

Millennial School Leaders: Why They Come, Why They Stay, and Why They Leave

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## ABSTRACT

This basic qualitative study explored the lived experiences of fifteen millennial school principals, with 1-5 years in the role. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. The following questions guided this study: 1) What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position? 2) What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship? 3) What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?

Findings that came out of this research include: 1) Millennial principals bring a strong work ethic that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, but could be a condition for them to leave. 2) Millennial principals' interest in seeking life balance influences them to pursue the role but could be a leading condition to motivate them to leave. 3) Millennial principals value relationships and feedback to encourage their pursuit, engagement, and longevity in the role. 4) Millennial principals are driven by intrinsic motivation to contribute that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, and could be a condition for them to leave. 5) Millennial principals pursue the role and remain engaged with their school community with high levels of commitment and dedication. 6) Millennial principals are self-aware and pursue roles that are a good fit for their strengths. 7) Millennial principals work collaboratively with their stakeholders to remain in the role. 8) Millennial principals lead with passion for teaching and learning which keeps them engaged in their work.

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## GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This study explored the lived experiences of fifteen millennial school principals with 1-5 years in the role, in rural and suburban schools in Virginia. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. Findings that came out of this research include: 1) Millennial principals bring a strong work ethic that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, but could be a condition for them to leave. 2) Millennial principals' interest in seeking life balance influences them to pursue the role but could be a leading condition to motivate them to leave. 3) Millennial principals value relationships and feedback to encourage their pursuit, engagement, and longevity in the role. 4) Millennial principals are driven by intrinsic motivation to contribute that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, and could be a condition for them to leave. 5) Millennial principals pursue the role and remain engaged with their school community with high levels of commitment and dedication. 6) Millennial principals are self-aware and pursue roles that are a good fit for their strengths. 7) Millennial principals work collaboratively with their stakeholders to remain in the role. 8) Millennial principals lead with passion for teaching and learning which keeps them engaged in their work.

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## **Dedication**

To my sister, Dr. Andrea Spears Kirkland, who had to leave us before we had time to finish all of our big adventures. You were always the first but lived to inspire and challenge me to be *the next*. You are profoundly missed.

## **Acknowledgments**

My goal has always been to arrive to the end of this project with gratitude and a product that I am excited to share with others. I am there. This study is tightly aligned with my intrinsic motivation for work, my job strengths, and my dedication to be a contributor to this profession.

To my husband, Jerry, who cleared the calendar, kept me fed, and generally kept the world around us spinning as it should so that I could neglect it all to research and write, thank you. To my children, friends, and colleagues (you know who you are) whose willingness to listen to my research, which may have sounded like air castles, helped me to put my passion into one focus, thank you. To my community of EdD colleagues, having traveled this same crazy journey, you stood ready to edit or loan books, thank you. To my amazingly supportive advisor, Dr. Carol Cash, whose willingness to meet in a zoom room on Sunday evenings or reground me when I was deep into the rabbit hole of ideas, thank you. This dissertation is a testament to the countless hours of work, determination, and grit poured into its creation. It stands as a reflection of my deep faith that God has set a path before me and it is my responsibility to walk boldly forward.

## Chapter 1 Introduction

The school principal plays an impactful role in addressing the needs of all stakeholders in schools (Grissom et al., 2021). With the ever-increasing demands placed on school leadership, principal turnover is on the rise in the United States (Levin et al., 2020). Leading schools has not gotten easier in recent years following the COVID-19 pandemic (JLARC, 2022).

Beyond building student achievement, effective principals have a significant impact on student and teacher outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021). The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) has shared a worrying report after surveying high school principals across the country. The results show that many principals plan to leave their jobs in the next three years. In fact, 4 out of every 10 principals said they're thinking about quitting. They blame the pandemic and growing political tensions for making them want to leave (Ruggirello, 2022). Research findings have recommended the importance of developing a strategic focus on “cultivating, selecting, preparing, and supporting a high-quality principal workforce” (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 91).

When considering future leadership talent, one may reflect on the leadership capacity of those already employed in a school. In most organizations, there may be 3-4 generational cohorts working together (Fry, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Generational differences may be influenced by lived experiences, demographics, and career development stages (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Organizations may want to understand these generations more fully in their efforts to support, develop, and retain school leadership (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Smith et al., 2016).

While the boomer generation ages towards retirement, the next generation in line to lead our schools may be the millennials (born between 1980 and 1996). Although they are now well into their careers, when they were children, the millennial generation was known as “the largest, healthiest, and most cared-for generation in American history” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 76). This group currently represents the largest generation in the workforce, and most have arrived with different values and expectations for themselves and their work (Gallup, 2016; Van Rossem, 2016).

While there is relevant research describing the expectations the millennial employee may bring to the workplace, there is a gap in research regarding the millennial in school leadership. This basic qualitative study was focused on the lived experiences of millennial school principals within their first five years in the role. Semi-structured interviews addressed what prompts them to pursue the principalship, the factors that motivate them to remain in their roles, and the conditions that would prompt them to leave their school leadership positions behind.

## **Background**

If school divisions are to attract, develop, and retain the millennial school leader, developing a clear understanding of what this generation is looking to find in their employer may be beneficial to inform the work. This generation’s expectations for self, for work, for supervisors, and for the organization may help to shape innovative methods and restructure systems in both school divisions and leadership prep programs. Gaining a better understanding of the workplace expectations of this significant talent pool could play a crucial role in enhancing leadership pipelines and retention in our educational institutions (Gallup, 2016). Additionally, establishing workplace environments that are better attuned to millennials' expectations can

directly bolster their future contributions and overall productivity (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016).

Gallup (2016) research has shown that 21% of millennials changed jobs within one year, seeking better opportunities elsewhere. Their recommendations for organizations to respond to the needs of this large workforce, was to consider adapting their workplace culture to align with millennials' expectations regarding job purpose, development, supervision, evaluation, mindset, and work-life balance. Failing to address the needs of this generation could put an organization at a disadvantage, especially at a time when many industries are facing workforce shortages, and agile businesses are adjusting their strategies to recruit and retain the substantial millennial workforce. A more responsive approach, such as understanding and meeting the expectations of millennial workers, is recommended for organizations looking to engage and retain their talents (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup in 2016).

### **Statement of Problem**

According to NASSP (2017), principal shortages are impacting school districts across the United States. According to their research, approximately half of school principals do not plan to continue in their roles beyond three years. To add to this retention problem, there is a shortage of qualified replacements due to high numbers of retirements, transfers, and career changes. Consequently, numerous school districts are facing principal vacancies and a scarcity of suitable candidates to fill these positions (NASSP, 2017). Based on the National Center for Education Statistics, the typical time a principal stays at a school in the United States was only around four years in 2016-2017. But this number hides some big differences. About 35% of principals leave their schools in fewer than two years, and only 11% stick around for 10 years or more (Levin et al., 2020). NASSP has addressed the expected impact of principal shortages on school districts:

The demand for employment of elementary, middle, and high school principals will grow 6% nationwide by the year 2022 due to population increases. This surge in demand will increase the financial burden on districts since the cost to recruit, hire, prepare, mentor, and continue training principals can cost school districts between \$36,850 and \$303,000, with typical urban school districts spending \$75,000 per principal. Many school districts across the country are facing a teacher and principal shortage that requires immediate attention and careful long-term planning (NASSP, 2017, Issue section, para. 2).

The long-term planning required to address principal shortages may be short-sighted without also learning more about the workplace expectations held by the newest generation to the principalship – the millennial leader. To effectively engage and retain millennial school leaders, employers may develop a clear understanding of the unique expectations regarding self-development, work, supervision, and organizational culture. This understanding can serve as a valuable foundation for developing innovative approaches within school divisions and leadership preparation programs. This study was designed to provide additional information to inform practitioners with a focus on why some aspiring millennial school leaders pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, as well as the conditions that may cause them to leave the principalship.

What we already know about this generation as children sets the stage for learning more about the needs and expectations of the millennial adult serving in the principal position in the workplace. Howe and Strauss (2000) characterized the millennial generation as a product of societal and cultural shifts, including increased use of fertility clinics and a child-centered approach to parenting. During their teen years, millennials were seen as positive, confident, intelligent, and deserving of recognition for their achievements, regardless of size. Despite

stereotypes from older generations, millennials were often rule-abiding and respectful of authority. They considered themselves tech-savvy and believed they could drive positive change for the future (Howe & Strauss, 2000). More recent research findings from Van Rossem (2016) described adult millennials as open communicators, cooperative, focused on goals, adept with technology, and capable of delivering high-quality work. However, they also acknowledged their need for substantial support from their supervisors.

With current research providing a small glimpse into the unique expectations of the adult millennial in the workplace, there is a gap in research surrounding the expectations, perceptions, and needs of the millennial school principal. What we already know from research has left us hopeful. Many of the millennial attributes imbedded in the literature review describe the type of leader who could be responsive to the strategic work required in our neediest schools. However, some of those same dispositions describe expectations that traditional district systems may not currently be designed to support. Innovative changes may be required to fully support, develop, and retain the millennial school leader. There are many questions that need answers if we are to provide the ideal workplace for these talented, confident millennial leaders in our school systems.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. There is some information from recent research about what millennials expect for themselves, from their work, from their supervisors, and from their organization as employees, but there is a lack of information about millennials serving in school leadership roles. This study provided a closer

look into the lived experiences of millennial school principals during their first five years on the job. The research focus of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. The benefit of the qualitative interview approach and the role of the researcher is described as follows:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypothesis, and not to *evaluate* as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. Being interested in others is the key to some of the basic assumptions underlying interviewing technique. It requires that we interviewers keep our egos in check. It requires that we realize we are not the center of the world. It demands that our actions as interviewers indicate that others' stories are important. At the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth (Seidman, 2006, p. 9).

## **Research Questions**

This study was designed to explore the unique lived experiences of 5 - 20 millennial school principals, serving in urban, suburban, or rural school settings, within their first five years in their role. Semi-structured questions were created to identify the perceptions, expectations, and constructed meaning that accompanied participant's experience during their pursuit, attainment, and retention in the principalship. The following questions guided this research study.

1. What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?

2. What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?
3. What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?

## **Overview of the Study**

As the largest adult cohort in the workplace and with the aging boomer generation in leadership moving towards retirement, millennial school leaders are next in line for the principal's chair, and many are already there. This basic qualitative study was designed to learn more about the experiences and constructed meaning and perceptions of current millennial principals (born between 1980 and 1996), with 1-5 years completed in their role, working in urban, suburban, or rural public-school settings. Participants were chosen using a nonrandom, purposeful snowball sampling. As described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a few key participants for this study who met the criteria established for participation were interviewed early and were then asked to recommend other participants who met the criteria. The researcher anticipated interviewing 5 to 20 participants. To determine when the sampling size was sufficient, and whether a pattern of saturation or redundancy had occurred, data analysis of interview responses was ongoing and simultaneous (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The context of the semi-structured questions in this study reflected the philosophical perspective of constructivism which states that "knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience or phenomenon" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23). Semi-structured questions provided consistency with guidance toward the focus but also allowed for additional probes and follow-up questions to explore the interpretations, constructs, and descriptions shared by study participants.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one in a virtual web-based platform to support consistency in the designated place rather than the natural field setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The semi-structured interview protocol provided an opportunity for understanding how study participants interpreted experiences and constructed meaning from those experiences which then prompted them to pursue the school principalship role. This methodology provided a framework to further explore each participant's experience in transitioning into the work of the principalship. Finally, basic qualitative methods allowed participants to describe the meaning they attributed to their experiences and better understand their constructed expectations for self, from their work, from their supervisors, and their organization. The approach supported the third research focus on learning more about the conditions that would support longevity in their principal role (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Conceptual Framework**

Available research on millennials and their expectations for self and their workplace proposed a conceptual framework. This served as “the underlying structure, the scaffolding or frame” of the study (Merriam, 2009. p. 66). Further, as defined by Merriam, it helped to “draw upon the concepts, terms, definitions, models, and theories of a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation” (p. 67). The conceptual framework, inspired by the literature review, reflected the constructive interaction that cycles between the millennials' deeply held expectations and actual lived experiences. For example, through the process of constructing meaning through lived experience, millennials determine if their current job meets their expectations for stability and potential for development or if a change in position or employer will be a better ‘fit’ for their life balance (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Pyöriä et al., 2017). According to Lester et al. (2001), “when employees’ contributions are rewarded in terms

of their own needs and expectations, it may give them further reasons to achieve many of their job/role requirements” (p. 19-20).

Qualitative data analysis in this study included both inductive and comparative techniques. The inductive approach entailed reviewing interview transcripts to identify themes organically, without applying pre-established categories. Continual comparison of newly acquired data with existing coded data enabled the researcher to refine and broaden these emerging themes as the data collection progressed. The conceptual model (Figure 1) was referenced by the researcher after reviewing coded themes and emerging categories across transcribed interviews. This method supported an on-going comparison with common expectations of millennial employees in the workplace as found in current research. These common themes, that were imbedded in the conceptual framework domains, have been more fully described in the literature review in Chapter 2.

The conceptual model was structured to provide a framework divided into four domains representing the cycle of interaction between expectations and actual lived experience. In this framework, the four domains represented the millennials’ expectations for self, for their work, for their supervisors, and their organization. Each domain was further defined by descriptive elements that illustrate what the expectation may be closely related to or may be portrayed as in the workplace. Further, this conceptual model demonstrated the cyclical interaction of millennials’ expectations with their actual lived experiences concerning self, work, supervisors, and the organization. This interaction could have an influence on their constructed meaning and perception towards their work. The elements in each quadrant were directly aligned with the emerging themes in current research concerning millennials in their workplace.

**Figure 1**

*Millennial Expectations and Lived Experiences*



*Note:* This model demonstrates the cyclical interaction of millennials' expectations with their lived experiences concerning self, work, supervisors, and the organization.

**Definition of Terms**

**Expectations** – The “employees’ developmental needs” (p. 19) which serves as intrinsic motivation representing a psychological contract or connection between the employee and the workplace (Lester et al., 2001)

**Millennial** – Individuals born in birth years 1980 to 1996, also known as Generation Y (Gallup, 2016)

*Urban* – Located in densely populated cities and surrounding regions (NCES, 2006)

*Suburban* – Located outside of principal cities but within urbanized areas with lower population density but still part of the larger metropolitan region (NCES, 2006)

*Rural*– Located in areas that are not part of urbanized areas with lower population densities and often farther from urban centers (NCES, 2006)

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

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) “limitations often attach to the methods of a study (e.g., inadequate sample size, difficulty in recruitment), and they represent weaknesses in the research” (p. 199). Merriam (2009) described the limitations of qualitative methods related to the researcher’s sensitivity to the participant’s responses and nuances of the message. In addition, she also addressed the potential for limitations due to the integrity of the researcher. This could become an issue when ascribing meaning or categories when disaggregating the data. Future studies can be informed by a review of the following known limitations and delimitations of this research study.

### **Limitations**

The known limitations of this basic qualitative study may affect the generalizability of the research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The final group size of 15 participants who met all the criteria for the sample was small. The research process was completed in a relatively brief amount of time (9 weeks) which may not reflect participants’ evolution through new experiences that influence constructed meaning over time. Nonrandom snowball sampling may be construed as selection bias (Hassan, 2023) as participants referred the researcher to acquaintances that share common experiences, expectations, or circles of influence. The protocols of this basic

qualitative method with one-on-one interviews were designed to learn more about the participants' lived experience. One may acknowledge that the emerging themes may only provide descriptive information about the perspectives of this unique group of study participants.

Every individual constructs meaning from their own unique life experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) so this study may not be generalizable, and participants may not have responded to interview questions with the expected level of reflection or transparency over aspects of their very personal experiences. The interview goal was to collect all response data to contribute to emerging themes which could potentially inform further consideration to direct the recruitment, development, and retention of millennial school principals.

### **Delimitations**

“Delimitations refer to the specific boundaries or limitations that are set in a research study in order to narrow its scope and focus” (Hassan, 2023, definition section). The delimitations of this study, which have been included to provide focus and increase validity, included clear criteria for participant inclusion. The selected participants were all school principals with 1 – 5 years of experience. Assistant principals were not considered. The selected participants were of the millennial generation (born between 1980 and 1996). Additional delimitations included clearly defined content questions in the semi-structured interview format, clustered to support each research question. Probing questions were articulated to support ways to gain descriptive details to further explore constructed meaning around experiences (Table 2). Finally, conducting all interviews during a relatively narrow window within one school term provided a boundary in time (Hassan, 2023). In this way, external influences placed upon school principals in this study, which in turn may influence their shared experience as leaders, were more similar than dissimilar. For example, changes in state accreditation, which often causes

increased stress for school leadership, did not influence data when all interviews were conducted during the second quarter of one school term.

## **Chapter Outline**

The primary objective of this investigation was to uncover the factors that drive certain aspiring millennial leaders to seek and embrace school leadership roles, explore the factors that motivate them to stay in these positions, and examine the conditions that might lead them to leave the role of a school principal. In chapter one, an overview of the study has been provided, including a purpose statement, research questions, conceptual framework, definition of terms, and limitations and delimitations of the study. Chapter Two provides a literature review of prior empirical research for background information to inform the current challenges faced by school leaders and a description of each of the generational cohorts represented in the workplace. Chapter Two also provides research findings which served to frame the expectations that millennials bring to their workplace which then influences how they construct meaning and shape their perceptions from lived experiences. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and provides an overview of the research methods and design elements that steered the course of this basic qualitative study. Chapter Three also provides an in-depth overview of the approach employed to conduct this study, covering the research design, research questions, participant selection, tool development, considerations for validity and reliability, methods for data collection, and the techniques used to analyze the data. Chapter Four provides substantial data analysis and findings for each research question. Chapter Five concludes the study with implications, findings, and suggestions for future research to further develop a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of millennial school leaders to better recruit, develop, and retain this large talent pool in the workforce.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

The National Center for Education Statistics found that in 2016-2017, the average tenure for a school principal was only four years (Levin et al., 2020). According to the 2019 National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and Learning Policy Institute (LPI) principal survey, 42% indicated they were soon planning to either leave their current school or leave the role of the principalship completely. The NASSP-LPI survey also found that 46% of principals from high-poverty schools and 43% from suburban and rural communities were ready to leave their schools or the profession completely. Principals who indicated plans to leave identified key working conditions such as heavy workload (63%), unresponsiveness from the district for support (51%), compensation (40%), high-stakes accountability (31%), lack of parent or community support (29%), frequency of student assessments (20%), lack of autonomy in decision making with teacher hiring (18%), and lack of decision-making authority in determining professional development for staff (17%) as motivations. While principals planning to stay may also have indicated heightened levels of concern for noted areas, those principal planning to leave were 1.5 to 2.0 times more likely to use the noted area of concern as the reason for leaving rather than a concern that could be addressed while staying in the position (Levin et al., 2020). With the many demands placed on school leaders, and the known impact of the role the principal plays beyond the important work of teacher retention, school divisions may want to know more about the conditions related to principal retention (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2020).

Consider the state of Virginia's schools and possible implications for the state of principal working conditions following the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2022, Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) provided a report to the Virginia General Assembly on the current state of Virginia's K-12 education system following the pandemic. This

group surveyed 4,176 staff from across 47 schools in 12 divisions to gain important information to inform their research on key topics, including “general working conditions, the impact of COVID-19 on staff morale and workload; the impact of COVID-19 on students’ mental health and academic achievement, and strategies to address those impacts; and the use of virtual learning, its impacts, and strategies to prepare for any potential future return to virtual learning” (JLARC, 2022, p. 88). With 1,175 or 28% of the total sampling group participating in the Virginia School Survey of Climate and Working Conditions survey, the statistical landscape framed the challenges ahead for Virginia’s school leaders. Virginia’s schools are struggling to recover in many areas following the COVID-19 pandemic. While 72% of Virginia’s teachers reported lower workplace morale, 67% reported lower job satisfaction as compared to pre-pandemic working conditions. In addition, 87% of Virginia’s school divisions experienced increased difficulty in hiring (94%) and retaining (90%) classroom teachers in the 2021-2022 school year. With a 32% enrollment decrease in teacher preparation programs and 15% of Virginia’s teachers planning to leave the profession, school divisions are faced with great staffing challenges now and in years to come (JLARC, 2022).

Based on this report, current and aspiring school leaders will need advanced skills and dispositions to address staffing shortages, low morale, and job dissatisfaction. They will need to lead teachers burdened by high workload, in poor school climates, while dealing with student misbehaviors, and parent dissatisfaction in a way not seen before the COVID-19 pandemic (JLARC, 2022). Principals perform a crucial role in determining the working and learning conditions in their schools (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Grissom et al., 2021). School leaders shoulder a heavy responsibility with high volumes of stress and workload which can lead to principal burn-out and attrition (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Levin et al., 2020).

Even beyond building student achievement, effective principals “have documented impacts on other student outcomes (e.g., attendance and discipline) that are important for students’ long-term success and on key teacher outcomes (e.g., job attitudes and retention)” (Grissom et al., 2021, p.43). Research findings have recommended the importance of developing a strategic focus on “cultivating, selecting, preparing, and supporting a high-quality principal workforce” due to the principal’s “substantively important effects that extend beyond student achievement” (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 91). According to their research, effective schools were led by school leaders who positively built school climate and culture by promoting collaboration and teacher efficacy around teaching and learning practices. In addition, these principals actively developed all stakeholders’ sense of safety, value, and support which resulted in high levels of trust and shared vision. Principals developed effective school climates by empowering and developing teachers, fostering trust, and engaging as a visible leader with the school community. Effective principals promoted cultures of learning through systems that supported professional collaboration (Grissom et al., 2021). Kouzes and Posner (2017) found in their years of research across industry and various generation cohorts that when leaders understood the values of their followers, they could support engagement and promote alignment with shared values. In addition, shared values built productive working relationships within an organization. This also had a positive impact on employee retention because followers stayed in organizations that were more closely aligned with their personal values (Kouzes & Posner, 2017). These leader attributes may align with the skills and behaviors needed to address the critical areas identified by the current state of schools and principal shortages.

When considering rising talent, current workforce generational demographic data should be reviewed (Lyons & Kuron, 2013). The workplace may include members from the aging baby

boomers, the middle cohort called Gen X, the largest group called millennials and the youngest worker to join the workforce known as Gen Z (Fry, 2018). While other generations were in the workplace, the influx of immigrants and current population data secured the millennial cohort as having the greatest workforce population in the U.S. (Fry, 2020). To be more specific, Fry's (2018) analysis of 2017 U.S. Census Bureau statistics describes 35% of the work force in the U.S. as millennials which equated to 56 million adults either working or actively searching for a job in 2017. According to Gallup (2016), there were approximately 73 million millennials born between 1980 and 1996 in the United States. This large generational cohort has entered the workforce, and some may have stepped into positions of leadership already (Fry, 2018; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). According to Gallup (2016), knowing more about workplace expectations of this large talent resource may support leadership pipeline development and employee retention in our schools. Creating workplace cultures that can respond more effectively to millennials' expectations can directly support their future contributions and productivity (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016).

### **Search Process**

The literature review investigated current research related to the expectations and talents of millennials in the workplace as they prepared to assume leadership roles in schools. The target age group for this review was approximately 30 years old, representing teachers who have completed at least three years of instructional experience and have pursued a 2–3-year Master of Education Leadership degree, which fulfilled requirements to attain the state licensure endorsement for school leadership. Initial searches revealed a gap in research specifically focusing on millennials in school leadership, prompting an expanded scope to include all millennial employees in the workplace. The research objective was to gain clarity and explore

potential implications related to the millennial generational cohort for recruiting, developing, and retaining future millennial school leaders. As the search process unfolded, several related themes emerged, leading to the identification of additional search terms and relevant research studies. The table below provides an overview of the search process conducted using various search engines and databases.

Table 1. Search Process

<b>Search Engine</b>	<b>Date Range of Articles</b>	<b>Boolean Phrase with Search Parameters</b>	<b>Number of Sources Generated</b>
EBSCOhost	2013-2023	generations in the workplace AND leadership	2
		(Millennials OR generation y) AND workplace	27
		(Millennials or generation y) AND leadership	34
		(Millennials or generation y) AND (school principals or principals or school leaders)	1
PsycINFO from EBSCOhost	2013-2023	(Millennials or millennials or generation y or gen y or generation me) AND leadership	42
Google Scholar	2013-2023	(Millennial or millennial) AND workplace millennials as generational cohorts	21
		millennial generation or Gen Y and Howe and Strauss	10
		sort by relevance, Research Articles only	48

Search parameters included: peer-reviewed, full-text in English, variations of search terms.

## **Generational Cohorts Working in Schools Today**

When considering potential leadership talent, one may reflect on the leadership capacity of those already employed in a school. In most organizations, there may be 3-4 generational cohorts working together (Fry, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000). “Like any social category (race, class, religion, or nationality), a generation can allow plenty of exceptions and be fuzzy at the edges” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 41). Between and within generational differences may be influenced by lived experiences, demographics, and career development stages (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013), but organizations may want to understand these generations more fully in their efforts to support, develop, and retain school leadership (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Smith et al., 2016).

Van Rossem (2016) conducted a quantitative study using cognitive mapping to analyze mental models of baby boomers, Gen X and Gen Y generational cohort managers’ views of coworkers of their own and the other two generations. This Belgian study found that managers may have an affinity towards employees from their own generational cohort. The impact of this clustering around a common cohort group may increase positive engagement and communication for that cluster while disregarding the needs and expectations of others in the workplace. In this instance, generational stereotyping may lead to poor management. There were additional findings in this study to shed light on generational differences which have been included in the following summary of behaviors, views, and attitudes of each generational cohort one may expect to find in our schools today (Van Rossem, 2016).

## ***Generation Z***

The youngest birth cohort in the workplace, Generation Z (born mid-1990s to mid-2010s) arrived to the workplace with a value for “self-paced, independent learning, and are very technologically adept, but they often struggle with interpersonal skills despite their desire for connection with peers” with a tendency to “seek immediate and frequent feedback and yet struggle to receive and integrate feedback” (Henry & Timm-Davis, 2023, Conclusion section). Like Generations X and Y, Gen Z watched the older generation dedicate their lives to their work, losing sight of the balance between their work life and their personal freedom in the process. They differ from the baby boomer generation in terms of workplace loyalty, their ethical dispositions, and work ethic (Fogg, 2009).

In one Malaysian study designed to explore the communication style of both Gen Y and Gen Z, Humaira Raslie (2020) found that “Gen Z expects more instantaneous feedback than Gen Y” (p. 11) but “both groups were similar in their general characteristics, which included preferences for group-work, affirmation, clear rules, and for their opinions to be valued” (p. 10). This quantitative study also determined that both generations were responsive communicators prioritizing relationships and gaining feedback from others, but Gen Z was less adept at managing a large workload (Humaira Raslie, 2020).

In describing the influences that shaped this generation, Onesto (2022) noted that Gen Z members experienced many of the things the other generations did but at a time in their lives where the impact was very different. For instance, the recession, automation, and outsourcing in the 1990’s had an impact on the traditional teen job market and there were fewer jobs available for Gen Z teens. This generation grew up in a world where social media metrics assessed their social status merging their private and online lives. Being born into a world with worsening

climate conditions, racial and social inequality, and an economy in recession, Gen Z mindsets were shaped in a way that was unlike the generations that came before them. (Onesto, 2022).

### ***Generation Y: The Millennials***

According to Howe and Strauss (2000) who conducted mixed methods research, this large birth cohort was a product of social and cultural shifts marked by visits to fertility clinics and child-centered attitudes in parenting. As teens, millennials (born between 1980 and 1996) were viewed as more positive, confident, smart, and worth celebrating for their achievements – both large and small. Contrary to stereotypes held by the generations who came before them, they were rule followers and accepted authority. Millennial teens viewed themselves as tech masters and believed they would be the generation who could impact change for a better future (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Adult millennial participants in Van Rossem’s (2016) study regarded their generation as being open communicators, easy to work with, goal oriented, tech savvy, and delivering the best work product. They also recognized their need for the most support from their supervisor.

Like other generations before them, millennial employees have brought their own unique generational perspective and values to their roles. This generation was driven by technology and expected to work on multiple projects at any given time with a talent for approaching projects with creative solutions (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Van Rossem, 2016). Millennials were motivated by a need to contribute to their employer’s vision and are seeking a sense of belonging (Wiedmer, 2018). Cultural influences on Generation Y or the millennials include September 11, Facebook, social media, and cell phones (Fogg, 2009) and an increased concern for child safety (Fry, 2018; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Research suggests that millennial workers were influenced

by their need for feedback and recognition in the workplace (Fogg, 2009; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

### ***Generation X***

Generation X participants in Van Rossem's (2016) study expressed a view of self with all idealized, positive traits. Currently, Generation X are entering into their midlife age and career span, but with potentially many years of professional work ahead (Chuang, 2019). Based on his review of research concerning this generation, Chuang (2019) recognized that Generation Xers may be considering career turning points, reflecting on career accomplishments, or re-examining their lives in general. The U.S. Census Bureau statistics showed only 82 % of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) were employed or seeking employment (Frey, 2018). According to Fogg (2009), Generation X is believed to have a greater amount of cynicism and will put their own interests first. He recommended that cultural influences that may have had an impact included MTV, home video games, the women's movement, and the internet. Much like their millennial counterparts, Fogg (2009) determined that Gen Xers were influenced by their need for autonomy, work balance, and flexible work structures.

### ***Baby Boomers***

With boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) either retired or aging towards retirement, workforce roles may continue to decrease as time progresses (Fry, 2020). Typical descriptives of this generation may include high standards and work ethic, more experience but less technologically oriented (Wiedmer, 2018). Boomers typically equate work status with self-worth and have achieved high levels of authority in their careers at the cost of life balance. As they retire, baby boomers leave gaps in the workforce. They also face trying to reconcile their

retirement with a loss in work identity (Wiedmer, 2018). Cultural influences on the baby boomers included the Beatles, the Vietnam War, rising popularity of television, and the sexual revolution (Fogg, 2009; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Baby boomers were driven by dedication, loyalty, and a sense of teamwork in the workplace (Fogg, 2009).

### **Generational Stereotypes**

Fogg (2009) recognized that employees have their own unique values and characteristics in the workplace so generalizations about each birth range group must be tempered. Van Rossem's (2016) Belgian study of managers and their attitudes towards generational groups in the workplace explored the dynamics of how each group viewed those in competing generational cohorts. For example, Van Rossem (2016) found that both baby boomers and Gen X viewed Generation Y in a more negative manner. In addition, baby boomers were viewed by others as less tech savvy but more experienced with high work standards. Recommendations to organizations include the benefit of creating multigenerational teams and providing opportunities to develop collegial awareness about generational stereotypes to promote generational diversity as a strength. Having an awareness of common characteristics of generational cohorts could be helpful in supporting workplace dynamics (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Van Rossem, 2016). While generational labels have made it possible to identify a group born during a specific time frame, it has been noted that people within generational groups may have very different values and expectations (Van Rossem, 2016).

Lyons and Kuron (2013) reviewed the body of research on generations in the workplace. Based on their findings, they have recommended more qualitative research to more fully explore generations as social forces in organizations. This may support organizations to more fully understand differences in work attitudes, values, life balance preferences, importance of

teamwork, changes in career patterns, and leadership behaviors. Much of the available research focused on generations based on birth cohort but social and historical influences may have a considerable impact on shaping the consciousness of that cohort group. According to Lyons and Kuron (2013) it would be beneficial for managers to recognize generational differences and impact on conflict and diversity. This literature review will provide a deeper exploration of the millennial's expectations for the workplace to determine if there were common themes and recommendations to support, develop, and retain millennial school leaders.

### **Millennials in the Workplace**

Grissom et al. (2021) calculated trends from the 2016 National Teacher and Principal Survey that indicated that years of instructional experience prior to stepping into a school principalship had dropped to an average of only 11.5 years. Their study also found that the number of principals considered to be novice (1-3 years of experience) increased to 31% during that same year. Using these data points as indicators to infer, the average principal described in their research would be serving as a novice school principal at 33-34 years of age. Using Gallup's (2016) birth year ranges for millennials (1980 – 1996) as an indicator, in 2021, the generational cohort that was 25 to 41 years of age were the millennials. The lack of large studies conducted around the expectations and aspirations of the millennial school leader represents an apparent gap in research.

Gallup (2016) synthesized available data from Gallup Panel, Daily Tracking, employee engagement databases, and the Gallup Health-Ways Well-Being Index to determine shared characteristics of this large, racially, and ethnically diverse group. Their focus was on how millennials presented themselves as employees. Findings included six recommendations for organizations to address the workplace needs of the millennial employee. They found that to

attract, develop, and retain the millennial worker, organizations could consider a shift in workplace culture to meet expectations for job purpose, development, supervision, evaluation, mindset, and balance. They also found that 21% of millennials left to pursue new, better job opportunities in one year (Gallup, 2016). Ignoring the needs of this generational cohort may place an organization at a disadvantage in a time where industries are experiencing worker shortages and more responsive businesses are shifting to recruit and retain this large millennial workforce. Organizations may adopt a more responsive approach to determine the expectations of the millennial worker to engage and retain their talent (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016).

Winter and Jackson (2016) completed a qualitative study conducting interviews with both millennial employees and their non-millennial supervisors to explore work value preferences and performance perspectives in the Australian Public Service (APS). This study made connections between supervisor-worker dyads and millennial expectations for the APS work setting. While managers of these millennial workers found them to be enthusiastic, willing to learn, and hardworking, data showed that they may leave the job within a brief period to seek higher opportunities if their current job lacked a steady path to promotion (Winter & Jackson, 2016).

Klimchak et al. (2019) examined age differences on both internal and external motivation using quantitative regression models with a sample group from a large utility company in the southeastern United States. Their research explored organizational identification using the framework of life span psychology theory. According to Klimchak et al. (2019), organizations may take a life-span theory approach to recruitment, development, and retention. This included an approach to tailor identity-building initiatives with the needs of younger employees versus older employees, who have shown more motivation towards learning goal orientation. For

recruitment and retention of younger generational cohorts, organizations may focus on highlighting the organization's status, or image, as a leader in the field as compared to focusing on the learning opportunities of the organization for older recruits (Klimchak et al., 2019).

VanMeter et al. (2013) explored the connection between millennials' ethical ideology and ethical decision making. This quantitative study sampled a group of 1,128 college business class students at a large U.S. university using workplace questions that would be relatable to a college student. VanMeter et al. (2013) determined that millennials were most likely to view ethics through the lens of situationism (high on both idealism and relativism scales). Their recommendations to organizations include consideration to onboard millennial employees through an ethics training that would include scenarios, team discussions, and real application to the expected job behavior. The organization would ensure clear understanding of what is and is not tolerated in their workplace culture. Supervisors may coach expected decision-making behaviors through the lens of regulations, legal requirements, and policies of the organization. Lastly, millennial workers could be matched with older generational mentors so both could benefit from shared perspective and discussion (VanMeter et al., 2013).

### ***Millennials' Expectations for Self***

Coates (2017) took a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to investigate the lived experience of millennials in the workplace. This qualitative study included multiple collaborative conversations with the researcher to deepen understanding with each of the five willing participants, all of whom worked full time for at least one year and were born between 1981 and 1994. They found that while many view the tendency for millennials to frequently change jobs as negative, members surveyed shared they viewed this as an opportunity to further develop experience and perhaps find a job with a perfect fit for their talents and increased stability. The

pursuit of work life balance may look different for each millennial, but it was equally sought by all five participants. They defined this theme to include reflection on balancing work priorities with mental and physical well-being. These study participants described the importance of seeking job roles that included flexibility and investing time in building work and life boundaries. Millennials in this study shared a common value for hard work and a strong commitment to being a contributor on the job. They also shared the importance of building positive work relationships with colleagues (Coates, 2017).

Arora and Kshatriya (2017) conducted a descriptive case study to determine the workplace factors important to millennial post-graduate management students in Ahmadabad, India. Dependent variables in this quantitative study included gender, work experience and marital status. According to this study, the millennial generation will not accept positions they view as having limited stability. Millennials in this study with prior work experience entered the job market with even higher expectations and millennials who were married had the highest expectations of all. There were no observed gender differences as both were equally choosy about their future employment in leadership with high expectations for their futures (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017).

VanMeter et al. (2013) found that as a generational cohort, millennials were confident in their abilities, with a high level of optimism and motivation. They approached their work with a strong desire to be successful and expected a level of flexibility from others to support their success. VanMeter et al. (2013) found that this group may have been more likely to judge decisions and actions through the lens of relativism or situational ethics instead of strict adherence to the organization's code of ethics. They may have felt that decisions were more influenced by personal, or group justification based on the situation rather than a strict code of

conduct. In addition, they may view decisions or actions taken by a collaborative group through a more ethically lenient lens than those decisions made by one member alone. In contrast, other millennials may approach the workplace with less tolerance for ethical violations. These cohort members would rate high on the idealist scale and would also portray more characteristics attributed to the servant leadership model with a strong tendency to be more team and leadership oriented (VanMeter et al., 2013).

Klimchak et al. (2019) found that millennial recruits would be interested in learning about opportunities for promotion to a more prestigious department or position within the organization. Gallup (2016) found four themes that characterized the behaviors and attitudes of this group that represented 38% of the workforce in their 2016 study. According to their research, millennials were unattached but connected, unconstrained, and idealistic. In addition, millennials were optimistic and believed they could find purpose and fulfillment in their work roles. Much like other generations before them, millennials wanted to live well and work in fulfilling jobs with financial stability. Despite this vision for the workplace, Gallup (2016) reported that less than 40% considered themselves to be thriving in their work while 55% felt they were not engaged in their work. With only 54% employed full-time, 10% were employed part-time and 7% were jobless but seeking full-time employment. This study also reported that in addition to 55% not engaged at work, an additional 16% reported they were *actively disengaged*. This high level of job disengagement had contributed to productivity losses amounting to approximately \$470 billion dollars annually in the U.S. (Gallup, 2016).

Organizations may want to explore research around leadership behaviors that lead to increased employee engagement where followers are intrinsically motivated to work harder to turn shared vision into reality (Amor et al., 2019; Avolio & Bass, 1988). According to Avolio

and Bass (1995), an organization's culture is influenced by behaviors modeled by the leader. Through individualized consideration a leader recognizes each follower's differences and develops their potential to reach greater levels of performance with a shift in focus on self to the needs of the organization. Through this process, leaders provide feedback to followers to further support growth through both mistakes and successes. Followers experience a shift in their focus on short-term goals to an awareness of their contribution for the good of the group. These transformational leaders provide work structures that both empower and develop the follower while encouraging autonomy (Avolio & Bass, 1995).

Amor et al. (2019) conducted quantitative research with Chi-square testing to explore structural empowerment, transformational leadership, and employee engagement. The study sample included 240 employees across organizations in the Spanish tourism industry with 58% of those employees surveyed being younger than 45 years of age. This study found that when leaders exercised the behaviors of transformational leadership, followers were more engaged in their work. Developing these leadership behaviors promoted a climate of support for followers through empowering social structures which in turn increased engagement (Amor et al., 2019). Leaders play an important role in follower engagement through behaviors of the transformational leadership model (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Amor et al., 2019; Avolio & Bass, 1988).

Gallup (2016) found that while millennials had high hopes for more from their workplace, their well-being was comparable to that of the two generational cohorts that preceded them. According to this study, millennials were more likely to seek new job opportunities more often, delay marriage and having children, and have less commitment to a certain religion or political party. This constant connectivity influenced the frequent search for new jobs that may have provided a better fit for their vision of their lives. This study also

connected the pursuit for well-being with organizational value. According to these research findings, and contrary to common belief, millennials tended to hold a high commitment to both responsibility and achievement leading to high levels of value for accountability. Work engagement was higher when millennials knew their managers would hold them accountable, which supported their desire to feel productive with a strong sense of ownership for their work (Gallup, 2016).

While millennial workers sought life balance in their lives, they were realistic and recognized that in the short-term, they would need to invest long hours and give up their weekends to achieve goals in their progression towards career development (Winter & Jackson, 2016). This study also found that millennial workers brought their strong self-confidence and belief that they had highly marketable talents to their workplaces. Millennials in this study valued the opportunity to work in roles that contributed to the organization while adding to social purpose or the common good (Winter & Jackson, 2016).

Pyöriä et al. (2017) conducted research in the Finnish labor market to determine differences in the millennial employee. Their linear probability model used Finland's Quality of Life Surveys in the years 1984-2013, to explore labor market entrants aged 15-29 to determine truth versus stereotypes. According to Pyöriä et al. (2017), the millennial employee in the Finnish labor market brought important skills and appreciation for their work while they maintained a value for time with family and leisure. Their results also indicated that millennials were very committed to their jobs once they found their preferred field of work. The research findings did not support the common belief that millennials had a weaker work ethic than other generational cohorts (Pyöriä et al., 2017).

### *Millennials' Expectations for Work*

Coates (2017) found that all millennial participants in the study described value for having a job that was fulfilling and contributed to improving the lives of others. Participants described meaningful work as work that provided enjoyment, engagement, fulfillment, and value with opportunities to make connections. In addition, meaningful work offered a challenge, created positive change for society, and promoted professional growth. Millennials were seeking employers who valued the contribution of the individual and supervisors that formed respectful relationships of support with them. Lastly, Coates' (2017) research found that millennials preferred a workplace that would provide an environment where they felt trusted with a level of autonomy in their work.

VanMeter et al. (2013) found that, as a group, millennials were more socially wired with a higher preference for group work than other cohort groups. According to Gallup (2016), unlike the boomer generation who pursued meaning in their family and community with a paycheck as a driving force, millennials were driven by purpose and meaning in their work while seeking fair compensation. In addition, they were more motivated by the organization's purpose and reputation. Millennials were attracted to work that was a good match to their strengths. Finally, a strengths-based perspective when managing employee performance resulted in 70% engagement with the organization (Gallup, 2016).

Gallup (2016) research supported the view that millennials were seeking to be contributors in the workplace. In addition, millennials were seeking jobs that provided opportunities for growth and development which could support retention measures. According to Gallup (2016), opportunities to enhance skills was a leading retention factor for this generation

of empowered millennials. While some desired collaborative alignment with their work team, they found it to be lacking in the mindsets of most millennials. Workplace development for millennials could include a focus on optimal team productivity and engagement. As millennials saw their work as a representation of who they were, managers could support them by making strategic connections between work and the needs of the organization or the team (Gallup, 2016).

### ***Millennials' Expectations for Supervisors***

Winter and Jackson (2016) found that millennials had a high value for work processes, tasks and outcomes that were efficient. In addition, they preferred managers to serve as mentors to support their focus on making improvements to increase efficiency while supporting their career development. Gallup (2016) reported that millennials were seeking to change the approach to performance standards to more closely meet their needs. For example, managers who provided meaningful development that aligned with the millennial employee's learning preference through various job imbedded opportunities would be well-positioned to support career advancement for their millennial worker. The Gallup research showed a 58% positive connection with work expectations when the manager took the time to engage, support, develop, and care about the millennial employee as a person beyond the job role. These employees were seeking managers who provided ongoing feedback, clarity around priorities, and support for accelerated professional growth (Gallup, 2016). Kouzes and Posner (2017) found in their research that all employees learned the skills and behaviors of effective leadership when they had a willingness to grow and evolve, with the support of strategic feedback, coaching, and mentorship.

Bass (1981) found that "supervisors who value belonging do much to increase the sense of ownership in activities with subordinates" (p. 138). Gallup (2016) research showed a 67%

correlation between managers who provided vital support to establish work priorities with millennial employee engagement in the workplace. This research aligned with the management support model characterized by developing clear individualized expectations to match the millennial worker's strengths, with collaborative work to define those mutually agreed upon expectations. Millennials were like older generational cohorts in that they expected their managers to provide clear expectations with regular communication, but they were less comfortable initiating informal communication with their supervisor. According to this study, 44% of the millennials surveyed felt more engaged with their work when their managers provided consistent communication with regular meetings. In contrast, only 20% who did not have this regular, consistent interaction reported feeling engaged (Gallup, 2016).

Bass (1981) determined that, "how much time a supervisor believes should be spent interacting with subordinates may make a considerable difference in the effectiveness of the relationship" (p. 138). The Gallup (2016) research supported the need for managers to regularly initiate conversations around meaningful performance feedback with their millennial employees due to the related positive impact on both engagement and performance. This study found that only 21% of millennials met with their manager for these conversations on a weekly basis. At these coaching meetings, which may have been in-person or in a virtual format, managers could have provided their millennial worker with time to share what they needed and what was top of mind with the opportunity to gain feedback. This management approach to leverage an employee's strengths to impact performance also increased the likelihood of millennial employee retention (Gallup, 2016). Kouzes and Posner (2017) supported this link between leadership quality and follower productivity. According to their research, followers report that the worst

leaders only utilized an average of 31% of their potential while the best leaders used 95% of their “talent, energy and motivation” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 300).

Based on Gallup (2016) research, millennials were seeking to communicate with their manager beyond the workplace. They wanted to connect and be cared about as a person in their lives outside of work. This research also found that 59% of millennials surveyed felt more engaged when their manager was approachable and was interested in hearing about their “non-related-work issues” (Gallup, 2016, p. 38) even though only 29% reported feeling comfortable having those conversations. This research finding may support an organization’s effort to increase retention since 62% of millennials indicated they were likely to remain with their current employer when they felt they had ease in communication with their manager and 53% reported they were planning to remain with a manager who responded to communication within 24-hours. This aligned with the finding that millennials maintained instant access to the world that directly impacted the level of engagement companies could access to communicate with both potential and current employees (Gallup, 2016).

According to Gallup (2016), millennial workers wanted to be productive contributors to their organization. Like most employees, millennials needed to have trust in their manager to feel safe and supported which led to productivity. Trust in the workplace also supported innovation, a collaborative culture, increased engagement, and retention. Unlike Boomers and Gen Xers, research suggested that millennials were more likely to want to know how their work contributed to the core work of their employer. They wanted to feel productive as contributors to this work (Gallup, 2016).

Coates (2017) found that a positive relationship with the supervisor contributed to the millennial employees’ overall personal satisfaction with work completion. Likewise, negative

relationships with their supervisor created difficulty for the millennial to complete their work (Coates, 2017). Followers were looking for their leaders to be “honest, competent, inspiring, and forward-looking” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 31). Their research also showed that 74% of the respondents increased their trust in the leader when there was evidence that the leader was “following through on promises and commitments” (Kouzes & Posner, 2017, p. 76).

### ***Millennials’ Expectations for the Organization***

Klimchak et al. (2019) found that externally motivated millennial employees made a strong connection between their organization’s identification and external prestige. External prestige included factors not related to employee performance such as the organization’s position as a leader in the industry and reputation for social responsibility. According to Gallup (2016), millennials were more likely to remain unattached and avoid affiliating with the brand or defined beliefs of the organization even while remaining hyper-connected to the world around them through technology. Coates (2017) found that millennials valued organizations that embraced new flexible work structures with opportunities for recognition and opportunity for advancement.

Arora and Kshatriya (2017) reported that millennials knew what they were looking for in an employer and they had high expectations. They found that while job security ranked at the top for this generation, prestige and reputation of the organization was second, with seeking a job with a challenging job description was in third place. In addition, organizations must be aware of the expectations and motivations that drove millennials to better recruit, develop and retain this workforce that was looking for something different than the traditional work model.

Organizations may consider a work model that embraced flexibility and balance for employees

who valued autonomy and sought to work for organizations that contributed to improving the lives of people and society (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017).

### **Millennials' Turn to Lead**

Leaders are shaped by many factors, but Bass (1985) described the influence of parenting style on the behaviors and style of the future leader. For example, Bass (1985) found that transformational leadership dispositions were fostered through the devoted parent's love and dedication to support the child's goals, individualized consideration, mentoring, and intellectual stimulation. Based on this research, during early adulthood, these future leaders were encouraged to pursue their individual interests and to gain visibility. During adulthood, the aspiring leader continued to be shaped by experiences and rewards. These evolving leaders were seen as confident, friendly, assertive, and most often found motivation to lead linked to satisfaction in power (Bass, 1985).

Gabrielova and Buchko (2021) conducted a research review to explore generational preferences and interactions between Gen Z employees and their millennial manager. Research suggests a strong alignment between the needs of the newest generation to enter the workforce and their millennial supervisors. Their review of literature made connections between transformational leadership style tendencies of the Gen Y leader which tightly aligned with the Gen Z employee's style preference. Implications for millennial leadership of the Gen Z generation included recommendations for the importance of shaping job security and motivation and using competition and autonomy to inspire innovation. To counteract tendencies for the millennial's low interpersonal skills, research suggests the importance of being purposeful in leading their Gen Z employee's engagement with conflict and stress in the workplace (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021).

Taylor and Stein (2014) conducted a mixed methods study to explore the female views on leadership in higher education according to generations. Research questions in their study focused on preferred leadership styles and those styles and behaviors of female leaders in different generational cohorts. With 282 quantitative survey respondents and 34 participants completing the qualitative interview, this study gained specific insight into the perceptions of how women view themselves as leaders. In addition, this study explored how they perceive differences among generational groups and perceptions of issues concerning life balance (Taylor & Stein, 2014).

Taylor and Stein (2014) found that women from Generation X and Gen Y both viewed themselves as big-picture thinkers. When managing change in the organization, all three generational cohorts valued communication, but millennials also recognized the importance of transparency, experience, and intuition while baby boomers recognized the importance of consensus building, supporting creative problem-solving and team building. The qualitative study results indicated that baby boomers had a higher mean score for collaboration than both millennials and Gen X participants. Generation X had a higher value on mentoring than either baby boomers or millennials. Baby boomers in their study had more positive views of the younger generational cohorts. Some study participants even noted that leadership differences were less about age group and more about personality traits (Taylor & Stein, 2014).

Concerning issues surrounding life balance, Taylor and Stein (2014) found that both Gen X and Gen Y study participants indicated that quality of life and balance was very important, and they wanted to pursue family, advanced degrees, and life. Their study found management values differences among generational cohorts. Baby boomers and Gen X both reported clarification of expectations and creative problem solving as important managerial skills. Millennials reported

that long-term planning was important. Millennials also found team building to be the least important skill. The differences between generational cohorts in this study emphasized the importance of being knowledgeable about generational differences while recognizing that these differences do not apply to every member of the group (Taylor & Stein, 2014).

There is an apparent gap in research to inform organizations on whether potential millennial leaders will pursue greater positions of responsibility. Workload, stress, and high demands placed on those in leadership roles may be in conflict with the pursuit of life balance and the need for self-care (DeMatthews et al., 2021). Roebuck et al. (2013) focused their qualitative study on three generations of women and their views on work balance and the relationship of these views towards seeking leadership positions in the workplace. With 161 women from these three generational cohorts completing questionnaires, this study determined that while boomers may view younger generations as having less work ethic, some members of this group wanted to encourage younger cohorts to avoid the pursuit of the same 80-hour work week they envisioned for themselves. While some organizations have become more responsive to the needs of the employee to have work balance, these study participants felt that balance continues to be an issue for all women. Many women in this study shared that they would not pursue leadership positions in their jobs unless they could maintain a healthy life balance. Instead of balancing these priorities, women are attempting to integrate them into their lives. Millennials are balancing hobbies, vacations, church, and community commitments. Gen Xers and boomers are balancing the need to care for their families that can also conflict with their professional lives. Women across all generational groups felt that this pursuit of balance was more closely related to one's profession and the demands of that job more than the generational group. When considering the implications of accepting a promotional role with great

responsibility, many women in this study reported that the risk of high workload and stress related to serving in the leadership role was too high a price to pay on their personal lives (Roebuck et al., 2013).

Smith et al. (2016) conducted qualitative research using survey questions provided to 101 males belonging to the baby boomer, Gen X, and millennial birth cohorts. The participants worked in different industries to include technology, education, service industries, transportation, and utilities. 64% of these participants held leadership or managerial positions. Utilizing a validity approach requiring all three researchers to code themes and draw conclusions, their research focused on exploring views of men from each of the generational cohorts on organizational leadership related to life balance. Emerging themes from this study concerning the integration of work-life roles included the millennial male workers' interest in becoming more engaged with families and communities, as compared to baby boomers in this study. Generation X participants expressed a desire to invest time on personal interests beyond work even while falling into the same cycles of long work hours of their father's generation. Boomers recognized that they struggled early in their careers to achieve life balance but, at some point, just accepted the work ethics of the organization and embraced the norms of the times (Smith et al., 2016).

Smith et al. (2016) found that while millennials recognized the value of technology, it did create a downside with the high level of connectedness to their jobs that impacted work balance. Both Gen X and baby boomers in this study felt that technology both helped and created complications for them in their ability to disconnect and achieve a greater work balance. Participants felt that while there were evident improvements in systems and structures, organizational support for work-life balance was not clear. Baby boomers recognized these changes that have taken place over time but also recognized that what a company says they will

do, and the actual workplace culture may not be in alignment for leaders to make life balance a priority for themselves (Smith et al., 2016).

Smith et al. (2016) found differences in the way generations viewed one another in the workplace. While boomers recognized the importance of mentoring younger colleagues who may be interested in pursuing leadership, some felt that millennials may be more focused on their time away from work lacking a dedicated work ethic like their own. Generation X leaders also felt that millennials may be more interested in contributing the minimum effort required and were less prepared for management commitment. While millennial males in this study felt they had maintained a positive work balance as compared to their older generational counterparts, they also revealed they carried additional commitments on their time due to hobbies and an active social life (Smith et al., 2016).

This study also explored themes related to the role played by the organization. According to Smith et al (2016), men were more committed to remain with organizations that supported their need for life balance outside of their workday. While older boomers may not readily see leadership potential in their younger employees, Gen Xers and millennials revealed that they were willing to forego promotional opportunities to support their goal for work balance. Pursuit of work balance was a leading factor in consideration of future leadership roles for both Gen X and Gen Y men in this study. The implications for organizations seeking to develop and retain leaders include the importance of supporting and encouraging leadership development at all stages of an employee's career. Organizations can benefit from promoting the integration of work balance early in an employee's career to better prepare them to accept subsequent leadership positions (Smith et al., 2016).

Barnes and Gearing (2021) conducted a qualitative, phenomenology study to explore millennial leadership perspectives. The study sample consisted of 11 higher education millennial leaders from small and medium sized colleges, both private and public. These participants were found through web sources noting their involvement in work undergoing change processes. Their research study used adaptive leadership as the conceptual framework to explore how these millennial leaders approached their work in the college setting. Analyzed through the lens of adaptive leadership, this research found that these millennial leaders presented with strengths that supported the work of leading change in their colleges to include “self-development through the development of others, bold transparency, high tolerance for ambiguity, and commitment to due diligence and data” (Barnes & Gearing, 2021, p. 58-60). In addition, these leaders recognized the importance of a mentor who helped them along their path to leadership positions through both personal and professional development. They, in turn, valued opportunities to mentor and recognize aspiring leaders in their organizations through the lens of succession planning. These leaders were purposeful in leading change with transparency around the level of difficulty and stress involved in the work. The relationships maintained by these leaders with their employees also supported transparency and productive interaction to address any performance issues. With their bold leadership approach to communication and decision-making, their employees were engaged in collaborative opportunities to contribute. In addition, millennial college leaders in this study agreed that “they would not define their self-worth based on the outcomes of their endeavors, whether positive or negative” (Barnes & Gearing, 2021, p. 63).

### **Recruitment and Development of the Millennial School Leader**

Meyer et al. (2020) used public data from three states in the Midwest to determine retention rates among leaders employed from 2011-2019. This quantitative research study sought

the trend data around three research questions to include the percentage of school leaders remaining in current positions in the same school, moved to a different school, or left school leadership completely. According to their findings, “principals younger than age 40 (millennial age group) were 144% more likely (nearly 2.5 times as likely) to be a mover after three years, and principals ages 40-44 were 49% more likely to be a mover after three years” (p.9). Movers were defined as those who left their current role to accept a new leadership role in a different school or district. This study also found that only about 50% of school leaders remained in their same school after three years (Meyer et al., 2020). Recruiting school leaders is one first step. Divisions may be interested in developing programs to reduce burn-out so that leaders have a greater capacity to address the needs of their schools while increasing principal retention (DeMatthews et al., 2021).

Recruiting school leaders may be more complex than posting job opportunities on social media. Bass (1981) found that “leadership occurring within organizational settings is affected by individual differences such as how much one needs to identify with the organization, how one’s location in the organization makes a difference in one’s values, emergence of dual loyalties, and changes in lifestyles” (p. 137). Gallup (2016) found that prospective millennial employees were likely to rely on recommendations from friends and family so ensuring that current employees could speak to and were proud of the employer brand was important. Managers developed a greater understanding of the millennial employee when they focused recruitment and planning for both “performance, and workplace connections” (Gallup, 2016, p. 21). From the recruitment lens, this directly impacted defining then offering what this generational cohort was seeking from their current and future employer (Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

## Summary

According to Gallup (2016), the current state of schools creates a need to attract and retain school leaders that can transform schools. As school divisions develop aspiring millennial leaders, their dispositions, priorities, and talents will also evolve to reflect their innate values and expectations in the workplace (Gallup, 2016; Howe & Strauss, 2000). Millennials are significantly different from previous generational cohorts, and they will have a unique impact on the workplace (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016; Howe & Strauss, 2000). “Millennials have a solid chance to become America’s next great generation, as celebrated for their collective deeds in a hundred years from now as the generation of John Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, Joe DiMaggio, and Jimmy Stewart is celebrated today” (Howe & Strauss, 2000, p. 5).

While a review of literature revealed an evident gap in research concerning millennial school leaders, there was a body of research that explored generational themes to inform the study (Fogg, 2009; Howe & Strauss, 2000; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Van Rossem, 2016; Wiedmer, 2018). The research explored the millennial’s experiences that may shape their perception of work to include their interaction with traditional systems and structures in the workplace (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017; Coates, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Klimchak et al., 2019; Winter & Jackson, 2016). The research also explored millennials’ engagement with defining purpose and social fulfillment in the workplace (Coates, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Klimchak et al., 2019; VanMeter et al., 2013).

Organizations may be able to understand generations in the workplace more fully by considering differences in work attitudes, values, life balance preferences, importance of teamwork, changes in career patterns, and leadership behaviors through further research (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Lyons & Kuron, 2013). Differences between and within generational cohorts and their shared identities provide an element of diversity in the workplace

but they may also contribute to conflict and diverse expectations in the organization (Smith et al., 2016; Winter & Jackson, 2016). Current research methodologies for exploring these themes have not supported broad generalizations of their findings but have instead provided a deeper need for additional research to explore the phenomenon (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016; Lyons & Kuron, 2013; Smith et al., 2016).

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter will provide an examination of the research methods and design components relevant to this study. This will include a description of the methodology, research design, research questions, sample selection, and instrument design. Validity and reliability, data collection procedures, and data analysis techniques will also be described.

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

Recognizing the impactful role of the school principal in addressing the needs of students, staff, and families (Grissom et al., 2021) while balancing the ever-increasing demands placed on their time, this study was dedicated to learning more about the perceptions, influences and expectations that would support longevity in position for school principals. Research has shown that principal turnover is on the rise in the United States (Levin et al., 2020) while leading our schools has not gotten easier in recent years following the COVID-19 pandemic (JLARC, 2022). With a deeper understanding of the needs and expectations of millennial school principals, school divisions may be able to adapt and innovate current, traditional systems and structures to competitively recruit, develop, and retain these new leaders to the principalship.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. Basic qualitative methodology was used to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to aspire to the role of the principal. These methods supported synthesizing information from lived experiences to determine what motivates the millennial school principal to remain in the role. Finally, this study was designed to further an understanding around the conditions or factors that

may cause millennial school principals to leave the role. While previous research has delved into the perceptions and expectations of millennial employees in various workplaces, there is an absence of research aimed at gaining a deeper insight into how millennial school principals shape their experiences, assign significance to them, and comprehend the expectations they hold for themselves, as well as those held by their followers and others. The findings from this study may offer valuable insights to school districts facing difficulties in attracting, nurturing, and retaining this talented generation within school leadership positions. Informed practices for recruiting and retaining the next generation of leaders can assist school districts in navigating the challenges associated with teacher shortages, diminished morale, and high turnover rates among principals. This study was designed to gain an understanding of why some aspiring millennial leaders pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, as well as the conditions that may cause them to leave the principalship.

### **Research Design**

A basic qualitative research approach was used in this study to understand more fully “how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 6). This approach allowed for “exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 4). The qualitative approach provided an opportunity to explore the constructed meaning of the participants’ lived experiences (Ruslin et al., 2022). This methodology also provided an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how being a millennial principal is “understood and experienced by multiple respondents, and how it interacts with other issues and factors affecting their lives” (Trochim et al., 2016, p.59).

Because “knowledge is constructed by people in an ongoing fashion as they engage in and make meaning of an activity, experience, or phenomenon” (Meriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 23), semi-structured interviews served as the method to learn more about the lived experiences from participants. This approach allowed for flexible and adaptable questioning while maintaining the focus of the research questions (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Ruslin et al., 2022). Open-ended content questions that were clustered around the three research questions were followed by relevant probes when needed to explore the interpretations, constructs, and descriptions shared by the millennial principals who participated in the study. The researcher’s role in serving as the primary instrument has been described as follows:

Probes are also questions or comments that follow up something already asked. It is virtually impossible to specify these ahead of time because they are independent on how the participant answers the lead questions. This is where being the primary instrument of data collection has its advantages, especially if you are a highly sensitive instrument. You make adjustments in your interviewing as you go along. You sense that the respondent is on to something significant or that there is more to be learned. Probing can come in the form of asking for more details, for clarification, for examples. (Merriam, 2009, p. 100-102).

Interviews were conducted one-on-one in a virtual web-based Zoom platform to support consistency in the designated place rather than the natural field setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Individual interviews provided each participant with time to fully describe their interpretation of the influences that prompted them to pursue and accept the school principalship role and their unique experience of transitioning into the work of the principalship. In addition, this interview structure allowed for participants to fully explore the meaning they attributed to

their experiences and better understand their constructed expectations for self, from followers, and from supervisors that would support longevity in the role (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Research Questions**

This basic qualitative study was designed to investigate the constructed meaning, perception, and outcomes of millennial school principals' lived experiences. Merriam (2009) elevates the importance of asking good questions to get good data. This study was guided by the following three research questions that were both concise and clear.

1. What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?
2. What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?
3. What are the factors or conditions that would prompt the millennial school leader to leave the principalship?

### **Participant Selection**

As the largest adult cohort in the workplace and with the aging boomer generation in leadership moving towards retirement, millennial school leaders are poised to step into the crucial work of transforming schools in a manner responsive to the current state which we explored in the literature review. This basic qualitative study was designed to learn more about the lived experience and perceptions of current millennial principals (born between 1980 and 1996). The fifteen selected participants had completed 1-5 years in their role serving as school principals at the elementary, middle, or high school levels. Study participants were working in urban, suburban, or rural public schools. Participants were selected using a non-random, purposeful snowball sampling. This purposeful sampling supported "presenting stories of

participants' experience" to "open up for readers the possibility of connecting their own stories to those presented in the study" (Seidman, 2006, p. 52).

As described by Merriam and Tisdell (2016), a few key participants for this study who met the criteria established for participation were interviewed early and were then asked to recommend other participants who met the criteria. All prospective research participants, who had been recommended by others, were contacted through email (Appendix A). Additional communication to confirm their interest was provided through email (Appendix B). The individuals who met all criteria for the study received details about the study's objectives, the duration and style of the interview, and the confidentiality protocols employed throughout the research (Appendix C). Once a prospective participant confirmed their willingness to join, a virtual Zoom interview was scheduled at an agreed-upon time. The researcher anticipated interviewing 5 to 20 participants but found a point of saturation at fifteen participants. To determine when the sampling size was sufficient, and a pattern of saturation or redundancy had occurred, data analysis of interview data was ongoing and simultaneous (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2006).

### **Instrument Design**

According to Merriam (2009), "drawing from the philosophies of constructionism, phenomenology, and symbolic interactionism, qualitative researchers are interested in how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, what meaning they attribute to their experience" (p. 14). For this study, basic qualitative interviews were selected as an objective tool of inquiry to more fully understand the influence of the lived experiences of millennial participants who met the criteria for the study. The guiding structure for instrument design was the research focus on millennial principals' aspirations to lead, commitment to

remaining, and factors that may provoke them to leave their principalships. Researchers have described the benefits of qualitative interviewing:

qualitative interviewing is in fact the most objective method of inquiry when one is interested in qualitative features of human experience, talk, and interaction (at least if objectivity means being adequate to a subject matter). Qualitative interviews seem uniquely capable of grasping these features of our lives (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 4).

Semi-structured interviews were conducted one-on-one with study participants through virtual sessions. Structured open-ended questions with follow-up prompts were constructed to loosely frame the focus of the interviews while allowing for participants to explore related constructed meaning and interpretation of lived experiences. The guiding questions focused on the period spent pursuing the principalship, the current experience while serving in the role, and inferring into the future to consider factors that may influence their decision to leave the principalship.

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) constructed around the major themes in research that describe the perceived millennial's expectations for themselves, and their workplace served as a reference point for comparative review of coded themes in participant responses. Prior to the start of the study, the researcher shared the draft interview questions and associated research questions with a group of doctoral candidates in educational research who have been trained in qualitative research and revised the interview questions as needed. Further, this researcher conducted a mock interview with a millennial school leader who was not selected to participate in the study to practice using the zoom transcription tools, gain insight, perspective, and possible refinement of the question protocol (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021). This provided important practice to try out and refine the questions to reduce confusing wording, while finding

“which questions yield useless data, and which questions, suggested by your respondents, you should have thought to include in the first place” (Merriam, 2009, p. 95). A semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D) was used with all participants to support consistency. Table 2 shows the content questions aligned with each research question for the semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher, along with the related probing questions.

Table 2

*Interview Questions and Probes*

Research Question 1: What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?	
Content questions	Probing questions
Why did you want to be a principal?	Describe the experience.
What prompted you to accept this role at this school?	What were your perceptions and motivations?
What skills or talents do you feel you bring to this job as a millennial?	How did you come to know this?
How have you been purposeful in the transition as leader with different generations?	How can you see this impact?
Have you noticed any differences among the generations during this experience?	Describe what you have observed.
Research Question 2: What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?	
Content questions	Probing questions
What keeps you engaged in doing this work?	Describe the experience.
What dispositions or traits do you feel you bring to this as a millennial?	How has this influenced other’s perceptions?
What leadership skills do you utilize when you work with others?	Describe how others respond to these methods.
Have you noticed any differences among the generations in your school?	Describe the interaction this has on your leadership.
How are you supported in your work?	Describe the type of support you have valued most.
Research Question 3: What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?	

Content questions	Probing questions
What would prompt you to leave this job?	Who influences that?
What do you expect and need from yourself to stay in this work?	Describe how you will provide for that.
What do you expect and need from others to stay in this work?	Could this be addressed while you remain in the role?
What are the dispositions that you have as a millennial leader which could support your longevity in this role?	Describe how this may evolve as you remain in the role.
What is your next goal after the principalship?	Describe how this role prepares you for the next role.

### **Instrument Validity and Reliability**

Following rigorous standards to ensure this study had been conducted in an ethical manner, was important to support the validity and reliability of the qualitative outcomes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using Creswell and Creswell (2018) to inform design methods and to increase the trustworthiness or validity of this study, the researcher included three approaches to check the accuracy of findings. First, triangulation was used during interpretation of interview responses by searching for a convergence of themes from the coded perspectives from participants. Second, using “rich, thick description to convey findings” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200) by providing multiple perspectives around themes supported a more realistic depiction of the lived experience. Third, contrary information was provided when the participant’s perspective did not confirm otherwise common themes. Providing all constructed meaning and perspective around the evidence for common themes provided a layer of credibility to outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

With the research focused on explaining or describing how the millennial school leaders in the sample interpret and construct meaning from their experiences, the qualitative reliability or consistency was assessed through triangulation, explicit description of researcher’s position, and

an audit trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The audit trail, or researcher's journal, provided a detailed account from interviews to note periphery details, follow-up probes needed, behaviors, problems encountered, and related observations. This audit trail also included a running record of interaction and analysis of data to consider points of saturation. Researchers have described the importance of following rigorous standards to support validity and reliability:

Reliability refers to the extent to which research findings can be replicated. In other words, if the study is repeated, will it yield the same results? Reliability is problematic in the social sciences simply because human behavior is never static. Even those in the hard sciences are asking similar questions about the constancy of phenomena. Reliability in a research design is based on the assumption that there is a single reality and that studying it repeatedly will yield the same results. This is a central concept of traditional experimental research, which focuses on discovering causal relationships among variables and uncovering laws to explain phenomena.

Qualitative research, however, is not conducted so that the laws of human behaviors can be isolated. Rather, researchers seek to describe and explain the world as those in the world experience it (Merriam, 2009, p. 220).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This researcher successfully completed the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program) courses earning the CITI Certificate in Social & Behavioral Research on September 9, 2022, (Appendix E). With a high value for maintaining integrity and following ethical research standards throughout this research process, participant anonymity was safeguarded to provide “protection from harm, the right to privacy” (Merriam, 2009, p. 230).

Data collection procedures followed IRB approval for the study. To engage potential research participants that met the criteria for this study, as they were recommended, initial contact was established via email as outlined in Appendix A. Subsequent communication, confirming their interest, was conducted through email, as specified in Appendix B. Upon confirming their willingness to participate with verbal consent, individuals received information regarding the study's goals, interview duration, interview format, and the confidentiality measures employed in the research process (Appendix C). Arrangements were made to schedule a virtual Zoom interview at a mutually convenient time with the participant having the opportunity to choose their interview location through access to the virtual setting.

### **Data Management**

Data for this qualitative study were collected through semi-structured one-on-one virtual Zoom interviews with the fifteen participants who provided verbal consent to participate. Due to the importance of safeguarding confidentiality, participants' names and identifying information remained undisclosed. Participants had an opportunity to provide pseudonyms to shield their identities and school affiliations. For data analysis, a coding system was used to substitute the pseudonyms or participant identity. Each participant's interview data were coded with descriptive demographic notations to include school setting (urban, suburban, or rural), birth year, years in the principalship, and school level (elementary, middle, high). An example of the code used for a rural elementary school principal born in 1990 with 5 years of experience would be R90-5E. This coding provided additional opportunities to explore trends in themes or categories during data analysis.

The Zoom interview sessions were recorded to provide the audio transcription. Once the researcher confirmed accuracy of the transcription (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021), the

recording was destroyed. The researcher maintained an audit trail to support consistency and reliability of data collected across interview events (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Electronic transcripts of interview data were stored on a password protected computer and USB device. Paper copies of transcripts, coding worksheets, and the audit trail were stored at the researcher's home in a secure office.

### **Data Analysis Techniques**

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) described the process of collecting and analyzing interview data using a simultaneous process throughout data collection. This approach to analyzing transcripts and searching for patterns or common themes following each participant interview allows the researcher to approach data analysis through immersion in the inductive process. Emerging themes can be confirmed in subsequent interviews or new categories may surface. Following Merriam and Tisdell's framework for coding interview transcripts, research questions were reviewed during data analysis to recenter and ground the focus. Focusing on how people make meaning from experiences through the constructivist lens, this researcher approached open coding in multiple reviews of the data. This iterative approach supported efforts to find nuance in responses while avoiding making personal inferences into shared experience.

Data review began with identifying the segments of data that aligned with research questions (Merriam, 2009, Saldana, 2016). Next, during the first review of each interview transcript, open coding captured key experiences, expectations, or insights in the transcript margins. The researcher also made notes in the audit trail of possible themes or categories that could become more prominent in subsequent interviews. The open coding of transcripts was completed following each interview (Saldana, 2016). Color coded highlights were used early on to signify emerging categories on interview transcripts. For example, data that referenced the

millennial principal's expectations for self was coded with purple highlights while data that described the millennial expectations for the work was coded with blue highlights on transcripts. This supported disaggregation of data into common patterns or categories during analytical coding. Ongoing comparisons between units of interview data showed emerging categories or "recurring regularities in the data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 177). This inductive approach to cluster common themes into categories following each interview allowed the researcher to deduce when the interview data had reached a point of saturation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Seidman, 2006). Qualitative data analysis relied on inductive and comparative approaches. The inductive method involved an iterative process of reading through the interview transcripts to identify themes without imposing pre-conceived categories. Constant comparison of new data with existing coded data allowed this researcher to refine and expand themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

To protect the privacy of study participants, each semi-structured interview transcript was coded with descriptive demographic notations to include school setting (urban, suburban or rural), birth year, years in the principalship, and school level (elementary, middle, high). An example of the code used for an urban middle school principal born in 1982 with 3 years of principal experience would be U82-3M. This minimal demographic information allowed for further disaggregation of data by subgroups as needed during analysis and for quick access to locate a particular interview transcript (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, Saldana, 2016).

Researchers' self-identification of positionality in the study is an important means to avoid implicit influence on the research (Holmes, 2020). This researcher's positionality as a late baby boomer with nine years in the principalship and a combined total of 16 years spent in school and division level leadership roles, placed the researcher firmly as an outsider to the

group being researched. Being aware of potential conflict in this study of the millennial generational cohort was noted to guard against potential bias which could surface during categorizing the emerging themes in the interview data. The intent to position oneself as a researcher with no judgement was supported with a member check approach during the interview (Adeoye-Olatunde & Olenik, 2021; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This approach provided an opportunity for participants to consider the researcher's understanding and further supported internal validity.

### **Methodology Summary**

Although there is research available on the workplace expectations of millennial employees, a notable research gap exists concerning millennials in school leadership roles. This qualitative investigation aimed to delve into the real-life experiences of millennial school principals and learn more about how they construct meaning and perspective from those experiences. The primary research objectives that served as the driving force behind this investigation was to uncover what prompts aspiring millennial school leaders to seek and accept school principal roles, to explore what motivates them to stay in these positions, and to examine the conditions that might lead them to leave the role of a school principal.

Following the three primary research questions, open-ended content questions, accompanied by related follow-up probes when needed were designed to delve deeper into the interpretations, concepts, and narratives provided by the millennial principals involved in this study. The fifteen study participants were selected using a non-random, purposeful snowball sampling. All accepted participants met all the criteria defined: current millennial principals (born between 1980 and 1996), having completed 1-5 years in their role, working in the elementary, middle, or high school levels, in either urban, suburban, or rural public schools.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted in one-on-one sessions through a virtual Zoom platform which allowed participants to choose their most relaxed and private setting for the interview. Collected transcribed data were analyzed and coded for emerging themes following each interview to support the synthesis of categories as they emerged. This iterative approach served as an indicator of when the data had reached a saturation point where no further new information had been gained. The researcher anticipated interviewing 5 -20 millennial principal participants who meet all the study criteria for participation but reached a saturation at fifteen participants. Maintaining an audit trail and frequent comparison of analyzed data supported consistency across interview sessions with new participants. Finally, awareness of this researcher's positionality and potential for bias was monitored through member checking. This approach allowed participants to reflect on what the researcher heard and to affirm that it was consistent with their meaning to ensure that we gained an understanding "as close as possible to participants' understanding" (Merriam, 2009, p. 219).

Research methodology reflects the purpose of the research study and is informed by the worldview of the researcher (Merriam, 2009). The methodology used in this study was selected to promote an understanding of how millennial school principals construct meaning from their lived experiences. Chapter Three provided an overview of the research methods and design elements that guided this basic qualitative study. This chapter provided an in-depth overview of the approaches employed to conduct this study, covering the research design, research questions, participant selection, tool development, considerations for validity and reliability, methods for data collection, and the techniques used to analyze the data.

Chapter Four will provide an analysis of interview data from all fifteen participants' lived experiences. We will consider emerging themes and connections to identify what prompts some

aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship.

## Chapter 4: Data Analysis

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders (born between 1980 and 1996) to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. This basic qualitative study was designed to explore the lived experiences of millennial school principals, serving in urban, suburban, or rural school settings, within their first five years in their role. Semi-structured questions were designed to identify perceptions, influences, expectations, and constructed meaning around experiences during their pursuit, attainment, and retention in the principalship. The research findings from this study could influence how school divisions recruit, develop, and retain this generation of school leaders. The following research questions guided this study:

1. What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?
2. What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?
3. What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?

The following interview questions provided a framework for participants to reflect on their experiences around those three research questions:

1. Why did you want to be a principal?
2. What prompted you to accept this role at this school?
3. What skills or talents do you feel you bring to this job as a millennial?
4. How have you been purposeful in the transition as leader with different generations?
5. Have you noticed any differences among the generations during this experience?

6. What keeps you engaged in doing this work?
7. What dispositions or traits do you feel you bring to this as a millennial?
8. What leadership skills do you utilize when you work with others?
9. Have you noticed any differences among the generations in your school?
10. How are you supported in your work?
11. What would prompt you to leave this job?
12. What do you expect and need from yourself to stay in this work?
13. What do you expect and need from others to stay in this work?
14. What are the dispositions that you have as a millennial leader which could support your longevity in this role?
15. What is your next goal after the principalship?

Closing questions were included to provide an additional opportunity for the participant to expand on a response if they had additional thoughts. Closing questions included: 16) Is there anything else you would like to share as it relates to being a millennial school leader? or 17) What have I not asked that has been a key factor to motivate and keep you in this work? The correlation between the interview questions and the three over-arching research questions is shown in Table 3.

Table 3

*Alignment of Research and Interview Questions*

Research Question	Semi-structured Interview Questions
Question 1	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
Question 2	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 16
Question 3	11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17

Probing questions were also created to use when needed to support participant's reflection on those experiences related to the research questions. The correlation between the optional probing questions and the specific interview questions were aligned in numerical order. For example, interview question 1 was aligned with optional probing question 1, interview question 2 was aligned with optional probing question 2, and so on. The probing questions were as follows:

1. Describe the experience.
2. What were your perceptions and motivations?
3. How did you come to know this?
4. How can you see this impact?
5. Describe what you have observed.
6. Describe the experience.
7. How has this influenced other's perceptions?
8. Describe how others respond to these methods.
9. Describe the interaction this has on your leadership.
10. Describe the type of support you have valued most.
11. Who influences that?
12. Describe how you will provide for that.
13. How will you/do you communicate this to others?
14. Describe how this may evolve as you remain in the role.
15. Describe how this role prepares you for the next role.

Interviews for this study were conducted over a 9-week period. Participants selected their preferred location, date, and time for their virtual interview. All interviews were conducted in a

Zoom virtual format and were recorded for the purpose of transcription. Each participant's interview data were coded with descriptive demographic notations to include a pseudonym if requested, school setting (urban, suburban, or rural), birth year, years in the principalship, and school level (elementary, middle, high). Merriam and Tisdell's purposeful approach to analyzing transcripts informed the methods used during data analysis. During the interview, the researcher made anecdotal notes in the audit trail to memorialize impressions during the interview. For example, some participants were eager to speak to their experiences and even laughed about some of their memories while others provided brief, concise responses that were less personal and did not provide deeper reflection until sharing their perspective around leaving the role. Following each participant's interview, the first round of coding involved open coding of the transcript in an inductive manner. This coding process continued in an iterative manner with each subsequent interview. In vivo coding was used when it seemed to provide the most descriptive code for the data to capture participants' language or expression. In the second level of coding, transcript data were sorted into themes and comparisons were made across data to confirm categories. In the third level of coding, this data were color coded to align with the four categories suggested by the conceptual framework (Figure 1). A fourth level of coding supported synthesizing the initial inductive codes with codes suggested by the conceptual framework (Figure 1). Iterative review of transcripts and interview recordings following subsequent interviews supported comparison. This provided a closer look to determine smaller nuanced themes across interview data and to search for contradictory themes.

## Data for Research Question One

### *Research Question One: What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?*

The interview questions and correlated probes for this first research question were designed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that prompted the millennial principal to pursue the position, why they accepted the role where they did, as well as those skills and talents they felt they brought to the role as a millennial leader. They were also asked to describe their transition to the role and any differences they had observed among the many generations in their workplace.

### **Interview Question One: Why did you want to be a principal?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question One, several themes emerged. Those themes were work ethic, intrinsic motivation, and passion for the work, and they are shared in Table 4.

Table 4: Motivation to Pursue the Role

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Work Ethic	X	X	X	X	X	X									
Intrinsic Motivation				X											
Passion for the Work							X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Participants were able to describe their motivations and factors that led them to pursue the principal role. Most included descriptions that included mentors that prepared them along their leadership journey. Some described the recognition from division leaders who saw their hard work, talents, and potential for success.

Six participants described their professional work ethic through descriptions of their dedication and hard work as assistant principals. This strategically prepared them for the role. For some, the urgency created by their supervisor's retirement or the gentle tapping from a division leader to take the next step served as motivation to pursue the principal role. Once they developed reputations as both effective and hardworking, timing was a key factor for these leaders to take the next step. All of the millennial principals in this study often referenced their strong work ethic and this theme will come up again in the remaining research questions.

Participant Five described this experience:

Seemed like the natural path. You know, I loved being an assistant principal, everything about it, and my principal retired, and so it seemed like a good time. I didn't become the principal at that school, but it seemed like a good time to start my own principalship.

Participant Six described the influence of the pandemic and their desire to support stability in their school. The timing of their transition from AP to the principal role followed the retirement of the school leader, which created the opportunity:

And I love this school so much. It was just like prime pandemic time. I didn't want somebody to come in and possibly turn things around for our school, and I knew consistency was so important at that time. So, then I applied for the principalship. and I got the position. So, it happened much sooner than I ever thought it would.

Participants described a connection between the timing of their principal retiring but provided a correlation to their desire to seek new challenges in different ways. Participant Four described this important construct that wove throughout the lived experiences on their career journey in education, "I always have had kind of the 'what's next' mentality. Not necessarily long-term goal setting."

Nine participants described their pursuit for the role driven by their passion for this work and interest in making a greater impact for the school community. While describing the impact of work through the lens of strong work ethic, these participants also made connections between their school and their expectations for contributing to the success of their school population.

Participant Seven shared:

I had already come with some leadership experience in a local county and so what called me here was the demographic, the fact that it was Title 1, and the fact that I could have an immediate impact on the community in which I live.

Participant Eight made the connection between the same motivation they held as a classroom teacher seeking greater impact, “As a teacher, I was having my students succeed. I was a very exceptional teacher and learner. I knew that in order to be able to reach more, and really change education, I needed to step into a bigger role.” Regardless of their motivation, these millennial school principals were very aware of why they pursued the role at that particular point in their career.

**Interview Question Two: What prompted you to accept this role at this school?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Two, several themes emerged. Those themes were work ethic, job fit, and passion for the work, and they are shared in Table 5.

Table 5: School Fit

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Work Ethic				X		X						X			X
Job Fit		X							X	X	X				
Passion for the Work	X		X		X		X	X					X		X

Participants constructed meaning from their lived experiences as teachers then assistant principals. Descriptions of lived experience around this question were often woven around their pursuit of the principalship. Most described this interaction between the desire to lead with expectations to do the work in a school that aligned with their strengths and passion for the work. There were many factors that may have influenced the school fit for participants. Themes that emerged for this interview question were categorized under work ethic, job 'fit', and passion for the type of work.

Seven participants had the opportunity to pursue a school position that aligned with their passion for working with a preferred learning community or school demographic. This alignment supported an opportunity to influence change and opportunity with a particular subgroup. Participant One described this experience, "When I was looking towards moving into the principal role, I was looking for kind of a similar match to where I was. I did feel successful working with that particular population of students."

Four participants sought school divisions that aligned with the work culture they expected to support them in their work or matched their leadership dispositions which provided an opportunity to work in a strengths-based position. Participant Two described this desire for a job 'fit' that met their needs for support:

The division has a high standard. They also have a great culture from top down. I think that's important. I was in a previous division where the culture and the climate from top down was not ideal and so that, number one, led me to a different path. In that division, my next step would have been to become principal and then the stress that comes with that and the daunting task that comes with it. You want the support from top down just to know that you can call on somebody to rely on somebody to lean on their support and

judgment and know that they're going to have your back on things when things go in a different direction.

Four participants approached the pursuit of promotional opportunity to the principalship through hard work and taking advantage of opportunities available. These participants found meaning in the general work of leadership. Participant Twelve described this:

So really, it was one of those situations where I saw an opportunity to attain a principalship in a different school district. And you know the principalship is quite competitive. A lot of it is timing. A lot of it is your personal readiness to take on this kind of ultimate responsibility. So really, a lot of things have to really line up both personally and professionally.

**Interview Question Three: What skills or talents do you feel you bring to this job as a millennial?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Three, five themes emerged. Those themes were pursuit of life balance, pursuit of stability, pursuit of success, strong work ethic, and relationship builder, and they are shared in Table 6.

Table 6: Millennial Expectations for Self

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Pursuit of Life Balance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pursuit of Stability		X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X		
Pursuit of Success	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Strong Work Ethic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Builder	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

While all study participants did not relate to being members of the millennial cohort, all were willing to provide attributes they felt most described themselves. Table 6 provides a comparison of all participants and the five categories that emerged from the interviews. In some cases, participants included descriptors in the latter part of the interview that were included as response to this interview prompt.

Fourteen of the fifteen participants described the importance of work-life balance to maintain family, faith, wellness, other interests, and work stability. Participant Fifteen described this conflict between personal drive towards success, work ethic, and life balance:

(We want to) make sure that we're doing it and delivering a high-quality work product. If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. And sometimes one of the things that affects burnout is that we can't do everything 100% all the time. Right? And so I find myself...One of my mantras is sometimes we can't let perfect be the enemy of good, right? So, we have to do a good job on this, but we can't do a perfect job, because otherwise that's just going to overwhelm our time and resources available, and we end up then sacrificing some of the other things in our life that sustain us.

The shared traits of the millennial generation are not always agreed upon, even by those in this generational cohort. Participant Four observed:

I don't think I do identify as a millennial. I struggle with the work mentality that, I think is commonly attributed to millennials, because I don't have that. I come early. I stay late. I do whatever it takes to get the job done on a high level, or else I don't do it. I'm really good at prioritizing the things that are most important.

When describing work-life balance and the value of having a hobby to dedicate themselves to, this participant reflected: “That's my happy place. That's my work-life balance...Something millennials struggle with is, they don't have this understanding of having a hobby that they dedicate themselves to. That allows them the outlet to then work hard outside of contract expectations.

Participant Seven described being *in the middle* of other generations and the influence on being relational as a leader:

I think that as a millennial leader, I have the lens into multiple generations. And my generation is considered one that you know we do remember the world before cell phones. We do. We did have pagers many of us, and so I feel the skills that I have now are very much technology. I have grown up with technology as it has grown if that makes sense. Collaboration, the ability to connect to multiple generations I think, is important in this role, because we have probably three generations of people working within our school. So, I've had the ability to work. I'm old to some and young to some, which is a very interesting spot to be in.

Participant Nine also described this positionality among generations:

Being a millennial you're kind of in the middle. So, you've worked with the baby boomer generation. You grew up with that generation. So, you have a little bit of an understanding and then, you know, you have siblings that are in the Gen. Z. You know, we grew up right when everything, Internet and social media and everything, was changing. So, I think in the middle we have a really good knowledge of the type of people we're going to be working with in the workforce.

Relationship building, making connections with every generation on staff and in the school community was a recurring topic as described by Participant Fifteen:

I'm an elder millennial, too. So that (term) talks to other people who were born in the early eighties. I feel like we almost feel like we're a micro generation or a subset of the millennials. Just because we grew up with dial up, and we can speak to folks who remember the pre-digital age and also the digital age. Right? So, we're, you know, we feel comfortable in technology. But we also remember an analog world. Because of my unique positioning within our generation, this makes me effective in that I can bridge between staff members and family members, community members of multiple generations.

**Interview Question Four: How have you been purposeful in the transition as leader with different generations?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Four, five themes emerged. Those themes were high expectations driven by data, collaboration structures, differentiating communication, shared vision, and supporting staff life balance, and they are shared in Table 7.

Table 7: Transition Into Role

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
High Expectations Driven by Data				X				X					X	X	X
Collaboration Structures		X							X	X				X	
Differentiating Communication					X					X			X		
Shared Vision	X				X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Supporting Staff Life Balance	X	X	X	X	X								X		

Participants reflected on this interview question but did not speak in depth about their transition into the role. Constructing meaning from the lived experiences of transitioning into the principal role with different generations in the workplace provided reflections around the themes of high expectations driven by students' data, the systems and structures established to support collaboration, efforts to provide differentiated communication, creating a shared vision, and purposeful steps taken to support life balance for staff.

As shown in Table 7, twelve of fifteen participants described developing a common vision for the work. The shared vision for professionalism with younger generations was referenced by Participant Six:

I'm having conversations with them about professionalism that I have never had to have. Being timely with email responses, showing up to meetings on time, looking our best when we come to work. It doesn't have to be, you know...I'm not looking for anything fancy but a layer of professionalism that sets you aside from student to teacher.

Participant Six also captured their shared vision for teamwork:

If you build your school community and you make it a happy place, you want to work there because you're all in it together, and I know if I don't do my part in it, then it puts it on somebody else's plate.

One additional thought shared by another participant describes the recognition that every teacher's response to the work influences others. Developing the shared vision for work addresses the generational mindset observed by Participant Eight and was attributed to working with millennial teachers:

And when things get hard, and things are challenging (they) make excuses instead of problem solving and saying it's not working. So, we need to figure something else out.

And we need to find a way to make it work.

Participant Nine described the value of meeting with the assistant principal to provide insight during the transition. This leader gained, "...institutional knowledge about the school and what was needed and what staff members needed. I think that was the best thing that I did." This leader was able to respond to the needs of the staff during the transition period with deeper insight and perspective which helped to address challenges.

Study participants who became principals during the pandemic spoke to this challenge.

Participant Nine shared:

I think that the transition was going to be challenging, no matter who I was working with so I really transitioned into here with just a variety of people and their fears. And so, you know, having staff members with children who were fearful of bringing germs home, having older teachers who were fearful to get sick, and then having younger teachers who just really didn't know what to do. So, I think I really had to get to know the staff members. I had to figure out who they were, what's important to them and what do they need to succeed.

This care and empathy shown to all generations during that transition resulted in positive outcomes as Participant Nine described, "So it's important for you to work with people, at least make it easier. So, I think that really set the tone for the type of school we want to be."

Many participants did not describe a transition period that was independent of their progression of current work with their school stakeholders. Once in the principal role, the pace of the work may not allow for a transition period that is unlike full engagement in the work of the position.

Life balance for self and supporting the life balance for staff was a recurring theme in this study. Six participants described conversations they had or decisions they made that showed their support for life balance for their staff. Participant One described this awareness and effort to support their staff:

We have a lot of work to do with mission and vision and who we are as a staff. What's important to us? How do we find balance supporting what the community wants as far as how school feels with what our staff is willing to take on. I have a very young staff, so a lot of them think that balance is important. Family is important. They don't want to work 60-hour work weeks. So, we have a lot of work to do to try and figure out who we are.

Participant Three spoke to supporting life balance and support for their older staff members by recognizing:

It is about that relationship and that rapport... and being able to accommodate and support your staff through all the challenges that they are having, that they are facing outside. They're going to want to give their all for you when they come to work.

Five participants mentioned the value of using data to inform and introduce high expectations for their new staff and community. Almost hand in hand with that approach, and referenced by four participants, was the purposeful creation of collaborative structures to support high expectations for outcomes. This approach to driving continuous improvement based on data and supported by collaborative teacher work groups was described by Participant Ten who

gained the collaborative support from the staff to, "...talk amongst themselves, explore this, and have people come in and talk" which should result in a new school initiative to improve scheduling.

Three participants spoke to the importance of differentiating communication for staff and the school community. Participant Ten reflected on this approach to being purposeful in communication with all stakeholders and knowing, "...what the community's values are." Having a high value for communication shapes the work of the school leader. Participant Thirteen captured the strategic work of being responsive in differentiating communication with the school community through weekly newsletters. This participant shared the structures established to ensure frequent differentiated communication to their community:

Every Friday at 6 PM my parents will get a text message from me, and an email with our voice message...and I do this bilingually. It gives me energy when I send the message.

This is when I am able to turn off the switch in my head. Okay, the weekend has started, and I go home and recharge.

Participants did not have as much to say about their transition with multiple generations in the workplace. Participant Twelve spoke to their thoughts around this topic, "...as a leader, you don't really give much thought to the labels and the generations, so to speak, but which you are aware of, is almost the complex social structures that evolve in a building." Participant Seven shared their experience in observing that, "I think that some of the differences that I personally have seen is that some of the younger teachers are a little more open to change, and really being flexible in their thinking and changing their practices, whereas, some of our veterans, while they do have great insights, they miss opportunities to grow and to look at something differently, because sometimes they get in their own way - thinking that they've done

it all and seen it all, when, in fact, we all need to be focused on continuing to grow and improve.” Because of this observation, this new leader was strategic in forming collaborative teams to allow for diversity and contribution across different experience levels.

**Interview Question Five: Have you noticed any differences among the generations during this experience?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Five, four themes emerged. Those themes were pursuit of life balance, pursuit of stability, pursuit of success, and strong work ethic, and they are shared in Table 8.

Table 8: Generational Differences in the Workplace

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Pursuit of Life Balance	X	X	X	X									X		
Pursuit of Stability	X				X					X		X			X
Pursuit of Success				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X
Strong Work Ethic	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X		X				

Like response data gathered from interview question 4, interview question 5 did not generate a large amount of data from the participants. While grouping teaching staff as veterans versus newer teachers, participants had relative agreement that generational differences were most evident around work ethic, approach to success, with smaller similarities around risk taking or stability in the work and pursuit of life balance.

According to Participant Fifteen, work ethic and an ability to be relational becomes a strength when the leader is: “Having to relate to all folks of different generations really kind of

comes back to how do these individuals respond to what motivates them? How do they respond to feedback?” Participant Twelve spoke to this pursuit of success with staff:

You start to recognize that a young teacher versus a veteran teacher, they all have relative strengths that can really help influence your staff. And so, I think it’s really about finding the strengths of all of our staff members. So everybody’s in a different readiness level. Sometimes with technology, you know implementation, sometimes the younger teachers have a lot. Their comfort level is perhaps a little bit higher...So you empower those teachers to kind of help train the trainers, get them involved. When it comes to school wide initiatives, sometimes you rely on some of your veteran teachers to help you develop those plans because of their experiences in education.

The commitment to choosing change and growth over stability, or keeping things the same, comes through in this leadership experience from Participant Ten. This new leader encouraged older staff to embrace growth mindsets while slowing eager, younger staff members to ensure a school-wide cohesiveness, “...that is going to be a schoolwide process. Why don’t you come and talk to me about it? And I’ll let you present it to the leadership team.” This approach reflected a system for supporting creativity and eagerness to lead initiatives while using protocols to gain, “everybody’s feedback and consider all the voices.”

## **Summary**

### ***Research Question One: What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?***

Participants described their lived experiences and the meaning they attributed to those experiences, around their pursuit of the principalship through the five interview questions. These

themes were synthesized into six categories, which included work ethic, self-aware, intrinsic motivation, job fit, and mentored to lead, and these are shown in Table 9.

*Table 9: Prompting to Pursue and Accept the Role*

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Work Ethic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Self-Aware	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Intrinsic Motivation	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Job Fit	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mentored to Lead	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
Passion for the Work	X	X	X		X			X			X	X	X	X	X

Participants shared themes of strong work ethic which some felt was uncommon for the millennial employee. They were self-aware of strengths and dispositions which informed their pursuit of the role and their school as a good job fit. They all shared strong intrinsic motivation for serving in the principalship and described their pursuit of success, stability in the job, a passion for their work, and a deep sense of care and empathy for the people they served in the role. While it was not a driving force in the decision to pursue the role, participant four reflected on the initial disappointment regarding compensation but described their motivation as, “Somebody that has continued to look for the next challenge.”

There were shared experiences across the group of fifteen millennial school principals. All but one participant described the mentorship of their principal or another leader at the division level who later encouraged them to apply for and accept the principalship. The driving inspiration for Participant Eight was their personal experience as a student:

And I wanted to step into the principalship, or even, you know, go that administrative route to continue to ensure that education was the highest priority and the highest quality

of education, because that's what kids deserve, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

While all fifteen described how they were purposeful in pursuing the principalship in their school because of what they saw as the best school fit, they did not define fit in the same way. Two of these participants stepped into the principal position “earlier than expected” following the retirement of their mentor to continue their work and provide continuity for the school. Four participants described a special emotional connection or alignment between the division culture and their own values. Three participants strategically chose schools where they could serve as role models for marginalized communities. This was captured through the words of Participant Thirteen:

How am I going to impact my community? Not just a community! How am I going to truly impact the community where I am able to be connected 100% because of my childhood, because of my story, because of who I am?

Ten of the fifteen participants specifically described their inspiration to lead using the word passionate or passion. This was defined in the context of approaching the work as they “dove in headfirst” or followed their “desire to want to have a bigger impact, and particularly impact on communities of students and families that I was passionate about helping.” While passion may seem similar to the concept of intrinsic motivation, and it could be a component, the participants described this specifically and separately. Participant Fourteen described their passion to lead:

I want to make sure that all of our students have equitable access to high quality teaching and learning. Our kids, for the most part, have equal access, equitable access to schools,

but not always to high quality teaching, and learning. And so, I wanted to make a difference in making sure that the experience for our students was more consistent and that students were succeeding based on the interventions and by design, based on the things that the school was offering. And so that's kind of my passion that drove me to the position in the first place!

Participant Ten described the importance of connecting to the division's vision in terms of connecting to "authenticity" in selecting the school with the right job fit. This leader described authenticity as a trait that allowed them to, "really earnestly speak from my heart about things that are concerning to me." While this concept may be closely connected to self-awareness, it was kept separate because of the value the participant ascribed to this in their selection of both the organization and the preferred job location. Participant Ten later described other leadership attributes that reflected self-awareness in leadership dispositions used when serving the needs of students, staff members, and the parent community.

There were common themes that emerged from interview data during open coding and were confirmed through comparative analysis with the Millennial Expectations and Lived Experiences conceptual model (Figure 1). These conceptual themes included the millennials' expectations for self (pursuit of life balance, pursuit of stability, pursuit of success, strong work ethic), the millennials' expectations for work (self-awareness with optimism and motivated, job fit), and the millennials' expectations for supervisors (positive, mentor relationships).

**Data for Research Question Two**

**Research Question Two: What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?**

The interview questions and correlated probes for this first research question were designed to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that motivates the millennial principal to remain in the role by learning more about the meaning they ascribe to what engages them in their work, dispositions, or traits they feel they may bring to the role, and the leadership skills they utilize when they work with others. They were also asked to reflect on differences they have noticed among the generations in their school and how they are supported in their work.

**Interview Question 6: What keeps you engaged in doing this work?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Six, five themes emerged. Those themes were pursuit of work ethic, opportunity to grow, commitment, students and staff, and job fit, and they are shared in Table 10.

Table 10: Work Engagement

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Work Ethic								X	X						
Opportunity to Grow										X	X	X	X		
Commitment	X	X	X	X		X		X			X		X	X	
Students & Staff	X				X	X	X	X	X	X			X		X
Job Fit												X			

Participants had a strong self-awareness about the motivating factors that engaged them in their roles every day. All participants agreed that they believed in the value of their work and

were committed to their schools. Some ascribed deeper meaning to their dedication to the students and staff while others spoke more about the continuous improvement work they were moving forward to create success for their students and staff. Two participants described their dedication in terms of hard work while others spoke to the value of professional growth or job fit for their leadership strengths.

When describing commitment, Participant Two shared:

I don't like giving up and I feel like a lot of people depend on me and rely on me. So, I never want to give up on others. I'm here for the kids. So even with all the negativity that comes with this job, and there's a lot of negativity that comes down the pike as the principal, the students, and the difference that I make with the students trying to instill just the strong character in them, definitely drives me!

Participant Three reflected on commitment to the role and shared:

I always feel like life happens. Everything happens for a reason. So, I know that at my division, I'm at my building for a purpose. I know I'm that leader that they've been wanting – and they deserve. And daily, throughout the school year, I see my impact in a small way.

Participants who constructed greater meaning from their experiences with the people in their schools spoke about these connections. Participant Five compared the connection to, “family that you have when you work in a school building.” Participant Seven reflected:

Without a doubt it is the students. It is seeing the impact that it can have on the life of a young person. It's reflecting on my journey as a person and how educators helped influence me and made me see that I could be more than what I imagined.

Participant Eight described a strong commitment with work ethic to get the work done, but also made strong connections to the people in the school, “What brings me to school with the same level of energy and the same level of commitment is my kids.” This participant shared that this influence, “inspires me and gives me the energy every day to show up to work with a smile.” Participant Fourteen also described the motivation for committing to collaborative approaches to problem solving:

I believe that the right answers are in the room, but I don’t believe I have all the right answers and so let’s come together. Let’s identify some problems of practice. And let’s identify some theories of action that can address that. And let’s start doing the work...that’s what excites me in the morning, too.

Participant Fifteen shared perspective on how they stay grounded in this work:

I think staying centered in my why which is the students we serve, right? So, especially if I’m feeling discouraged, or tired, or overwhelmed or burned out, feeling that we know the why. So, I go spend some time with kids and remember the why which is making an impact for them, providing opportunity, and allowing our students to see the benefits of the educational services we provide and the programs that we’ve been able to build and offer.

**Interview Question 7: What dispositions or traits do you feel you bring to this as a millennial?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Seven, five themes emerged. Those themes were empathy and resilience, reliability and adaptability, goal-oriented, work ethic, and relationship builder, and they are shared in Table 11.

Table 11: Millennial Dispositions or Traits

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Empathy & Resilience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Reliability & Adaptability		X	X		X	X			X	X	X	X	X		
Goal-Oriented	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Work Ethic	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Builder	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

This interview question was similar to question three and participants responded in similar ways. However, question three asks for skills and talents which are capabilities. It was important for this researcher to remember that dispositions typically reference natural characteristics that one brings to a situation. This question includes the opportunity to describe traits to support participants in more deeply reflecting on experiences. The iterative synthesis of this interview data were dedicated to assigning codes that name dispositions and comparing those to the skills that participants used to describe their leadership.

All participants described their strong work ethic and dispositions around being goal oriented as being important to their work as leaders. Participant Fifteen described the level of dedication applied to responding to challenge at multi-levels:

Listen and analyze first before I react...being able to take in a lot of information, be a good listener and understand the big picture before formulating a response or reformulating action or community communication. So really trying to understand rather than having a knee jerk.

Participant Eleven described the depth of work committed to developing teacher buy in and including teacher voice in decisions:

People may not agree with all of your decisions, but if you can center it back on your why, you know, why are we doing what we do - we do what we do for kids – and you can ground it in that, then they can get on board. They might not necessarily agree with it, but they can understand how it leads to the direction that you've provided them.

Participant Nine spoke to a concern that many leaders have around establishing boundaries to protect their work balance:

Someone very wise said to me, it will be there when you get back and you know it's not due tomorrow. So sometimes I have to give myself permission to let go a little bit. As I mentioned, family is important to me.

Participant Eight described the strong work ethic and passion that all of these millennial principals referenced to support the success of their respective schools:

I am driven in the sense that I find something fresh every day and we achieve something every day, whether it's small or large... I strive towards that achievement for my teachers. I strive towards that achievement for my kids and every single kid that walks through this door. They're going to achieve something for that day.

Participant Ten described dispositions of reliability and adaptability through an analogy. This leader described systems and structures for future work stability and change:

I'm kind of an architect where I'm building. I feel like I am creating what I want my school to be. You know, when I walked in originally, it felt like somebody else's school and it's starting to feel like my school and starting to shift culture around on some things that are more student driven.

Fourteen participants described their approach to being relational with their school community. Participant Five reflected on being conscious about meeting the needs of all stakeholders while being, "...right in line as a millennial." This participant was consciously approaching change for their school community:

I think that I am definitely changing things, like efficiency and staff, with technology and getting things done. I think that as a millennial, I've really had to prioritize, though, trying to get that face time with people because I know that people really value it.

Participant Three spoke to many dispositions required to support the work of leadership but concerning reliability, work-ethic, and having a goal-oriented mindset shared, "I think my generation, we're just like, get it done! We don't complain. We just get stuff done. We work extremely hard. We really don't have that work-life balance because we're always going deep."

A few of the participants were not certain that generational cohorts were relevant. Some participants described the leadership approaches they have taken to develop momentum behind school initiatives by focusing on developing buy in across the staff with little focus on the differences that may or may not be present among their staff. Participant One felt, "I just don't know if I necessarily align with some of the things that I hear." This leader felt that:

I don't know. I think I have a good work ethic, but I don't know if that necessarily has anything to do with me being a millennial. I think it's more that work is important to me. I'm a hard worker and I value balance and wellness and those kinds of things.

**Interview Question 8: What leadership skills do you utilize when you work with others?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Eight, several themes emerged. Those themes were work high expectations with growth mindset, collaboration structures, developing a shared vision, and visible and relational, and they are shared in Table 12.

Table 12: Leadership Skills Used to Lead

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
High Expectations with Growth Mindset	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Collaboration Structures						X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Developing Shared Vision						X	X	X		X			X		X
Visible & Relational	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	

Constructing meaning from lived experiences for this interview question required participants to consider their actions and the response by their stakeholders which reflected on leadership skills. Most participants described new systems, structures, or traditions created. All participants described their strengths and a few even shared their leadership methodology.

Fourteen of the fifteen participants described approaching their role as principals with high expectations for outcomes. Leading continuous improvement with data-driven decision-making while keeping a growth mindset was a common response. Participant Fourteen, who valued collaboration, high expectations and a growth mindset, while serving in a visible and relational manner spoke to ensuring that:

The quality of work is consistent from teacher to teacher, that interventions are in place as a team for students if they're struggling, and that interventions are in place for extension if a student is doing well. So, kind of posing these questions and doing it from

a place of not indicting any teachers or anybody in the building but looking at it as how we can optimize our practice as a building and make this the school that we know it could be. And that sometimes that can be a slow process. I find that that's probably most helpful with bringing teachers and staff members along with you. I don't have all the answers, that's the point of us working as a PLC.

Participant Nine was reflective about supporting outcomes through clear expectations and communication. This leader recognized the value for establishing more life balance by sharing the workload while building the capacity of other leaders in the building:

I'm learning a lot about myself and how I'm giving directions, or how I'm painting things done. So, when it comes back, I can be like, oh yeah, that's done. And just to kind of build other's capacity but also to lighten the load of things that I feel like I need to do.

Seven participants described establishing collaborative team structures and six described their work around developing shared vision for the work. Participant Fifteen described this in relation to the challenge of the work to establish collaboration structures while remaining relational with staff. While the pandemic created an unexpected pause in their work, this participant focused on the long-term goals:

We have a plan. We have a vision. We've been working incrementally overtime. Covid was a huge challenge in terms of kind of derailing or pausing some of the stuff that is the most impactful part of the work we do, which is again building something over time, organizational development, and change.

Participant Thirteen described the work of creating a schoolwide vision which will one day "leave a footprint on the division." This leader approached the work by first "building this

belief” which will lead to “building the vision, solidifying the vision” over time. This principal described in depth a multi-year plan to build school culture and close achievement gaps for this school community.

Thirteen participants described their leadership through stories around being visible, engaged, and relational. Participant Eight described this work with staff which has led major initiatives in the school, “I definitely believe that my passion exudes out. They hear it - they hear the urgency, but I also am an incredibly trustworthy principal.” In describing how trust is defined by the staff, this leader shared:

I do what I say, and I say what I do. And they know that I am consistent. I'm fair and I'm going to do what we said we're going to do, and I don't veer off that. I also do the work with them. If I expect them to do something and implement something, I am right there with them. I teach. I take small groups every day. I model. I am in.

Participant Twelve spoke to being visible and including staff in what they called their distributive leadership approach. This leader shared their vision for leading initiatives with buy in from a key group to maintain momentum:

It takes a lot of planning, and it takes a lot of perseverance because you know, inevitably, you're going to face staff resistance, and you always will. But I think the more you're in this role you start to understand that you don't necessarily need buy in from everybody. But you do need to have a core that's with you and that will ride with you and that's kind of the way I interpret our leadership team. It's like that's where I start, like we need to make sure they're buying into what we're doing here and getting their feedback and helping the leadership team be part of this planning process. School improvement is

difficult, but I think that seeing these educational outcomes and student achievement - seeing our progress from year to year - that's really exciting.

Five participants described setting a new vision for the school. While this did not represent a majority, the theme captured a strongly held value for those participants. Participant Three spoke to their leadership style in this way, "I know we use this word often, but I'm really a transformational leader. I love opportunities. I love a challenge. And I think being a school leader, that is something you face every single day." This participant described the personal connection felt with their school community, "I grew up with a lot of the same struggles that my students today deal with. So, I'm able to relate but also let them see that you know you can really overcome and get somewhere." In setting the culture of this school, Participant Three models courage, "Be flexible, you have to be patient, levelheaded, also. You've got to be fast on your feet in terms of knowing the situation when it comes to you. You've got to be able to problem solve in a quick manner." Knowing the impact of leadership, this young millennial leader models confidence for the school community, "You know the building can be burning down but I'm still always calm and collected. I always have a smile on my face."

While describing leadership skills used when working with others, five participants described their leadership style as servant leadership. Participant One shared, "I think I am a servant leader. I would like to think that. I'm a doer and a supporter and a problem solver." When describing their approach to leading, this participant shared:

I like to see the big picture and I think that comes with time, too, like you get into this role and you start to see that I can make this decision but then it has this ripple effect... I'm definitely a workhorse. I struggle to find balance as much as I say that I want it and maybe that comes with the millennial territory.

Participant Five described servant leadership through the lens of the staff and community:

I think they would describe my leadership as being very much like a servant leader. They see me subbing in classrooms. They see me jumping in and grabbing a math group to provide Tier 2 intervention for kids who didn't do well. Whatever it is... they see me cleaning up throw up! You know, there's days you have no custodians in your building.

Participant Six described their servant leadership approach by describing how they make the day better and the job easier for staff. Participant Nine spoke about showing care for staff during the pandemic and taking care of them while finding out what they needed to be successful.

Participant Seven described taking care of teachers, families, and students while holding value for patience and flexibility for self and for staff.

**Interview Question 9: Have you noticed any differences among the generation in your school?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Nine, two major themes emerged. Those themes were generational differences evident and work stage difference evident, and they are shared in Table 13.

Table 13: Perceived Generational Differences in the School Setting

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Generational Differences Evident	X		X	X	X	X		X	X				X		X
Work Stage Difference Evident	X	X		X	X		X			X	X	X			X

While interview question five explored the generational differences that millennial participants encountered in their workplace, Question Nine is more about their constructed

meaning around the experiences had with those they lead. Nine participants described generational differences that they have encountered as school principals. Nine participants, three of which overlapped with the first group, acknowledged that there were differences between older and younger staff members but felt this was probably more related to work stage or experience. In some cases, as mentioned before, the millennial participant was hesitant to identify themselves as a member of the generational cohort.

Participant One shared perspective on how the pandemic has had a lasting impact on the dynamics of their veteran staff and newer staff in the school. This new leader describes the staff dynamic:

I see two very different pockets of people and I think that just might be unique to our building, because of the situation we're in being fairly new and coming out of Covid...a group that was here when the initial vision was set and really felt bonded together, and even trauma bonded through Covid. I also have a pocket of people who are brand new."

Other school leaders described differences among their staff which has been observed by different approaches to supporting school events beyond the contracted school day. Participant Two observed, "This new generation coming in is more like 'Ok! This is just a job and after the job, I go home!' But there's, PTA events or other things, other pieces that encompass the whole position as a teacher." This participant also noted, "I would say from my generation up, that we take pride in our job. We make sure that we look at our job as like the number one thing besides our family." Participant Four noted, "That's one of the problems here. We're pretty homogeneous... I've been trying to bring in some younger teachers to help rebalance that." This leader is finding that in this school, "The younger generation seems to be more into the social, emotional needs of kids. They're more aware of just the empathy needed in school for kids to be

successful before the teaching and the curriculum.” Participant Five has noticed, “Teachers who've been in the field for a longer time, really want everything to be the same on their grade levels. Where teachers, you know more kind of like millennials...you really see that creativity come out more.” This leader recognized the importance to, “Just consider the differences. And, so, when you know, you can adjust them.” Participant Thirteen has found ways to use millennial and Gen Z preferences for instant feedback to support communication within the school:

They are always on their cell phone texting back and forth. They have a group message and that's how they collaborate, that's how they do meetings, that's how some of them do planning through text messages. I am also building those relationships and I know these groups on their phones so if I want to relay something to the group, I just basically tell somebody – hey, tell all of your groups to read this message and that gets the information to them so fast!

Some participants felt that the work stage and the level of staff investment in the mission of the school were more evident than differences that may be attributed to generational cohort. Participant Eleven was hesitant to speak to generational differences and instead focused on the purpose of work, “You know I don't know how much it's connected to my generation, or anything else like that. I think for me, my number one thing I'm most passionate about is getting kids plugged into school!” This leader described the work of setting school-wide goals to reduce chronic absenteeism through student connection. They found ways to leverage small adjustments with collaborative teams to motivate staff to, “get on board and everybody's rowing the boat in the same direction.” Participant Five conveyed the importance of recognition and relationships when leading a multi-generational staff:

But when it comes down to it, no matter when you were born, people like to be celebrated. They like their successes to be shared. They like to be acknowledged for their hard work. And so, while there may be differences in work ethic and how they view a job should be done, or the journey to get there, when you're leading, if you're all about the people you're going to get them to buy in and connect.

**Interview Question 10: How are you supported in your work?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Ten, four themes emerged. Those themes were positive supervisor relationship, feedback from stakeholders, support from family members, and supportive network of colleagues, and they are shared in Table 14.

Table 14: Constructed Meaning Around Support

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Positive Supervisor Relationship	X					X			X	X	X	X	X	X	
Feedback from Stakeholders		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Support From Family Members						X				X		X	X		X
Supportive Network of Colleagues	X		X	X	X		X						X	X	X

Interview question 10 pushed the participants to consider their needs and their current situation. They were asked to connect the actions of their followers, supervisors, and support systems to identify what they considered to be effective support. Participant Fifteen observed:

We live in a people world and people are not perfect. There's always issues. And we work through it. And just because something didn't go perfect didn't mean I wasn't doing

a good job at it or doing the best I could. So, you know, I think it's just shifting mindsets there but those are things that have been helpful for me.

All participants faced challenges where they needed to know they had support available. Common support sources that emerged from the data included a positive supervisor relationship, supportive feedback from stakeholders, support from a family member, and support from a network of colleagues.

The most common source of support for a group of eleven participants was feedback from stakeholders. Participant Nine described managing the expectations of the school community which underscored the need for support:

I think there's just a level of understanding from the community. And I think the really hard thing about education right now is that you know everybody wants everything and doesn't recognize that we are humans that have lives outside of this work, as well.

Participant Five recognized the benefit of a supportive staff and described this relationship held with their supportive school community:

I get to work every day knowing that I'm making a difference whether it's for a teacher, or for a parent, or for a child. You know you're making that difference every day. And I think that's really you know what makes you go back. They fill my bucket, just as much as I hope I fill theirs.

Participant Two also valued feedback from the family members of their staff which has helped them to recognize their influence on the lives of those they serve:

I've had numerous husbands, and other staff members come up to me and just say you made such a difference in my wife. You have made such a difference in the school. I

want to come to school. I want to be here. I want to be a teacher here. Your support is excellent. So those pieces, that drives me!

Eight participants recognized the value of having a supportive network of colleagues to continue serving successfully in the principal role. Participant Six noted, “There's some other principals that I chat with and it's like, alright, I'm not the only one feeling this way.” Participant Three valued principal colleagues to provide problem solving support and shared experience, “I have a good little group of friends who are principals in other school divisions.”

Eight participants described the importance of having support from a positive supervisor relationship. Participant Thirteen used this relationship to seek resources to support the school, “I am pretty good at advocating for resources. This leader was strategic in requests, “I just ask with data as my backup, and they usually get what I'm asking for because I don't ask for myself. I don't ask for me. I ask for kids.” Participant Eleven valued the high level of support from both the school community and division support staff, “...they have faith that the work that we do is good work, and they treat us like professionals.” Participant Ten anticipated having more clarity from their supervisor over time, “I have a new supervisor so I'm kind of learning the expectations for the role and how that may be different for all the principals in our division.” Participant Nine felt they had a great supervisor relationship and shared:

What I'm getting currently is just understanding. I will always be my harshest critic and sometimes when I'm like you know that this isn't good enough. It is a reminder of *this is* good enough and you're doing the best you can. I think that's genuine, and I think having someone that when you say ‘can you give me feedback on this’ that they will genuinely give you feedback to continue to grow.

Five participants shared the value of having a support system at home. These participants were specific about who that significant support person has been. Four participants described the support of their spouses to serve as a sounding board. Participant Three described the additional support provided by a parent who steps in to lend support at home which allowed them to dedicate longer hours at the school building to support events. Participant Fourteen described support across different levels of their work:

I receive school-based support from parents, from staff members, from students who provide feedback and provide support. I also think with other principal colleagues, I received support. I think we do a decent job at the high school level of operating as our own professional learning community and working with each other to identify best practices and to see if there are some shared issues from school to school and ended up and identify schools that have similar demographics and similar makeups and backgrounds and seeing what interventions are working or not working. And so the support there is invaluable as well. And then lastly, I'd say central office support. Each one of my (supervisors) has been awesomely supportive and helpful and present and that's really appreciated by me.

## **Summary**

### **Data for Research Question Two**

#### ***Research Question Two: What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?***

This research question was aimed at gaining a deeper understanding of the experiences that motivated the millennial principal to remain in the role, the dispositions, or traits they felt

they may bring to the role, and the leadership skills they utilized when they worked with others. They were also asked to reflect on differences they have noticed among the generations in their school and how they were supported in their work. These themes were synthesized into related subgroups which included leadership traits and skills, leadership dispositions, and leadership support structures, and these are shown in Table 15.

Table 15: Motivation & Structures that Support Retention

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
<i>Leadership Traits &amp; Skills</i>															
Collaborative	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Dedicated	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Innovative	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>Leadership Dispositions</i>															
Empathy & Resilience	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Relationship Builder	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Reliability	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
<i>Leadership Support Structures</i>															
Stakeholder Support		X	X		X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Peer Support	X		X	X	X		X						X	X	X

The leadership traits and skills that emerged from the interview data centered around the systems put in place to support teamwork, discussion, shared planning, and shared vision for the continuous growth of their schools. The dedication of the participants in this study was reflected in their description of work ethic, which often involved working longer and staying later to cover school events, while struggling to maintain work balance. Most participants described servant leader attributes with the hallmarks of empathy, care for the well-being of others, and pitching in to provide remediation, supervise a late game, or clean up after a sick student.

Participants shared the work they were doing as leaders to innovate as they described approaches for continuous improvement with high expectations for growth over time. Many referenced the need for small adjustments rather than a major overhaul, recognizing the hard work of their teams, and holding a growth mindset around outcomes. They all held a future vision for their schools and recognized the talent and dedication of their staff. As Participant Two shared:

I didn't have to make massive changes so I could make small tweaks and small changes that had huge impacts. I wasn't completely flipping over a school. I was taking what was already established and then just adding other pieces that I thought were very beneficial for school culture and climate and instilling those across the board with students, staff, and families. And just watch it kind of flourish from there.

Leadership dispositions that would be the visual manifestation of skills and traits included empathy and resilience, relationship builder, and reliability. Participants described leading their schools during or following the Covid pandemic. Their resilience in shaping the structures of their schools to overcome the challenges of that time was evident as they spoke to the care and compassion that was foremost in their minds as they supported their staff. This empathy was manifested by positive feedback from staff and dedication to remain and continue the work. Being relational and visible while connecting with staff, students, and families was also a strong theme. Participants described spending time speaking with students in the hallways. They spoke to building relationships with families to support the needs of students. Participants also spoke to the work of shared decision making because of the relationships they had built with their leadership teams and staff. Participants held a high value for the connections they had, recognizing that providing opportunities for teachers to have voice and offer feedback helped

them to lead their schools. Reliability was a theme that came through as participants were talking about their commitment to their school community and their interest in being someone that could be trusted. Participants spoke to remaining engaged in their schools even when discussing the more difficult situations they have faced as school leaders. Participant Seven described taking ownership for dealing with the stress of the principalship:

I don't know why, even within the work, there are days where you know things just don't go your way. But I try to always come in each day with a clear mind and recenter myself and be grateful for the opportunity because this is something that I asked for. It's something that I dreamed about and so I try to remember that I sure am lucky. I sure am lucky to be living that dream. And so, I ground myself and have gratitude.

Our participants had support structures that helped them to lead during the more stressful and difficult times. Most principals received positive feedback and ongoing support from their school communities. Some spoke to the importance of gaining feedback from students to ensure their voice was heard and considered before changes were made. Others described being visible and relational. Participants described the importance of positive feedback which they regularly received from their teachers and sometimes even from the families of those teachers. This positive feedback kept them energized and motivated to continue to make an impact for their stakeholders. While some participants had experienced positive relationships with supervisors, they were more likely to talk about a supportive network of colleagues who they could share common experience, gain nonjudgmental feedback, and problem solve. Some of our participants also referenced support from family members. Whether this important person was a spouse or parent in the field of education or the business world, when they went home at the end of a

stressful day somebody who cared about them was there to offer support. We will talk about the importance of these support structures again in Research Question Three.

**Data for Research Question Three**

**Research Question Three: What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?**

The interview questions and correlated probes for this third research question were designed to gain a deeper understanding of the factors or conditions that may prompt the millennial school leader to leave the job. In consideration of remaining in the role, questions were designed to learn more about what they may need from themselves to remain, what they may need from others to remain, and those dispositions held that may support their longevity. A final question was designed to learn more subsequent roles millennial principals may envision for themselves following the principalship.

**Interview Question Eleven: What would prompt you to leave this job?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Eleven, five themes emerged. Those themes were sacrifice to life balance, lack of stability or support, job fit or misalignment, work ethic or burn out, and fair compensation, and they are shared in Table 16.

Table 16: Factors and Conditions Prompting to Leave

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Sacrifice to Life Balance		X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lack of Stability/Support	X		X		X	X		X		X		X	X	X	
Job Fit/Misalignment					X				X						
Work Ethic/Burn Out		X									X		X		X
Fair Compensation		X		X								X			

Participants shared a range of ideas when asked what might prompt them to leave the principalship. Some participants had already given this a lot of thought even within the first five years in the role. Themes that emerged from the data include unwillingness to sacrifice their life balance and family time, a concern regarding the lack of stability and support, thoughts that they may reach a point of being ineffective in the job, the cumulative effect of long hours and stressful days, and the lack of competitive fair compensation to provide for their families.

The struggle to balance the high workload and stress was a common theme for participants who recognized the value of taking time for self-care during the school year. The eleven participants who noted this as a concern provided different perspectives. Participant Fourteen felt that the work was not easy for school leaders or for school educators. The demands placed on teachers and the stressors and new challenges that principals were facing had made the work difficult. This participant shared perspective:

This is not the same position that I observed as an assistant principal when I started. It's significantly different. I don't know if it's any one thing that would cause principals to kind of start looking around. I would say this, that for any position - principals included- being able to strike a healthy balance, healthy work life balance, and making sure that the expectations allow breathing room and space for folks to not have to choose whether to sacrifice their health or well-being, or their family's health and well-being, in order to do a good job.

Participant Fifteen reflected on the influence of stress in the role which could become a leading condition to motivate them to leave the role:

Especially over the last couple of years, there's been a lot of challenges too, so it's been really important for me to learn to dwell in the positive, to make sure I'm recharging on the things that really do feed me professionally, you know your working soul. I think over the last few years, also learning to put up some boundaries - personal boundaries. Ultimately, the biggest thing that would prevent me from wanting to continue is burnout.

Lack of stability and support was an important theme for nine participants. Participant Three spoke to the level of support needed from the supervisor and central office for, "...that sense of collaboration, that sense of being able to just problem solve." While some of our participants shared a high-level of satisfaction with the level of support and trust given to them from their supervisors, their school board, and their staff, others like Participant Ten acknowledged it would be a motivator to leave, "...if I don't have the support of people above me... I would find that draining because there's just so many little nuances of conversations of things that you can't fully articulate." This leader sought their supervisor to support them and to provide, "the benefit of the doubt." Participant One measured their success through the level of support received and noted that it could be an indicator of when to leave, "I think if the support wasn't there, if I was to lose the support from my directors, or if I felt like my staff wasn't seeing my vision, I think that would be a big indicator." Participant Five shared leadership experiences that did not align with their goal to serve as an effective instructional leader and weighed the cost of addressing disruptive behaviors that involved physical intervention. This participant shared lived experience that could influence their ability to remain in the role over time, "... that one thing honestly that I could see happening is really just like the physical piece of being a principal... once I had a kid give me a concussion."

Job fit or feeling misaligned with the role was an important theme for two participants, which was not a majority, however their concern around the potential to be unsuccessful in their role despite dedicating long hours to the work is worth consideration. Participant Five described the current state of schools in society shifting, which could take focus away from serving as an instructional leader. This shift caused a misalignment with their goal for school leadership:

We all know that there needs to be more respect for educators. We all know that people have to learn to speak differently to people. And so, I just think because we're in a public forum like it kind of comes unfortunately with the position now. You kind of wake up every day and hope that you're not the topic of social media anywhere!

Participant Nine captured some of the frustration that others shared:

Truthfully, I think that what would motivate me to leave would be just unrealistic expectations and a lack of understanding of the challenges that we face. You know there's a push to continue to make growth. I think the biggest challenge that we as the principals feel like people don't understand is all the pressure to make growth.

Strong work ethic leading to burn out was a growing concern for four participants. Knowing that the early years in a new role demanded long days and often weekends to meet the expectations of stakeholders, these participants were realistic in considering the amount of stress and the potential impact on their health and to their families. Participant Two described the burnout in the role as they worked:

... giving so much so your cup is empty, then you have to work to refill that cup. I mean you're dealing with the brunt of the negativity day in and day out whether it's student

discipline, whether it's staff issues, whether it's grown-up issues, whether its parents being upset about a situation that happens.

Participant Eleven expressed a high level of satisfaction with the support they had been given but their pursuit of work balance to avoid burnout was something they tried to address through, "...having trust in the other people that you work with" to share the additional workload.

Fair Compensation was not mentioned when participants talked about pursuing and remaining in the principalship, however three participants were reflective about the long-term importance of earning a competitive wage over the course of their career. Participants recognized that starting out in the administrative role may not pay as well as those with the same education in other professional occupations. Participant Two described this conflict between serving in a role with a great amount of responsibility and pressure and receiving relatively low compensation compared to other industries:

It's not a factor for me. I'm fine with what I make. I'm not leaving to make more money. At the same time, kids graduating college nowadays, they're jumping into work fields that they're starting at \$80,000. You know that I've worked half of my career to be at \$80,000 and this is a tough job.

**Interview Question Twelve: What do you expect and need from yourself to stay in this work?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Twelve, three themes emerged. Those themes were life balance, strengths-based work, and self-efficacy, and they are shared in Table 17.

Table 17: Expectations for Self to Remain

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Life balance	X	X	X	X		X			X		X	X		X	X
Strengths-Based Work					X			X							
Self-Efficacy							X			X	X		X		

Participants reflected on their experiences and shared perspective around what it may look like for them to successfully navigate the challenges of their job for a length of time. Some participants defined what longevity meant to them and Participant One recognized that:

They want somebody to stick around and be there to do the work and that’s what I want for myself. I don't want to go somewhere and then leave right away because that's just not good for kids. It's not good for staff. Nobody likes change - change is hard.

Themes that emerged from the data as participants constructed meaning around experiences to support remaining in the work included life balance, strengths-based work, and self-efficacy.

Life balance was a common theme throughout this study but for this question, participants described making this a greater priority. They recognized the value of self-care but there was conflict with their work dedication in some cases. Participant Two spoke about the struggle to maintain balance:

I walked into this position, and the first thing I said to all my staff is - family first! I set the tone on that piece... as I've gone along the way, I still try to preach that on my end. I definitely do for my staff. I give them all the time and don't push that piece on them but for me - you get sucked into this job. It's never ending and never stops.

Participant Three described this effort to maintain balance and practice self-care with an early morning workout plan. This leader felt they were making good progress towards this goal but recognized that they needed to remember that, “the weight is on your shoulders. Just let it be because you’re going to stress yourself out.”

Strengths-based work was an important theme for two participants, and while this was not common for many, the two participants felt strongly about positioning themselves where their strengths were used to build achievement and support innovative work. Both participants were clear about what they needed to remain active in their leadership roles. Participant Five spent time describing perceptions around the influence of state and local initiatives that took important time away from building the capacity of school leaders to serve more effectively as instructional leaders, “What is the main job of school? It’s instruction!” Participant Five described the frustration with competing interests and wanted to be part of the solution as an effective instructional leader. Participant Eight envisioned support from the central office that would be aligned with strengths to support capacity building through individualized feedback, provision of challenge, and development for promotional opportunities. This participant recognized the need for a continuation of current success with innovative methods with future opportunities to develop the capacity in others.

Four participants described the importance of advocating for resources and opportunities with a strong sense of purpose. Participant Thirteen described this approach to advocating on behalf of student need with data in hand to inform supervisors and central office. Participant Seven spoke about the importance to, “trust myself that I’m going to make the right decisions.” Participant Ten described the factors one cannot control, and the importance of grounding the work through personal faith which provided the stability and confidence to continue. Participant

Eleven described keeping a big picture perspective while dealing with difficult parent issues because “that’s the minority not the majority” which helped to advocate for discipline decisions while remaining resilient to continue the work of the principalship.

**Interview Question Thirteen: What do you expect and need from others to stay in this work?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Thirteen, seven themes emerged. Those themes were positive supervisor relationship, support from central office, autonomy, support from stakeholders, work balance, support from family or faith, and support from network of peers, and they are shared in Table 18.

Table 18: Expectations from Others to Remain

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Positive Supervisor Relationship	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Support from Central Office			X		X	X		X			X		X	X	X
Autonomy				X	X		X	X			X	X	X		X
Support from Stakeholders		X	X	X	X	X	X		X		X			X	X
Work Balance						X	X		X		X	X	X	X	
Support From Family or Faith		X	X	X	X	X				X		X	X		X
Support from Network of Peers		X	X				X								X

While participants did not have as much to say about what they needed from self to remain in the work, they had a lot to say about what they needed from others. The themes that emerged from reflections around lived experience and constructed meaning for participants included the need for a positive supervisor relationship, support from central office, autonomy in

the work, support from stakeholders, work balance, support from family or faith, and support from their network of peers.

Concerning the need for a positive supervisory relationship, thirteen participants described the type of support they would consider to be most beneficial. Participant Fifteen shared the need for a supervisor to prioritize new initiatives, “Sometimes there's just initiative overload, just too many demands made.” This participant had high expectations to meet continuous improvement goals but described frustration with too many initiatives and urgency to address them all. Participants described positive supervisor support as providing resources, feedback for growth, and helping them to problem-solve difficult situations. There was a strong need described for the supervisor to provide responses in a timely manner so the leader could be more responsive to their school community. Organizational support with prioritizing and recognition for hard work was included when participants described either the supervisor they had or the supervisor they needed. One participant sought a supervisor's support but did not want to be micromanaged or overlooked. Participant Ten described this expectation:

Having somebody who is going to hear you and kind of guide you in a way that is not critical is helpful. I feel like my current supervisor is that way. He will give advice and has backed me up with things. But I think if it was different, or if there was an expression of disappointment, that would bother me.

Support from the central office was important for participants. Eight participants described the situations in their schools which required support from central office departments. One principal described the need for more protocols and procedures and more clarity or organization than what they currently have at the district level. Participant One valued the

support from central office as, “collaborative partners” relying on their support when faced with tough challenges. This participant shared that,

I think I have that support and I feel like I can bounce ideas off of them. I can speak freely to them and problem-solve with them. I think I'm here for the long haul. I think if that were to go away, it would be very challenging to the work that we're doing.

Autonomy was an important theme in at least six interviews. Participants described the importance of autonomy to create and lead initiatives in their schools. In addition, there was frustration with initiative overload caused when state mandates took precedence over school continuous improvement plans. Micro-management was used to describe the perceived over-reach of supervisors or central office. Participant One observed,

I just need to have that autonomy or I'm out like that. That's the deal breaker for me. I like strategy, I mean, and that's part of the principal job that I've really thought revs me up and probably I'm in the very large minority of principals right now that enjoys continuous improvement stuff. I need to have the freedom to be me and do it my way. I'm a maximizer so I get it done.

Support from stakeholders was specifically described as important to ten participants. They described this support as a source of encouragement and motivation to continue doing great work. For those who did not currently have consistently strong support from stakeholders, it was seen as something that was very much needed. Participant Fifteen gained insight from the leadership team and staff, “...that I do trust to give balanced, honest feedback which is also useful and helpful.” Providing opportunities to provide feedback generated support for the leadership of the school.

Life balance is the theme that continues to emerge throughout the study. It was top of mind for seven participants when asked what they needed from others. Participant Thirteen described communication practices that also signaled them to disconnect on Friday evening after sending the weekly communication to families. Participant Six described making a conscious effort to separate for self and for their staff knowing that:

...my mind will still be thinking about work, but I won't open the computer unless there's a dire emergency. I won't respond to emails on the weekend, and I don't send my staff emails on the weekend or after hours.

Many leaders spoke to how they provided support for the life balance of their staff and following practices that would protect their separation from work. In most instances, they themselves still struggled to do the same while operating at a high level to stay ahead of their work. Participant Fourteen shared an analogy for the need to maintain a growth mindset and for the division to support balance for their leaders:

It really requires us to be more flexible and malleable than we've ever been in education and education's a funny space to ask for folks to pivot quickly. It really moves more like a cruise ship than like a rowboat. It moves more like a cruise ship (with) slow, long turns. But again, helping with that mindset, and I think that's a big key to supporting principals.

This participant also maintained a personal value for balance and noted that a leader cannot, “be a rock star at work and then go home and you've never been to any of your kids’ events or you're not being a loving husband or wife.” This leader connected this lack of balance and time spent to support family priorities as, “...a setup for failure.”

Support from family or one's faith provided encouragement and support to nine participants. Having this personal support component provided participants with counterbalance for the stressful work of the job. Participant Six recognized that, "The workload keeps increasing. The demands keep rising but the support we're given (from the division) stays the same." Participants described depending on a family member's support who also served in roles in education because they could relate to the dynamics and stress of the role. Participant Fifteen appreciated their spouse, "...being in public education too, so my partner really understands the world I live in and...we can be a good support for each other." Participant Ten valued the ability to depend on their spouse as a confidential sounding board when things were difficult at work. Participant Thirteen gained the support of their spouse even before accepting the role, knowing that the demands of the principal job would impact their home life during the busier days in the role. This participant relied on family support to recharge:

...go home and just spend time with my kids, spend time with my wife, and be there.

That is a moment for me to recharge because if I don't recharge on a daily basis, I would not be myself, my best, and I need to be my best for my building, for my community.

Support from a network of peers was noted as valuable for participants throughout this study because critical colleagues doing the same work provided important perspective. One principal noted this as a group to commiserate with while recognizing that you are not alone. Participant Two recognized this influence:

I could not be in a better spot than I'm in now. When I look at the goals of education and principalship and everything like, that I couldn't have dreamed up a better place (than) where I'm at right now. A lot of principals that I keep in touch with whether we get together here and there, text here and there, call here and there, all those things, the sad

part is that we're all in the same boat! I've leaned on them too as far as just like – hey, how are you feeling? You know I have principals that I've reached out for advice. I've reached out to talk to them about their perspectives and everything. Unfortunately, it's all the same now and that's a tough part.

This participant was discouraged by the shared perspective among their network of colleagues that the work was growing increasingly difficult to manage regardless of the division or location of the school.

**Interview Question Fourteen: What are the dispositions that you have as a millennial leader which could support your longevity in this role?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Fourteen, five themes emerged. Those themes were pursuit of life balance, visionary, problem solver, clear communicator, and student-centered, and they are shared in Table 19.

Table 19: Dispositions to Support

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Pursuit of Balance		X	X	X	X						X		X		
Visionary	X			X					X						X
Problem Solver	X					X				X					
Clear Communicator	X	X					X					X			
Student-Centered	X		X		X			X							X

Participants were reflective about their work and the influence they had on the culture of their building. The dispositions, or manifestation of their skills and traits, were evident in the way they described their pursuit of balance for themselves and their staff, and their approach to

creating a shared vision with structures to collaborate and do innovative work, their confidence with problem solving while considering perspective from stakeholders to create buy in for those decisions. Themes emerged around their approaches to communicating with stakeholders and their focus on instruction and equity for students. While participants came from elementary, middle, and high school levels, with different years of experience, and different life experiences that led them to the role, there were common dispositions to support longevity in the role. It is important to note that their concept of longevity was different. One participant described the importance of seeking a new challenge every three years while another felt 8 to 10 years in the role would be the right time frame to move to another challenge in their career.

Pursuit of balance or resilience in serving in the role was described in previous questions. This was something that participants were either hoping to attain or actively pursued by disconnecting from work or setting boundaries to carve out time for self-care. Participants who felt they had structures to their lives that protected this time also tried to set the tone for life balance with their staff. Regarding work balance and the potential to cause them to leave the role, participants considered this to be a defining line between staying or leaving. Participant Six described setting the tone for staff to disconnect in the evenings and on the weekends. This participant felt that their own life balance with protected time for family was important:

I feel like that might start interfering. It's like not something I'm willing to give up. It's my family time. I mean, I don't know if that's a common theme, but that time is so precious to me that I can't give that up.

The theme of being a visionary leader as a disposition that would support longevity in the role, came through when participants described the systems and structures they created to move their work forward with their school communities. Participant one acknowledged that, "We have

a lot of work to do with mission and vision, and who we are as a staff. What's important to us? How do we find balance supporting what the community wants?" This participant recognized the dynamics of vision work when leading a young staff with different work priorities than veteran staff, who are holding tight to the traditions of the school. Leaders are often called to bring all of the talent of their stakeholders together to achieve a shared vision for the work. Participant Three described themselves as a transformative leader, someone who has the big picture and helps staff to work towards that goal. Participant Four described the need to be able to take risks and to be creative while being strategic to ensure it will "help elevate our end goal."

While only three participants specifically named problem solving as a disposition they held to support them in this work, most described the work they were doing in the role to solve the challenges every day. Participant One shared their self-awareness around strengths they brought to the role feeling that they, "...come up with a lot of different solutions to some problems that we have. I'm pretty technology savvy, so I think that I come up with some things to create different documents and things just support our work here."

Providing clear communication was a common theme that emerged from the interview with three participants. Participant Twelve took an active role with supervisors and division leadership and maintained frequent email or phone communication to build relationships. This leader was purposeful in engagement and regularly invited them into the school building, shared ideas and copied them on communication to highlight the positive work. This leader believed that, "If your district leaders (are) believing in you and your abilities then I feel I can move mountains!"

Serving as student-centered leaders was a common theme for five participants. A passion for serving as visible, instructional leaders was referenced as something that they valued and

helped to recenter them to offset the stress and demands of the role. Participant fourteen described the importance of staying flexible as instructional leaders,

...bringing that willingness to grow, bringing a growth mindset, is critical for not only my support but really for the school support. Because the truth of the matter is, we're not dealing with the students of 1997 anymore. It's a different day.

Participant Three described leadership as a fit for the strengths needed for the role. They spoke about student centered leadership even when describing the work with their staff, "I'm just trying to pour back into you so you can pour back into the students!"

**Interview Question Fifteen: What is your next goal after the principalship?**

In reviewing the data in response to Interview Question Fifteen, six themes emerged. Those themes were central office, superintendent, higher education, leave education, no plans to leave, and unsure about the future, and they are shared in Table 20.

Table 20: Future Aspirations

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Central Office								X	X	X					
Superintendent			X									X			
Higher Education	X				X										
Leave Education		X					X								
No Plans to Leave											X		X	X	X
Unsure About Future				X		X									

Emerging themes from participants when asked to consider their career plans beyond their current role centered on possible transitions into central office to serve as instructional support, pursuit of greater responsibility in the superintendency, or interest in developing teacher

and leader pipelines through positions in higher education. Some participants weighed the possibility of leaving education to seek new challenges in other fields while some have not given thought to leaving the role.

Three participants described their interest in pursuing instructional leadership roles in central office after the principalship. Participant Ten envisioned a future position to influence and, "...guide the decision making of other principals" which could also influence policy at the state level. Participant Nine felt, "The job I want doesn't exist yet but maybe it does in a way. But I think like others, I just want to work with instruction and work with teachers." Participant Eight described frustration with their supervisor's lack of forward thinking to support with opportunities and to provide guidance or challenges to support them to one day step into more leadership roles within the school division.

Two participants described an interest in one day pursuing a superintendent role. Participant Three described taking strategic steps to support future goals now:

In the perfect world, I'd love to be a school division superintendent. I've always (looked) two steps ahead like the next move. So right now, I'm actually in the process of looking (to see) about what I need to do to get my superintendent's license. I'm looking at doing an aspiring superintendent cohort soon just to really see if it's something I want to do. If it's not, you know I'm fine with still doing something in the school division.

Participant Twelve was also strategically looking for a greater level of impact at the three-year mark in the principalship. This leader reflected, "Could I use my skill set in a more district level capacity like the district leader or superintendent?" This participant shared, "It's hard to imagine that this is where the professional growth stops with the principalship for me." This participant

acknowledged that the journey to get to the current role has been, “pretty extensive and it's not easy” but that “it's not easy to stay in one place for a long period of time and I've been here for eight years.” Considering future aspirations to lead with greater responsibility had many facets to consider as this participant weighed the decision around:

... how to make a greater impact and supporting your family. Those kinds of personal things come into play with salary (when) you kind of start to look at what's competitive within different school districts and different positions in the principalship. You really have to be on all the time and sometimes it's hard to get that relief from that and the stakes are high the pressure is intense - the pressure to perform.

Two participants considered other roles that could put them in a position to address challenges in education, build pipelines for teacher leaders, and serve to find solutions for the problems we are facing in our schools today. Seeking a position in higher education could position them to shape the next generation of teachers and leaders. Participant Five reflected on future goals:

I would love to have a position... look at universities and other things, that are looking to really make a difference in how we're going to retain teachers and how maybe we can really change education so that it is a career that people want to be in again.

After reflecting on the current state of schools, this participant added, “I would just love to be part of that solution.” Building on this theme, Participant One shared their interest in working at the college level to support teacher development, “...mentoring is my heart. I love instructional leadership. So, eventually I think that's something I would want to do. I don't really ever see myself as a director (or) superintendent, or anything like that.”

Two participants envisioned leaving the field of education completely to seek new growth experiences. Participant Seven shared:

I've been thinking about that as I am approaching now year 10 in school leadership. I'd like to maybe consider some other roles that will stretch my growth, perhaps outside of school. I would not even be completely cut off to potentially leave the field. I won't necessarily be in this role for the next 20 years. I mean, I've got a lot of time there so I'm someone that likes to grow and go and find another opportunity to see how I can sharpen my skills.

Participant Two was reflective when they considered their next steps:

Honestly, probably out of education. I hate to say it. I go back and forth all the time just because this is it. (It's) my area I care so deeply about. I mean like I said, I probably have another 20 years to go. Central office isn't it for me because of the kids. I'm not going to go back to teaching, and I can't stay. I'm not going to be able to be a principal for 20 more years! So, I'm also at that point where it's like – Ok, I need to look at giving to my family (and) figuring out that piece, figuring out solid balance between the two, as well as, figuring out what my next passion could be because I have no idea. And that's a huge piece too you know. So, I don't know I'm going to learn a lot about myself in the next three years, I'm sure.

Four participants had no plans to leave the principalship. Participant Eleven shared:

I have a lot of job satisfaction. I'm blessed in that way. I'm from a school that historically is academically successful so I don't have a lot of exterior pressures that some of the other people that you may be interviewing experience on a day-to-day basis.

Specifically, in regard to leaving the principalship, this participant shared, “I think it's not something that I've considered leaving.” Participant Fourteen reflected, “I quite enjoy the work that I do as a principal. I enjoy being at my school and serving a community and students and staff members like ours. I can't imagine anything better than that.” Participant Thirteen maintained a focus on launching a shared vision with the school and community with a strategic focus on the importance of that work at this early stage of the principalship. Participant Fifteen was reflective:

I think most people in my role (in) the last couple of years have considered, is it time to move or not? What other roles are out there? Is there something that would be more fulfilling or more where I could have more impact? or would better help me achieve balance? So, I've definitely considered it - not seriously where I've applied anywhere but definitely looked in there to ponder and talk about it. But I'm still here because I still think there's important work to be done. I still have gas in the tank to do it and I still think I can do it effectively.

Two participants were unsure about their next steps. Participant Four did not discuss seeking promotional opportunities or leaving the principal role. Instead, this leader weighed options that could lead to leaving the current location to a more affordable area having accepted the work location because it seemed like “a safe choice and then once I got here and realized how expensive it was” questioned the decision. Instead of considering potential for future work, this participant shared, “At this point, somewhere warm, because I don't make long term goals.” Participant Six recognized that they did not expect to be in their current role at this work stage. With years ahead before retirement, this participant noted:

I have no clue. I think that's part of my personal struggle right now because I saw myself in this seat much later in life. I was like – Oh, I'll retire as a principal! And now I'm like, I've got a long way to go. Where am I going to end up? I don't know.

## Summary

### **Research Question Three: What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?**

The third research question was aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the factors or conditions that may prompt the millennial school leader to leave the job. In consideration of remaining in the role, we attempted to learn more about what these participants may need from themselves, and others remain, and those dispositions held that may support their longevity. A final question provided some insight into the perceived career progression towards retirement. There were five leading themes synthesized from responses in research question three. These included sacrifice to life balance, maintain life balance, positive supervisor relationship, pursuit of balance, and contribute to the profession, and are shown in Table 21.

Table 21: Motivation to Leave and Future Aspirations

Participant Responses	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	P12	P13	P14	P15
Sacrifice to Life Balance		X		X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Maintain Life Balance	X	X	X	X		X			X		X	X		X	X
Positive Supervisor Relationship	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Pursuit of Balance		X	X	X	X						X		X		
Contribute to the Profession	X		X		X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

There were common themes that emerged when synthesizing the data for this research question. Rather than merging traits, dispositions, expectations, or perceptions, we have highlighted the leading theme for each interview question. This approach allows us to more clearly view the pattern of responses and to lend weight to the recurrence of themes. The leading themes for research question three include unwillingness to sacrifice life balance for the work, a personal need to maintain life balance to remain in the work, a deep interest in having a positive supervisor relationship to support them, and the disposition to pursue balance to support longevity. When asked to consider future work goals, we combined the four themes that would result in these millennial leaders remaining in roles to continue contributing to the profession whether this involved promotion, remaining, or stepping into a role in higher education to support development or innovation.

Eleven participants shared their commitment to drawing boundaries around the work demands that could ultimately cause them to sacrifice life balance. When describing this balance our participants talked about self-care and much needed time to be effective as parents, spouses, and friends. Maintaining life balance was a common theme throughout this study. Our millennial participants recognized that they had to create structures and accountability to ensure they prioritized opportunities to disconnect from technology to include emails, work phones, and social media to create time to focus on their lives outside of work. For this research question, ten participants shared that this was an expectation they held for themselves to remain in the work. Participants described taking ownership of this by taking time for walks, dinner with the family each evening or waking up extra early to get to the gym before work.

Thirteen participants noted the importance of having a positive supervisor relationship to stay in the work. Some participants experienced positive supervisor relationships which provided

opportunities to gain feedback, have regular check-ins, have someone to problem solve with around rising issues, or simply someone to serve as an advocate for school resources. Other participants recognized that they needed better supervisor relationships to be able to continue in the work. Some participants sought supervisors who were dedicated to growing their strengths as leaders and encouraging them to consider future promotional opportunities. In the absence of positive supervisor relationships supporting these participants to remain in the work, they often described the high level of support they received from staff, the school community, and their network of colleagues.

Remaining in the profession was a shared goal of eleven of the participants. These school leaders envisioned different careers ahead, but all described a dedication to contribution. These contributions could manifest as future opportunities in higher education to be part of the solution to develop systems and strategies to support the development of teachers and leaders or transitioning into a central office role to support instructional leadership. Whether pursuing the role of superintendent as part of their progression of greater responsibility division wide or remaining in the principalship to support their passion for supporting staff and students, these millennial leaders held a drive for contributing to the profession in meaningful ways. Only two remaining participants were vague about future goals and may still decide to remain or seek an opportunity of greater responsibility in their school divisions. Regarding the two participants who expressed an interest in potentially leaving the profession, neither had fully explored alternatives but were open to considering opportunities that would match their strengths and provide an opportunity to pursue a new passion for their work life.

## **Data Summary**

This basic qualitative study was designed to explore the lived experiences of millennial school principals, serving in urban, suburban, or rural school settings, within their first five years in their role. Semi-structured questions were used to identify perceptions, influences, expectations, and constructed meaning around experiences during their pursuit, attainment, and continuation in the principal role. Research question one asked participants to describe what prompted them to pursue and accept the principal position. Participants had the opportunity to share why they wanted to become a principal, what prompted them to accept the role at their particular school, the skills or talents that they felt they brought to the job as a new millennial leader, to describe their transition into the position with different generations, and to share any differences among the generations that they had observed when they stepped into the role. Research question two provided an opportunity for participants to share their motivations to remain in their role. Participants had an opportunity to describe any differences they had observed among the generations working on their staff, motivations that keep them engaged in their work, dispositions or traits they used in their role as a millennial, any leadership skills they used when working with others, and their perspective around the supports that they received in their work. Research Question Three engaged participants in considering the factors that may motivate them to leave the principal role. Participants reflected on what may prompt them to leave the role, what they needed from themselves to stay in the work, what they needed from others, the dispositions they felt they had as a millennial leader which helped to support their longevity, and their next goal after the principalship. At the close of each interview, participants had an opportunity to reflect back then share anything they may have remembered as it relates to being a millennial school leader or could be a key factor to motivate and keep them in the work.

Strong emerging themes across all three research questions provide insight into the expectations and motivations of the fifteen millennial school leaders who participated in the study.

Chapter Five will propose a synthesis of these research themes. We will consider eight findings which will further condense into five study implications. These implications may influence how school divisions recruit, develop, and retain the millennial generation as school leaders.

## Chapter Five: Implications and Findings

### Introduction

Chapter Four provided qualitative data from fifteen interviews to explore the lived experiences of millennial school principals, serving in urban, suburban, or rural school settings, having completed 1-5 years in their role. The selected participants included nine elementary, four middle, and two high school principals. While no urban principals were found through snowball sampling, ten suburban and five rural principals were included in this study. Chapter Five will review the research questions, summary of findings, implications, suggestions for future research, and reflections.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. The research questions for this study were designed to identify what prompts some aspiring millennial leaders to pursue and accept the role of school leadership, what motivates them to remain in that role, and what conditions might prompt them to leave the principalship. The following research questions guided this study.

1. What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?
2. What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?
3. What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?

## Summary of Findings

This summary was grounded on the findings derived from fifteen interviews conducted with millennial school principals. The findings were used to formulate implications relevant to the study. In this chapter, those findings will be explained and supported by the review of relevant research from Chapter Two.

### *Finding One:*

**Millennial principals bring a strong work ethic that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, but could influence conditions to leave the role.**

All fifteen participants described their dedication and commitment to a strong work ethic. This theme was referenced in different ways but was always used to describe their approach to accomplishing the work. Participants described their strong work ethic 55 times across the expanse of all three research questions. Hard work influenced their pursuit of the role, dedication to current work, and was described as a factor of influence when weighing the potential for longevity in the role.

The influence of this trait throughout the stages of these millennial principals' career was imbedded in responses around their lived experiences at each stage of their professional journey. In Research Question One, six participants described hard work as the driving force that prepared them to step into the principal role. Becoming known as a rising leader who was willing to work hard, developed their reputations which brought notice to them as candidates by mentors and others in their school divisions. When asked what prompted them to accept the role at their current school, four participants described the work ethic that they would bring to address the needs of their school. When asked about skills and talents they bring to the job as millennials, all

fifteen participants described their strong work ethic as being the key trait that would support their success. When describing differences among the generations in their schools, differences in work ethic came through for nine of the participants.

In Research Question Two, all fifteen participants described work ethic through descriptions of their hard work, dedication, reliability, and innovative approach to striving for excellence with their stakeholders. When asked about what keeps them engaged in the principal role, two participants described their dedication and hard work in the position. When asked about dispositions or traits they felt they brought as a millennial, all participants discussed approaches to setting goals that they knew they could accomplish in time through hard work. This approach to meeting the demands of the position supported the participant's engagement with the work and awareness that it was a good job fit.

In Research Question Three, all fifteen millennial school principals looked to the future by describing their need for support from various stakeholders to counterbalance the weight of the hard work and growing demands of the job. Four participants talked about fatigue and potential burnout from the long hours and hard work they knew they had to invest in their schools. Participants connected this to the need for more life balance to enable them to continue in the work. When asked about their next goal after the principalship, eleven participants described either remaining in the role or pursuing positions with greater responsibility which would require high levels of dedication and hard work.

Throughout the interviews, participants described this strong work ethic as an expectation for self and for others on the job. When discussing differences among the generations in the school, some participants noted differences among the veteran and younger staff members and the amount of work hours they were willing to invest beyond the school day. The Millennial

principal participants valued the level of commitment, dedication, reliability, responsibility, and high expectations for work outcomes which they themselves brought to the position.

The current body of research on millennials in the workplace addresses this theme. The outcomes from a study conducted by Coates (2017) supported this affinity towards hard work and commitment to being a contributor as a shared common value for the millennials in the workplace. However, Smith et al. (2016) described the differences in the opinions held by different generations with both Gen X and boomers holding views that millennials lacked a dedicated work ethic and were less prepared for the management commitment. Gallup (2016) provided support for millennials holding high commitment to both responsibility and achievement. The Gallup (2016) study also noted that work engagement was higher with accountability but that millennials have a strong desire to feel productive with ownership for the work.

***Finding Two:***

**Millennial principals' interest in seeking life balance influences them to pursue the role but could influence conditions to leave the role.**

In Research Question One, fourteen millennial participants described pursuit of life balance along with pursuit of stability as skills they bring to the job. When asked about any differences among generations during their transition into the role, five participants learned to accept that younger staff members were not willing to stay late or take work home. Supporting staff life balance was a priority for six participants as they described their approach to leading with empathy and care for their teachers.

In Research Question Two, participants focused more on leading their schools through hard work, long work hours, and a conflict between balancing work and family time. This theme emerges again in Research Question Three when participants were describing factors and conditions that would motivate them to leave the principalship. When describing what may prompt them to leave the job, sacrificing life balance, especially time with family, was noted by eleven participants. When describing what they needed from themselves to stay in the work, ten participants wanted to make more time for family, setting boundaries around personal time, and self-care to balance the stress of the role. When asked what they expected and needed from others to stay in the work, seven participants described systems or structures that would support maintaining or improving life balance. When asked about their dispositions as millennial leaders that could support their longevity, six participants reflected on their pursuit of balance.

The research around the theme of life balance as a value for the millennial in the workplace has been explored through limited studies. Coates (2017) explored the pursuit of work life balance and found it to be sought by all five participants in the study. Coates defined this theme to include reflection on balancing work priorities with mental and physical well-being. In the Winter and Jackson (2016) study millennial workers sought life balance in their lives, they were realistic and recognized that in the short-term, they would need to invest long hours and give up their weekends to achieve goals in their progression towards career development. Concerning issues surrounding life balance, Taylor and Stein (2014) found that both Gen X and Gen Y study participants indicated that quality of life and balance was very important. The DeMatthews et al. (2021) study determined that workload, stress, and high demands placed on those in leadership roles may conflict with the pursuit of life balance. Smith et al. (2016) found that millennials recognized the value of technology, but it did create a downside with the high

level of connectedness to their jobs that impacted life balance. While only four of the seven female millennial principals in this study indicated that they would leave the job if it caused them to sacrifice life balance, Roebuck et al. (2013) found that women across multiple generations shared that they would not pursue leadership positions in their jobs unless they could maintain a healthy life balance. Seven of the eight male millennial principals in this study indicated that they would leave the job if it caused them to sacrifice life balance which is aligned with the findings by Smith et al. (2016) that millennial men were more committed to remain with organizations that supported their need for life balance outside of their workday. Gallup (2016) warned that 21% of millennials changed jobs within one year, seeking better opportunities elsewhere and one of the things they were seeking was balance. A change in position or employer may be a better ‘fit’ for their life balance (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017; Gallup, 2016; Pyöriä et al., 2017). Lyons and Kuron (2013) recommended additional investment by those in the workplace to develop an understanding of generational differences around life balance and other values.

***Finding Three:***

**Millennial principals value relationships and feedback to encourage their pursuit, engagement, and longevity in the role.**

Participants described the importance of gaining feedback and support from those within the organization, family members, and colleagues in the profession across all three research questions. In Research Question One, fourteen participants described an important supervisor or other division administrator who served as a mentor. These influential leaders then encouraged next steps to pursue the principal position. When asked about skills they brought to the principal role as a millennial, fourteen participants described their ability to build relationships with staff,

supervisors, students, and the school community. Because of these positive connections, they gained important feedback and support. Participants held strong value for the feedback and support from their staff and school community.

In Research Question Two, fourteen participants described their ability to develop professional relationships as a leadership disposition which supported them in the work. Fourteen participants described systems in place to support collaboration around school initiatives and student learning. Eleven participants described the value held for positive stakeholders' support and eight described peer support that provided them with valuable perspective and feedback to continue effectively in their role.

In Research Question Three, thirteen participants described the importance of having a positive supervisor relationship to remain in the role. When asked about the conditions that may prompt them to leave the job, lack of stability and support was described by nine participants. When asked about what they expect and need from others to stay in this work, eight described support from central office, ten participants described support from stakeholders, while four indicated the benefit of having a supportive network of peers. While support at work was important, nine participants also described the comfort and strength they received from having the support of a parent, spouse, and their personal spirituality.

The research around the millennial's value for feedback and support was limited but select studies informed this finding. Coates (2017) described the millennial's value on the importance of building positive work relationships with colleagues. This was such an important value that the millennial participants indicated that they would seek employers who valued their contribution and supervisors that would form respectful relationships of support. In this study, the supervisor relationship influenced overall personal satisfaction with work completion

(Coates, 2017). Winter and Jackson (2016) found that millennials preferred managers to serve as mentors to support their focus on making improvements to increase efficiency while supporting their career development. Gallup (2016) found a 58% positive connection with work expectations when the manager took the time to engage, support, develop, and care. The millennials in the Gallup (2016) study sought managers who provided ongoing feedback, clarity around priorities, and support. Research suggested that millennial workers were influenced by their need for feedback and recognition in the workplace (Fogg, 2009; Gabrielova & Buchko, 2021). Van Rossem (2016) regarded their generation as being open communicators with a need for the most support from their supervisor. In their research, Kouzes and Posner (2017) found that all employees learned the skills and behaviors of effective leadership when they had the support of strategic feedback, coaching, and mentorship. Regarding the interaction, communication, and collaboration that is a part of relationship building, Barnes and Gearing (2021) found that millennial college leaders in their study held the mindset that success or failure in the work did not directly define them.

***Finding Four:***

**Millennial principals are driven by intrinsic motivation to contribute that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, and could be a condition for them to leave.**

Participants described perspectives that merged as a theme of intrinsic motivation to contribute throughout the study. In Research Question One, when asked to describe the skills and talents they felt they brought to the job as a millennial, all fifteen participants described drive for success in achieving goals and at least one spoke about the internal drive to make a difference. When asked to describe what prompted them to accept the role at their current school, four

participants described it as a perfect job fit for their interests and their strengths. When asked to describe differences among the generations when they stepped into their role, eleven participants described differences in the way their staff were motivated to pursue success. Generally, participants often found that veteran teachers may prefer to keep things the way they have always been, but they would stay late to support school events. Younger staff members often left at the end of the school day, but younger staff members were motivated to be part of the solution by sharing creative ideas to try something new. One participant referenced the importance of finding the motivation for all of their staff to move new initiatives forward.

In Research Question Two, intrinsic motivation came through as a theme through three interview questions, but it was described in different ways that all refer to having internal drive or motivation. When asked what keeps you engaged in doing this work, four participants described the importance of having opportunities to continue to grow as leaders. Nine participants described the students and staff as their motivation to arrive every day ready to meet the challenges of leading their schools. Participants who were principals during the pandemic described how they developed a culture of care for the fears and needs of their staff and students. Fourteen participants described empathy and resilience as a dispositional strength. Leading with high expectations was a recurring theme for fourteen of the participants.

The theme of internal motivation was described in different ways during the interview questions for Research Question Three. When participants considered the factors or conditions that may prompt them to leave the job, two participants described the disappointment they would feel if they were not able to be successful in meeting the demands of the role. Feelings one may have around stability or disappointment may impact intrinsic motivation. When participants described expectations for self, two participants described the need for strengths-based work that

would match the talents that they brought to the role and four participants described the importance of maintaining a high level of self-efficacy. When asked to describe what they expect from others to stay in this work, eight participants strongly felt the importance of maintaining autonomy because they held a passion or drive to be fully invested in making decisions to address the needs of their schools. When asked to consider their next goal after the principalship, eleven participants described a motivation to contribute to the profession whether that meant remaining in the principal role or contributing in other ways.

Fair compensation as a motivation for the work was briefly referenced by three participants but it was not given as a sole reason for doing the work. Compensation was not a condition that would drive them from the role, but it was a factor that they considered to be important over time. Leaving the profession to consider occupations that pay more was a consideration for later in their career.

There was limited research on millennial's intrinsic motivation but the studies that addressed this were specific in their findings. According to Gallup (2016), unlike the boomer generation who pursued meaning in their family and community with a paycheck as a driving force, millennials were driven by purpose and meaning in their work while seeking fair compensation. VanMeter et al. (2013) found that as a generational cohort, millennials were confident in their abilities, with a high level of optimism and motivation. These millennial leaders used their bold leadership approach to support communication and decision-making while providing their employees with a structure to be engaged in collaborative opportunities to contribute (Barnes & Gearing, 2021). Additional studies determined that millennials were motivated by a need to contribute to their employer's vision (Wiedmer, 2018; Winter & Jackson, 2016; Pyöriä et al., 2017). Millennial participants in one study described value for having a job

that was fulfilling and contributed to improving the lives of others (Arora & Kshatriya, 2017; Coates, 2017).

***Finding 5:***

**Millennial principals pursue the role and remain engaged with their school community with high levels of commitment and dedication.**

The theme of commitment and dedication came through when participants were describing what keeps them engaged in the work of leading their school, especially during difficult situations. Research Question Two caused participants to reflect on their deep sense of dedication to their school, students, goals, work role, and to the community. Nine participants described a deep level of commitment to leading their school through continuous improvement and other challenges. Nine participants described themselves as reliable and adaptable as they described taking on systems level change because they were dedicated to the growth of their school. All fifteen participants described their leadership experiences through the lens of dedication to their profession even while talking about the high levels of stress and workload that they were balancing. Thirteen participants described their disposition of reliability in serving the needs of their school community. All fifteen participants described the dedication that they brought to their job every day. Nine participants described their reliability when engaging with the school community to ensure that all voices are heard and that the needs of the school are a priority.

The research to support this theme has been woven through other findings as millennials approach their work with reliability, drive, motivation, and passion. Research that specifically described commitment was limited. Research strongly suggested that millennials shared a strong commitment to being a contributor on the job (Coates, 2017; Barnes & Gearing, 2021).

Interestingly, Gallup (2016) found that they have less commitment to a certain religion or political party even though they have a high level of commitment to their work. Roebuck et al. (2013) described how millennials are balancing hobbies, vacations, church, and community commitments which adds to the lack of life balance.

***Finding 6:***

**Millennial principals are self-aware and pursue roles that are a good fit for their strengths.**

The millennial principals that participated in this study had a very clear sense of the skills and dispositions that they brought to the role. Remember, that these are young leaders having completed only 1-5 years in the role. All fifteen participants described pursuing the position at their current school because it appealed to their strengths, interests, and passion for the work - it was a good fit. Five leaders recognized differences among the generations in their schools in relation to the way veteran and younger teachers pursue stability in their work which manifested in team dynamics or interaction with colleagues. These millennial leaders saw the value in making the most of the strengths of their staff regardless of age or work stage. Eleven participants noticed differences around pursuit of goals or success among the generation on their staff. All fifteen participants were self-aware and could connect their strengths and dispositions with how they address current challenges in their schools or in looking back to handling the challenges of leading schools during the pandemic. In Research Question Three, three participants described their strength as a problem-solver to support their longevity in the role.

Research that explored this theme was limited. Gallup (2016) contributed insight into the theme of strengths-based fit. They found that millennials were attracted to work roles that were a good match to their strengths. Because of this, a strengths-based perspective when managing

employee performance resulted in 70% engagement with the organization. This management approach to leverage an employee's strengths to impact performance also increased the likelihood of millennial employee retention (Gallup, 2016). It would be important to remember that millennial leaders presented with strengths that supported the work of leading change in their colleges (Barnes & Gearing, 2021). Coates (2017) underscored the importance of providing jobs that were a perfect fit for the millennial's talents to support their need for job stability.

***Finding 7:***

**Millennial principals work collaboratively with their stakeholders to remain in the role.**

Creating opportunities to collaborate with their supervisor, and with their leadership team at school, families, students, staff, and colleagues in other buildings was a recurring theme. Participants described the way they create opportunity for themselves and others. In Research Question One, four participants described collaboration structures to ensure that all staff were engaged in the planning for instruction or making recommendations to support student learning. All fifteen participants described achieving goals in a way that engaged staff and parents. Five participants described developing shared high expectations with data and having regular conversations around moving initiatives forward to support growth. Twelve participants described creating shared vision with their school stakeholders. Three participants described their approach to providing clear communication to their diverse community and to different generations on staff to ensure everyone stayed connected and engaged.

In Research Question Two, six participants described how they aligned shared purpose or vision with the work of their staff to develop buy in. All fifteen described how being goal oriented is a leadership skill that keeps them engaged in the work. Fourteen participants

described how they collaboratively built relationships to pull staff and community together to accomplish the shared work. Thirteen participants stressed the importance of being visible and relatable with students and families so that both would feel involved and in partnership with the school.

In Research Question Three, five participants described how their ability to lead as a student-centered principal would support their longevity. Four participants described themselves as big picture thinkers which included the ability to work collaboratively to ensure everyone's voice was considered before moving forward with new initiatives or changes in their school.

The research from Chapter Two did not include as much to support this theme for the millennial in the workplace. Grissom et al. (2021) research found that effective principals promoted cultures of learning through systems that supported professional collaboration. Taylor and Stein (2014) found that women from Generation X and Gen Y both viewed themselves as big-picture thinkers. This study also found, however, that baby boomers had a higher mean score for collaboration than both millennials and Gen X participants. They also provided a reminder that while it is important to be knowledgeable about generational differences, these differences do not apply to every member of the group (Taylor & Stein, 2014). VanMeter et al. (2013) found that, as a group, millennials were more socially wired with a higher preference for group work than other cohort groups.

***Finding 8:***

**Millennial principals lead with passion for teaching and learning which keeps them engaged in their work.**

In Research Question One, seven participants described their passion to support their particular school. Some spoke to their passion for leading Title 1 communities and others described their ‘why’ for the school location and the school demographics that connected with their personal life experiences. Nine leaders described passion for the work to pursue a position with greater responsibility because they knew they could also have a greater impact which really got them excited to come to work every day.

In Research Question Two, one participant described job fit aligned with drive and passion for a specialty focus at their school. One described the motivation to support students as a passion they bring to leading as a millennial. While these are the participants that used passion as a descriptor, other participants spoke about their ‘why’ for the work in terms of purpose for their career or life’s goal.

In Research Question Three, five participants felt that their passion as a student-centered leader was the disposition to support their longevity. This was even described as the focus that kept them grounded when negativity from stakeholders or lack of resources created stress for them. The internal drive to serve as a visionary leader (4 participants) while being effective at problem solving (3 participants) and keeping a passion for being a student-centered leader (5 participants) were three dispositions that our millennial leaders felt could support their longevity in the role. One leader considered future professional goals following their current role as their “next passion” that would support life balance. In the summary across all interview questions,

ten participants described their passion for their schools and student learning as a force to support their ability to remain in their role.

Research from Chapter Two supports this theme for millennials to approach their work with passion. Howe and Strauss (2000) studied the millennial generation as children into young adulthood. During their teen years, millennials were seen as positive, confident, intelligent, and deserving of recognition for their achievements, regardless of size. Despite stereotypes from older generations, millennials were often rule-abiding and respectful of authority. They considered themselves tech-savvy and believed they could drive positive change for the future (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Lester et al. (2001) described the millennial employee as someone seeking alignment between their contribution, recognition, and further motivation to achieve.

## **Implications**

Motivation to pursue, accept, then remain in a principal role is influenced by many factors. The following five implications represent a synthesis of the eight findings already presented. The implications for school divisions are meant to support the need to attract, develop, and retain the millennial school leader. The findings are imbedded in the implications in such a way to develop a clear understanding of what this generation may be looking to find in their employer.

### ***Implication One:***

**If school divisions are to attract the millennial school leader, they should consider developing principal pipeline structures that allow millennial principals to be involved.**

The millennial leader approaches their role with dedication, strong work ethic, and a goal-oriented approach to leading schools. They have learned to do this while honoring the

voices of their stakeholders, approaching their role through a lens of serving others, and a willingness to face the daunting challenges in our schools. They have a story to tell, a perspective shaped by leading through a pandemic. They are bold about what they believe to be effective practice and are willing to embrace continuous improvement systems to support new, innovative approaches to building achievement and engagement for their staff, students, and communities. These leaders are managing the challenges of new local and state initiatives in their first years on the job while taking time to serve with empathy. Millennials want to contribute so giving these principals authentic opportunities to mentor and coach aspiring leaders may be beneficial. The millennial principal has the relationship building strength to serve as a strong collaborative colleague with a veteran school principal, as well. Millennial leaders want to contribute to solutions. These leaders are poised to serve as a bridge when Gen Z aspires to lead, and we may be wise to enlist their support.

***Implication Two:***

**If school divisions are to attract and retain the millennial school leader, they should consider strengths-based development to prepare them for future roles with the organization.**

One size fits all mentality has never been a good fit for the millennial and this may lead to greater frustration rather than greater growth for the millennial principal. Participants in this study referenced their strength in problem solving, goal setting and creativity. They valued support and feedback and cultivated others to provide this through relationship building. They have a preference for working collaboratively with their school teams, but they also need to spend time with those in similar roles to align their thinking or to gain a sense of stability around the condition of the job itself. Millennial principals who were frustrated by the quality of support

they have received from their supervisor or central office most often described a disconnect between what they needed and what they were provided with. Professional development must be aligned with their needs. Millennials in this study were self-aware and willing to advocate for what they needed. A division seeking to develop their millennial principals should consider actively listening and responding to their feedback.

***Implication Three:***

**If school divisions are to retain the millennial school leader, they should reconsider systems and structures that are contributing to principal burn out.**

Millennial principals are willing to work hard but for longevity, they will be seeking employers who support their need for autonomy, positive supervisor support, and life balance. School systems have invested time and resources into programs that support emotional wellness for students and staff, but the school leader is shouldering a crushing level of responsibility. Millennial principals are driven by an intrinsic motivation to support achievement, positive work environments, with a student-centered approach but they cannot sustain the long hours and high demands for a long career in the role. Most millennials still have 15-25 years left in the workplace so it may be worth considering ways to build a work culture for leaders that promotes self-care, recognizes the importance of disconnecting from emails after hours and on weekends, encourages the use of vacation time, and supports a growth-mindset approach to continuous improvement. Millennial school principals value life balance and are seeking to prioritize the demands of work to allow time for this in their personal lives.

***Implication Four:***

**If school divisions are to develop the millennial school leader, they should consider systems of support, mentorship, feedback, and coaching provided by supervisors.**

Millennial school leaders know their strengths and they are seeking feedback to support their pursuit of longevity in the role. They are supporting collaboration and growth for their schools, and they are seeking the same for themselves. They are seeking a positive supervisor relationship and recognition for the work they are doing well. They are leading complex work in their schools that will take time to see the outcomes, so they are seeking growth mindsets for their staff and from their supervisor. They value strong mentors and are willing to serve as coaches and mentor aspiring leaders on their staff. They want to continue to grow their strengths and seek meaningful professional development to support them in being ready to pursue new roles to support the profession. Remember that they are dedicated and passionate about their work. Millennial principals are early in their careers and will need someone to invest in developing, mentoring, and coaching them to support their longevity.

***Implication Five:***

**If school divisions are to keep and develop the millennial school principal, they should consider providing recognition and resources for their work engaging school communities.**

Millennial school leaders value the school community partnership. This is evident in the way they create opportunities for feedback, remain visible and engaged and attend school events after hours. They are visible and talk with students during change of class, care deeply about their reputation, and the reputation of their schools which is impacted by social media. They want to serve others with a high level of dedication every day. They approach their work with a

passion and a strong work ethic which ensures they are both reliable and deeply invested in the work. The pace, workload, overload of initiatives, negative public opinion, challenging staff dynamics, and so many other external and internal influences can impact their day. But at the core of who they are as school leaders they have a strong ‘why’ for their work. School divisions will want to keep and develop this strong talent pool. Ensuring that there are recognition programs to showcase their achievements will motivate and inspire others. Ensuring that human and fiscal resources are available to lead innovative work will help to support and retain this talent pool in the workforce.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Implications from this study provided five considerations that could reshape the way school divisions approach recruitment, development, and retention of the millennial school principal.

Future research may include:

1. Expanding the study to include millennial principals from urban schools.
2. Completing a similar study but narrowing the focus on principals from Title 1 schools due to the increased rate of turnover.
3. Completing a similar study with Gen X principals in their first five years in the role.
4. Completing a similar study with Gen Z assistant principals aspiring for the principalship.

### **Conclusion**

Gaining a better understanding of the workplace expectations of this significant talent pool could play a crucial role in enhancing leadership pipelines and retention in our educational institutions (Gallup, 2016). This basic qualitative study was designed to explore the unique lived

experiences of millennial school principals, serving in urban, suburban, or rural school settings, having completed 1-5 years in their role. Semi-structured questions were created to identify the perceptions, expectations, and constructed meaning that accompanied participant's experience during their pursuit, attainment, and retention in the principalship. This study answered the following research questions: 1) What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position? 2) What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship? 3) What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship? The main themes that came out of this research are that: 1) Millennial principals bring a strong work ethic that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, but could be a condition for them to leave. 2) Millennial principals' interest in seeking life balance influences them to pursue the role but could be a leading condition to motivate them to leave. 3) Millennial principals value relationships and feedback to encourage their pursuit, engagement, and longevity in the role. 4) Millennial principals are driven by intrinsic motivation to contribute that influences them to pursue the role, motivates them to remain, and could be a condition for them to leave. 5) Millennial principals pursue the role and remain engaged with their school community with high levels of commitment and dedication. 6) Millennial principals are self-aware and pursue roles that are a good fit for their strengths. 7) Millennial principals work collaboratively with their stakeholders to remain in the role. 8) Millennial principals lead with passion for teaching and learning which keeps them engaged in their work.

From those eight themes, the five implications from this study include: 1) If school divisions are to attract the millennial school leader, they should consider developing principal pipeline structures that allow millennial principals to be involved. 2) If school divisions are to

attract and retain the millennial school leader, they should consider strengths-based development to prepare them for future roles with the organization. 3) If school divisions are to retain the millennial school leader, they should reconsider systems and structures that are contributing to principal burn out. 4) If school divisions are to develop the millennial school leader, they should consider systems of support, mentorship, feedback, and coaching provided by supervisors. 5) If school divisions are to keep and develop the millennial school principal, they should consider providing recognition and resources for their work engaging school communities.

This generation's expectations for self, for work, for supervisors, and for the organization may help to shape innovative methods and restructure systems in school divisions. Establishing workplace environments that are better attuned to millennials' expectations can directly bolster their future contributions and overall productivity (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Gallup, 2016). Organizations may want to understand all the generations in the workplace, but especially in leadership roles, more fully in their efforts to support, develop, and retain school leadership (Gabriellova & Buchko, 2021; Smith et al., 2016).

## **Reflections**

I was so impressed by the level of dedication and passion for this work that I found when talking with each of our fifteen millennial school principal participants. They are working hard and trying to meet the needs of every stakeholder in their school community while shouldering the burden that accompanies the principalship. I could probably interview each of them again in five years to see if anything has changed for them or if they still arrive to their schools with motivation and drive to take on the challenges of the day. I sure hope so.

While I was energized by their passion for the role of the principalship, I was equally disheartened to hear the stories surrounding their challenges in aligning the capacity of their staff behind the many state and division initiatives that continue to be pushed down to their schools.

With a growing shortage of teachers, we are starting to experience a shortage of qualified school leaders prepared to lead our schools. Are school divisions ready to consider something new to attract, develop, and retain this talented workforce? It is time to do consider change to ensure that schools in the near future have the best talent sitting in the principal's seat.

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Appendix A:  
Participant Email Invitation

Email Subject Line: Research Opportunity to Influence Study on Millennial School Leaders

Dear Prospective Interview Participant,

Hello, my name is Connie Balkcom. I am a supervisor for administrative recruitment and a former school principal in Prince William County Public Schools, Manassas, Virginia. I am currently pursuing my doctorate degree in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech. I am conducting research on millennial school principals' lived experience in the leadership role. The data collected in this study will be used to help school divisions and practitioners to improve their methods of attracting, developing, and retaining millennial school leaders.

I am looking for school principals, from urban, suburban, or rural schools, born between 1980 and 1996, and currently within 1-5 years in the principal position, to participate in this study. If you meet these criteria and are interested in learning more about this study, please reply to this email and I will be happy to share an information sheet with you. Your verbal consent to participate in the interview will be accepted prior to your participation.

Your confidentiality is important to me. During the interview, participants will select a pseudonym to use which will become the descriptor for references to interview data in the study. There is a minimum risk associated with participating in this study. It will not be possible to have your information identified beyond the pseudonym provided. During the interview, participants will be recorded, via Zoom, for transcription purposes only. The recording in Zoom will be saved on a secured laptop and destroyed once the transcript review has been completed. The interview should last between 30-45 minutes.

Thank you for taking the time to consider participating in this study.

If you have any questions concerning the interview, you can contact me at 703-801-2684. This interview protocol has been reviewed by the Human Research Protection Program of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (IRB 23-1213). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Virginia tech HRPP at [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu) or (540) 231-3732. Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

Connie S. Balkcom

## Appendix B

### Participant Email Confirmation

Email Subject Line: Research Opportunity to Influence Study on Millennial School Leaders

Dear Interview Participant,

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my research on millennial school principals' lived experience in the leadership role. As shared in the invitation email, the data collected in this study will be used to help school divisions and practitioners to improve their methods of attracting, developing, and retaining millennial school leaders.

Your confidentiality is important to me. When we meet for your interview session in Zoom, you will provide a pseudonym to shield your identity and school affiliation. Each participant's interview data will be coded with descriptive demographic notations to include a pseudonym, school setting (urban, suburban, or rural), birth year, years in the principalship, and school level (elementary, middle, or high). Your verbal consent to participate in the interview will be accepted prior to your participation.

The descriptor will be used in all references to interview data in the study. There is a minimum risk associated with participating in this study. It will not be possible to have your information identified beyond the pseudonym provided.

The interview should last between 30-45 minutes. Please call me 703-801-2684 at your earliest convenience so that we can select a date and time to complete your interview.

This interview protocol has been reviewed by the Human Research Protection Program of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (IRB 23-1213). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, or concerns or complaints about the research, you may contact the Virginia tech HRPP at [irb@vt.edu](mailto:irb@vt.edu) or (540) 231-3732. Thank you for your assistance.

Best regards,

Connie S. Balkcom

## Appendix C

### Research Information Sheet



#### Information Sheet for Participation in a Research Study

Principal Investigator: Carol S. Cash, EdD  
IRB# and Title of Study: 23-1213- Millennial School Leaders: Why They Come, Why They Stay, and Why They Leave

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

I am a graduate student at Virginia Tech, and I am conducting this research as part of my course work.

#### > WHAT SHOULD I KNOW?

If you decide to participate in this study, you will complete an interview. *As part of the study, you will be asked to share your perspective on what prompted you to pursue and accept the school principal position, what motivates you to remain in the role, and what factors or conditions may motivate you to leave the principalship.* All interviews will be conducted in a Zoom virtual format, which will be recorded for the purpose of transcription. Recording is a requirement for participation.

The study should take approximately 30-45 minutes of your time. Some participants may be asked to meet again with the researcher after data analysis occurs to review themes that became present during the study. 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 don't want to answer and remain in the study. The investigator may withdraw you from this research if circumstances arise which 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.

Any data collected during this research study will be kept confidential by the researchers. At the beginning of the interview, you will be asked to select a pseudonym which will be used to 'rename' on the Zoom site. The Zoom interview transcription will be coded with your pseudonym. Your responses are anonymous, so no one can associate your answers back to you. Please do not include your name or other identifying information in your responses that can identify you.

The recordings will be uploaded to a secure password-protected computer in the researcher's office. The researchers will maintain a list that includes a key to the code. The master key and the recordings will be stored for 3 years after the study has been completed and then destroyed.

#### > WHO CAN I TALK TO?

If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact **Connie Balkcom** ([csbalkcom@vt.edu](mailto:csbalkcom@vt.edu)) or **Carol Cash** ([ccash48@vt.edu](mailto:ccash48@vt.edu)). You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation 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  
Interview Protocol

**Page 1**

**Title of the Study: Millennial School Leaders: Why They Come, Why They Stay, and Why They Leave**

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Zoom Setting for Participant:

Interviewer: Connie Spears Balkcom

1. Confirm receipt of information sheet (emailed to participant before the meeting):
2. Turn on the Zoom record with closed caption (visual transcribing)
3. Follow script below.

**Thank you for meeting with me today [timeframe].**

**I appreciate your time and your willingness to participate in this study. The interview today centers around your lived experiences as you pursued and accepted the principalship, what motivates you to remain in this role, as well as the conditions that may cause you to leave the principalship.**

**The interview will take 30-45 minutes.**

**This interview transcript will be coded with demographic information which will serve to identify it later:**

**What is your *pseudonym* for the interview?**

**What is your school's geographic location? (*urban, suburban, or rural setting*)**

**What is your birth year? (*1980 – 1996 range*)**

**How many years have you been a school principal? (*1-5 range*)**

**Which level are you currently leading? (*elementary, middle, high, or other combination*)**

**If you are ready, let's begin.**

*(Follow the interview protocol which outlines questions to be asked with probing suggestions on p.2)*

## Appendix D

### Interview Protocol Continued

**Page 2**                      **Millennial School Leaders: Why they come, why they stay, and why they leave**  
Interview Protocol

*Interview Questions and Probes*

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**Research Question 1: What prompts the millennial leader to pursue and accept the school principal position?**

---

Content questions	Probing questions
Why did you want to be a principal?	Describe the experience.
What prompted you to accept this role at this school?	What were your perceptions and motivations?
What skills or talents do you feel you bring to this job as a millennial?	How did you come to know this?
How have you been purposeful in the transition as leader with different generations?	How can you see this impact?
Have you noticed any differences among the generations during this experience?	Describe what you have observed.

---

**Research Question 2: What motivates the millennial school leader to remain in the principalship?**

---

Content questions	Probing questions
What keeps you engaged in doing this work?	Describe the experience.
What dispositions or traits do you feel you bring to this as a millennial?	How has this influenced other's perceptions?
What leadership skills do you utilize when you work with others?	Describe how others respond to these methods.
Have you noticed any differences among the generations in your school?	Describe the interaction this has on your leadership.
How are you supported in your work?	Describe the type of support you have valued most.

---

**Research Question 3: What are the factors or conditions that would motivate a millennial school leader to leave the principalship?**

---



Content questions	Probing questions
What would prompt you to leave this job?	Who influences that?
What do you expect and need from yourself to stay in this work?	Describe how you will provide for that.
What do you expect and need from others to stay in this work?	How will you/do you communicate this to others?
What are the dispositions that you have as a millennial leader which could support your longevity in this role?	Describe how this may evolve as you remain in the role.
What is your next goal after the principalship?	Describe how this role prepares you for the next role.

---

Closing question: Is there anything else you would like to share as it relates to being a millennial school leader? What have I not asked that has been a key factor to motivate and keep you in this work?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Your responses will inform our research and add to a unique body of literature.

Appendix E  
CITI Program Certificate

Completion Date 09-Sep-2022  
Expiration Date 08-Sep-2025  
Record ID 51358091

This is to certify that:

**Connie Balkcom**


Has completed the following CITI Program course:

**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)**

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

  
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at [www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w1b3d54d9-1b49-4d93-8e6e-e4a3545d6273-51358091](http://www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w1b3d54d9-1b49-4d93-8e6e-e4a3545d6273-51358091)