety of participants and sites for the study. Through this variety, the findings may have more applications to a greater audience.

For this study, the researcher selected principals to interview at the elementary, middle, and high school level. While this allowed for the discovery of patterns that might occur across school levels, it also increases the number of readers who will be able to relate to the study

participants. The study is being conducted in a school district with a high level of diversity in their student, staff, and administrative leadership. By using a variety of sampling strategies to select interview candidates, a diverse pool of candidates was used for this study. These factors contributed to the external validity of the study.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Qualitative research needs detailed, in-depth data collection from multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this research, the primary sources of data were interviews and relevant documents. Individual interviews enabled the researcher to discover an in-depth understanding of how participants facilitated their hiring practices. Interview questions and protocols developed for this study were based on researched guidelines (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2003; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2014). Reviewing documents in coordination with the interviews will allow for some data triangulation (Creswell & Poth, 2016). Documents for review included school data profiles, staff retention rate documents, field notes, and an electronic journal with audit trail. As described in the section above, protocols were developed to support the reliability and validity of the study.

### ***Interviews***

To determine a starting point for interview candidates, Human Resources Supervisors at the Elementary, Middle, and High School level in this mid-Atlantic school district were contacted and asked to supply the researcher with the names of two to three of their principals who they believe to be effective at the hiring process. Using this list, the potential participants were invited to interview and were provided information explaining the purpose of the study. They were informed of the interview protocols and asked to sign an informed consent form. The

personal interviews were scheduled with the school leader or their executive assistant to occur at a time convenient for the principal. The interviews were conducted electronically. At the conclusion of the first set of interviews, the principals were asked to name two to three peers that they felt were effective at hiring. Follow up interviews with these principals were carried out in a similar format. Interviews were continued until data saturation had been reached. These interviews provided the researcher with insight and understanding into the hiring process used by these school leaders. These interviews were necessary to understand and respond to the research questions posted by this study. A structured interview process was used with clarifying information provided as needed to foster understanding of the questions. The interviews were all transcribed, and the participants had the opportunity to review the transcription for accuracy. After completing the interviews, significant observations and reflections were documented in the electronic journal to provide an audit trail of the process.

### ***Documents***

Using triangulation to improve validity and credibility requires the usage of data from a variety of sources (Creswell & Poth, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For this study, documentation was collected to provide more context to the interviews that are conducted. These documents included transcriptions, interview notes, school instructional retention rates, school data profiles (with school standardized data and survey information), and an electronic journal of observations to serve as an audit trail. E-mail correspondence, as it may pertain to the topic, may also be included in the documentation. This documentation will help provide a more accurate depiction of the context of the school leaders' hiring practices.

## ***IRB Approval***

As this research involves human participants, it was necessary to receive IRB approval to conduct this research. The researcher went through the process to receive this approval before conducting the study. The researcher took required training in Human Subjects Protection (see Appendix B). The researcher e-mailed a supervisor in the office of testing and accountability to get the information and procedures for submitting a packet of necessary documentation to the school district to receive local permission to conduct the research. All respondents were provided Information Sheets (see Appendix C) and received information about the purpose of the study. All research was conducted in alignment with the school district protocols and IRB standards.

## **Data Treatment/Management**

Creswell and Poth (2016) stated that throughout the design and implementation of a qualitative study, from the planning through the reporting, researchers need to be cognizant of any ethical issues that could occur and then work to address those issues. They described three principles for researchers to consider while conducting research: “respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice” (p. 114). They defined respect for persons as ensuring that the researchers follow all consent protocols and respect the privacy of all participants. They described concern for welfare as ensuring that protections are in place for all participants and not placed at risk. They described justice as ensuring that participants are treated equitably and that sampling strategies should be properly justified.

Creswell and Poth (2016) stated that a critical first step in conducting research is getting permission from local authorities to gather data and conduct research. For this study, approval from the Supervisor of Program Evaluation for this mid-Atlantic region was secured. Prior to conducting the interviews, the proposed study was discussed with Supervisors for Human

Resources. The methodology provided by Creswell and Poth (2016) was followed to ensure all prospective interview candidates were contacted to disclose the purpose of the study and receive informed consent. The consent form stated that study participation is completely voluntary and will not place them at any risk. The interviews were conducted electronically to ensure that the interview was minimally disruptive to their work responsibilities. Interview questions and protocols were created to avoid using leading questions, to ensure that sensitive information wasn't disclosed, and to withhold personal impressions.

During data analysis, it is critical for the researcher to provide multiple perspectives and discuss any contrary findings that may arise. As noted by Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) this is especially true when reporting data conducted during interviews. Ensuring privacy and confidentiality is important, and the researcher followed the recommended protocol of assigning fictitious names to interview subjects to maintain confidentiality. While reporting data, authentic results and language appropriate for the audience were provided. The researcher ensured that the research was not plagiarized and shared the results with others including participants and stakeholders.

To ensure ethical research, it was critically important to maintain confidentiality at all times. To protect the identities of the school district, and the individuals in this research, pseudonyms were used for all people, places, and organizations. The dissertation, research notes, and supporting documents were saved on a password protected computer and backed up on a secure portable hard drive. Interviews were recorded on a password protected computer and uploaded to a password protected computer file to aid in transcription and analysis. The computer and hard drive were kept in a secure location at the researcher's home.

The US Department of Health and Human Services Office for Human Research Protections has created regulations for the protection of human subjects in research at 45CFR 46 (45 *CFR* 46, 2021). This requires research records to be retained for at least three years after the completion of the research. Data, including informed consent forms, will therefore be stored securely for a minimum of three years following completion of the research study and then be eliminated. All paper files will be shredded and disposed. Any electronic files on memory drives, shared drives, laptops, and file servers will be permanently deleted.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Creswell and Poth (2016) provided a framework for analyzing qualitative data. The first step, after entering the data, involved going through each line of text or discrete passage and discerning what the interviewee was stating in that passage. Using the text, the researcher created a code label that applies to the situation. After analyzing this data, the researcher then looks to combine the codes into applicable broader themes.

Creswell and Poth (2016) discussed the usage of computer programs to help with concept mapping, chart creation, and cluster analyses. These tools help the researcher create a visual representation of the data to organize responses into distinct themes to address the research questions. They also noted that computer programs are beneficial in creating qualitative reports that can be used during data analysis or that can be helpful in recording insights as the data are processed. To aid in detecting patterns in coding, data were entered into Word and then into an Excel spreadsheet to analyze patterns. A coding program was also used to analyze and create visual representations of the respondent data.

## **Methodology Summary**

This chapter included the purpose of the study, the research design, research questions, needed data, site/sample selection, instrument design, instrument validity and reliability, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques. A basic quantitative study design approach will be used for the collection and analysis of information. This examination of the hiring process, as conducted by a variety of school principals, will add to the existing body of research regarding this important topic in education.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Analysis of Data**

#### **Introduction**

Despite the impact on students and schools, Klassen and Kim (2019) found that there has not been much systematic attention on the process of decision-making in how we make decisions selecting teachers. This was affirmed by Bruno and Strunk (2019), who similarly noted a scarcity of research on how school districts should hire effective teachers. With a teacher shortage hitting school districts nationwide (Walker, 2019), administrators cannot rely on successful previous experience as their only guide to effective hiring.

The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be successful. In this Mid-Atlantic school district, principals practice site-based management, and they are given latitude in their hiring procedures. The lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. Through analyzing these practices, commonalities were explored that might be applicable to a broader group of principals to help support future hiring decisions.

#### **Study Data**

To explore principals' hiring practices, the scientific methodology used for this study was a basic qualitative design. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) list several key features of this research method. Some of these defining characteristics are categorized as the focus of the research, the philosophical roots, the role of the researcher, the importance of induction, the necessity of rich description, and other important competencies. Ten principals from elementary, middle, high, and combined schools in one Mid-Atlantic school district were interviewed.

The researcher developed a range of interview questions to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?
- 2) What do school leaders indicate are the most important qualities that they look for when making hiring decisions?
- 3) What hiring practices have school leaders changed based on their experience of hiring teachers who were either effective or ineffective?

### **Data Analysis**

Creswell and Poth (2016) provide a framework for analyzing qualitative data. The first step, after entering the data, involves going through each line of text or discrete passage and discerning what the interviewee was stating in that passage. Using the text, the researcher creates a code label that applies to the situation. After analyzing this data, the researcher then looks to combine the codes into applicable broader themes. Creswell and Poth (2016) discuss the usage of computer programs to help with concept mapping, chart creation, and cluster analyses. To aid in detecting patterns in coding, data were entered into Word and then into an Excel spreadsheet to analyze patterns. A coding program, NVivo, was also used to analyze respondent data.

Interviews were all conducted and transcribed using the Virginia Tech Zoom account on the researcher's secure and password protected computer. After the original transcription was completed, participants were given three weeks to review and amend the transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the transcription and the themes contained therein (see Appendix D). No participants amended the initial transcript shared.

Transcripts were then collated together by interview question on their own Word document housed on the researcher's password-protected computer. The researcher then read through the interview responses for each question, made notes, and created codes to identify patterns, categories, and themes as described by the qualitative analysis provided by Creswell and Poth (2016). Data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet and NVivo analysis software. A pivot table for each interview question was used to monitor common clusters emerging from participant responses. The researcher reviewed Chapters 1-3 to support the development of themes that related to the pre-existing literature. During data analysis, the researcher engaged in ongoing reflection to understand multiple perspectives and study contrary findings that may arise. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) noted the importance of doing this when reporting data conducted during interviews.

### **Research Question One Analyzed Data**

What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use? The following interview questions correspond to research question one:

1. Please provide an overview of your hiring process starting with your selection procedures up through choosing a candidate to hire.
2. How did you develop your hiring process?

### ***Data Collection and Analysis: Research Question 1***

#### ***Interview Question 1***

**Please provide an overview of your hiring process starting with your selection procedures up through choosing a candidate to hire.**

After reviewing the transcripts, the following categories were identified: posting positions, gathering candidates, setting up and conducting interviews, and procedures for selecting a candidate for the position.

All principals, P1 – P10, discussed, as a first step, the posting of the vacancy in the county workflow system. P1 stated, “So, obviously, we put the position into {our workflow system} to start collecting candidates.” (P1, *l* 3). This system is linked to the county employment page and alerts job seekers of job vacancies by position by school. The vacancies list the basic responsibilities of the position, expectations of duties, and information on the salary range. After the positions have been posted, administrators are then able to see who has applied for their vacant position. The system also allows them the ability to review other applicants who have recently applied with the school district even if they have not applied for their specific school. After completing the logistics for posting the position, principals moved on to the next step, gathering candidates.

All principals (P1-P10) then discussed the methods they use to gather candidates. These methods varied among the group of principals, with a couple of practices being common among most of the group. All principals referenced looking at references (P1 – 10). P2 stated, “I take a quick look at their references and their experiences and I’m starting to see some candidates that might be a fit” (P2, *l* 19). P6 stated, “I spend quite a bit of time going through the people who apply and see what's posted online” (P6, *l* 141-142). Almost all principals referenced reviewing resumes of prospective candidates (P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P10). P5 noted that, “They would look at the references” (P5, *l* 137), and P2 stated, “I take a quick look at their references and their experiences and I’m starting to see some candidates that might be a fit” (P2, *l* 19-20). P7 stated, “We'll try to establish criteria that matter to us” (P7, *l* 183). Several principals

referenced checking for proper certification (P1, P3, P5, and P7). P1 stated, “We will read resumes and look at references, ensuring that the person is qualified and certified” (P1, l 4-5). Several also mentioned looking at screening scores that were conducted by human resources or other certified staff (P4, P6, P7). P4 (l 62-64) stated, “We look at if they've been screened by the content supervisors. We'll usually start with whoever has the highest screening.” Additionally, a few mentioned giving a preference to those candidates who proactively reached out to them regarding their interest in the school (P4, P8, and P9). P4 stated, “We start with the people that reached out to us personally for the position. If someone showed interest and reached out to us, those are usually the people we try to bring in first, because obviously there is a want to get into this building” (P4, l 46-48). P8 added, “I also look at who's reached out to me. I know, for some people they don't even pay attention to anybody who emails you. I feel like, you've gone to a little bit of extra effort, so I do generally try to check them out if they email me.” (P8, l 251-253). Additional unique methods that were mentioned included informing current staff of upcoming vacancies (P8), “I first let the staff know, just to say, that there has been an opening and if anyone is interested in considering a move” (P8, l 244-245), posting on social media about the vacancy (P8), and reaching out to college connections for candidates (P6 and P10). P6 stated, “I have other connections, but otherwise I might reach to organizations that I know, or like {local university} people that I know and say, hey, do you have any candidates who might apply” (P6, l 139-141).

After gathering prospective candidates, the principals then set up and conducted interviews (P1-P10). Principals all discussed the importance of their interview committees (P1-P10) and ensuring that they invite or include key personnel, like grade level leads, grade level teammates, and department chairs (P1-P10), as illustrated by P7 who stated, “We have other

team members in the interview with us such as the department chair or a teacher from within that team” (P7 l 204-205), or lead mentors (P4, P10). P4 stated,

I always try to invite my lead mentors. My lead mentors are my direct connection to my new hires so it's important that they are in the process from the beginning all the way through to the hiring. The mentors are one of their first points of contact. They're the ones who say - you told us in your interview that this is something that you're passionate about, so let me help you get there, so it kind of bridges that connection. I can't be everywhere at once, and it really does support our new hires whether they're brand new to teaching or they are a veteran teacher. So, my lead mentors are invited to everything now, whether they can make it or not, we still make sure that they're involved with the hiring process.” (P4 l 72-80).

They discussed the importance of the creation and refinement of their interview questions. P7 provided an in-depth review of how they created their interview questions,

We're asking questions that are instructional planning, instructional delivery, assessment, and feedback. We generally use the same question organization for interviews. There are 3 questions in all of our interviews that are icebreakers that tells about your professional experiences, and why you're interested in this school, and then the next two questions are where we tend to vary between departments. We've asked questions like “Describe a teacher that inspired you as a learner, and what it is about that teacher that you've found inspirational?”. The next question is “What are the things you think you're going to deliver as a teacher in your classroom?”. Generally, if there is a correlation, we may ask a question, “What else can you tell us?” Or “Why should we select you?” is occasionally asked. We typically will get into a technical question from a current curriculum

perspective. It might be how you teach the writing process in a language arts interview. It may be in a science interview. I will often say “I want students to be engaged in the process of science, not learning about science. What does that look like in your classroom?” In a social studies classroom, it may be “Can you describe a scenario in which you are teaching the skill sets associated with those of a historian as opposed to teaching the facts of history? How do you help students develop those skillsets down the line?” So that would be a technical question asked that kind of gets us started. In the interview we are developing a scale of candidate knowledge. (P7, l 210 – 225)

A couple of principals noted the importance of considering scheduling factors when conducting the interviews (P4, P8). P4 stated, “When we schedule them for interviews, we try to chunk it all around a smaller amount of time. We don't like to do a couple of this week and maybe one next week, and one later. We try to do it closer together, because it helps us to make sure that we stay fresh on all the candidates” (P4, l 56-59)

After conducting the interviews, principals (P1- P10) worked with their teams to select their top candidate. Several principals mentioned debriefing with their team regarding candidates’ strengths and weaknesses (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P7). P1 noted, “after each interview we would have a debrief about the strengths and growth areas for each candidate” (P1, l 11-12) Several mentioned looking at applicants’ unique contributions and diversity when making their final decisions (P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10). While one principal mentioned having used a scoring rubric on occasion (P7), “We have at times...used a rubric or a model answer” (P7, l 231), most noted that they did not have specific rubrics that were used in the interview process (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6), as stated by P6, “We don’t use a rubric” (P6, l 174).

Table 2 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 2**

*How Schools Conduct Their Hiring Procedures*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Posting Positions	x	X	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x
Gathering Candidates	x	X	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x
Setting up and Conducting Interviews	x	X	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x
Selecting a Candidate	x	X	X	x	x	x	x	X	x	x

*Interview Question 2*

How did you develop your hiring process?

After reviewing the transcripts, the following categories were identified: experience as an assistant principal, development of practices over time, and professional development.

A majority of the principals stated that their hiring practices were, in part, based on experiences that they had had as an assistant principal working with their principal (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10). P1 noted that a major influence on his hiring came, “mostly from my former principal” (P1, / 318) with P2 adding, “as an assistant principal at my previous school in {a different county} our principal there had a pretty solid process that I was a part of frequently. So, I borrowed a lot from that when I got here” (P2, / 325-326). P7 stated, “{my former principal} was very supportive and brought me into the process that he used when I was a teacher going through a leadership program. So, some of that's things I learned from him and

some of it's things I've learned from another principal, but ultimately it took a couple of years to get down to how we're all going to do business” (P7, l 400 – 403).

Many of the principals also noted that they had refined their hiring practices over time based on the experiences that had or hadn't worked for them. P1, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P10 all describe how they have developed and refined their processes as they have gained more experience in the principal position. P4 stated, “So, it was a lot of trial and error over multiple years, and no hiring is ever perfect” (P4, l 357). P7 also added, “we've gotten better just seeing hundreds of candidates to know when somebody's going to be a good fit for us” (P7, l 406-407). P8 stated, “So, most of my procedures came from my experience with a peppering of training and some from the county” (P8, l 421-422). P4 noted, “How did we develop that? A lot of experience of things that did not work. I was always a part of the hiring process with my former principal. I really started looking at candidates and, yeah, it's like a puzzle. You dig deep down, and you go back through their references. You try to find things that might spark” (P4, l 343-345).

Several principals stated that professional development played a role in the creation of their hiring practices (P1, P5, P6, P7, and P8). Some (P1 and P5) referenced professional development they had taken as a principal and others mentioned trainings that they had received from the Human Resources Department (P1, P5, P6, P7, P8). P5 noted, “I would say from HR, I think, when I was in the AP Academy. There may have been a couple of sessions on hiring practices. The HR Supervisor really helped principals and assistant principals, I think, with hiring practices and really just the whole process” (P5, l 375-377). P7 stated, “I think some of it was very much input from human resources” (P7, l 395). Two principals, P1 and P5 specifically noted that reading a book by Jimmy Casas had shifted their thinking, with P1 stating, “I'd say the

Costas PD and then my experience as an assistant principal are probably the two biggest influences” (P1, l 322-323).

It is noteworthy that several principals also stated that their practices hadn’t been particularly informed by central office or their leadership coursework (P3, P8, and P9). P3 stated, “As a new principal, you're not really taught that by central office. For the most part, that was not part of my leadership classes. So, basically, it causes you to swim on your own, and hopefully you get it right. If you don't, it gets interesting” (P3, l 337-339). P8 added, “I don't think we really talked about the process in our graduate program. So, it was probably more just experience, not really training through the county” (P8, l 416-417).

Table 3 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent regarding how principals stated they developed their hiring process.

**Table 3**

*Principals’ Responses to the Development of their Hiring Process*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Experiences as an AP	x	x		x		x	x		x	x
Developed over time	x			x	x		x	x	x	x
Professional Development	x				x	x	x	x		

**Major Themes**

Categories that emerged from the interview questions were used to identify two themes for the first research question: logistics and central office systems and personal experiences and

development. The findings established by these themes will be further discussed in Chapter 5. The table below, Table 4, represents the emerging themes from research question one.

**Table 4**

*Themes Emerging from Research Question 1 and Categories Contributing to Themes*

Themes	Categories Contributing to Themes	Interview Question Foundation
Logistics and Central Office Systems	Posting Positions	1
	Professional Development	2
Personal Experiences and Development	Gathering Candidates	1
	Setting up and Conducting Interviews	1
	Selecting Candidates	1
	Developed over time	2
	Experiences as an AP	2

**Research Question Two Analyzed Data**

What are the most important qualities that school leaders look for when making hiring decisions?

The following interview questions correspond to research question two:

1. Throughout the hiring process, are there specific traits or qualities that you look for when making your hiring decisions?
2. What qualities do you think are the most important when making hiring decision?Data Collection and Analysis: Research Question 2

***Interview Question 3***

**Throughout the hiring process, are there specific traits or qualities that you look for when making your hiring decisions?**

After reviewing the transcripts, the following categories were identified: information from references, prior work experiences, specified characteristics, connections, and areas they don't consider.

Several principals mentioned information gathered from references as being critically important when making hiring decisions (P1, P2, P6, and P8). P1 stated, "I'd say the biggest thing for me is references and seeing what former people are saying about them" (p1, l 444). P2 noted, "If you see that somebody has worked in different environments, and then you see in the references evidence of success in those environments, that's a good starting point" (P2, l 461-462).

Many of the principals referenced examining prior work experiences when making their decisions (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P10). Those experiences include the level of candidate transiency (P1, P6, and P7), their variety of school experiences (P2, P10), their student teaching experiences (P2, P7, P8, and P10), and their prior experience at the relevant school level (P2, P3, P7, and P10). P3 stated, "I look at content knowledge, and how much experience they have" (P3, l 477-478). P2 stated, "When you can find it, experience in middle school. It is nice when you've experienced working with middle school students" (P2, l 458-459). P7 noted that he spends time, "looking at the resume and going through the resume linearly and sequentially, progressing through their professional and academic experiences" (P7, l 521-522). P8 adds, "You want to have somebody with a good foundation of knowledge of and an idea of what the job's going to be about. Ideally maybe they've done student teaching. They've been in schools. They know what good instruction might look like. You do have to have that before you fit" (P8, l 540-541).

Many of the principals stated specific qualities that they seek when making hiring decisions (P2, P3, P7, P8, P10). These qualities included a willingness to take on additional responsibilities (P2, P10), a complementary skill set to the current staff (P7), coaching/club experience (P2, P10), sense of humor (P8), positive attitude (P8, P10), enthusiasm for the school (P5), open-mindedness (P6), strong relationship building (P8), and strong content knowledge (P3, P7, and P8). P2 noted, “I look for folks that express a willingness or have experience with getting involved in things outside of the classroom whether it be coaching or club sponsorship or just showing desire to impact the school outside of just the four walls of their classroom” (P2, *l* 463-465). P3 stated, “Part of what I look for is individuals who have strong content knowledge” (P3, *l* 475). P8 noted, “You want to have somebody with a good foundation of knowledge of and an idea of what the job's going to be about” (P8, *l* 540-541), and “we say we can always teach skills, you can't really teach the attitude, right? But you know you also have to have some starting place for skills” (P8, *l* 552-553). This topic will be further delineated in the subsequent question.

A few of the principals mentioned the importance of connections when making their hiring decisions (P3, P4, P5, and P10). Those connections were often to the current staff in their building or a preference for candidates from specific colleges and universities whose graduates have proved successful at their school. P3 stated, “I sometimes look at schools where we usually get strong candidates. So, I look at content knowledge, and how much experience they have. I also look at teachers from schools that you know they have a good reputation, or a good fit based on teachers that I have worked with” (P3, *l* 478-479). P4 stated, “I will say we've had success with certain schools more than others. Absolutely. So, any time someone comes across the table, and they might have studied at one of those particular institutions, it sparks my interest a little bit

more because then I know they're prepared" (P4, l 481-483). P5 stated, "I do look if someone comes to me and says that we have a candidate that graduated from {a certain university} ... So, there are certain schools, like the schools up in Pennsylvania... where we've gotten great candidates. And it's not like it's 5 out of 10. I would say all 10 have been great candidates. So, there are certain schools that I will look for" (P5, l 492-494).

Finally, several principals mentioned areas that they don't consider when making their hiring decisions (P1, P5, P9, P10). Those areas include GPA ("I don't look at the GPA" (P5, l 500) and where they attended college ("I've never really looked at that" (P9, l 573). Additionally, P10 stated, "I really don't look necessarily at the school. I'm sure there's people who are like, I'm a Hokie, and once a Hokie you always need to be getting them. But, no, I don't, and grade point average, no, I don't. I don't think most people do (P10, l 588-590).

Table 5 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

Table 5  
 Traits or Qualities Looked at Throughout the Hiring Process

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Information from References	x	x				x		x		
Prior Work Experiences	x	x	x			x	x	x		x
Specified Characteristics		x	x				x	x		x
Connections			x	x	x					x
Areas Not Considered	x				x				x	x

Table 5 shows that principals had different areas that they considered important, with a candidate's prior experience being used the most frequently when making hiring considerations.

#### *Interview Question 4*

#### **What qualities do you think are the most important when making hiring decision?**

After reviewing the transcripts, the following categories were noted: prior experiences, perceived fit, pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, and intangibles.

Several principals noted the importance of prior experiences when making their final hiring decisions. Several principals mentioned the importance of successful prior experiences (P4, P5, P7, and P8). These comments, “I do look a lot for experienced teachers” (P8, *l* 781) and “We, of course, look for experience” (P4, *l* 698), are indicative of the responses on that topic. In addition, one principal, P5, noted the importance of finding candidates who had experience working with students of diverse backgrounds. That principal stated their preference for candidates with, “some experience working with any kind of challenging students or if they have experience working with students from different backgrounds, from diverse backgrounds” (P5, *l* 712-713).

A few principals mentioned the perceived fit of the candidate as a critical factor in their hiring. P1, P2, and P10 all mentioned the importance of the candidate being a good fit for the needs of the building. P1 noted, “It's really about a feel and a feel for the building” (P1, *l* 594). P1 and P2 noted that it was important to them to find candidates who they perceived to be a complementary match to the current teams or departments in their building. P2 stated, “I also ask if I can picture them working on that team and thinking about what that team needs” (P2, *l* 633-634). Another principal, P8, noted the importance of finding a match to increase the diversity in the building (based on race, experience level, and/or gender).

Many of the respondents (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7) noted the importance of pedagogical skills. This quality manifested in a variety of fashions. Most commonly, several principals (P2, P4, P6,

and P7) discussed the importance of the candidate understanding the basic elements of effective instruction. One noted, “I want to hear them describe a lesson in which the planning has become reality. I want them to say, I did this, and this was the outcome, and I chose this activity because of this” (P7, *l* 770-771). Several (P2, P4, and P6) mentioned the importance they place on a candidate being able to verbalize, in an interview, how they will work and collaborate with their team (P2, P5, and P7) or how they might work with their students (P2, P4, and P6). One principal referenced wanting a candidate “being able to speak to good instruction without using all the canned kind of responses” (P6, *l* 738-739), and another referenced wanting candidates who could, “verbalize what they would want to do in the classroom and in the CLT” (P2, *l* 628-629). Additionally, there were several features only mentioned by one of the respondents. Those areas include intentional planning (P7), an ability to ask for help (P4), a willingness to accept and respond to feedback (P4), the ability to make content accessible to all learners (P7), and the ability to create meaningful feedback (P7). One respondent’s response provides relevant insight, stating, “None of the good things that happen in our classrooms happen without intentional planning in my opinion. We have some good accidents, but in our best classrooms, teachers are very intentional about what's happening” (P7, *l* 768-769).

The following category, interpersonal skills, elicited the most information from respondents, with P1 P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10 all stating the importance of interpersonal skills when selecting their candidate. The top interpersonal skill was a candidate’s passion for either teaching (P1, P4, P7, P9, and P10) (“But overall, the biggest thing is, does the person have a passion for teaching? Can they exude that in an interview that they have a passion for working with kids?” (P1, *l* 599-600)), or working with students (P1, P2, P6, and P7). The next most frequent response was the perceived ability of the candidate to build relationships and make

connections with their students and colleagues (P1, P2, P3, P7, P9, and P10). Responses on this topic included statements like this, “I’m looking to see whether or not they’re able to build relationships” (P3, *l* 674-675), “If they don’t say relationships, they’re not working here... everything has to come back to relationships” (P1, *l* 610-612), and “I’m looking for, are you a relationship builder to me? That’s important, because I figure there are certain things we can teach you, but I can’t teach those innate qualities that you just kind of feel from a person” (P9, *l* 801-803). Another principal had a similar sentiment regarding this topic, stating, “we can teach you those skill sets, that’s just technical work that we’ll build over time. The other stuff I can’t necessarily teach you” (P7, *l* 778-779). Two respondents (P7, P10) noted both the importance of having a growth mindset and the inquisitiveness of the candidates. Individual respondent’s added authenticity (P6), belief in children’s ability to learn (P3), and initiative-taking (P4). One principal, P6, stated it is important that prospective candidates, “come across authentic, because the kids are going to eat them alive if they’re not. If they’re not, or they don’t truly care about kids and what they’re teaching, it’s not going to work” (P6, *l* 727-728).

The final category is intangibles, or something that the respondents were unable to put into words. Each of the principals in this category (P1, P2, P3, P6, and P9) discussed what they called, “a feel.” That response is seen in the following passages, “It’s really about a feel” (P1, *l* 594), “So, it truly is a feeling” (P2, *l* 638), and “It’s kind of a feeling you have. I wouldn’t say it’s random because there’s something that connects” (P3, *l* 693-694).

Table 6 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 6***Most Important Qualities in Finalizing Hiring Decisions*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Prior Work Experiences				x	x		x	x		
Perceived Fit	x	x						x		x
Pedagogical Skills		x		x	x	x	x			
Interpersonal Skills	x	x	x	x		x	x		x	x
Intangibles	x	x	x			x			x	

Table 6 shows that principals had different areas that they considered important, with a candidate's interpersonal skills being referenced the most frequently when making final hiring decisions.

***Major Themes***

The following three themes emerged from this review: prior experiences, pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal skills. The table below, Table 7, represents the major themes from research question 2. These themes will be further discussed in chapter 5.

**Table 7***Themes Emerging from Research Question 2 and Categories Contributing to Themes*

Themes	Categories Contributing to Themes	Interview Question Foundation
Prior Experiences	Information from References	3
	Prior Work Experiences	3 and 4
	Connections	3
	Areas Not Considered	3
Pedagogical Knowledge	Pedagogical Skills	4
Interpersonal Skills	Perceived Fit	4
	Interpersonal Skills	4
	Specified Characteristics	3
	Intangibles	4

**Research Question Three Analyzed Data**

What practices have principals found to be effective and ineffective for successful hiring when reflecting on their hiring decisions and looking at educational outcomes? The following interview questions corresponds to research question three:

1. Thinking of some of the effective teachers that you hired, do you recall any indicators during the hiring process that led you to hire this teacher?
2. Thinking of teachers you have hired that have not been as effective, do you recall and indicators of that during the hiring process?
3. How has your hiring process evolved over time?

4. Do you have anything else that you would like to share about your hiring practices?

*Data Collection and Analysis: Research Question 3*

*Interview Question 5*

**Thinking of some of the effective teachers that you hired, do you recall any indicators during the hiring process that led you to hire this teacher?**

After reviewing the transcripts, several major categories became evident: reference to their previous successful teaching, a candidate's pedagogical skills, and a candidate's interpersonal skills. These categories were similar to those discussed in question four.

Several of the principals (P1, P5, P9, and P10) referenced the successful teaching experience of those effective teachers, prior to them working at their schools. One principal noted that many of her successes had previous experience and stated that, "they already had proven records. So that made the process a lot easier" (P9, l 984). Another reported, "We are looking for experience, and even with the brand-new teachers, experience with student teaching, you know, or some type of experience in a classroom. I think that that's really important" (P5, l 910-911).

Many principals (P1, P3, P5, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10) reported indicators they had noticed that involved pedagogical skills. As one principal stated, he has had success with candidates where "they're technically really, really strong. So, if I'm looking for someone that has strong teaching methods" (P7, l 944-945). He additionally noted that, "they're engaging people with really strong content knowledge and they're an expert in instructional planning and delivery" (P7, l 953-954). Five principals (P1, P3, P5, P7, and P8) noted the teacher's love of their content area, for example, "that love for the subject area, all of that came through in the

interview” (P1, l 832-833). Four principals (P4, P7, P8, and P9) stated the teacher’s clarity of thought and vision for success in the classroom. Other areas of note were a desire to continue developing their professional skills (P4 and P6), strong technical skills, and an ability to teach a variety of content areas. One principal stated they had success with candidates, “where they're continuing to learn and they're continuing to try new things. They don't just say, well, I've always done it this way, or I've been doing this for many years, and it's successful. I want somebody who's going to continue to change with the times” (P4, l 879-880).

As in the previous question, principals focused heavily on the interpersonal skills of their effective teachers. All of the principals (P1 - P10) mentioned a quality in this category in their responses. Again, passion for their school and teaching (P1, P2, P5, P8, and P9) and building relationships (P1, P2, P3, and P6) were frequent responses. As one principal stated, he has had success with candidates who are “buying into building relationships; buying into the idea that you know we're not here to get kids, we're here to help kids” (P1, l 835-836). Additionally, someone being there to help the students (P1, P2, P3, P6, and P8) was a common factor that defined an effective teacher. One principal stated, “They really seem excited about teaching or really love this whole idea of learning, and they're very kids-centric” (P8, l 974-975). Another noted about a successful candidate that, “she would talk in depth about the research and the learning she's done around language acquisition. But then she was smart enough to say if they don't know I care about them, all of this doesn't matter” (P2, l 851-853). Additional factors mentioned by respondents included candidates who were dynamic (P1), creative (P8), high energy (P3, P5), talented (P2), having presence (p3), gifted at listening (P4), authentic (P6), flexible (P10), understanding (P4), and reflective (P6 and P9). Regarding talent, one principal stated his former principal told him to, “hire talent. He said, you're going to feel talent, you're

going to see talent, and you might interview someone, and the talent is jumping off the pages and you know that they're going to be good for kids...If they have talent and passion, you're going to be good to go, so I'm always looking for that when I'm interviewing somebody” (P2, 855-858).

Table 8 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 8**

*Traits Shown by Highly Effective Hires*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Prior Work Experiences	x				x				x	x
Pedagogical Skills	x		x	x	x	x	X	x	x	X
Interpersonal Skills	x	x	x	x	x	x	X	x	x	x

Table 8 shows that principals considered both pedagogical skills and interpersonal skills when analyzing candidates, they had hired who had turned out to be very effective at their job.

***Interview Question 6***

**Thinking of teachers you have hired that have not been as effective, do you recall and indicators of that during the hiring process?**

After reviewing the transcripts, four major categories were discovered: pedagogical skills, interpersonal skills, logistical factors, and challenges not evident in the interview.

Several of the principals (P2, P4, and P10) focused on a lack of pedagogical skills as an indicator of teacher ineffectiveness. One stated, “There was probably not a lot of meat to their answers, so, very surface. Just not a go-getter who could describe a language arts block from beginning to end” (P10, 1 1234-1235). They mentioned during the hiring process they had

noticed that pedagogical supports might be needed (P2), they believed the candidate to have weak management (P4), or their answers lacked depth (P10). One principal stated, “If one of their first questions is - what's your discipline process? That's a red flag right there that tells me that you don't have a lot of experience with classroom management or that you don't understand how to manage your classroom” (P4, l 1071-1073). Another added, “If I look back at the handful here that have been a miss, I didn't feel great after the interview process, but they were the best that we had, and we thought we would be able to put some supports in place” (P2, l 1044-1045).

While split on the specifics, interpersonal skills again dominated the responses for this question, with P1- P8 all noting a variety of areas as indicators. Those indicators included a negative attitude (P1) (“There is very much a woe is me attitude which I did not see at all in the interview” (P1, l 1026)), lack of confidence (P1 and P3), concerns with connecting with students (P2, P4, P7, P8), belief in lack of effort (P4), inflexible (P5 and P7), not passionate about teaching (P6), insensitive (P6), not reflective (P6), lacking authenticity (P6), inability to listen (P7), lack of collaboration (P7, P8) and an inability to accept feedback (P7). One principal added, “When they have a low level of confidence. And they show a little insecurity; they answer slowly, and because they don't have confidence, they're not sure what they want to do, so they don't have a presence, and in the classroom, they waffle, and go back and forth, and that individual may have some struggles with we're doing. I think middle schoolers eat insecurity for breakfast” (P3, l 1055-1057).

Many of the principals (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P9, and P10) mentioned logistical factors that resulted in them hiring less effective teachers. Four respondents noted that instead of waiting for an ideal candidate, they sometimes needed to go with the best candidates who were available (P2, P5, P6, and P10). As stated by one principal, “Unfortunately, you know, sometimes you hire

in hope” (P3, l 1053). Another stated, “Anytime that you're hiring in August I always have concerns” (P1, l 1036). Another principal added, “One was, to be honest, we were kind of between a rock and a hard place, and we needed someone, and they were qualified. We just couldn't find anybody” (P6, l 1137-1138). One of the principals said, “We were thinking, let's just get somebody in, which, unfortunately I feel like we're seeing more and more of- let's just get somebody in and hope that I can train you and I can support you with the resources” (P10, l 1225-1227). Two principals noted that some of their ineffective teachers had been forced transfers from other locations (P6 and P9). Another mentioned the challenge of trying to conduct interviews over Zoom (P9).

Finally, half of the principals (P1, P4, P5, P7, and P10) all mentioned that the challenges they experienced with teachers were not evident in the interview process. One stated, “There are a lot of people out there that can talk, and they talk really well, and they know the philosophy behind it. They just don't do it” (P4, l 1060-1061). Another noted, “It's been so completely different than what the interview panel saw. Those are frustrating. It's hard because you know everything can look good and then a different person shows up” (P5, l 1127-1128). One principal stated that indicators were, “not always apparent immediately during the interview, but sometimes there are indicators before they step in the classroom, but, at that point, it's, you know, let's make the most of this partnership at that point” (P7, l 1161-1162). Finally, one mentioned, “we've all interviewed people who turn up the first day and you're like, were you the same person that I interviewed? So, it's trying to figure out who's going to not be the person you saw in the interview” (P10, l 1236-1238).

Table 9 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 9**

*Areas of Challenge Shown by Less Effective Hires*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Pedagogical Skills		x		x						x
Interpersonal Skills	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		
Logistical Factors	x	x		x	x	x			x	x
Challenges Not Evident	x			x	x		x			x

Table 9 shows that principals had different areas that aligned with less effective hires, with interpersonal skills and logistical factors appearing most frequently.

***Interview Question 7***

**How has your hiring process evolved over time?**

After reviewing the transcripts, two major categories became evident: impact from applicant shortages and an evolution of hiring practices with experience.

Half of the principals (P1, P2, P4, P7, and P9) stated that their hiring practices had been impacted due to the shortage of prospective applicants. As one principal stated, “I would argue we have to make more compromising decisions than we did a decade ago” (P7, l 1403-1404). Another added, “Now it's desperation. I mean basically, because there are so many principals looking for teachers all at the same time. And you basically have to sell yourself because teachers have so many options” (P9, l 1458-1459). Due to this, they noted having to make more compromises (P7 and P9) in their selection process and try to fill their vacancies faster (P2 and P4). One stated, “I’m no longer waiting a week to see what applicants pile up before I screen, you're doing it in the moment” (P2, l 1282-1283). Several of the principals also stated that there has been a power shift from administration to teachers (P1 and P9). This shift has resulted in

principals needing to do more to sell their school and their leadership (P1, P2, P4, P5, and P9). As stated by one principal, “I think that the power has changed a little bit from admin to teachers. We've talked with our staff that we have to sell our school to candidates. We have to sell who we are as leaders. We have to sell who we are as teachers” (P1, *l* 1246-1247). Another echoed that language and said, “I feel like I have to take the time to really sell the school. Our leaders have become saleswomen and salesmen” (P5, *l* 1385-1386). Another, on that same theme, said, “Now I have candidates that have like a whole list of things they want to know, like specific things. They might ask about planning time and how we manage that. Which is totally different than it's been in the past. I know we have to sell ourselves because everybody else is looking for those candidates” (P9, *l* 1478-1479). Another noted, “Times have changed. I think schools do need to do a lot more outreach, make those personal touches and make those personal connections” (P4, *l* 1367-1368). Principals have tried to do that by highlighting test scores (P1), highlighting their school on social media (P2), and touting their survey scores from staff and the community (P2). Principals noted the increased importance of supporting their current staff (P2, P9). One principal stated, “it's maintaining a positive reputation and hopefully building on it... we do take care of our teachers, and that word gets out” (P2, *l* 1310 – 1319).

The other category discussed was the specific ways that the principals had evolved their practices over time. Many principals stated that they now trust their decision making better (P3, P6, P7, P8, and P10). One stated, “as time goes on, and you get a pretty good percentage of good hits, then you learn as a leader and kind of trust yourself a little more with the idea of what you're looking for, or what's going to work out. So basically, I know what I'm looking for and based on whether or not the individuals show that in an interview will determine if I want them” (P3, *l* 1332-1335). Another said, “I probably trust myself more” (P8, *l* 1454). Several principals noted

that they have gained a better understanding of their building and their needs which has made them more effective at hiring (P2, P6, and P8). One stated, “I think I’m getting better about knowing what I want, and knowing how the school works, how the departments work together, and what personalities are going to clash. So, yeah, I think you develop a sense for that” (P6, 1394-1396). Another noted a shift in his practices where he is, “going to punt on some of the technical side and focus in on more of the personal traits. The technical qualities I’m confident we can support through mentorship, through strong CLTs, through strong supervision” (P7 1410-1412). A few noted that they have worked to get more people involved in the hiring process, with P2 and P5 stating that they have worked to develop their administrative teams’ skills in the hiring process. P1 and P9 stated that they have increased the number of people that they involve in their hiring decisions. Finally, others have modified their interviews with examining their interview questions (P6 and P7) or ensuring that applicant have more opportunities to talk with current staff (P5).

Table 10 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 10**

*Factors in the Evolution of Principal Hiring Practices*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Impact from Applicant Shortages	x	x		x	x		X		x	
Evolved Hiring Practices	x	x	x		x	x	X	x	x	x

Table 10 shows that most principals have evolved their hiring practices during their tenure. Several principals noted that they have had to evolve their practices due to changes in qualified candidates.

### ***Interview Question 8***

#### **Do you have anything else that you would like to share about your hiring practices?**

While this question was very open-ended, several major categories became evident: the impact of applicant shortages, personal reflections, and thoughts on hiring.

The topic of applicant shortages was on the forefront of several principals' minds (P1, P2, P6, P10). One principal stated, "it's definitely changed due to this teacher shortage" (P1, l 1515-1516). Another mentioned that it is, "a heck of a smaller pool even for a school like ours. So, shifts have occurred" (P2, l 1536). Another said, "I don't think anybody at this time really has that many people applying for our jobs, so I think that has had an impact on how we hire as well" (P6, l 1639-1641). One stated, "It's not like I'm closing the door to anyone, it's that no one's coming" (P10, l 1809-1810). Several principals discussed potential remedies to this issue. Hiring earlier (P1), speeding up the hiring process (P2, P3, and P5), using retirees to spur recruitment (P5), increasing connections between colleges and universities and K-12 schools (P5), and offering new teachers signing bonuses (P5).

Several principals used this question as an opportunity for their personal reflections on what is important to them when hiring. Topics in this category include seeking more diversity (P5 and P10) (my intentional hiring practices to make sure that I'm bringing more candidates in that look like the students in our building" (P5, l 1599-1600)), an increase in reflectiveness (P9) increased attention to following up with applicants (P3 and P8), and the importance of including the lead mentor in the process (P4). That principal noted, "I just really think involving the lead

mentor is huge, bringing them in from the beginning. Because if there are ever concerns it's usually the lead mentor who is the first person I go to help me out, so you have to make sure you got a solid lead mentor who understands the instructional core, and supports your vision and mission of the school, because they will make sure that it gets done" (P4, l 1580 – 1583).

Finally, some principals used the closing question to talk about the general topic of hiring. One stated, "I think it's a great time to kind of delve into this and I think if we're all being honest about what it is that we're all looking for, we will be able to recruit better people. But where are we learning it? We're not...So I think it's a great thing to talk about at the leadership level, especially now" (P10, l 1865-1868). This discussion included updating interview procedures (P6), the desire for better screening procedures (P6), and the recognition that the work of the principal doesn't end with hiring candidates but that it continues throughout their work (P8). One stated the challenge of figuring out best practices that might apply to all. He stated, "Different buildings need different things, and the metrics that I may make a priority over, might not be the same as someone else" (P7, l 1690-1691). Two principals (P7 and P10) discussed how important this topic was for succeeding in education. One said, "you are balancing a finite amount of time with an incredibly important decision that impacts the life of your school" (P6, l 1646-1647). Another mentioned, "I see it as the Holy Grail, and our role as educational leaders is to put the right people in the right place" (P7, l 1712-1713). P7 also noted that this topic wasn't one frequently discussed with colleagues. That principal, P7, also mentioned the challenges in even figuring out how one would measure hiring success. He stated, "I believe that we've done decent work in hiring people that have done decent work for kids, so I think some of what we're doing is working. What I don't know is how we measure that" (P7, l 1672-1674). One principal (P3) noted that despite all of their growth in hiring, sometimes their

instincts are just wrong. P8 closed by mentioning that sometimes, effective hiring just comes down to luck stating, “there’s always a degree of luck with it all” (P8, 1 1755-1756).

Table 11 represents the categories identified in this interview question and the corresponding principal respondent.

**Table 11**

*Additional Thoughts on Hiring*

Categories	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10
Applicant Shortage	x	x	x		x	x				X
Personal Reflection			x	x	x	x		x	x	X
Thoughts on Hiring			x			x	x	x		X

Table 11 shows that principals had three major categories of discussion when closing. Many of them reflected on their personal practices and the implications of the applicant shortages. Half of them discussed their views on the importance of learning more about effective hiring practices.

**Major Themes**

The following three themes emerged from this review: changing conditions in education, understanding what works, and critical factors when hiring. The table below, Table 12, represents the major themes from research question 2. These themes will be further discussed in chapter 5.

**Table 12***Themes Emerging from Research Question 3 and Categories Contributing to Themes*

Themes	Categories Contributing to Themes	Interview Question Foundation
Changing Conditions in Education	Applicant Shortage	7, 8
	Logistics	6
Understanding What Works	Personal Reflection	8
	Evolved Hiring Practices	7
Critical Factors When Hiring	Pedagogical Skills	5 and 6
	Interpersonal Skills	5 and 6
	Prior Experiences	5
	Personal Reflections	8
	Challenges Not Evident	6

**Summary**

The purpose of this study was to identify the hiring practices that principals state they use to hire effective teachers. Through a basic qualitative design, principals were interviewed using a semi-structured approach. Interviews were recorded and transcribed through the researcher's Virginia Tech's Zoom account and subsequently coded using the researcher's secure Virginia Tech Drive. The following three research questions guided this study:

- 1) What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?
- 2) What do school leaders indicate are the most important qualities that they look for when making hiring decisions?
- 3) What hiring practices have school leaders changed based on their experience of hiring teachers who were either effective or ineffective?

## **Themes Emerging from the Analysis of Data for Research Question 1**

The data from Research Question 1 showed that there were two main facets taken into consideration that guide hiring practices for principals. Some hiring practices are predicated on the systems and protocols put in place by the school district and a function of the hiring program that is used in the district. Some professional development and interactions with human resources provided many leaders with their hiring structures. While the principals differed in their approach, they all had the same basic hiring steps. Though some of the structures were a function of the hiring program, principals relied heavily on their personal experiences and their own development as a leader to refine their hiring practices. Their approach to gathering candidates, selecting candidates, and setting up and conducting interviews were frequently impacted by their experience as assistant principals and their reflection on their successes. Themes for Research Question 1 can be found in Table 4 and are as follows:

### ***Theme 1***

Part of a principal's hiring process is based on the systemic logistics set in place in the hiring district and partly a result of professional development trainings that provide the key elements needed to move a position forward.

### ***Theme 2***

Personal experiences and the successes and setbacks from trial and error led principals to develop distinctive practices for hiring effective teachers.

## **Themes Emerging from the Analysis of Data for Research Question 2**

The data from Research Question 2 highlighted three prime areas of consideration that principals use in making hiring decisions: experience; technical skill; and interpersonal skills. Principals placed a high level of importance on a candidate's prior success when those indicators were available. They gathered this information through their resume, references, and a variety of connections. Principals also indicated a preference for candidates with a strong understanding of pedagogical skills that could lead to positive student outcomes. Principals also frequently discussed the perceived interpersonal skills of their prospective candidates and the personality qualities that they were looking for to guide their decision making. This perception was an important part of their final hiring decisions. Themes for Research Question 2 can be found in Table 7 and are as follows:

### ***Theme 1***

Principals rely on prior experience of candidates to inform their hiring decisions.

### ***Theme 2***

Principals work to infer the pedagogical skills of prospective candidates when making hiring decisions.

### ***Theme 3***

Principals place a high level of importance on their perception of a candidate's interpersonal skills when making their hiring decisions.

### **Themes Emerging from the Analysis of Data for Research Question 3**

The data from Research Question 3 indicated how principals have changed their hiring practices based on their experiences as a school leader. Analyzing hires who have shown to be effective or ineffective provided principals with data to inform their future decisions. Most principals had discovered critical factors for hiring based on what had and hadn't worked in the past. Their hiring practices were also influenced by their ability to reflect on their own procedures and understanding what would work best for their building. Finally, many principals were cognizant of the evolving landscape for hiring teachers in a time of a hiring shortage for teachers. These systemic changes and resulting hiring challenges were foremost on the minds of many of the respondents. Themes for Research Question 3 can be found in Table 12 and are as follows:

#### ***Theme 1***

Changing conditions in education due to a variety of factors have altered how principals hire.

#### ***Theme 2***

Gaining experience as a leader and having a better understanding of what will work in their school, has helped inform principal hiring decisions.

#### ***Theme 3***

Based on what has and hasn't worked with previous hiring, principals have been able to develop critical factors to inform their hiring practices.

Chapter 5 will include a summary and discussion of findings, implications for practice, suggestions for future research and personal reflections.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Findings, Implications, and Recommendations for Future Studies**

For this qualitative study, the researcher examined the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be successful. The lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. Through analyzing these practices, commonalities were explored that might be applicable to a broader group of principals to help support future hiring decisions. Data were collected using semi-structured interviews, which were recorded via Zoom and then transcribed. The transcriptions were coded and analyzed in order to develop categories and themes centered around the following research questions:

- 1) What hiring practices do school leaders indicate that they use?
- 2) What do school leaders indicate are the most important qualities that they look for when making hiring decisions?
- 3) What hiring practices have school leaders changed based on their experience of hiring teachers who were either effective or ineffective?

This chapter will state the findings and implications of this data and conclude with recommendations for future studies.

#### **Summary of Findings**

After analyzing the data, five findings were identified. These five findings, their corresponding data points, and supporting research follow.

## *Finding 1*

**Principals consistently used the same systems for their hiring practices: posting positions, gathering candidates, setting up and conducting interviews, and creating procedures for selecting a candidate for the position.**

All principals (P1-P10) in this study were asked to describe the methods they use to gather candidates. While the specific methods varied among the group of principals, there were several practices followed by nearly everyone in the group. All principals began the process by posting the position in the human resources systems and then started looking at references (P1 – 10) as a critical first step in the hiring process. P6 stated, “I spend quite a bit of time going through the people who apply and see what's posted online” (P6, l 141-142). Almost all principals referenced reviewing resumes of prospective candidates (P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P10). P5 noted that, “They would look at the references” (P5, l 137), and P2 stated, “I take a quick look at their references and their experiences and I’m starting to see some candidates that might be a fit” (P2, l 19-20). P7 stated, “We'll try to establish criteria that matter to us” (P7, l 183). Several principals referenced looking through candidate resumes for proper certification (P1, P3, P5, and P7). P1 stated, “We will read resumes and look at references, ensuring that the person is qualified and certified” (P1, l 4-5). Several also mentioned looking at screening scores that were conducted by human resources or other certified staff (P4, P6, P7). P4 (l 62-64) stated, “We look at if they've been screened by the content supervisors. We'll usually start with whoever has the highest screening.”

After gathering prospective candidates, all of the principals then set up and conducted interviews (P1-P10). Principals all discussed the importance of their interview committees (P1-P10) and ensuring that they invite or include key personnel, such as grade level leads, grade level

teammates, and department chairs (P1-P10). P7 stated, “We have other team members in the interview with us such as the department chair or a teacher from within that team” (P7 l 204-205), or lead mentors (P4, P10).

After conducting the interviews, principals (P1- P10) worked with their teams to select their top candidate. Several principals mentioned debriefing with their team regarding candidates’ strengths and weaknesses (P1, P2, P4, P6, and P7). P1 noted, “after each interview we would have a debrief about the strengths and growth areas for each candidate” (P1, l 11-12). Several mentioned looking at applicants’ unique contributions and diversity when making their final decisions (P4, P6, P7, P8, P9, and P10). While one principal mentioned having used a scoring rubric on occasion (P7), “We have at times...used a rubric or a model answer” (P7, l 231), most noted that they did not have specific rubrics that were used in the interview process (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6), as stated by P6, “We don’t use a rubric” (P6, l 174). Further information regarding the specific process used by principals is listed in Table 2.

The research around hiring practices indicates that the steps taken by the principals in this study are common to the hiring process. Studies demonstrate the importance of carefully constructed job descriptions (Moore, 2017), screening questions (Harris et al., 2010), reference checking (Perry & Haluska, 2016), and the interview process (Clement, 2013; Fry, 2000). These studies indicate that these processes are all used to help schools select the most effective candidate. While there is variety among school districts, these common processes are frequently used throughout the country (Will, 2019).

A critical first step toward success is creating job postings and descriptions that reflect the needs and important requisite skills of the job (Kimbrel, 2019; Moore, 2017). Harris et al. (2010) noted that one common method used to provide a baseline of information on prospective

candidates is an initial screening process. Whitworth et al. (2016) recommended components that include a specific job description aligned with the expectations of the job, a structured multi-tiered interview process, and thorough reference checks. More recent research has indicated the possibility of a positive relationship between some screening tools and future teacher performance.

When creating interview questions, it is important to conduct a job analysis to create questions and then use identical questions for each candidate. Studies have found it effective to use a variety of question formats including situational questions based on past behavior (Kimbrel, 2019; Moore, 2017). While not used by most of the principals in this study, researchers do promote the use of individual answers being rated with a predetermined scale and scored against pre-determined preferred answers. They suggest having trained interviewers and using other predictive elements so that decisions are not based solely on the screening and interview (Kimbrel, 2019; Moore, 2017).

Perry and Haluska (2016) stated that references remain the only real means to assess who has the skills to take an organization where leadership wants to go. References help leaders separate fact from fiction, and determine who is a sincere candidate from who is good at interviewing. Résumés and interviews, the other two major hiring variables, are unreliable by themselves. Referencing is the glue that binds the process (p. 156). Bruno and Strunk (2019) furthermore found professional references to be predictive of teacher evaluation ratings.

### ***Finding 2***

**Principals indicated that their hiring practices were influenced by their professional experiences (but not by research or district development).**

A majority of the principals stated that their hiring practices were, in part, based on experiences that they had as an assistant principal working with their principal (P1, P2, P4, P6, P7, P9, and P10). P1 noted that a major influence on his hiring came, “mostly from my former principal” (P1, 1 318). P2 stated, “as an assistant principal at my previous school in {a different county} our principal there had a pretty solid process that I was a part of frequently. So, I borrowed a lot from that when I got here” (P2, 1 325-326). P7 stated, “{my former principal} was very supportive and brought me into the process that he used when I was a teacher going through a leadership program. So, some of that's things I learned from him and some of it's things I've learned from another principal, but ultimately it took a couple of years to get down to how we're all going to do business” (P7, 1 400 – 403).

Many of the principals also noted that they had refined their hiring practices over time based on the experiences that had or hadn't worked for them. P1, P4, P5, P7, P8, P9, and P10 all described how they developed and refined their processes as they gained more experience in the principal position. P4 stated, “So, it was a lot of trial and error over multiple years, and no hiring is ever perfect” (P4, 1 357). P7 also added, “we've gotten better just seeing hundreds of candidates to know when somebody's going to be a good fit for us” (P7, 1 406-407). P8 stated, “So, most of my procedures came from my experience with a peppering of training and some from the county” (P8, 1 421-422). P4 noted, “How did we develop that? A lot of experience of things that did not work. I was always a part of the hiring process with my former principal. I really started looking at candidates and, yeah, it's like a puzzle. You dig deep down, and you go back through their references. You try to find things that might spark” (P4, 1 343-345).

Additional findings are delineated in Table 3.

Several respondents noted that their preparatory coursework and formal training did not play much a factor in how they developed their hiring practices. This supports the research that states that there continues to be a disconnect between research-based practices and actual hiring practices (Jacob et al., 2018). Klassen and Kim (2019) state, “Little systematic attention has been focused on how we make decisions about choosing teachers for the classroom or how we select prospective teachers” (p. 32). Bruno and Strunk (2019) similarly noted a scarcity of research on how school districts should hire effective teachers.

### ***Finding 3***

#### **Principals relied on prior experience to inform their hiring decisions.**

Principals noted the importance of prior experiences when making their final hiring decisions (P4, P5, P7, and P8). These comments, “I do look a lot for experienced teachers” (P8, l 781) and “We, of course, look for experience” (P4, l 698), are indicative of the responses on that topic. In addition, one principal, P5, noted the importance of finding candidates who had experience working with students of diverse backgrounds. That principal stated their preference for candidates with, “some experience working with any kind of challenging students or if they have experience working with students from different backgrounds, from diverse backgrounds” (P5, l 712-713).

Many of the principals referenced examining prior work experiences when making their decisions (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, P8, P10). Those experiences include the level of candidate transiency (P1, P6, and P7), their variety of school experiences (P2, P10), their student teaching experiences (P2, P7, P8, and P10), and their prior experience at the relevant school level (P2, P3, P7, and P10). P3 stated, “I look at content knowledge, and how much experience they have” (P3, l 477-478). P2 stated, “When you can find it, experience in middle school. It is nice when

you've experienced working with middle school students” (P2, 1 458-459). P7 noted that he spends time, “looking at the resume and going through the resume linearly and sequentially, progressing through their professional and academic experiences” (P7, 1 521-522). P8 adds, “You want to have somebody with a good foundation of knowledge of and an idea of what the job's going to be about. Ideally maybe they've done student teaching. They've been in schools. They know what good instruction might look like. You do have to have that before you fit” (P8, 1 540-541). There was a frequent consensus among respondents that experience matters. Tables 5,6, and 8 provide information on the frequency of this category of response.

Examining previous experience aligns with the wealth of research that states that the best predictor of teaching success comes from previous teaching experience (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011) since previous success often begets future success. Indeed, the only factor consistently aligned with future success is prior success (Rockoff, Jacob, Kane, & Staiger, 2011). Studies show that principals generally prefer applicants with more experience (Giersch & Dong, 2018). With high-stakes testing, principals are more inclined to select teachers they see as more likely to improve student achievement. While both research and the respondents indicate the importance of previous successful experience (whether it be professional teaching or student teaching), this is becoming more difficult to rely on as the need for high quality teaching candidates continues to increase.

#### ***Finding 4***

**Principals consistently used their perceptions of a candidate’s interpersonal skills when making hiring decisions.**

In addition to successful prior performance, all of the respondents were very invested in their perception of a candidate’s interpersonal skills. All of the principals (P1 - P10) mentioned a

quality in this category in their responses. Principals frequently looked at candidates for their perceived passion for their school and teaching (P1, P2, P5, P8, and P9) and for their perceived skill in building relationships (P1, P2, P3, and P6). One principal stated that he has had success with candidates who are “buying into building relationships; buying into the idea that you know we're not here to get kids, we're here to help kids” (P1, 1 835-836). Respondents stated that someone being there to help the students (P1, P2, P3, P6, and P8) was a critical factor that defined who would become an effective teacher. One principal, when describing a quality candidate, stated that, “they really seem excited about teaching or really love this whole idea of learning, and they're very kids-centric” (P8, 1 974-975). Another noted that a candidate she interviewed who was very effective was able to “talk in depth about the research and the learning she's done around language acquisition. But then she was smart enough to say if they don't know I care about them, all of this doesn't matter” (P2, 1 851-853). Additional responses on this topic included statements like this, “I’m looking to see whether or not they're able to build relationships” (P3, 1 674-675), “If they don't say relationships, they're not working here... everything has to come back to relationships” (P1, 1 610-612), and “I’m looking for, are you a relationship builder to me? That’s important, because I figure there are certain things we can teach you, but I can't teach those innate qualities that you just kind of feel from a person” (P9, 1 801-803). Another principal had a similar sentiment regarding this topic, stating, “we can teach you those skill sets, that's just technical work that we'll build over time. The other stuff I can't necessarily teach you” (P7, 1 778-779). Tables 5,6,8, and 9 provide information of the frequency of this response with respondents.

Research is well aligned with the importance of these qualities in effective teachers. Hopkins (2009) noted that there are certain characteristics that many principals look at when

making hiring decisions: 1) Passion; 2) Enthusiasm; 3) Sensitivity and compassion for others; 4) A big heart for kids and a caring attitude; and 5) A good sense of humor. It was further noted that principals want teachers who will be able to connect emotionally, socially, and intellectually with students (Hopkins, 2009). Harris et al. (2010), found that principals selected from a mixture of both professional and personal characteristics with caring, content knowledge, teaching skills, and enthusiasm being mentioned most frequently in qualities cited by principals as important characteristics in their hiring practices.

Many of the ten mind frames identified by Hattie and Zierer (2018) aligned with qualities noted by respondents. These beliefs include: teachers are evaluators of student work and understand their impact; teachers are change agents who feel self-efficacy; teachers see assessment as useful feedback; teachers engage in dialogue with students and colleagues rather than monologue; teachers enjoy the challenge; teachers engage in positive relationships; teachers focus on learning rather than teaching; teachers see learning as hard work; teachers collaborate to develop collective efficacy. Finally, school leaders looked primarily for teachers who were caring and willing to work hard for their students. Jabbar (p. 143, 2018) noted, “principals believe personal characteristics are very important, sometimes more so than teacher quality measures.” This study had similar findings.

### ***Finding 5***

**Principals indicated that the current smaller pool of teachers has resulted in selection challenges in the hiring process.**

Principals noted that current conditions in education have had an impact on their hiring process. Many of the principals (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, P9, and P10) mentioned logistical factors that resulted in them hiring less-effective teachers. Four respondents noted that instead of waiting

for an ideal candidate, they sometimes needed to go with the best candidates who were available (P2, P5, P6, and P10). As stated by one principal, “Unfortunately, you know, sometimes you hire in hope” (P3, l 1053). Another stated, “Anytime that you're hiring in August, I always have concerns” (P1, l 1036). Another principal added, “We were kind of between a rock and a hard place, and we needed someone, and they were qualified. We just couldn't find anybody” (P6, l 1137-1138). One of the principals said, “We were thinking, let's just get somebody in, which, unfortunately I feel like we're seeing more and more of - let's just get somebody in and hope that I can train you and I can support you with the resources” (P10, l 1225-1227). Tables 10 and 11 provide respondent frequency on this topic.

While the challenges of post-pandemic education are still new and evolving, teacher turnover and shortages have been increasing over time. Research notes that high turnover creates instability that makes it challenging to have unified, coherent instruction. Ingersoll (2001) found the rate of turnover for teachers was higher than the rate for most other professions. It is therefore logical to expect that the turnover of teachers will result in a decrease in student achievement (Adnot et al., 2016). With a teacher shortage hitting school districts nationwide (Walker, 2019), administrators cannot rely only on successful previous experience as their only guide to effective hiring. Many of the principals are seeing this teacher shortage happen in real time as they have fewer candidates to fill an increasing number of vacant positions.

### **Implications of Findings**

After reviewing the findings from this study, several implications were identified that may impact current and future leaders.

### ***Implication 1***

**Principals should continue using a multi-step hiring process that starts with a clearly posted position with a description of essential skills and includes candidate screenings, thoughtful interview questions, and a consistent interview process.** While all principals used this framework, there were unique variations that might benefit from further examination. These variations included questions that encouraged candidate reflection and questions that probe a candidate's pedagogical knowledge, interpersonal skills, and educational philosophy. Considerations of the role of teacher involvement on interview panels may also be worthy of exploration. Finding 1 provides the foundation for this implication. *Finding 1: Principals consistently used the same systems for their hiring practices: posting positions, gathering candidates, setting up and conducting interviews, and creating procedures for selecting a candidate for the position.*

### ***Implication 2***

**School districts should provide opportunities for hiring principals to review current research in hiring to ensure that their practices are based on research as well as their experience.** Principal hiring practices were greatly impacted by their professional experiences on interview panels before they became a principal. After becoming a principal, their practices were most frequently refined based on their own experiences with success and challenges with hiring. For the most part, principals did not rely on current research, educational coursework, or human resources professional development to create or refine their hiring procedures. This may be an opportunity to increase effectiveness in this important area. This implication aligns with the second Finding, *Finding 2: Principals indicated that their hiring practices were influenced by their professional experiences (but not by research or district development).*

### ***Implication 3***

**School districts should provide professional opportunities for principals to share their learned experience related to successful hiring practices.** School districts would do well to provide a forum for school leaders to have discussions about this topic to provide opportunities for practitioners to share successful experiences. As much as possible, principals should continue to use a candidate’s prior experience for guidance when making hiring decisions. Both research and respondent practice aligned in describing the positive correlation between prior success and future success. But challenges can exist in discovering the extent of previous success as accuracy in previous references can be subjective. Additionally, successful practice in one environment may not translate to another school environment with a different situation. Due to this, it would be beneficial for school leaders to have a forum in which they can discuss the unique hiring practices that have been successful for them. Finding 3: *Principals rely on prior experience to inform their hiring decisions.*

### ***Implication 4***

**School district leaders should work with principals to develop a rubric or framework that might help them quantify personal qualities with more consistency or accuracy.** Principals rely heavily on their perception of a candidate’s interpersonal skills. This often equates to a “feeling” they have that a prospective candidate has the qualities that they value for a teacher at their school. It would be beneficial for hiring administrators to use rubrics or research-based frameworks more than a feeling. As some respondents noted, sometimes that feeling is wrong. With a current school atmosphere that focuses heavily on SEL, having a mechanism to understand the EQ of prospective staff would promote the effectiveness of that teacher in alignment with this educational priority. Finding 4: *Principals consistently used their*

*perceptions of a candidate's interpersonal skills when making hiring decisions* provides the context for this implication.

### ***Implication 5***

**School districts should identify additional or alternative ways to acquire and support teachers.** With fewer applicants and an increase in the quantity of competitive opportunities, school leaders need to work to create an atmosphere attractive to today's workers. Whereas previous candidates had to sell their reputation to a school leader, school leaders now must do the same to attract candidates. Leaders must do more to move quickly on upcoming vacancies and work harder to minimize staff turnover by supporting and retaining the staff they currently have in their building. School districts, state departments of education, and universities should collaborate to identify ways to expand the teacher candidate pool. This implication is based on Finding 5: *Principals indicated that the current smaller pool of teachers has resulted in selection challenges in the hiring process.*

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Using the findings and implications of this study, the following areas could be considered for additional research:

1. Conduct a study to examine different hiring systems and trends that are responsive to the extensive shortage of qualified teacher candidates. While a diminishing work force has been impacting education for a while, those trends have been accelerated post-Covid. The role of hiring and retaining teachers in the current environment has evolved.

2. While this study examined responses from principals at a cross-section of school levels (elementary, middle, high, and combined), additional work could be done to focus on a specific level to see if there are unique needs and practices found at that level.
3. This study focused on candidates in one specific school district with site-based management that allowed for individual variation in hiring practices. It would be beneficial to contrast the dominant hiring practices found in this school district with hiring practices in other school districts.
4. Consider a study that focuses on the makeup of interview panels. Several principals mentioned the importance in authentically including input from teachers and teacher leaders in developing interview questions and providing feedback on interview responses. Examining the methodology of this practice could yield results that might positively impact leaders in refining their hiring practices.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the hiring practices of principals to discover what practices they have found to be effective. The lessons that they have learned from their hiring experiences were examined. The study's findings align and diverge from research studies on hiring practices. The respondents all followed the traditional procedures of the hiring process, posting a position, screening candidates, interviewing candidates, and selecting candidates. But within that framework, practices widely varied. Despite there being some specific better practices in hiring procedures, the respondent group largely based their practices on their own experience as a principal or as an assistant principal. The respondents valued experience, as research states they should, and also put a heavy emphasis on the perceived interpersonal skills

of the candidate. Few respondents had a consistent way to measure that skill and would benefit from a standardized practice that could prove more reliable. As it stands, many base their perception of a candidate's interpersonal skills more on a feeling than on anything objective. Sometimes that works, but sometimes it doesn't. As principals work to grapple with hiring challenges, continued research on effective practices will be needed to help guide them towards making the best choices. The success of their school and students requires nothing less.

### **Personal Reflections**

As a former principal, I felt that hiring effective teachers was one of the most, if not *the* most, important parts of my job. Hiring has a tremendous impact on school environment, school climate, and student outcomes, both emotionally and academically. The best hires add tremendous value to an organization and enrich the lives of everyone in the school community. I believed that hiring began before the position was even posted. The reputation a leader creates is an incredibly powerful determining factor in hiring. I viewed my staff as being the best marketing for the school that I could have. Believing this, I worked to create a positive environment for them that they could then describe to others and make our school a place that educators wanted to teach. In conducting these interviews, more respondents are coming around to this same understanding. The candidate pool is more limited than it has ever been, and candidates can afford to be selective about where they end up. Due to this, principals need to do a better job of selling their schools to prospective candidates and creating a school culture that retains the good teachers that they currently have. With so many vacancies, teachers, especially the best ones, can go where they feel most valued. I think that these important foundational topics, school community and hiring practices, would benefit from continued attention and

research. Without recruiting, hiring, and retaining the best teachers, our students won't have the futures that they deserve.

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## Appendix A

### Principal Recruitment Email

#### Participant Solicitation Emails: Interview

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study, Hiring for Success: The Hiring Practices of Site-Based Management Principals

(IRB#22-467)

Body of Message:

The study will be done through interview questions conducted through a virtual meeting. The interview will consist of several questions on the topic of hiring practices. The interview should take no longer than 45 minutes for us to complete. Interview response data are confidential.

Attached is an information sheet explaining your rights and any risks regarding this study. Your participation is completely voluntary. Please contact me by replying to this email or call me at 571-xxx-xxxx(redacted) with any questions.

Thank you,

Eric Worcester  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Tech  
[ericw19@vt.edu](mailto:ericw19@vt.edu)  
571-xxx-xxxx(redacted for paper)

## Appendix B

### Human Subjects Protection



Completion Date 17-Sep-2019  
Expiration Date 16-Sep-2022  
Record ID 33339437

This is to certify that:

**Eric Worcester**

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

**Social & Behavioral Research**

(Curriculum Group)

**Social & Behavioral Research**

(Course Learner Group)

**1 - Basic Course**

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

**Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)**

**CITI**  
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w584272b8-5dd5-406e-89fd-9ff4f512b2c7-33339437](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w584272b8-5dd5-406e-89fd-9ff4f512b2c7-33339437)

## Appendix C

### Virginia Tech Study Information Sheet



#### Research Study Information Sheet

Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Dr. Ted S. Price

IRB# and Title of Study: 22-467 Hiring for Success: The Hiring Practices of Site-Based Principals

You are invited to participate in a research study. This form includes information about the study and contact information if you have any questions.

#### ➤ **WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?**

If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a structured interview. As part of the study, you will be asked to share your hiring practices and lessons that you have learned about hiring effective teachers. The interview will be conducted virtually. The study should take approximately 45 minutes of your time. We do not anticipate any risks from completing this study.

You can choose whether to be in this study or not. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not wish to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise that warrant doing so.

#### ➤ **CONFIDENTIALITY**

We will do our best to protect the confidentiality of the information we gather from you, but we cannot guarantee 100% confidentiality.

All identifiable markers will be separated from the data set prior to data analysis in Microsoft Excel.

Participant interviews will request you to classify yourself as an elementary, middle, or high school principal. You will also be asked to identify your school location worksite. Buildings will be coded not by school name, but as a designated radio call sign (Alpha, Bravo, Charlie, etc.) All building coding will be kept confidential, as will division location and name.

A password-protected database will be used to contain my dissertation, notes, and files. Backup copies of work will be kept in a locked location to which only the researchers have access.

➤ **WHO CAN I TALK TO?**

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact **Eric Worcester ([eric19@vt.edu](mailto:eric19@vt.edu))** or **Dr. Ted Price ([tprice@vt.edu](mailto:tprice@vt.edu))**. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights, or remedies because you participate in this research study. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact the Virginia Tech HRPP Office at 540-231-3732 ([irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu)). ***Please print out a copy of this information sheet for your records.***

## Appendix D

### Email to Principal for Transcript Verification

Greetings,

Below is the link to the transcript from our interview earlier in the year. I apologize for the lengthy delay between the interview and providing the transcription. If you have time, please review the transcript. If you see the need to make any changes, the document is shared and can be edited. I am hoping to complete this portion of my dissertation in the next couple of weeks, so if you do have any changes, please have them completed by January 13<sup>th</sup>. Thank you again for your participation in this research. Learning more about the hiring process has been fascinating, as much for the things that we know as for the things we don't.

Interview Transcript: Attached

Regards,

Eric Worcester  
Doctoral Candidate  
Virginia Tech  
[ericw19@vt.edu](mailto:ericw19@vt.edu)  
571-xxx-xxxx (redacted for paper)