

Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention

Heather L. Abney

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Charles L. Lowery, Chair

Jodie L. Brinkmann

Carol A. Mullen

Eric W. Worcester

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Abstract

As schools continue to face teacher shortages, further research into the effective principal leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates is recommended and could have implications for schools across the country. The purpose of this research study was to investigate how high school principals perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. Participants were six current public high school principals at a selected school division in Virginia with an 85% or higher teacher retention rate. A conceptual framework is included in this basic qualitative study that was based on a policy brief that highlights focus areas that principals should consider prioritizing to increase teacher retention to include developing a shared vision, creating a culture of trust, encouraging shared instructional leadership, and promoting safe working conditions. The research addressed the gap in the literature on teacher retention and the role of the principal and enhanced the literature by sharing the findings on principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention at their schools such as fostering personal connections, providing mentoring support, placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication and prioritizing collaborative learning teams. Additionally, encouraging teacher voice, focusing on high quality instruction, protecting time for teachers to manage the workload, and aligning professional development to school goals were highlighted by principals.

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General Audience Abstract

As schools continue to face teacher shortages, further research into the effective principal leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates is recommended and could have implications for schools across the country. The purpose of this research study was to investigate how high school principals perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. This basic qualitative research study focused on a selected school division in Virginia and participants included six high school principals with an 85% or higher teacher retention rate. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview and an analysis of the data provided insight into the importance of school principals implementing leadership practices that contribute to a supportive working environment that influences teacher retention. Findings and implications are presented in this research study that have the potential to improve principal leadership practices and contribute to the body of growing research on teacher retention to include recommendations for current and aspiring school leaders.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my heroes- the parents who changed my life and helped me become the person I am today. Candice Haynes- the amazing woman who brought me into this world as a teenager and made the courageous decision to give my twin brother and I up for adoption knowing that she could not provide us with the stable life she knew we deserved. And to my adoptive parents, Terry and Suzie Reed. You adopted six of us and throughout our lives you reminded us that our past does not define our destiny. You also instilled in us a work ethic that helped me achieve so many goals over the years and now this, a doctoral degree.

I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, Joseph and Mary Ketay. I will always cherish the memories of times spent with both of you. I know you are looking down from above, smiling with pride.

Finally, I dedicate this dissertation to my wonderful husband and children. My husband began calling me Dr. Abney when I began this journey, and it was a constant source of inspiration. Your motivational words kept me on track to meet the mini goals I set each month and now that I am done, let the empty nesting adventures begin! And finally, to my children Jasmine and Christian- I've had so many titles over the years, but my all-time favorite is "mom". I love you both so much.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Interest in the teaching profession has declined as college students choose other careers of interest and teacher attrition numbers rise (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). It has been estimated that the United States faced a shortage of 110,000 teachers during the 2017-2018 school year (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). This significant decline in the number of teachers indicates that the state of the profession is the lowest it has been in 50 years (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). The current teacher shortage crisis is a problem not only for individual schools, but for the entire American education system (Garcia & Weiss, 2020, Kraft et al., 2021). As school leaders across the country face teacher shortages, exploring ways to increase teacher retention has become a top priority (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Teachers are such a vital part of school communities and yet we see them not only leaving their schools but also leaving the teaching profession in record numbers (Mullen et al., 2021). Research on principal leadership practices and the effect it has on teacher retention found that half of teachers quitting the profession do so because of lack of support from the principal, poor working conditions, ineffective mentoring programs, and weak professional development opportunities (Nguyen et al., 2019; Shell et al. 2023; Watlington, 2010). While numerous studies have explored the general factors influencing teacher attrition, there is limited research on the specific leadership practices that contribute to high retention rates.

This study focused on the effective principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention and was guided by the following research question: How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates. Participants were current public high school principals at a selected school division in Virginia with an 85% or higher teacher retention rate.

Statement of the Problem

Each year schools across the country struggle to fill the 200,000 teacher positions that are vacant (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). The teacher shortage is growing and prevents school systems from providing an equitable education to all students (Allensworth et al., 2009; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Watlington et al., 2010). Kraft et al. (2021) highlighted the teacher shortage crisis in a research report calling it a national problem that if not addressed, has significant impacts on the quality of education for students. Addressing teacher attrition is particularly imperative due to the negative impact it has on the most vulnerable students attending low performing schools (Watlington et al., 2010). In a study conducted by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) the effect teacher turnover has on historically underserved students was highlighted. Title 1 schools are public schools that receive federal funds to support students from low-income families and these schools have a teacher turnover rate that is almost 50% more than non-Title 1 schools. This results in newer, less experienced teachers working with the students who have the greatest needs. In a policy agenda by Garcia and Weiss (2020), it was noted that in high poverty schools, the number of inexperienced teachers has increased. They argue that without immediate intervention and action, the achievement gaps will widen, and the educational system will continue to fall behind where it should be to meet the needs of students. Additionally, in schools serving a population over 55% students of color, the turnover rate is 70% higher than in schools where fewer than 10% students of color attend (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). To improve the quality of education for all students in the United States, finding ways to reduce teacher turnover is critical (Kraft et al., 2021).

Kraft et al. (2021) noted that the research regarding the current state of education suggests that teacher shortages have a significant impact on a wide range of day-to-day school

operations, and the costs associated with replacing teachers year after year can be astronomical. The United States spends over \$7 billion annually on issues related to the teacher shortage crisis (Morettini, 2016), and the costs associated with teacher turnover in large school districts with low teacher retention rates can be millions of dollars (Ford et al., 2019). In addition to the financial burden, teacher attrition negatively impacts school staff in addition to students (Shell et al., 2023; Shuls & Flores, 2020). When teachers leave, continued professional development plans established in schools are impacted, vacancies in key subject areas emerge, and teacher leadership is lost (Allensworth et al., 2009). Money allocated for training new teachers is precious and not always easy to obtain which further adds to the overall impact on schools and districts (Shaw & Newton, 2014). In addition to the costs associated with hiring new teachers, schools must also provide them support, which adds additional staffing costs (Morettini, 2016).

Significance of the Study

The continued focused research on teacher retention is important as districts try to retain new teachers in high need areas (Castro et al., 2010). Becker and Grob (2021) noted, “While there is a lot of research on relational trust, there is less research on the relationship between principal behaviors, relational trust, and teacher retention” (p. 11). Additional studies on effective principal leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates, what support from school administration impacts a teachers’ decision to stay or leave, and the reasons why schools have stronger organizational contexts would bolster the research relating to the effect principals have on schools (Boyd et al., 2011; Grissom et al., 2021; Kraft et al., 2016; Shell et al., 2023). Further insight into the reasons why teachers stay, and the effective principal leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates could have implications for schools across the country as teacher shortages continue to be a concern.

Purpose of the Study

The current teacher shortage crisis is a problem not only for individual schools, but for the entire education system in our country (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Kraft et al., 2021). Nguyen et al. (2019) reported that principal effectiveness was identified as a significant factor that has a direct impact on teacher retention and attrition, and it was noted as an area where additional research would be beneficial. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that influence teacher retention. This study will add to the existing research on principal leadership practices that positively influence teacher retention with the hope that current and aspiring school leaders have additional tools and strategies to implement to create a positive and supportive working environment where teachers choose to stay (Becker & Grob, 2021).

Research Question

This basic qualitative study focused on high school principals with an 85% or higher retention rate in a selected school division in Virginia. The study was guided by the following research question:

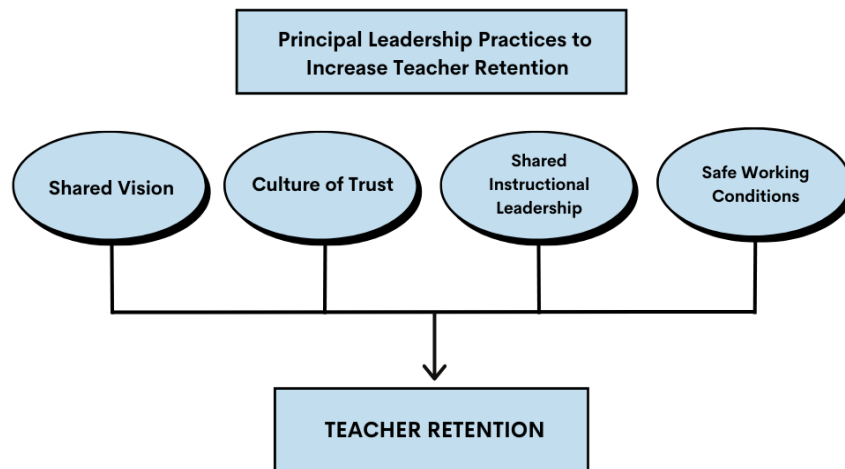
- How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates?

Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework grounds the study and serves as a roadmap of the main areas of focus to be studied to include the most important variables and the relationships that are most valuable in supporting the research design decision and, in this case, a basic qualitative inquiry informed by phenomenology (Miles et al., 2019; Rocco & Plakhotnick, 2009). This framework describes, organizes, and categorizes concepts of the study while mapping the scope of the

research (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rocco & Plakhotnick, 2009). The conceptual framework guided the basic qualitative research design that was selected as the researcher conducted phenomenological interviews to explore how school leaders perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The conceptual framework applied for this qualitative study is included in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Principal Leadership Practices to Increase Teacher Retention*



This conceptual framework (Figure 1) was based on Becker and Grob’s (2021) policy brief that highlights four focus areas that principals should consider prioritizing to increase teacher retention: develop a shared vision, create a culture of trust, encourage shared instructional leadership, and promote safe working conditions. The framework was developed for this study after the researcher found similar findings in several articles on the topic of teacher retention and the impact of principal leadership practices (Allensworth et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Hughes & O’Reilly, 2015; Player et al., 2017). Each of the components in Figure 1 will be illustrated through a review of the literature on teacher retention

and effective principal leadership practices followed by interviews with a targeted sample of public high school principals with an 85% or higher retention rate in a selected school division in Virginia.

Introduction to Methodology

This qualitative study guided by a phenomenological approach was conducted through interviews with a targeted sample of public high school principals with an 85% or higher retention rate in a selected school division in Virginia, and information was obtained from the division's Research and Accountability Department. In-depth interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who had direct experience with a common phenomenon to gather first-hand accounts and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the phenomenon of interest is the collective lived experiences of school leaders in implementing leadership practices that influence teacher retention. After conducting interviews, the researcher identified common themes through analyzing the responses from principals regarding perceptions of their leadership practices and the influence on teacher retention.

Definition of Key Terms

Throughout this dissertation, the researcher used several terms that have closely related definitions. The list below includes clearly defined terms from current literature relating to teacher retention and principal leadership practices.

Administration: For purposes of this paper, administration refers to principals and assistant principals responsible for supervising teachers while also providing guidance and support (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Mentoring: Experienced teachers collaborate with novice teachers to provide support and accessibility with the goal of improving teacher performance (Morettini, 2016, Mullen & Fallen, 2022).

Novice teachers: Entry level teachers in their first year of teaching (Castaneda & Varela, 2022).

Principal leadership practices: Principal leadership practices refer to the actions, behaviors, and strategies that impact teacher retention (Becker & Grob, 2021).

Professional development: Professional development refers to building teacher capacity to enhance student learning by providing teachers with resources and learning opportunities (Grissom et al., 2021).

Teacher attrition: Teacher attrition describes the phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Teacher induction program: Teacher induction programs are designed to provide new teachers with peer mentors, classroom management strategies, professional development opportunities, and ongoing support from school administration (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Teacher retention: Teacher retention refers to teachers staying at the same school (Lochmiller et al., 2016).

Teacher turnover: Teacher turnover describes the phenomenon of teachers moving between teacher positions or schools, without leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Working conditions: Working conditions is a phrase that refers to a wide array of professional situations impacting teachers. These conditions include student discipline and how it is addressed, professional development opportunities, teacher empowerment, the physical

environment, and support from administration as well as families and colleagues (Burkhauser, 2017; Castaneda & Varela, 2022).

Organization of the Study

This study will be organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 will include an overview of the proposed study, the statement of the problem, significance and purpose of the study, the research question that guides the research, a conceptual framework, and definitions of key terms. Chapter 2 will include a review of the literature that is relevant to the study. Chapter 3 will examine the research methodology. Chapter 4 will provide an overview of the findings and will also include an analysis of the data that was collected. Chapter 5 will include a discussion of the major findings and implications for practitioners as well as suggestions for future research on the topic of teacher retention.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This review of the literature focuses on school leadership practices that influence teacher retention. Nguyen et al. (2019) reported that principal effectiveness was identified as a significant factor that has a direct impact on teacher retention and attrition, and it was noted as an area where additional research would be beneficial for several reasons. In recent years, there has been an increase in teaching vacancies across the country and lower teacher education enrollment numbers in colleges (Becker & Grob, 2021). Research from the RAND Corporation indicates that if a teacher is not satisfied with their school's working conditions, then they are more apt to leave (Burkhauser, 2017). Dissatisfaction with teaching, increased pressure with test accountability, and lack of administrative support are reasons associated with teacher attrition (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Research indicates that fostering productive and resilient school cultures while also providing both mentoring support and professional development are practices that leaders should consider in this critical time of teacher shortages (Shaw & Newton, 2014). According to Hughes and O'Reilly (2015), school leadership directly impacts school outcomes, and the principal plays a critical role in teacher retention (Becker & Grob, 2021; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021).

Discovering ways to enhance teacher retention would benefit schools and enhance overall student learning and when principals provide ongoing instructional and emotional support in addition to improving working conditions, teacher retention increases. "Having an effective principal really matters- more, we think, than researchers often have emphasized in the past" (Grissom et al., 2021, p. 25). Kaiser and Thompson (2021) asserted that teachers remain in schools when they have a collaborative relationship with their principal and when they are provided with ongoing support. Evidence from research suggests that teacher satisfaction is

directly tied to a teacher's decision to stay or leave the profession (Nguyen et al., 2019). A significant indicator of teacher retention at a school is based on leadership by the principal (Allensworth, 2009). Effective principals are strategic in taking the necessary steps to reduce teacher attrition in their own buildings (Grissom et al., 2021). Boyd et al. (2011) explained in his research that supportive administration is one of the most important factors in teacher retention. Understanding more about the practices of effective principal leadership can result in increased teacher retention which in turn benefits students and school communities.

Search Process and Criteria

The search for literature on teacher retention began in February 2022 when this topic became an area of interest. EBSCOHost was the first online database accessed through the library at Virginia Tech University (VT) using the following key words: teacher retention and principal leadership and the search yielded 323 articles. Gale One was then accessed through VT Works using the key word "teacher retention" with a focus on peer reviewed journals and full text documents from March 2010-November 2023 and this search yielded 78 academic journal articles. Google Scholar was also used to search for peer reviewed articles starting in 2010, using the following key words: "teacher retention" and "urban high schools" since urban high schools was an initial focus area. This search yielded 8,190 results. The search criteria were then refined using VT works and included the key words "principal leadership" and "teacher retention" with a focus on peer reviewed articles. This search yielded 37 articles. The subsequent review of literature on teacher retention and principal leadership revealed names of key researchers that had been cited multiple times in articles on the subject of teacher retention and effective principal leadership practices. Articles by these authors were then accessed and utilized as part of the literature review process. Virginia Tech professors also shared articles, dissertations and

studies that aligned with my research topic of interest and those are referenced in this review of the literature. Finally, before attending the Virginia Association of Secondary School Principals (VASSP) conference in June 2023, I reviewed information about the presenters which led to a study by Becker and Grob (2021). The study was read, reviewed, and cited as an impactful study.

This review of the literature is structured in a manner that addresses the teacher shortage crisis in the United States while reviewing the most relevant research on the impact of teacher turnover, the reasons teachers leave and why they choose to stay. While reviewing the research on teacher retention and principal leadership, considerations for school leaders emerged and if implemented, could improve teacher retention, thus benefiting entire school communities.

Historical Background

The teaching profession continues to face shortages as college students choose other careers of interest and teacher attrition numbers rise (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Teacher turnover has been a challenge for years and schools are finding it more and more difficult to hire effective teachers (Burkhauser, 2017; Castro, 2023). Teacher attrition is defined by teachers leaving the profession while teacher turnover occurs when teachers change schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling Hammond, 2017). Each year schools across the country struggle to fill the 200,000 teacher positions that are vacant (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). As school districts now face the challenge of recruiting and retaining teachers, this was not always the case. “One of the greatest demands in public schools happened when baby boomers matriculated through schools in the 1960s and 1970s” (Rodgers & Skelton, 2014, p. 1). This enrollment increase created a higher need for educators, resulting in more college students choosing to enter the teaching profession.

The current teacher shortage crisis is a problem not only for individual schools, but for the entire American education system (Garcia & Weiss, 2020, Kraft et al., 2021). This significant

decline in the number of teachers indicates that the state of the profession is the lowest it has been in 50 years (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). It has been estimated that the United States faced a shortage of 110,000 teachers during the 2017-2018 school year (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Impact of Teacher Shortages

The teacher shortage is growing and prevents school systems from providing an equitable education to all students (Allensworth et al., 2009; Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Watlington et al., 2010). Kraft et al. (2021) highlighted the teacher shortage crisis in a research report calling it a national problem that if not addressed, has significant impacts on the quality of education for students. Teacher attrition also has a negative impact on historically underserved students as well as low performing schools (Watlington et al., 2010). Findings by Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2017), reveal that schools serving low-income students have a higher teacher turnover rate, and this results in newer, less experienced teachers working with the students who have the greatest needs. Students attending Title I schools experience the effects of a teacher turnover rate that is 50% more than in schools that are not designated as Title I and that percentage jumps to 70% for the math and science turnover rate in Title I schools. When teachers leave, continued professional development plans established in schools are impacted, vacancies in key subject areas emerge, and teacher leadership is lost (Allensworth et al., 2009). In a policy agenda by Garcia and Weiss (2020), it was noted that in high poverty schools, the number of inexperienced teachers is growing and without immediate intervention and action, the achievement gaps will widen, and the educational system will continue to fall behind where it should be to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students.

Kraft et al. (2021) noted that the research regarding the current state of education suggests that teacher shortages have a significant impact on a wide range of day-to-day school

operations and the costs associated with replacing teachers year after year can be astronomical. In addition to the financial burden, teacher attrition negatively impacts school staff in addition to students and this is evident when reviewing student achievement data in these schools (Shell et al., 2023; Shuls & Flores, 2020). The United States spends over \$7 billion annually on issues related to the teacher shortage crisis (Morettini, 2016) and the costs associated with teacher turnover in large school districts with low teacher retention rates can be millions of dollars (Ford et al., 2019). Money allocated for training new teachers is precious and not always easy to obtain which further adds to the overall impact on schools and districts (Shaw & Newton, 2014). In addition to the costs associated with hiring new teachers, schools must also provide support to new teachers, which adds additional staffing costs.

Teacher shortages also impact the leadership practices of principals. Castro (2023) conducted a qualitative study to investigate strategies of teacher resilience in the state of Oklahoma and how teacher shortages alter the leadership practices of principals as well as the overall impact this can have on an organization. This study included fifteen secondary novice teachers employed in high needs schools and findings revealed that to increase teacher retention, educational leaders need to ensure novice teachers are provided with training opportunities that focus on problem solving strategies in an environment that is both supportive and collaborative (Castro, 2023).

Understanding motivations for teacher attrition is important in illuminating the depth of the teacher shortage crisis and how it can be turned around through effective principal leadership. Teachers leave schools for a variety of reasons, but common themes were found in the articles accessed for this literature review. Allensworth et al. (2009) conducted a study, and findings revealed that teachers typically do not stay in schools when they do not have

collaborative relationships with their peers and when they did not feel supported or respected by parents.

In a meta-analysis of the literature, Nguyen et al. (2019) synthesized findings from 120 studies on the causes of both teacher attrition and retention and discussed common themes as well as policy implications. Teachers leave due to student disciplinary issues, poor working conditions, inadequate support from school administration, and weak professional development programs with little emphasis on induction/mentoring programs (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Burkhauser (2017) also noted that when teachers do not perceive that the working conditions of a school are adequate then they are more apt to leave. Research by Garcia and Weiss (2020) indicates that teachers who quit the profession often say they do so because of lack of influence over school policies, activities, and rules.

A review of literature on principal practices and the effect on teacher retention by Shell et al. (2019) found that half of teachers quitting the profession do so as result of a lack of support from the principal. New teachers are more likely to leave schools if they are not provided with an effective mentoring program and teachers who indicate that a strong professional development program is not in place at their school are more likely to leave (Castaneda & Varela, 2022, Nguyen et al., 2019; Watlington, 2010). Garcia and Weiss (2020) found that teacher attrition was attributed to administration teams not being supportive or encouraging. Furthermore, teachers are more likely to leave schools where there are significant student discipline problems and where the facilities need attention (Nguyen et al., 2019).

It is important to not only look at what causes teacher burnout, but to also consider what can be implemented in schools to support teachers since reducing teacher turnover is essential in improving the quality of educational experiences for students (A. J. Castro et al., 2010; Kraft et

al., 2021). Organizational factors that impact teacher attrition can be addressed through positive and supportive principal leadership (Nguyen et al., 2019). Additionally, it is important for educational leaders to ensure teachers are provided with support from day one (Reitman & Karge, 2019). To increase teacher retention, school leaders must place a high emphasis on the way teachers are viewed and treated (Garcia & Weiss, 2020).

Reasons Why Teachers Stay

As the leader of the school, the principal plays a key role in teacher retention (Burkhauser, 2017). Teachers working in schools led by supportive administration teams have higher morale, thus directly impacting teacher satisfaction and overall retention rates (Shell et al., 2023). In a policy brief by Becker and Grob (2021), research on the role of the principal in teacher retention was reviewed. The goal was to better understand the practices that leaders can undertake to improve teacher retention. According to the research reviewed in the policy brief, several focus areas that principals should consider prioritizing to increase teacher retention were mentioned to include developing a shared vision, creating a culture of trust, encouraging shared instructional leadership, and promoting safe working conditions (Becker & Grob, 2021). Similar findings were also noted in several articles on the topic of teacher retention and effective principal leadership practices (Allensworth et al., 2019; Ford et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015; Player et al., 2017).

Shared Vision

Establishing a relationship between teachers and the principal that is collaborative is important in reducing teacher attrition (Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015). Becker and Grob (2021) highlighted the importance of having a shared vision in place as a main factor in teacher retention and noted that this occurs when the principal has communicated expectations to staff

and there is collaborative leadership resulting in staff members committed to the school goals. According to Player et al. (2017), when principals communicate the school vision to staff and work collaboratively to achieve the vision, teacher retention increases. Allensworth et al. (2009) examined teacher retention and found that when inclusive leadership is in place, teachers stay because they feel as though they are partners and have a voice in their work environment. Shuls and Flores (2020) found similar findings from a study conducted in Missouri school districts where teacher retention was the highest in the state. Schools in these districts are led by supportive administrators who allow and promote teacher voice. According to research compiled by the Wallace Foundation, effective principals make it a priority to collaborate with teachers about instruction and focus their attention on creating a positive and productive school environment (Grissom et al., 2021).

Resources to support teachers include collaborative relationships as well as peer mentorship (Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). As school leaders across the country face the challenges associated with teacher attrition, the benefits of strong mentoring programs are noted often in studies that research ways to increase teacher retention (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Teachers stay in the profession when provided with opportunities to participate in teacher mentor or induction programs (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Shuls & Flores, 2020). In addition to a strong mentoring program, professional development opportunities can help increase teacher retention rates (Castro et al., 2010; Rodgers & Skelton, 2014). Teachers must have time to participate in professional development that fosters peer collaboration and continuous learning (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). According to Rodgers and Skelton (2014), professional development provides teachers with research-based strategies to support improved instructional

practices in the classroom. Additionally, professional development provides an additional layer of support for teachers which results in higher morale which could lead to improved job satisfaction and an increase in teacher retention (Castaneda & Varela, 2022).

Reitman and Karge (2019) conducted a study that included a survey of sixty teachers and interviews with ten teachers, all of whom received significant support as first year teachers (Reitman & Karge, 2019). The purpose of the research was to determine what support provided by school leaders promoted retention. The teachers had been part of an induction program that had ongoing meetings and included professional development as well as classroom support. A mentor was provided and visited the classrooms to provide growth producing feedback. Teachers noted that the collaboration had a direct impact on their decision to stay and in this case, there was a 100% retention rate. The conclusions of the study revealed the importance of support for new teachers that began on day one and continued until the educator demonstrated proficiency. The support which included a mentor and opportunities for professional learning began again if the teacher changed grade levels or schools. Implications for school leaders were included in this study to consider when looking for ways to increase teacher retention (Reitman & Karge, 2019).

Culture of Trust

Several articles accessed during this review on principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention included information about the importance of creating a culture of trust (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Grissom et al., 2021; Player et al., 2017; Shuls & Flores, 2020). Retention increases when administrators establish school cultures where trust is a priority, and teachers are valued as well as respected (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Retention was found to be higher in schools where the principal was viewed as trustworthy and when teachers believed they had a voice in school decisions (Player et al., 2017). A productive, resilient school climate is one

where teachers feel safe and empowered, valued, and supported. Principals who place a high value on promoting a culture of trust also collaborate regularly with teachers, parents, and even community members to promote collaboration and continuous school improvement (Grissom et al., 2021).

School leaders need to increase opportunities for teacher influence to create a stronger sense of belonging to include teachers feeling safe when they seek out support and guidance from school administrators (Castro et al., 2010; Garcia & Weiss, 2020). If school leaders take the time to have meaningful conversations with teachers to support their social emotional needs, trust can be established, which promotes a positive and productive working environment (Ford et al., 2019). Principals can foster a culture of trust by encouraging collaboration, ensuring teachers feel empowered, and working to build a school culture that promotes safety and ongoing support (Grissom et al., 2021).

Shared Instructional Leadership

Allensworth et al. (2009) researched the retention of K-12 teachers in Chicago after determining that one hundred schools had a high turnover rate and found that in 2006, a typical high school had a 54% turnover rate. While the research report by Allensworth et al., (2009) investigated the reasons why teachers were leaving, the authors also included considerations for administrators aimed at improving teacher retention rates. This research revealed that teachers stayed when they trusted the principal, had a voice in decision making, and viewed the principal as a strong instructional leader (Allensworth et al., 2009).

While working to ensure teachers are provided with relevant professional development opportunities in schools, effective principals encourage shared leadership and look for other teacher leaders to engage in leading these opportunities to drive student outcomes (Grissom et

al., 2021). The interactions principals establish with teachers in an environment that promotes shared instructional leadership includes a focus on improving instructional practices through effective coaching while closely monitoring school goals by using data to make schoolwide decisions (Grissom et al., 2021).

Shuls and Flores (2020) reported that teacher retention was higher in schools where there was evidence of shared leadership in which teacher voice was encouraged. This focus on shared instructional leadership leads to positive and productive school cultures (Shuls & Flores, 2020). New teachers can also be encouraged to mentor each other since social emotional support and encouragement were found to be the most significant aspects of mentoring that impacts teacher retention (Morettini, 2016).

Safe Working Conditions

A school's working conditions refers to the leadership team and the support provided to teachers by administrators (Ford et al., 2019). Effective school leadership teams can increase teacher retention by establishing positive school cultures and promoting safe working conditions (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). A study conducted by Boyd et al. (2011) focused on K-12 teachers in New York City and found that teachers stay when importance is placed on working conditions and when administrative support of teachers is evident. Teacher retention increases when working conditions include a supportive administration focused on encouraging positive peer working relationships and addressing school disciplinary concerns (Castro, 2023; Kraft et al., 2016). In fact, principals may be the ones who have the greatest influence on improving working conditions for teachers. Examples of ways in which principals can improve working conditions include addressing student disciplinary issues, protecting teachers from external forces, while also providing support and recognizing teachers for their accomplishments

(Burkhauser, 2017; Castro, 2023). Findings from research conducted by Allensworth (2009) and Player et al. (2017) echoed similar results. Allensworth (2009) stated,

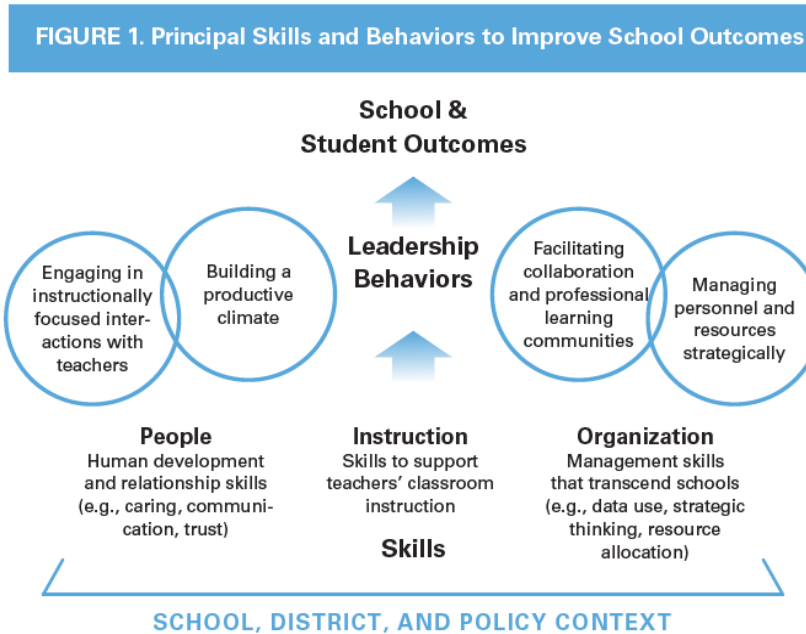
Teachers stay in schools where the conditions are well suited for them to have the potential to be effective- where their colleagues are collaborators, school administration is supportive, parents trust teachers to do their jobs, and the learning environment for students is safe and non-disruptive. (p. 2)

These studies, like others analyzed, reveal the impact of principal leadership on teacher retention.

Teachers want to stay in schools where the principal is empowering, supportive, communicates effectively, and takes the time to recognize individuals for exemplary work (Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015). A report by the Wallace Foundation includes findings about the impact an effective principal can have on school outcomes and Grissom et al. (2021) noted four sets of principal practices that can positively impact a school organization. The first practice involves an intentional focus on interactions with teachers that are instructionally focused. This includes improving instruction through high quality teacher evaluations, providing effective growth producing feedback, and using data to make instructional decisions. Secondly, effective principals establish supportive and positive school cultures where teachers and students feel empowered and valued. Grissom et al. (2021) also found that successful schools led by effective principals encourage collaboration which includes a focus on professional learning communities and common planning time for teachers. Finally, effective principals strategically manage resources and intentionally make decisions regarding personnel management to support both teaching and learning. As noted in the review of the literature and exemplified in Figure 2, great principals have a positive effect on schools, impacting instruction, people, and the organization, thus increasing teacher retention.

Figure 2

Principal Skills and Behaviors to Improve School Outcomes



From Grissom, Egalite, and Lindsay. *How Principals Affect Students and Schools*, 2021.

Grissom et al. (2021)

Summary

According to Grissom et al. (2021), an effective principal positively impacts student outcomes, teacher retention, and enhances the entire school community. In a review of the literature on the impact of principal leadership on teacher retention, the following themes emerged in the research: the overall impact of teacher shortages on school communities, reasons why teachers leave and why they stay, and the principal leadership practices that positively impact teacher retention. As Shell et al. (2023) noted, “Regardless of the school location (rural or urban) and the school type (elementary, middle, high, special), the characteristic of principal support remains a significant predictor of U.S. teacher retention and attrition” (p. 110).

Several studies indicated the need for further research on teacher retention and the role of the principal (Becker & Grob, 2021; Boyd et al., 2011; Castro et al., 2010; Shell et al., 2023). Additional studies on the impact of principal leadership on teacher turnover would contribute to the research relating to the effect principals have on schools (Grissom et al., 2021). The continued focused research on teacher retention is important as districts try to retain new teachers in high need areas (Castro et al., 2010). Additionally, more studies are needed to find out what support from school administration impacts a teachers' decision to stay or leave and why it is critical (Boyd et al., 2011). More qualitative research is recommended to investigate the reasons why schools have stronger organizational contexts resulting in increased teacher retention (Kraft et al., 2016). Becker and Grob (2021) noted, "While there is a lot of research on relational trust, there is less research on the relationship between principal behaviors, relational trust, and teacher retention" (p. 11). Additional studies to investigate why supportive administration is an important aspect in a teacher's decision to stay or leave would provide a better understanding of the factors that impact teacher retention (Boyd et al., 2011; Shell et al., 2023). Further research into the principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention is recommended and could have implications for schools across the country as teacher shortages continue to be a concern.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the purpose of the study, the research question, and the research design. Information regarding the site and methodology through sample selection, instrument design, data collection, and data analysis is presented. Issues of trustworthiness and the background of the researcher will also be discussed. This qualitative study allowed for the primary form of data collection to be through interviews and a triangulation of the results, with the goal of providing clearer themes and findings regarding principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how school leaders perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The current teacher shortage crisis is a problem not only for individual schools, but for the entire American education system (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Kraft et al., 2021). It has been estimated that the United States faced a shortage of 110,000 teachers during the 2017-2018 school year (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). This significant decline in the number of teachers indicates that the state of the profession is the lowest it has been in 50 years (Kraft & Lyon, 2022). Nguyen et al. (2019) reported that principal effectiveness was identified as a significant factor that has a direct impact on teacher retention and attrition, and it was noted as an area where additional research would be beneficial. This study will add to the existing research on principal leadership practices that positively influence teacher retention with the hope that current and aspiring school leaders have additional tools and strategies to implement to create a positive and supportive working environment where teachers choose to stay (Becker & Grob, 2021).

This qualitative study was conducted through interviews with a targeted sample of public high school principals with an 85% or higher retention rate in a selected school division in Virginia, and information was obtained from the district's Research and Accountability Department. This study was guided by a phenomenological approach, since the researcher sought to describe a person's lived experience to help understand a phenomenon and its meaning (Bevan, 2014; Smith et al., 2022). In-depth interviews were conducted with a group of individuals who had direct experience with a common phenomenon to gather first-hand accounts and perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the phenomenon of interest is the collective lived experiences of school leaders in implementing leadership practices that influence teacher retention. After conducting interviews, the researcher identified common themes through analyzing the responses from principals regarding perceptions of their leadership practices and the influence on teacher retention.

Research Question

This basic qualitative study focused on high school principals with an 85% or higher retention rate in a selected school division in Virginia. The study was guided by the following research question:

How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that influence teacher retention?

Researcher Background

I currently serve as a high school principal in the region where the participants in the study are employed. I was a high school teacher for eight years, an assistant principal for five years and have served as a high school principal for the past nine years at the same high school in a suburban Virginia school division. During this time, I have seen an increase in teacher

shortages in my region and in talking to other leaders across the state of Virginia and beyond, I have become more aware of the importance of teacher retention and have been interested in my role as a principal and how my leadership practices could influence a teacher's decision to stay or go. My positioning as a high school principal within the same region as the study participants allowed for more in-depth conversations about their experiences and perceptions related to teacher retention, as I share a similar professional perspective. While offering valuable insights, this insider knowledge also required a mindful consideration of potential biases and the need for transparency in my research findings.

Paradigms and Assumptions

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), paradigm interpretative frameworks fall into the following categories: post positivism, social constructivism, transformation, and postmodern. As a qualitative researcher, it is imperative to understand how philosophy and theory fit in the research process (Miles & Huberman, 2019). Sutton and Austin (2015) reminded researchers to actively acknowledge their own personal beliefs and assumptions that might influence their study and continuously reflect on these throughout the research process to provide transparency and a deeper understanding for readers about how their perspective shaped the findings. Social constructivism provides an understanding of how a researcher's background shapes their interpretation as they seek to understand the meanings others have about the world (Sutton & Austin, 2015). This brief overview will provide additional context into the qualitative research that was conducted along with the paradigm that is most closely associated with the researcher's

aim and research question. Additionally, justification for this philosophical underpinning will be briefly discussed and explained.

As someone who has worked as a high school principal for nine years, the researcher recognized a need to understand the way in which principals as educational leaders perceive and make meaning of their influence on teacher retention. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative researchers emphasize the importance of acknowledging the beliefs and theories that inform their work, not just intellectually, but also by explicitly writing about them in their research reports. This transparency helps readers understand the researcher's perspective and how it influences their findings. In reviewing the four philosophical assumptions that Creswell and Poth detailed, along with the questions, characteristics and implications for practice, the epistemological assumption is one that resonated with the researcher.

The epistemological assumption examines knowledge and what counts as knowledge, how the claims are justified, and the relationship between the researcher and the topic of study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher made it a priority to prevent personal biases from interfering and it was equally important to rely on quotes from the participants while conducting the in-depth interviews during the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

Limitations refer to the factors and conditions which the researcher cannot control (Patton, 2015). This qualitative research study sought to examine the principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The findings from this study will not be generalizable to other school divisions as the study was conducted in a large suburban school division in Virginia. Additionally, the researcher recognized the potential for bias as a principal in the region where the study was conducted.

Delimitations

Delimitations refer to the factors and conditions of the study which the researcher can control (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Only one school division in Virginia was selected to participate in this study and high school principals with retention rates of 85% or higher were interviewed. The researcher obtained information from the division's Research and Accountability Department to determine high schools in the selected school division with 85% or higher retention rates for the last three years. Once the potential schools were determined, the researcher ensured the same principal had been at the selected schools for the past three years. The study focused on the principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention and did not examine other potential factors.

Research Design

A fundamental belief in basic qualitative research is that the world follows recognizable patterns, and these patterns can be understood and explained (Chenail, 2011; Ellis & Hart, 2023). A basic qualitative research inquiry informed by a phenomenological orientation, particularly in the interview and analysis phase, was selected for this research study since it seeks to describe and interpret the conscious perceptions of a person's lived experience with a particular phenomenon. This research design focuses on investigating questions that are considered significant, either within a particular field or based on the researcher's intellectual curiosity, with the ultimate goal of contributing to theoretical understanding (Chenail, 2011; Patton, 2015).

Basic qualitative approaches can often be mixed with or informed by other qualitative designs (Kahlke, 2014). In the case of this study, the researcher used a phenomenologically informed approach. The marrying of phenomenology with other forms of qualitative research, such as narrative inquiry studies, is also common (Hood, 2016; Lindsay, 2006; Nigar, 2020;

Patterson, 2018). A phenomenologically-informed or phenomenologically-grounded qualitative research approach is one that borrows from phenomenology certain aspects of inquiry (Hood, 2016; Køster & Fernandez, 2023; Williams, 2021). Examples of phenomenologically informed qualitative research can be seen in Todres et al. (2014) study of the relationship between insider perspectives and caring in qualitative research and in Papdimitriou's (2012) study of physical rehabilitation.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) stated that phenomenological research includes in-depth interviews conducted with a group of individuals who have direct experience with a common phenomenon to gather first-hand accounts and perspectives. For this study, the researcher utilized the phenomenological idea of how participants perceive their leadership practices as lived experiences (Jackson et al., 2018), and how participants consciously make meaning of those practices as experiences (Van Manen, 2023). The researcher attempted to understand their perspectives through thick, rich descriptions of their practices and the effect of those practices on teacher retention which is another common feature of phenomenological study (Todres & Holloway, 2004; Willis et al., 2016).

The ways this study as a basic qualitative study differs from phenomenology are also important to consider. For example, the researcher did not try to interpret the cognitive aspects of the phenomenon as school leaders perceive it and instead was more concerned with examining the processes of principal leadership practices as potential means to counter issues of teacher retention (Willis et al., 2016). While the lived experiences characteristic of phenomenology are critical to the inquiry, the data collected may extend beyond the lived experiences of the participants (Van Manen, 2023).

Qualitative research is used when there is a need for a problem or issue to be further investigated and it allows the researcher to hear the voices and stories of individuals to better understand their everyday experiences (Cresswell & Poth, 2018; Smith et al., 2022). A qualitative study approach incorporates several characteristics. First, the goal of the study is to understand the shared experiences of a group of people. Second, the researcher serves as the instrument for data collection and analysis. Third, once the data is collected, it is analyzed inductively which allows the researcher to generate explanations and descriptions to derive meaning from the individuals' everyday experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Using the stated method, the study can help to better explain this phenomenon of the influences of principal leadership practices on teacher retention and its essential meaning (Bevan, 2014; Smith et al., 2022).

A basic qualitative study guided by a phenomenologically oriented approach was selected to allow the researcher to examine, describe, and interpret the leadership practices of principals in a selected school division. A qualitative phenomenological research approach was employed to fully understand the effect of principal leadership practices on teacher retention. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 84% of teachers remained at the same public school during the 2020-21 and 2021-2022 school years so a retention rate of 85% or higher was selected as a criterion for this study. Teacher retention information was obtained from the district's Research and Accountability Department. The school division as well as the schools and participants were chosen through purposeful sampling. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with open ended questions, as interviews are the primary source of data collection within a phenomenological research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

Participants in this study were purposefully selected to gain the most relevant information from varied individual perspectives to further explore the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 2014). Purposeful sampling takes place when the researcher determines the necessary selection criteria and then selects participants from which the most information can be learned (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Patton, 2015). Participants were practicing public high school principals at a selected suburban school division in Virginia who have served in the role for at least three years and have an 85% or higher teacher retention rate. This method of participant selection allowed the researcher to gain insight into one's lived experiences and perceptions which was used to select participants for this qualitative research study (Patton, 2015). The high school principals provided diverse perspectives and perceptions within the school division as they represent a diverse participant pool to include African American, Caucasian, and Hispanic men and women.

The prospective research participants were sent an email requesting their participation in the study. Scholarship on sampling phenomenological studies recommends focusing on three to ten participants considering quality of the interview and data collected over sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Smith et al., 2022). Follow up emails occurred to confirm interest and willingness to participate in the research study, as well as specific details to include the purpose of the study, the time commitment of the participant, and the structure of the interviews that were conducted (Smith et al., 2022). The goal was to conduct six to eight in depth, semi structured interviews with principals. While the researcher is a high school principal, measures such as validity and reliability were included to limit researcher bias. Patton (2015) reminded researchers about the importance of establishing validity in qualitative studies and a

more thorough and detailed discussion about the need to reduce possible bias will be included in the section that includes measures of trustworthiness.

Instrument Design and Validity

Jacob and Ferguson (2012) reminded researchers about the importance of having an interview protocol with procedures to follow to ensure an effective, research-based process is in place. The interview protocol helps to ensure validity and includes the following steps: determine the research questions that will be answered by interviews, use purposeful sampling to identify participants, determine the type of interview that will be used to gain the most useful responses to the research questions, use adequate recording procedures to collect data when conducting interviews, design and use an interview protocol, use pilot testing to refine the interview questions and procedures, decide on a location to conduct the interview, obtain consent from the interviewee to participate in the study, and follow good interview procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

As part of this in-depth data collection process and to provide the researcher with multiple sources of evidence (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the researcher contacted the Research and Accountability department in the selected school district to request a list of high school principals who have been at the same high school for the last three years and have a teacher retention rate of 85% or higher. Smith et al. (2022) asserted that a 45–90-minute session be set aside for the semi-structured interviews to allow the participant time to fully engage in the discussion about their lived experience of the phenomenon. This researcher scheduled 60-90 minute online interviews with the selected principals to gain a deeper understanding of the perceived principal leadership practices that impact teacher retention.

The semi-structured one-on-one interviews began with the researcher establishing rapport with the participant before moving into the structured interview session that promoted an interaction where the interviewer listened and the participant talked (Smith et al., 2022). Effective open ended interview questions afford flexibility to probe and ask follow up questions while also allowing the researcher to elicit descriptive data from the participants to better understand the stories associated with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al., 2022).

The structure for the interviews was modeled after a phenomenological interview method suggested by Bevan (2014) that “enables a researcher to demonstrate consistency, dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness, which is essential for the quality of research” (p. 142). This interview method included the following three domains: contextualization, apprehending the phenomenon, and clarifying the phenomenon. Contextualization allows for questions that are both descriptive and narrative. This type of questioning enables the person to provide context for the experience surrounding the phenomenon and the researcher’s approach is to gain insight into the meaning of the shared experience while accepting the natural attitude of the participants (Bevan, 2014).

Bevan (2014) suggested apprehending the phenomenon as the second phase of a phenomenological interview. In this phase, the researcher begins to ask more detailed questions about the shared experience. The preliminary questions are descriptive in nature followed by structural questions to encourage the participant to expand on the response so the researcher can gain more clarity. Bevan (2014) also explains “descriptive and structural questions provide a basis for maintaining the phenomenological reduction as well as a configuration for examining

and avoiding explanatory questions or premature interpretations on the part of the researcher” (p. 137).

Clarifying the phenomenon is the final phase of the phenomenological structure to the interview process suggested by Bevan (2014). Within this phase, the use of imaginative variation is implemented to explore the phenomenon through elements of experience. By asking these clarifying questions, the researcher is actively listening to make meaning through imaginative variation for descriptive adequacy (Bevan, 2014; Moustakas, 1994). The phenomenological interviews were conducted using the research question to guide the content questions and probing questions included in the Appendix.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) contend that researchers must develop effective open-ended questions to elicit descriptive data from participants about a phenomenon. The questions asked during the semi-structured depth interviews provided the researcher with detailed and thorough rich descriptions of the lived experiences of high school principals leading schools in a time where our country continues to face teacher shortages and exploring ways to increase teacher retention has become a top priority (Shuls & Flores, 2020).

Data Collection

Data collection in this qualitative study included in-depth interviews using open-ended and probing questions with a schedule for semi-structured interviews (Lauterbach, 2018; Moustakas, 1994; Smith et al. 2022). After approval was granted to conduct research in School Division X, this researcher emailed the selected principals and provided them with an explanation of the purpose of the study as well as the topics to be covered in the interview (Smith et al., 2022). Once participants confirmed participation, an interview time was selected that worked best with their schedules. The semi-structured interviews were conducted electronically

and then transcribed. The researcher followed up with some of the participants during the transcription process to ensure the responses were portrayed with accuracy and to elicit any suggested changes that best reflected their perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Grosseohme, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This researcher also maintained a notebook to record significant observations and reflections (Lauterbach, 2018).

Data Management

This researcher completed the CITI training for Basic Social and Behavioral Research. Refer to Appendix X for information regarding the completed training. An application for this research study was approved by Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The participating school division in Virginia then approved of this qualitative study.

The interview transcripts and audio recordings from each participant were reviewed for accuracy before being downloaded on the researcher's password protected computer along with other data obtained for this study. This researcher maintained a computer back-up file in a locked cabinet to which she has sole access. The data will be stored securely and retained for five years after the completion of the study.

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis involves making meaning out of the data by finding common themes and interpreting information from the participants' experiences and perceptions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Successful analysis of the data requires that time be devoted to reflection and discussion (Smith et al., 2022). Giorgi (1985) provided a method for analyzing data in phenomenological approaches to research which includes the following steps for the researcher:

- Become immersed in the data, reading for a sense of the whole.
- Read through the texts identifying common themes and creating codes to identify meaningful units.
- Categorize similar meaning units into categories for the transformation of data.
- Infer and articulate the meanings behind the words of the participants for the synthesis of transformed meaning units.
- Capture the essence of the phenomena of the study through a description of the structure of the experience.

The researcher modeled her analysis of the qualitative data on Giorgi's method using computer programs as recommended by Creswell and Poth (2018) to create a visual representation of the data to assist with organizing the responses into themes associated with the research question. Audio recordings were transcribed using the Zoom feature and the researcher conducted member checks from the participants interviewed to ensure credibility (Creswell, 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Coding is a method that enables researchers to organize and group similar data into categories for detailed analysis (Patton, 2015; Saldaña, 2009). Once interviews for this research study were transcribed, the process of horizontalization was implemented where the researcher read through the interviews multiple times rendering equal value to each participants' statements and then categorizing the statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher began with the themes of shared vision, culture of trust, shared instructional leadership, and safe working conditions (Becker & Grob, 2021). A themes template provided a structure that guided the analysis, influencing the types of themes that might emerge from the data. The lived experiences of the participants became visible as textual description was attached to these themes (Shaw &

Gould, 2001). Common themes were then identified that emerged from principals' perceptions of their leadership practices and the impact on teacher retention as the researcher explored their lived experiences to better understand the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shaw & Gould, 2001).

A thorough analysis of the data will be presented in the findings section of the dissertation. By delineating the core structural elements of the participants' experiences, the research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention. This approach ensured that the essential qualities of these experiences were systematically explored and articulated, aligning with the overarching purpose of the study.

Trustworthiness

Four criteria are used to measure the trustworthiness of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Anney, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To enhance the credibility of this research, the researcher identified an expert panel to review the interview protocols and provide recommendations for improvements prior to interviewing participants (Dinnesen et al., 2020). Once the interviews took place, a member check process was implemented to seek feedback from the participants and to validate the data they provided was accurate (Creswell, 2014; Grosseohme, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Transferability implies that the results of a study can be applied to other contexts. To enhance transferability, the researcher must include detailed descriptions of both the context and the phenomena that is being studied (Patton, 2015; Trochim, 2001). The researcher employed purposeful sampling and shared detailed information from participants during the interviews followed by overall findings of the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By ensuring transferability,

the quality of the research was improved allowing school leaders to apply the results from this study to enhance their own leadership practices and positively impact teacher retention in schools.

Dependability ensures that if the study were to be replicated, the results would be the same (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Anney (2014) recommends a code-recode strategy to enhance dependability. This strategy involves coding the same data twice and allowing for two weeks between each coding. The researcher coded the data using a chosen coding scheme and returned to the data two weeks later to recode it using the same coding scheme. Through incorporating this strategy, the researchers have a deeper understanding of the data patterns that emerge, and the authenticity of participants' responses improves (Anney, 2014).

Trochim (2001) states that confirmability is established when the results of a study can be confirmed by others, and he provides strategies that researchers can implement to enhance confirmability. A data audit was incorporated to fully examine both the data collection as well as the steps taken to analyze the data (Anney, 2014; Saldaña, 2009; Trochim, 2001). Throughout the research process, a reflexive journal was maintained by the researcher to record thoughts and reflections about the phenomenon, identify personal interpretations of the participant's lived experiences, and to address issues of trustworthiness during the interview process (Anney, 2014; Lauterbach, 2018; Patton, 2015). Confirmability was also established as the researcher engaged in phenomenological analysis where the data was clustered into themes and then developed into meanings of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a description of the research design, research questions, study setting, participants, instrument design, data management and analysis, and issues of trustworthiness. A

qualitative methodology with a phenomenological approach was chosen for this study to investigate perceptions and lived experiences of principals leading schools with high teacher retention rates. Virtual interviews with participants were recorded, and the Zoom transcription feature was utilized. The researcher used deductive coding to analyze the data collected to determine common themes. Chapter 4 includes the data analysis and findings of the research. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings and implications for practitioners and future research on the topic of teacher retention.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction

This chapter includes an analysis of the data collected along with the themes and findings of the research found regarding principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how school leaders perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The research question was: How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that influence teacher retention? Participants included six practicing high school principals in a selected suburban school division in Virginia who have served in the role for at least three years and have an 85% or higher teacher retention rate.

A phenomenologically oriented approach was selected for this study to allow the researcher to examine, describe, and interpret the leadership practices of principals in a selected school division and the influence on teacher retention. The school division as well as the schools and participants were chosen through purposeful sampling and semi-structured interviews via Zoom with open ended questions were selected as interviews are the primary source of data collection within a phenomenological research approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Principal Participant and Interview Data

Eight prospective research participants were sent an email requesting their participation in the study. Follow up emails occurred to confirm interest and willingness to participate in the research study, as well as specific details to include the purpose of the study, the time commitment of the participant, and the structure of the interviews to be conducted (Smith et al., 2022). The goal was to conduct six to eight in depth, semi structured interviews with principal. Scholarship on sampling phenomenological studies recommends focusing on three to ten

participants considering quality of the interview and data collected over sample size (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015; Smith et al., 2022). Six principals were available to participate in the study and gave consent.

Once participants confirmed participation, an email was sent with dates and times to determine the interview time that worked best with their schedules. The semi-structured interviews were conducted electronically and then transcribed. Each participant was informed that they would be assigned a pseudonym which is included in the data analysis. A member check process was implemented, and participants were able to verify their transcripts to validate the data they provided was accurate (Creswell, 2014; Grossoehme, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I also maintained a notebook to record significant observations and reflections (Lauterbach, 2018).

Phenomenological interviews were conducted using the research question to guide the content questions included in the interview protocol (Appendix C). The questions asked during the semi-structured in-depth interviews provided detailed and thorough rich descriptions of the lived experiences of high school principals leading schools in a time where our country continues to face teacher shortages. As transcripts were reviewed after each interview, I began an iterative analysis approach to begin to familiarize myself with the data and took notes in my reflexive journal knowing that successful analysis of the data requires that time be devoted to reflection and discussion (Smith et al., 2022). Once interviews were completed, the process of horizontalization was implemented as the interviews were read multiple times to categorize significant statements into themes (Moustakas, 1994). I incorporated Giorgi's approach (1985) to analyze data by reading through the transcripts to identify common themes and created codes to identify meaningful units. Common themes emerged from principals' perceptions of their

leadership practices and the impact on teacher retention as I explored their lived experiences to better understand the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Shaw & Gould, 2001).

Table 1 includes the High School Principal Participant Demographic Data. Of the six participants, three have served as a high school principal for 5-10 years while three have served for 10-15 years. As I focused on the lived experience of each high school principal throughout the interview process, each participant was assigned a pseudonym.

Table 1

High School Principal Participant Demographic Data

Participants		Description
Pseudonym	Gender	Years of Experience as a High School Principal
P1 Andrew	Male	5-10
P2 Amy	Female	10-15
P3 Cary	Male	10-15
P4 William	Male	5-10
P5 Sheldon	Male	10-15
P6 Lee	Female	5-10

Findings

The eight findings align with the conceptual framework selected for this study that was based on Becker and Grob’s (2021) policy brief which highlights four focus areas that principals should consider prioritizing to increase teacher retention: develop a shared vision, create a culture of trust, encourage shared instructional leadership, and promote safe working conditions. Table 2 includes the findings associated with each participant. Participants were current high

school principals in a selected school division with an 85% teacher retention rate over the last three years.

Table 2

Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention

	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Fostering personal connections	X	X	X	X	X	X
Providing mentoring support	X	X	X		X	X
Placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication		X	X	X	X	X
Prioritizing collaborative learning teams	X		X	X	X	X
Encouraging teacher voice		X	X	X	X	X
Focusing on high quality instruction	X	X		X	X	
Protecting time for teachers to manage the workload	X	X		X	X	X
Aligning professional development to school goals	X	X	X	X	X	

All six principals implement the following leadership practice that they perceive as a practice that contributes to high teacher retention rates: fostering personal connections. Five principals perceive that providing mentoring support, placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication, prioritizing collaborative learning teams, encouraging teacher voice, protecting time for teachers to manage the workload, and aligning professional development to school goals has resulted in high teacher retention rates. And four principals noted that focusing on high quality instruction is a leadership practice that positively influences teacher retention.

Finding 1

High school principals perceived fostering personal connections with teachers as an essential leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 1. All six principals highlighted the importance of establishing personal connections with teachers and fostering a sense of belonging. Each

described what they do to establish personal connections with teachers and common themes included daily check-ins, ongoing emotional support, and teacher recognition. Andrew said he makes it a priority to make teachers feel welcome and supported and like other participants, daily check-ins with teachers were highlighted. He shared, “you can die the death of a thousand paper cuts. I try to flip that upside down and just do a thousand small things to let folks know that they’re valued and appreciated.” This includes taking the time to walk around in the morning to say hello to teachers by name, asking about their kids, and knowing what’s important in their life. Andrew said he believed “small things like that, I think matter just as much”. He talked about making it an effort to have daily individual interactions with teachers to make sure they know how much they are valued.

Cary also talked about his intentionality in establishing personal connections with teachers saying, “sometimes it’s just a matter of having daily dialogues with teachers in the hallway and helping them feel part of our school culture.” He talked about his visibility throughout the school during the day and how he emphasizes the importance of this with his assistant principals sharing with them that while it is important to get into classrooms to observe teachers, taking the time to stop and check in with them is equally important.

Another participant, Sheldon, also makes it a priority to get out into halls and classrooms noting that spending time with teachers is one of the most impactful things leaders can do. “One of the most valuable things we can do and most of us can do is simply check in on people without necessarily any agenda.” He went on to say, “we need to allow folks the space to share whatever is on their mind so we can understand what their challenges are and maybe either help them process through them so that the individual can make sense out of something, and we can help them with that challenge, allowing them to process out loud.” He mentioned that sometimes

this might be the validation a person needs to know that someone cared enough about them to stop by and say hello noting that this might be the only thing they needed on that day. He said that sometimes during these check-ins with teachers he finds things out like the there is a need for something like textbooks to provide quality instruction. He said when he can deliver on things like this for teachers, “it’s an easy win for us.” Sheldon continued saying, “I think we get a lot of mileage out of just taking a minute to allow people to check in.”

William mentioned the importance of personal connections and said he often walks around to check in with teachers to make sure he and his administrative team are “supporting them in a way they see and value as support.” Lee also highlighted her visibility throughout the day and said that in addition to making it a priority to stop by to visit teachers in classrooms, she often sends handwritten cards to thank them for something she has noticed them doing that has positively impacted students and sends out a card to a teacher when she knows they are experiencing a challenging time in their life. “I’ve received responses from teachers saying how much this means to them and how much they appreciated receiving the card.” Taking the time to send handwritten cards to staff members was also shared by Andrew when he talked about the ways he fosters a sense of belonging at his school.

Amy’s interview revealed that establishing personal connections with her teachers is a result of her intentionality in creating a school culture that fosters ongoing emotional support. She shared that she has messaged and modeled the “faith, family, friends’ mantra” since becoming a principal. When asked to elaborate on that mantra, she said she emphasizes the importance of having faith in each other and giving one another the benefit of the doubt. She provided further detail in her messaging to teachers by saying she has “faith in you as a staff member, which means when you come to me because there are concerns with family, friends, or

you need personal time, I'm very supportive of that." Amy perceives that her staff feels supported both personally and professionally and that leads to retaining teachers as she works to "make sure they feel that they are really part of this family."

She talked about her training in mental health and school psychology and how she feels like sometimes her job includes being a counselor for teachers. Amy provided an example of her counseling support for teachers when she described her open-door policy and how teachers come to her office for three reasons: "to vent and get something out, to vent and share a possible solution, and to vent because they need an answer and don't have a solution." Amy claimed that,

I think by having an open door, I can pretty much talk teachers through situations. I think about times when teachers have been so down that they are feeling like this [teaching] isn't worth it anymore and I am trying to get them through that and saying, that was really awesome and that will happen again. Let's figure out how to address this because I believe good things can happen again.

Amy discussed a recent situation when a teacher came to her office feeling so down and stressed about something that had happened in her classroom, where the teacher told her that she just didn't know if continuing to work as a teacher was worth it anymore. Amy listened intently, giving the teacher time to share the extent of the situation and to vent about how she was feeling at that moment. Amy then reminded that teacher of the impact she was having on students and gave an example of something she had recently seen while visiting her classroom. Throughout Amy's interview, she exemplified the importance of her "faith, family, friends" mantra and she said there is comfort in knowing that her teachers also believe in this mantra, and she perceives that instilling this sense of belonging has positively influenced teacher retention at her school.

Taking the time to recognize teachers was also shared by some of the participants as a leadership practice that fosters a sense of belonging. Cary discussed the importance of celebrating teachers for the work they do by hosting staff recognition events where he provides a staff meal and highlights some of the great work happening within the school because he wants his teachers to know he cares about them. He said, “I think giving our teachers supports and recognizing them as much as possible for the positive work they do is important and it help them feel like we [administrators] care about them.” Sheldon also shared that he hosts staff socials throughout the school year to provide opportunities for staff to feel connected with one another. Sheldon said the staff socials are open to everyone and serve as touchpoints so create a sense of belong with staff. Since he knows how important it is to retain teachers, he prioritizes connecting with new teachers at these socials to make sure they are feeling a part of the school community.

Lee commented that “despite the challenges teachers face, there are so many positive things happening each day. It is up to us as principals to make sure we highlight those moments and remind teachers that they are valued.” She shared the importance of creating a positive school culture as she continually looks for opportunities to celebrate the wins. When asked to expand on this, Lee gave an example of a recent celebration regarding an award that her school had earned from the Virginia Department of Education and the recognition her school was receiving from the School Board. She reached out to teachers and invited them to be a part of the recognition ceremony and teachers later commented that this really meant a lot to them as well as their families. This data aligns with literature reviewed on effective principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention. Teachers want to stay in schools where the principal is empowering, supportive, communicates effectively, and takes the time to recognize individuals for exemplary work (Hughes & O’Reilly, 2015).

William said he believes teachers stay at his school because they have colleagues that they trust and work well with: “They have a sense of belonging and connection here. And I hope they feel they have a supportive administrative team, and we will continue to foster that.”

William shared a story that highlights the importance of fostering personal connections with staff. He talked about a high performing teacher that left his school for a promotional opportunity and recently accepted a transfer back to his school because of the support she had under his leadership. He expanded more on this story and said,

I think this really illustrates what is especially important for the highest performing teachers and what is most meaningful for them. It’s not the individual kudos or the shiny new objects you can give them. What’s meaningful is a meaningful team, support, and professional learning. And, the feeling like you can have an impact beyond the classroom.

He said another thing he does as a school leader is “foster leadership” and this particular teacher was a founding member of his instructional leadership council and grew immensely in that role, so her next step was to accept a promotional opportunity in the division. She served in that role for a year but told William that she was ready to return to his school. She said, “I miss the school. I miss the support I received there, and I miss the team I worked with.” William said that this example really illustrates what is especially important and meaningful for the highest performing teachers.

The responses from all principals interviewed illuminate the phenomenon of teacher retention and the importance of creating a positive environment where teachers feel a sense of belonging. Each principal gave specific examples of ways they have ensured teachers feel connected and this leadership practice is one that they all perceive to be critically important in

retaining teachers at their schools. While fostering personal connections emerged as a universal priority, principals also emphasized the importance of providing mentoring support to new teachers.

Finding 2

High school principals perceived providing mentoring support to teachers as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 2. Five principals talked about how valuable mentoring is to teachers, particularly novice teachers, and they discussed how they make this a focused priority in their schools. Common themes about the importance of mentoring emerged during the interviews to include support that starts on day one, opportunities to observe best practices, and additional support from the supervising administrator, department chair, and teacher teams.

Sheldon's approach to supporting novice teachers begins before day one. When asked to expand on this thought he said, "there's a communication plan and then there is a logistical plan where we try to make sure a room key, laptop, school shirt, and in this case, the line schedule is communicated early so that we can try to lower anxiety around the preparedness." He referred to this as a lesson plan where he intentionally maps out experiences to increase communication and remove hurdles for new staff before they arrive.

Amy has incorporated a mentoring program since over the years she has noticed the challenges novice teachers face. She stated,

I think for novice teachers, the challenge is assimilating or overcoming the learning curve and I don't necessarily mean the management and the teaching. It's everything – how to put leave in, how to get the gradebook system to work, etc. We throw everything

at them in that first week and they're still trying to figure it out....So, we try to make that 40-ounce steak a six-ounce steak that is purposeful for whatever is coming up next.

She communicates to the mentor that during the first few weeks of school, novice teachers should just focus on that short amount of time and the most important items to know to begin the school year, and the other things can wait.

Lee echoed similar sentiments and discussed how the mentoring program at her school has positively influenced teacher retention over the years. She said, "One thing that is important to me is an effective mentor program, so we make sure we set our teachers up for success on day one by assigning them a strong mentor and providing support throughout the school year."

Sheldon also assigns novice teachers a mentor as part of the standard protocol in the school division and this supports literature reviewed prior to the study. Teachers stay in the profession when provided with opportunities to participate in teacher mentor or induction programs (Garcia & Weiss, 2020; Reitman & Karge, 2019; Shuls & Flores, 2020). He noted,

We show adequate attention to our new staff until they are up and running and are no longer new staff. And then we try to support our experienced staff so that they're not overwhelmed and feel like they've got the resources they need.

Cary also conveyed the importance of a mentoring program to support teachers noting that teacher retention is dependent upon a solid mentorship program and a focus on relationship building. He shared,

We have a solid mentoring program with the teachers that have been consistently working with the group of [novice] teachers over the years. They're very meticulous in meeting every month and I believe if the first-year [mentoring] exposure for new teachers is good, it is a positive year.

Principals also talked about ways they provide novice teachers with opportunities to observe best practices. Cary shared that his lead mentor does demonstration lessons for new teachers to provide an additional layer of support. During these demonstration lessons, mentees have an opportunity to ask questions about how to effectively introduce a lesson as well as how to overcome challenges if students struggle. Cary perceives that his strong and effective mentoring program is one of the reasons his teacher retention rate is consistently over 85%.

In recent years, as retaining teachers has become a focus in her division, Lee has incorporated peer observation opportunities where novice teachers observe strong veteran teachers. Time is then allocated for the novice teachers to reflect on the lesson and collaborate with their mentor about takeaways and ideas they might consider for their own classrooms. The mentor then follows up several weeks later to informally observe the novice teacher to provide non-evaluative feedback and note any strategies that were implemented after observing the veteran teacher. These data align with current literature on the importance of a strong mentoring program. Resources to support teachers include collaborative relationships as well as peer mentorship (Kaiser & Thompson, 2021). Lee asserted that,

As a leader, placing an intentional focus on our mentoring program and making sure we are getting teachers out there to observe other classrooms is probably one of the most impactful things that I've done to increase teacher retention because it makes teachers instructionally stronger, and it shows that we are supporting them.

She shared that each year she follows up with first year teachers at the end of the school year to ask about what experiences in the mentor program they found most beneficial, and the peer observation opportunity is always talked about more than any other support. When asked to expand on that thought Lee said,

Teachers said the opportunity to observe veteran teachers working with the same students they had in class allowed them to see what instructional strategies were most effective in increasing student engagement. In fact, a couple of them commented that when they began to implement some of these strategies, they found classroom behavior improved.

Cary's lead mentor is also a department chair, and he talked about how she "works really hard at trying to provide information to new staff to the building and staff new to teaching." Cary noted that in addition to supporting the first-year teachers, his lead mentor also checks in with second- and third-year teachers to see how they are doing and offer any help if needed which aligns with a study conducted by Reitman and Karge (2019) which revealed the importance of support for new teachers that began on day one and continued until the educator demonstrated proficiency. Although the lead mentor knows that staff with one to two years' experience don't qualify for a paid mentor according to the division requirements, she advocates for an assigned mentor if she finds that a teacher who recently transferred to the school is struggling and Cary supports her with these requests. He said he believes that if teachers have a positive first year at this school, then they will most likely stay for another year.

Sheldon also discussed how he leans on his department chairs to provide support to novice teachers. He stated, "We ask our department chair to be part of that process [mentoring] because some of them are as strong as anybody else in the division." During monthly mentor meetings, the lead mentors bring common themes to discuss and then provide support to the novice teachers accordingly. In addition to the support from an assigned mentor and the department chair, Sheldon and the supervising administrator go into every classroom of every new teacher in the first three weeks of school. He mentioned sometimes he or the supervising

administrator note a classroom management issue when visiting a classroom and by noticing the issue early in the year, they can help to resolve the challenge the teacher is facing. He went on to say, “Without fail, you must find out what’s happening in the classrooms and then get in again within the next month.” Sheldon perceives this to be an effective practice that positively influences teacher retention because it promotes a two-way dialogue to support the novice teacher in what’s working and what isn’t working. Amy also shared that in addition to the assigned mentor, she makes sure teachers know that she and the supervising administrator are also available to provide mentorship which she perceived is the reason why so many teachers feel comfortable visiting with her throughout the school year.

Finally, Sheldon talked about how intentional he is with assigning classrooms to new teachers as an additional layer of support when he said, “One of the best things I can do for a new teacher is put them in a classroom next to a really strong teacher.” He shared that this has helped him develop a quality workforce over the years with a strong focus on instruction.

While Andrew didn’t speak specifically about a mentor being assigned to support a new teacher, he perceives his collaborative learning teams [teacher teams] as the mentoring program at his school. He said he believes the support from a team of teachers has created a culture at his school where teachers know they have several people to turn to when they have questions or just need guidance. Andrew elaborated saying, “I talk to teachers who are new to teaching and teachers who are new to our building” and the support teachers receive from their teacher teams is what they find to be one of the biggest things that has made their transition to his school so seamless.

As the high school principals shared their lived experiences pertaining to supporting novice teachers, it highlighted the importance of strong mentoring programs in schools. Amy,

Cary, Lee, and Sheldon specifically referred to a mentor program where a veteran teacher is assigned to a novice teacher to provide ongoing support during the school year. However, Andrew's responses regarding mentoring illustrated new understanding for me as a researcher as I realized that for him, "mentoring" is synonymous with "supporting" and in his school, teacher teams satisfy this need. In addition to placing an importance on mentoring support for teachers, principals also prioritized schoolwide communication in their schools.

Finding 3

High school principals perceived placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication to teachers as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 3. Five principals talked about the emphasis they place on schoolwide communication through various avenues to include faculty meetings, newsletters, and through the evaluation process. Amy shares the school's vision for the school year before teachers are even required to report back to work. When asked to clarify she said, 'we offer an open training before the work week where we invite everyone [staff] to come even though it is not required, and we usually have 80-90% of the staff here.' At this meeting each year she shares the division priorities as well as the focus areas for the school based on student performance data and noted that "it's sort of a marriage of what we need to be able to do for our kids and what the division is sharing with us."

Like Amy, Lee opens the school year with a faculty meeting that includes information about school goals met the previous year, data to support goals for the current school year, as well as the division objectives. William described how he ensures that his administrative team is consistent in sharing a similar vision with staff for what their priorities are in terms of safety and learning. As a team, William and the administrators take the time to discuss school focus areas

before school starts and how they will work together to ensure their vision is a consistent message to staff throughout the year. This supports findings by Grissom et al. (2021) about leadership practices that can positively impact a school to include placing an intentional focus on interactions with teachers that are instructionally focused.

Cary talked about faculty meetings at his school and how he uses this time to share information about school goals and progress being made. Cary articulated that by having staff sharing instructional strategies with their peers at a faculty meeting, “it doesn’t come across as top down since we are having our in-house people [teachers] share their insights. Cary also incorporates time during faculty meetings to recognize staff. Cary explained,

We recognize staff during faculty meetings when we’ve seen good things going on. We ask teachers to share something that we saw happening in their class to include how they made it happen; the positives and some areas they have reflected on and would make changes on in the future.

He said he has gotten positive feedback from staff about the structure of his faculty meetings. Lee said that she takes the time during this faculty meeting and others throughout the year to highlight the successes and celebrate the wins. She noted the positive feedback she has received from staff over the years about her communication style and the focus on staff recognition that is ongoing which aligns with research on the ways principals can improve working conditions for teachers by taking the time to recognize them for their accomplishments (Burkhauser, 2017; Castro, 2023).

While William did not speak specifically about faculty meetings, he mentioned the importance of recognizing staff for the positive work they are doing. He clarified this by saying “just being present, validating individuals who are working hard, and encouraging them to

continue so they can see and understand the impact they're having. I think all those things really make an impact for folks feeling satisfied and wanting to continue to work hard every day."

Amy shared that schoolwide communication also includes the times when she is vulnerable with her staff and realizes that a leadership decision she made might not have been the right one. She recalled an instance last Fall where she knew she should've handled something differently and she stood before her staff and said, "the buck stops here, and I apologize. Here is that it means for me and here is what it means for you. If you have any questions, ask them now or come talk to me." After the faculty meeting, she shared that teachers came up to her and said they had always respected her, but this took things to a new level. She realized at that point how much her honesty and vulnerability meant to teachers.

Hughes and O'Reilly (2015) found that teachers want to stay in schools where the principal is empowering, supportive, communicates effectively, and takes the time to recognize individuals for exemplary work. Cary said, "as I tell teachers, we don't have the perfect answer for everything. And what's going to work in one class is not necessarily going to work in another class, but it doesn't mean you give up trying." Cary and Amy's responses during the interview illustrated their perceptions of not only their communication skills as a leader but also their comfort around being vulnerable, both lending to the notion that they perceive teachers value these traits in a leader.

Cary also discussed his focus on schoolwide communication to include a weekly newsletter for staff. His "tech tips newsletter" includes common issues with technology that he has heard from teachers. He works with the teacher who supports technology in the building to create a toolkit for teachers and in addition to these newsletters, the tech teacher offers open lab hours throughout the day so that teachers can stop by for assistance and help on any tech issues

they might be encountering. Lee also stated, “I send out a weekly newsletter that includes current focus areas for our school, priorities for the week, and answers to common questions that have been asked by teachers and other staff members.”

William shared that “the number one thing I can do is communicate well and to be calm and consistent for staff to know that there’s consistency and that when they need to know something, they can count on me that I will have communicated it with them.” He went on to say, “they [staff] know what they’re going to get with me, that I’m not reactive or reactionary so that gives them a sense of safety at working dealing with the administrative team.”

Lee, Sheldon and William all talked about their communication with teachers which includes feedback they have normed as an admin team to ensure they are sending a consistent message to teachers after observing classrooms and they perceive this to be leadership practice that has led to increased teacher retention at their schools. Sheldon noted that teachers new to his building have said, “I’m actually being observed now and I’m getting feedback after the observation process and/or during the evaluation process.” He said this led him to believe that teachers with experience at other schools had not had strong reflective/evaluative experiences with their supervisors in the past and he and his administrative team are “trying to do authentic work around feedback and evaluation.”

Each of the five principals who perceive schoolwide communication as an effective leadership practice influencing teacher retention talked about their intentionality with how and when they communicate as well as the focus on highlighting teachers for the great work they are doing. While these revelations did not come as a surprise to me as the researcher, it did illuminate the importance of communication by principals that is both ongoing and positive. Whereas schoolwide communication was perceived by principals as an effective leadership

practice influencing teacher retention, an emphasis was also placed on encouraging collaboration amongst teacher teams in school.

Finding 4

High school principals perceived prioritizing collaborative learning teams as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 4. Five principals prioritized collaborating learning teams as a leadership practice they perceive influences teacher retention. Principals mentioned allocating time during the day for collaborative teams to meet, the impact on student academic progress, and the importance of support from administrators.

Andrew has created a schedule that allows for built in time during the school day for teacher teams to meet and plan together, discuss student progress, and share ideas. He noted that, When I talk to our new teachers, they mentioned that one of the biggest things they really appreciate is they get to learn from each other and have questions answered without having to ask them. These are misunderstandings or things that in dark alleys we didn't talk about as teachers, but now our teacher teams can have these conversations out in the open and by design.

Andrew followed up by saying that when he has talked to new teachers and teachers new to the building, what has helped them the most is this dedicated time each week to come together with their collaborative learning teams. Cary said that it has been important for him to dedicate this time each day for teacher teams to meet and that teachers have found this practice supportive.

William also prioritizes collaborative learning teams at his school and perceives this to be a practice that his staff finds most supportive. During a staff professional workday, he allots time for teacher teams to collaborate, plan, and discuss student data.

Lee discussed her view on collaborative learning teams and how in recent years, she has made this a focused priority and as a result, she has seen an increase in student academic performance. She stated,

By giving collaborative learning teams time to meet during the school day, we are seeing teams that were historically struggling come together. The student outcomes are improving in these teams when we make sure we are intentionally devoting time to supporting teachers as they reflect, discuss best practices, and review student data.

Andrew shared “it’s just that concentrated time to work together that I think it really has an impact [on student academic progress]. They [teachers] feel more satisfied because they build those relationships with their colleagues and their teams.” He went on to say, “one of the biggest things I’ve done to try to kind of build some momentum behind teachers wanting to stick around has been really committing and implanting our PLC [professional learning community] process throughout the building.” When asked to expand on that thought, Andrew shared that “I’m not expecting any one teacher to have everything figured out with regards to best practices for curriculum, classroom management, differentiation, and assessment practices. Instead, we really lean on the collective genius of our teacher teams.” This confirms Grissom et al.’s research (2021) that found successful schools led by effective principals encourage collaboration to include a focus on professional learning communities and common planning time for teachers.

Cary also noted that they have seen an increase in student performance data at his school since establishing a focus on collaborative learning teams. His administrators meet with the collaborative learning teams on a consistent basis and are purposeful in the data discussions while discussing student performance in class and how each teacher will incorporate the ideas shared during class lessons. He went on to say, “and we [administrators] are also talking with

them [teachers] when we meet with them to provide feedback after an observation. We ask how they purposefully planned their lessons with their collaborative learning teams and what they will do as a team to keep moving forward.” This supports Shuls and Flores’ (2020) findings that state teacher retention increases when there is evidence of shared instructional leadership.

William stated that because of focusing on creating effective teacher teams at his school they have seen students learning at a higher rate and test scores have increased. In fact, during the interview, William spoke about John Hattie noting that “collective efficacy has the highest effective size.” He went on to say that “when you have a group of people who believe they can do it, that they can accomplish a task at a high level, that usually means they will function at a higher level and have a higher impact.” William perceives that placing an intentional focus on prioritizing collaborative learning teams results in highly effective teachers and he believes without them, “we’re not going to be able to implement any change or develop the organization [school] over time.”

Sheldon shared that over the years, he has made it a priority to develop high functioning collaborative learning teams, and he perceives this as a leadership practice that has positively influenced teacher retention at his school. He said that by the time he was in year five, six and seven of the principalship, retention rates dropped. He went on to say that he can’t say for certain what the change was but in recent years, “it was kind of a refinement, not just my skill set but growth of my administrative team and their approach along with the higher functioning CLTs [collaborative learning teams] that has developed over the years.” He talked in more depth about the development of his administrative team and their leadership approach with supporting teacher teams and how he has seen his teachers become stronger educators as a result. “I think

there was greater clarity of purpose and perhaps greater satisfaction in the workplace.” For novice teachers, Sheldon said,

I think the strongest support we [administrators] can give them [novice teachers] is curriculum support whether that is through a collaboration learning team or other systems and mechanisms that allow them to have access to assessments. It could be a lab idea, a literacy-based class assignment or long-range planning documents. Whatever it is, the more we can support teachers through a curriculum lens the better off they are.

Lee also ensures the supervising administrator attends some of the collaborative team meetings at her school and offers professional development opportunities when areas of concern are brought up by the teachers. This professional development is often provided by central office and “supports the team by meeting them where they are and offering resources, they might not have been aware of.” When asked to expand more on this idea, Lee shared a time when Central Office staff came to her school to support a collaborative learning team that was struggling with establishing common norms and expectations and this led to frustration and each member of the team doing something different. Student academic progress in this subject area became stagnant as a result. Through ongoing support from Central Office, the collaborative learning team was able to overcome obstacles and began working in unison which led to improved student outcomes.

The responses from the principals who perceived prioritizing collaborative learning teams as a practice that influences teacher retention brought to light the impact this has on student academic performance. Additionally, each principal noted the correlation between effective teacher teams and student academic progress while also mentioning the support teachers have from one another as well as their administrator during this dedicated time built into the school

day. In addition to prioritizing collaborative learning teams, principals highlighted the importance of promoting teacher voice in schools.

Finding 5

High school principals perceived encouraging teacher voice as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 5. Four principals discussed ways they encourage teacher voice in their schools by reviewing survey results and seeking input from department chairs as well as other teacher leaders. Lee mentioned that she sends staff surveys about possible ideas to encourage and support teacher voice. She and administrators then review the survey results to determine the next steps. Sheldon reviews the annual division survey results to capture teacher voice and looks for themes and trends he and his administrative team need to consider addressing. He elaborated by sharing two examples of how he encouraged teacher voice and input before making a school wide decision regarding a bell schedule change and with assessments and how they would be represented in the gradebook. He said, “we had a committee approach to dialogue where everybody that was interested in providing input was invited to attend.”

When decisions need to be made that will impact the entire building or the community, Sheldon first surveys department chairs, then creates a survey committee to come up with guidance documents that go back to the department chairs for input before being sent out schoolwide. He did say that it can be “painfully slow in some cases to measure in the deployment” recalling a two-year process to a change that was made with the bell schedule but that involving all stakeholders in the decision process resulted in a positive outcome. He said

when it comes to these decisions that are made, “in the end, there are not surprises and that has been important to us.”

Sheldon and others talked about the importance of seeking feedback from department chairs since they often represent the voices of their departments. When considering potential solutions to the challenges the teachers have shared, he discussed these challenges with department chairs to get their input. He clarified this idea by saying, ‘we use our department chairs as conduits between school leadership and departments.’ To expand further on this thought he shared the following,

We [administrators] try to narrow down the options for a few that are feasible and then we’ll go to the department chairs with some of the dialogue that we’ve had and share what’s been discussed and then ask them to weigh in. We then give them a grace period of a day or two to come back to us with feedback.

Cary discussed the ongoing meetings he has with department chairs and how he really leans on them to bring the voices of their department to the forefront. He shared, “We [administrators] meet with the instructional leaders every two weeks and seek their input. We share an idea and ask them to meet with their departments to give us feedback before a decision is made.”

Like Sheldon and Cary, Lee talked about how she shares ideas with department chairs to elicit input before making a schoolwide decision. Lee noted that, ‘department chairs understand the importance of getting feedback from teachers within their departments and then bring these ideas, concerns, and solutions to the department chair meetings so that decisions can be made that will positively impact the school community.’ She also mentioned that over the years she has created a culture where teachers know her door is always open and if they feel strongly about something, they are encouraged to come and speak to her about it. She gave a recent example

where a veteran teacher came to her to say that she was concerned that so much attention was being focused on the students who were behind academically, needing additional support. She recalled that years ago, Lee had more celebrations for students throughout the year who were doing great things academically and behaviorally. Lee said she reflected and realized the teacher was correct in her analysis. Lee then worked with her administrative team to establish an event the next month to celebrate students who were performing well academically. She not only received positive feedback from students and teachers, but also from parents.

William shared that he has created an instructional leadership council comprised of teachers from various departments and he ensures they have a voice in decision making. He said the goal of the instructional leadership council is to help develop teacher leaders “who then go out and be a voice for implementing instructional strategies in their own CLTs [collaborative learning teams] and in their departments.” In addition to seeing input from teacher leaders, William also incorporates other avenues for teacher voice to be heard to include “just walking around and talking to people, especially knowing who I can trust to give me very honest and balanced feedback as well as input.” He mentioned that a lot of the staff members at his school have been working there longer than him as well as most of his administrative team, so they have institutional knowledge that is critically important for him consider before making a schoolwide decision. In fact, he noted that some of the staff members who have been at his school for close to 30 years are retiring at the end of this school year so that does concern him a bit since their input has been so valuable to him. He clarified this point saying, “it is important to reach out and understand that institutional knowledge, what’s worked, what hasn’t, and why not.” This aligns with Grissom et al.’s (2021) findings that state principals foster a culture of trust by encouraging collaboration with teachers.

Cary also talked about hearing from the informal teacher leaders at this school stating that, “there are people that will not step up and lead because they don’t want the title, but they can help get the information you are looking for as a leader and then help convey the message.” He went on to say, “there are some people that come directly to me with feedback, and I also approach others in the hallways to get their feedback since it’s also important for me to hear from the informal leaders.” He recalled a course he took in college where the professor talked about “informal leaders that sometimes wind up ostracizing people from participating but can help get you more information as long as you keep them close.” Cary summarized this example by saying as the school principal, he gets a good pulse on the views of the staff by hearing from the informal leaders at this school. The importance of teacher voice was also highlighted in a study by Allensworth et al. (2009) who examined teacher retention and found that when inclusive leadership is in place, teachers stay because they feel as though they are partners and have a say in their work environment.

As the principals shared their lived experiences and the ways they encourage teacher voice, it illuminated the intentionality these four principals place on getting input from all teachers, not just those in leadership roles. William’s comments about the ways he encourages teacher voice from veteran teachers informed new understanding. The importance of institutional knowledge and listening to the voices of staff members who have been in the school longer than him is a concept that would benefit all principals, especially those who have staff members with over 20 years’ experience still teaching at the school. While encouraging teacher voice emerged as a significant leadership practice, principals also emphasized an importance on high quality instruction for students.

Finding 6

High school principals perceived focusing on high quality instruction as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 6. Four principals discussed their focus on high quality instruction to drive student outcomes. Principals discussed the growth producing feedback they provide to teachers as well as professional development opportunities and support from administrators and teachers leaders to support student academic progress. Andrew shared that he has taken a tier one approach to teaching and learning and looks for ways teachers can “make sure that first time instruction is as powerful and impactful as possible.” He said back when he was a teacher, students would often stay after school for academic assistance if they needed it but nowadays, students and teachers are ready to leave after school. When visiting classrooms, he also makes sure the feedback he and his administrative team provide is aligned with tier one instructional strategies to include resources and supports for teachers. To expand further on this idea, Andrew stated,

We norm our practices as an admin team. We look at our observation feedback and then provide each other with feedback as we look to see if the feedback we have provided the teacher is descriptive and growth producing. We also do shared observations regularly to see if we are seeing the same thing as another way to norm our practices.

Andrew said this has been important for his team so that he can “build their capacity [as instructional leaders] and build their ability to provide growth producing feedback to teachers.” Allensworth et al.’s (2009) research revealed that teachers stayed when they viewed the principal as a strong instructional leader, and this aligns with survey results Andrew received from his staff indicating that they view him as a strong instructional leader. When asked to elaborate on

examples, he discussed that he realized his teacher teams struggled with data dialogues based on ratings from the rubrics teams were asked to complete. He said, “teacher teams revealed that data dialogues weren’t happening consistently.” Andrew then took this information that was directly shared by his teachers as an area in need of improvement and planned out professional development around data dialogues. He stood before his teachers at a faculty meeting and said, “here is what your data and feedback revealed and based on that, we are providing professional development because it is targeted on the things you said you needed as teachers.” He went on to say he has received positive feedback as a result of this transparency, and he perceives his work as an instructional leader focusing on growing his administrators and teachers is a leadership practice that positively influences retention at his school.

Amy also shared that her survey results indicate staff view her as a strong instructional leader. When asked to talk more about this, she shared that she implemented a schoolwide professional development focus around improving writing and speaking which aligns with findings by Grissom et al. (2021) that highlighted the importance of ensuring teachers are provided with relevant professional development opportunities in schools to drive student outcomes. A teacher recently approached Amy and shared that she had seen a huge increase in the written responses from students after implementing the strategies she had learned. Amy commented that she thinks “the feedback comes from me more when I actually see that they [teachers] are making the connection between the professional development we are providing them and how they can incorporate these same strategies with their students.”

Amy also described a time when a teacher came to her last year worried about her students’ reading and science skills. She collaborated with the teacher about strategies the teacher could consider implementing in the classroom and they talked through some ideas which

the teacher then implemented and later shared that the strategies had been effective. As Amy reflected about that situation, she said, “I think the feedback comes when I actually see that they’re [teachers] making the connection between what we’re [administrators] doing with them and what they could be doing with students.” She recalled this as being validation that she is having a positive impact at her school because of her instructional leadership.

William discussed the importance of continuous improvement planning and said, “we make sure if we are going to put time and energy into professional learning that it’s with high quality, meaning it’s effective and not a waste of time.” He said that as an administration team, they ask themselves what two things they need to focus on based on student performance data and then they give teachers support in these areas. He stated, “I think one of the practices our staff find most supportive is that when we have professional development, we spend probably twice as much time with follow up support.” When asked to expand on that thought, he talked about establishing a CLT [collaborative learning team] professional day to provide teacher teams time to talk about the instructional strategies they learned about in the professional development session and in this case, it was ways to increase student engagement in the classroom. The teacher teams then had time to work together to “update their unit plans and update their tasks or tweak them to make sure those conversations are happening in class.” He said teachers have told him they have found this to be supportive and that it helps them in their practice. William went on to say that “when you have a highly functional or effective team, it also affects teacher retention.”

William also shared that he has noticed that while novice teachers often say that their challenge is student behavior, he helps them to realize that “the best remedy to classroom management problems is a good lesson plan that is going to be engaging and keeps students on

task.” He then works with his administrators and department chairs to make sure these teachers are supported. He talked about the importance of “getting to the real root cause of what every teacher needs because it is going to be different”, noting that every new teacher has different strengths, weaknesses, or areas for growth.” William perceives that his strength as an instructional leader is a leadership practice that has positively influenced teacher retention at his school.

Like Andrew, Amy, and William, Sheldon also noted that the annual survey results indicate his staff view him as a strong instructional leader. Sheldon discussed the work he and his administrators have done around literacy. He talked about the baseline data at his school that shows student reading proficiency could be higher and that “for some students, it is going to be the gateway to performing at a higher level on external assessments.” Sheldon then shared how he and his leadership team have created a core toolbox of tools for teachers focused on literacy and how he incorporates this focus during the professional development that happens before the school year starts and during the faculty led professional development opportunities that take place throughout the year. Additionally, Sheldon shared that his work as an instructional leader expands to the teacher leadership at his school. He said that he has given a couple of teachers a period of release time “so they can serve as instructional coaches as reading instructors or specialists because “they’ve got a decade of sound practice in the assessment space to drive forward some of these goals [literacy based]”.

In the literature reviewed prior to this study, Becker and Grob (2021) highlighted the importance of collaborative leadership resulting in staff members committed to the school goals which aligns with this finding. The principals who perceived focusing on high quality instruction as a leadership practice that influences teacher retention were all intentional in their efforts to

make sure teachers were not only provided with professional development to support high quality instruction but also received support from their administrators, peers, and teacher leaders to implement the strategies learned. While principals prioritized high quality instruction in their schools, an emphasis was also placed on allocating time during the workday for teachers to plan and collaborate.

Finding 7

High school principals perceived protecting time for teachers to manage their workload as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 7. Five principals talked about ways they protect time for teachers to manage their workload by providing dedicated time during the school day for teacher teams to collaborate and engage in professional development opportunities. Andrew shared that he has worked with his administration team to allocate time for his teacher teams to meet during the school day instead of after school. He said, “we make a big deal out of manipulating our master schedule to have that time built into the school day so that we’re not asking teachers to choose between things like childcare responsibilities or meeting with their teams.” He went on to talk about how he has made it a priority to protect that time for teachers since planning and collaborating with others to meet the needs of students is so important. He went on to say he doesn’t assign teachers a duty period, instead “we really protect that time to try to reinforce the idea that it’s [collaborative learning teams] a critical component to being an educator at our school.” In addition to supporting teachers through creating time in the workday for teacher teams to meet, Andrew also perceives that this leadership practice positively impacts student academic performance. He said he has seen an increase in student performance on state

assessments, noting that “our data reflects that it’s creating a more rigorous, consistent, and comprehensive experience for our kids.”

Amy talked about getting to know her teachers on a personal level and reinforcing the idea that she is there to support them as their instructional leader. She discussed the increase in workload for teachers since becoming principal over ten years ago and the conversations she has had with individuals to help them manage everything that needs to get done in a day. She shared an example when a teacher came to her very frustrated with a long list of things she needed to accomplish within a few days, and she didn’t know how she would get it all done. Amy saw the frustration and offered to give the teacher a professional day to get caught up and said she would hire a substitute teacher for that day. She said the teacher was later heard talking to a peer and mentioned how supportive their principal had been. Amy said, “they [teachers] see I’m trying to do everything I can to help them be successful.” She paused for a moment, reflecting on that experience and said that “when you’re reasonable and fair, people want to stay…”

William shared a similar example when he discussed how he helps teachers manage the workload. While prioritizing collaborative learning teams at his school, he knows that they often need uninterrupted time to refine their instructional practices as a team to continue meeting the needs of students. He talked about the importance of dedicated planning time during the school day and “just not having enough time in the day to have those kinds of conversations, even in a weekly CLT meeting”. He commented that in a time where teachers are tasked with so many things to do, he takes the time to remind them of what their highest priorities are by allocating time for them to meet with their teacher teams during the school day, and this helps them implement instructional strategies at a high level and work more effectively as a team. William

said he perceives protecting time for teachers to manage their workload is a leadership practice that has led to high retention rates at his school over the years.

Like Cary, Lee talked about ways she protects time for teachers to manage their workload to include offering professional days with uninterrupted time for collaborative learning teams to meet and for teachers to catch up on whatever they need time to do. She also mentioned looking at the demands coming down from the division and figuring out how she can incorporate those demands into what teachers are already responsible for doing. She reflected on these ideas and said, “I think any opportunity we have to give teachers time is something that is valued.” Lee also discussed the time she allocates for novice teachers to not only observe veteran teachers but then have reflective conferences with their administrators so that together they can talk about some practices the novice teacher can incorporate in their own classroom. This intentional focus on allocating time for relevant professional development learning opportunities was highlighted in a study by Castaneda and Varela (2022) and noted as a leadership practice that positively influences teacher retention. Lee said this practice is one that teachers have found to be valuable in helping them grow as educators and administrators have noticed the growth when going into classrooms to conduct observations.

Sheldon discussed the increase in workload for teachers in recent years to include the professional development requirements for teachers that come from the central office level as well as the school-based initiatives that require dedicated time. He stated,

My job as the principal is to champion what we are working towards as a school division, and I try to send the message that together we can do this. I spend a lot of time repackaging some of the central office requirements with the initiatives we have in our continuous improvement plan.

Sheldon mentioned that instead of trying to communicate both requirements, he folds them into one and teachers find this more manageable which aligns with research on teacher retention and ways principals can improve working conditions for teachers to include allocating time for the work that needs to be done (Burkhauser, 2017; Castro, 2023). Additionally, most professional development offerings at Sheldon’s school are optional. “He said, “we try not to make professional development a mandate because I want people to feel as though they have the time and therefore the willingness to try new things.” He said he has had positive feedback from teachers because of this.

As the principals shared their lived experiences and the meaning they make out of these experiences, it was enlightening to hear the focused efforts in protecting time for teachers to manage their workload. While Andrew, William, and Lee shared examples of ways they protect time during the school day for teacher teams to meet and collaborate, Sheldon’s comments about ways he helps teachers manage the workload were enlightening and is a leadership practice other principals should consider. His suggestion about “repackaging some of the central office requirements with the initiatives we have in our continuous improvement plan” and making the professional development options optional resonated with me as the researcher since he was the only principal who mentioned these ideas, and both lead to added responsibilities for teachers. In addition to protecting time for teachers to manage their workload, principals highlighted the importance of providing professional development that supports the school vision and priorities.

Finding 8

High school principals perceived aligning professional development to school goals as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention.

Analysis to Support Finding 8. Five principals purposefully align professional development to school goals based on teacher input and student performance data. Andrew had his teachers complete a self-assessment to determine their level of knowledge and expertise with collaborative learning teams. He was able to get feedback from 200 teachers and 50 collaborative learning teams. The feedback revealed that professional development was needed in this area, especially with data dialogues since that was consistently a low rating. Andrew took this feedback and worked with his leadership team to plan professional development according to what teachers said they needed and aligned it with their school goals. Grissom et al. (2021) found that effective principals promote shared instructional leadership that includes a focus on improving instructional practices while closely monitoring school goals and using data to make schoolwide decisions. Andrew said he was able to go back to his teachers after reviewing their feedback and say, “Here is what your data and feedback said and based on that, here is the professional development we are providing.” He commented that he had buy in from his teachers since he was basing the professional development on what they said they needed and as a result, he has already witnessed growth in this area when he has looked at his overall school data.

Amy described the professional development her teachers had engaged in this year and said it was directly tied to their continuous improvement plan. She said, “our professional development was really a marriage of what our data showed we needed to be able to do for our students and what the division was sharing with us.” She noted that she is intentional in making sure the professional development fits the needs of her students and also reflects what her teachers have told her they need. When she introduced the professional development plan at the beginning of the school year she told the teachers that when she “came around and talked to you at the end of the year, you said you needed...” She said the teachers then commented saying,

“yes, that’s pretty much what we said.” As a result of the professional development her school has engaged in this year, she said that just recently teachers were telling her that they had seen a significant increase in the writing prompt responses from the first attempt to the second one.

Cary also discussed how he has aligned professional development opportunities for teachers with their continuous improvement goals and how he and his team then provide feedback to teachers based on the priorities and goals. He talked about going “into classrooms with our trend tracker to see specifically what’s going on and we are intentional in the feedback we can then give to teachers.” This aligns with research on teacher retention by Rodgers and Skelton (2014) that places an importance on providing teachers with research-based strategies to support improved instructional practices in the classroom. Cary said he has had positive responses from teachers since the professional development opportunities support the school goals and the feedback they are receiving is directly tied to this.

William had similar sentiments and said, “I think it all starts with continuous improvement planning and really knowing what our goals are and making sure our school-based professional learning is aligned to that.” He said he is intentional in making sure that if teachers are putting time and energy into professional learning that it’s high quality and effective. He went on to say, “knowing we have a limited amount of time, we ask ourselves, what are the one or two things we want to focus on? We then give teachers time and support to do that.”

Sheldon also talked about the importance of professional development and said, “we’ve been intentional to make sure our professional development is aligned with the goals we’ve set for our continuous improvement as an organization.” He discussed the work his teachers have done around literacy after looking at baseline data and reviewing students’ reading proficiency levels. He noted that for many students improving their reading proficiency is going to be the

gateway to performing at higher levels. He said, “when we subscribe to professional development, we make sure there is a component of that literacy work in the PD before school starts and, in the faculty led PD throughout the year. We try to align it all.”

While principals were specific on their responses about how they align professional development to school goals, Andrew and Amy also shared how they also incorporate feedback from teachers when determining professional development opportunities. This provided new understanding and aligned with Finding 5 that also places an emphasis on encouraging teacher voice and should be considered an important leadership practice for principals to implement to include teacher retention.

The Meaning of It All

As I focused on the lived experience of each high school principal, it became evident that the high retention rates at their schools are a direct result of their intentional focus in creating a positive school culture where teachers want to stay. Each finding was supported by literature and quotes around themes from participants’ lived experiences to honor their voices and strengthen the credibility of this study. Participant interviews revealed insightful commentary into how each high school principal truly perceives and experiences leadership.

Andrew reflected on his time in the classroom noting that it has been almost 20 years since he was a teacher, and he realizes that teachers now have so many more responsibilities to include answering the many emails that come in each day as well as the accountability that comes with state standards and students passing assessments. He talked about striving to make it evident to teachers in his school that while he may not have all the answers, he is willing to work to make sure teachers know how much they are valued and appreciated. Andrew’s perceptions align with the existing literature on teacher retention and why teachers stay.

When asked if there was anything else Sheldon wanted to share about his perceptions of his leadership practices that influence teacher retention he said,

“We’re trying to make sure the trains run on time and communication is clear. We’re show adequate attention to our new staff until they’re up and running and no longer new staff. And we try to support our experienced staff so that they’re not overwhelmed and feel like they have the resources they need.”

Sheldon’s perceptions highlighted in this quote speak to his intentional focus on placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication and providing mentoring support.

Cary noted that he believes for the most part his teachers are happy working at his school. “My door has always been open for them to come in and speak with me. I’ve never shut any of them out and I sit there and listen.” He talked about not having all the answers and sometimes telling the teacher that he will have to talk to one of the assistant principals or someone from Central Office to get more information but he ensures he then follows up with the teacher. He stressed the importance of working to figure out a solution to see what he and his administrative team can do to support the teacher with the situation they are facing, and he has had positive feedback from teachers as a result. He said he perceives this is one of the reasons teachers choose to stay at this school year after year.

Amy talked extensively about ways she has created a family atmosphere at her school and said, “the staff feel supported both professionally and personally and I think that lends itself a lot to retaining teachers, to making sure they feel that they really are a part of this family.” Throughout Amy’s interview it became clear that she fosters personal connections at her school and teachers stay because they have a sense of belonging.

Lee said that as a principal she strives to model positivity by being a supportive leader and finding ways to celebrate the successes since “there are so many positive things happening each and every day and it’s up to us as principals to make sure we highlight those moments.” She also shared something she heard a superintendent say years ago at a leadership conference. “Our role as administrators is to support teachers so teachers can support students.”

William spoke passionately about how much he values teachers, how critical their role is, and the importance of a supportive principal to develop and grow teachers. What he shared is something that I believe every school leader needs to consider as schools look for ways to create stronger organizational contexts resulting in increased teacher retention (Kraft et al., 2026). He stated,

“To me, it always been one of the most important things we do as principals is to hire and keep the best teachers because without them, we’re not going to be able to implement any change effectively or develop the organization over time. It really comes down to whether or not you have a high functioning teaching staff. That’s never been lost on me.”

Summary

Chapter 4 included an analysis of the data collected along with eight findings of my research regarding principals’ perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention. All six principals place a focus on fostering personal connections with teachers and they perceive this as a practice that contributes to high teacher retention rates. Five principals perceive that providing mentoring support, placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication, prioritizing collaborative learning teams, encouraging teacher voice, protecting time for teachers to manage the workload, and aligning professional development to school goals, has resulted in high teacher retention rates. And four principals noted focusing on high quality instruction are practices that

positively influence teacher retention. Chapter 5 summarizes the findings and includes implications of this study, as well as recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Findings, Implications, and Conclusion

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how school leaders perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. This chapter includes a discussion of the conceptual framework applied for this study and how it aligns with the research presented in the literature review. Also included is a discussion of the major findings from Chapter 4 related to the literature on teacher retention and the role of the principal, implications for school leaders, and recommendations for future research.

As a qualitative researcher, I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of high school principals to gain a deeper understanding into how their leadership practices positively influence teacher retention within their schools. This study was guided by the following research question: How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that influence teacher retention?

This qualitative research study guided by a phenomenologically oriented approach sought to examine, describe, and interpret the principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention. Participants included six practicing high school principals in a selected suburban school division in Virginia who have served in the role for at least three years and have an 85% or higher teacher retention rate. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics, 84% of teachers remained at the same public school during the 2020-21 and 2021-2022 school years so a retention rate of 85% or higher was selected as a criterion for this study.

The intended outcome of this study was to identify principal leadership practices that positively influence teacher retention with the hope that current and aspiring school leaders have

additional tools and strategies to implement to create a positive and supportive school culture where teachers choose to stay. I plan to provide current and aspiring high school principals and division-level leaders within the participating school division with the findings from this study to support improved teacher retention rates.

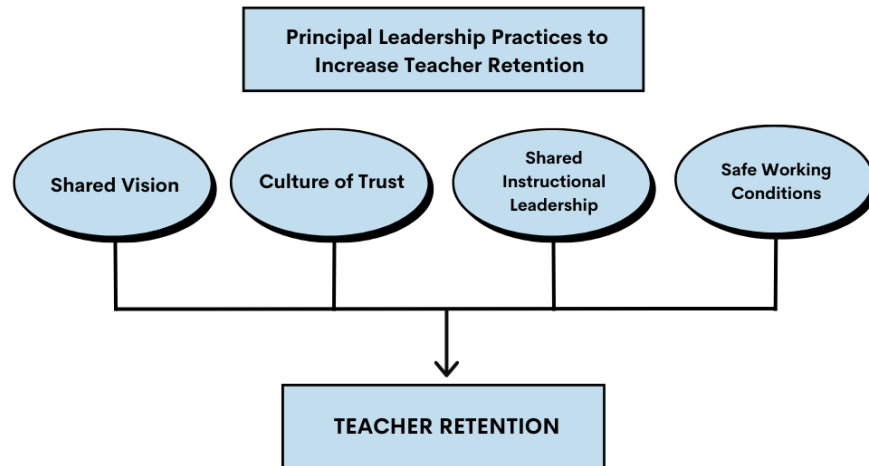
The research addressed the gap in the literature on teacher retention and the role of the principal and enhanced the literature by sharing the findings on principals' perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention at their schools such as fostering personal connections, providing mentoring support, placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication and prioritizing collaborative learning teams. Additionally, encouraging teacher voice, focusing on high quality instruction, protecting time for teachers to manage the workload, and aligning professional development to school goals were highlighted by principals at schools with an 85% or higher teacher retention rate.

Review of Conceptual Framework and Connection to Findings

My goal was to investigate how high school principals perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. The results from this research study have the potential to improve principal leadership practices and contribute to the body of growing research on teacher retention to include recommendations for current and aspiring school leaders as well as division-level leaders. The conceptual framework applied for this study is outlined in Figure 1 and was based on a policy brief that highlights focus areas principals should consider prioritizing to increase teacher retention to include developing a shared vision, creating a culture of trust, encouraging shared instructional leadership, and promoting safe working conditions. Through a discussion of the findings that support the literature, alignment with the conceptual framework will be shared and discussed.

Figure 1

Principal Leadership Practices to Increase Teacher Retention



Discussion of Findings

In this research study, major findings are discussed if more than half of the participants presented similar themes in their responses during the individual interviews. Findings one through eight addressed the research question: How do high school principals perceive and implement leadership practices that influence teacher retention? All findings support the conceptual framework and align with research presented in the literature review.

High school principals perceived fostering personal connections with teachers as an essential leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Each participant described what they do to establish personal connections with teachers and this focus on creating sense of belonging is supported by literature reviewed for this study and aligns with the concept of culture of trust (Becker & Grob, 2021). Participants in this study overwhelmingly mentioned the value of establishing personal connections with teachers and this was also noted by Ford et al. (2019)

who shared that when school leaders take the time to have meaningful conversations with teachers to support their social emotional needs, trust can be established, which promotes a positive and productive working environment. This supports findings that state school leaders need to increase opportunities for teacher influence to create a stronger sense of belonging to include teachers feeling safe when they seek out support and guidance from school administrators (Castro et al., 2010; Garcia & Weiss, 2020). Findings by Shuls and Flores (2020) also align with this finding stating that retention increases when administrators establish school cultures where trust is a priority, and teachers are valued as well as respected.

High school principals perceived providing mentoring support to teachers as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Participants in this study talked about the importance of implementing mentoring programs and this leadership practice is supported by literature reviewed and aligns with the concept of a shared vision (Becker & Grob, 2021). In line with Garcia and Weiss' (2020) and Shuls and Flores' (2020) findings about the benefits of implementing strong mentoring programs, participants in this study mentioned the value of mentoring as a key factor in retention. This aligns with the study by Reitman and Karge (2019) that research what supports provided by school leaders promoted retention. The teachers in the schools had been part of an induction program that had support from a mentor who visited the classrooms to provide ongoing support and growth producing feedback. Teachers noted that the collaboration had a direct impact on their decision to stay and in this case, there was a 100% retention rate. Research by Kaiser and Thompson (2021) was also reviewed for this study and highlighted the importance of supporting teachers include collaborative relationships as well as peer mentorship (Kaiser & Thompson, 2021).

High school principals perceived placing an emphasis on schoolwide communication to teachers as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. In line with Becker and Grob's (2021) policy brief that highlights the importance of communicating a shared vision to staff and working collaboratively to meet school goals, participants in this study articulated the importance of schoolwide communication. This finding aligns with research reviewed by Player et al. (2017) that also revealed when principals communicate the school vision, teacher retention increases. Burkhauser (2017), Castro (2023), and Hughes and O'Reilly (2015) noted that teachers want to stay in schools where the principal communicates effectively and takes the time to recognize individuals for exemplary work.

High school principals perceived prioritizing collaborative learning teams as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Participants interviewed for this study mentioned their intentional focus on creating collaborative learning teams and the correlation between effective teacher teams and student academic progress while also mentioning the support teachers have from one another during this dedicated time built into the school day. This aligns with the concept of shared instructional leadership highlighted in Becker and Grob's (2021) policy brief. While literature reviewed for this study did not specifically mention dedicated time allocated during the school day for teacher teams to meet, findings by Garcia and Weiss (2020) and Kaiser and Thompson (2021) articulated the importance of creating an environment that fosters peer collaboration and continuous learning. Grissom et al. (2021), Player et al. (2017) and Shuls and Flores (2020) also noted that teacher retention increases when there is evidence of shared instructional leadership with a focus on administrative teams collaborating with teachers to achieve the school vision.

High school principals perceived encouraging teacher voice as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. In line with Becker and Grob's (2021) policy brief that highlights the importance of communicating a shared vision that includes input from teachers, participants in this study articulated the importance of encouraging teacher voice. Allensworth et al. (2009) and Shuls and Flores (2020) examined teacher retention and found that when schools are led by supportive administrators, teachers stay because they feel as though they are partners and have a voice in their work environment. This aligns with research compiled by the Wallace Foundation, noting effective principals make it a priority to collaborate with teachers about instruction (Grissom, et al. 2021).

High school principals perceived focusing on high quality instruction as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Participants in this study who emphasized high quality instruction as a priority, were all intentional in their efforts to make sure teachers were not only provided with professional development to support high quality instruction but also received support from their administrators, peers, and teacher leaders to implement the strategies learned, aligning with the concept of shared instructional leadership highlighted in Becker and Grob's (2021) policy brief. Findings by Allensworth et al. (2009) revealed that teachers stay when they view the principal as a strong instructional leader and my findings support this claim as the participants noted focusing on high quality instruction and all have an 85% or higher teacher retention rate. Becker and Grob (2021) and Grissom et al. (2021) also identified the importance of shared instructional leadership with a focus on improving instructional practices in schools through relevant professional development opportunities to drive student outcomes.

High school principals perceived protecting time for teachers to manage their workload as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Participants in this study were intentional in finding ways during the day for teachers to manage the workload to include allocated time in the daily schedule for teacher teams to meet and provide professional workdays for teachers to have uninterrupted time for planning and collaborating. Findings from Burkhauser (2017) and Castro (2023) also discuss the importance of principals protecting teachers from external forces so that they have time to manage their workload effectively and this aligns with the concept of safe working conditions noted in the conceptual framework that guides this study. The intentional focus on allocating time for teachers to engage in relevant professional development opportunities was highlighted in a study by Castaneda and Varela (2022) and noted as a leadership practice that positively influences teacher retention.

High school principals perceived aligning professional development to school goals as an important leadership practice that influences teacher retention. Grissom et al. (2021) and Rodgers and Skelton (2014) articulated the importance of principals providing teachers with research-based strategies to support improved instructional practices in the classroom to align with and meet school goals. Participants interviewed for this study shared similar sentiments aligning with Becker and Grob's (2021) concept listed in the conceptual framework guiding this study: shared vision. Castro et al. (2010), Garcia and Weiss (2020) and Kaiser and Thompson (2021) noted that teachers must have time to participate in professional development that fosters peer collaboration and continuous learning. Findings by Castaneda and Varela (2022) support this finding, revealing that professional development provides an additional layer of support for teachers which could lead to improved job satisfaction and an increase in teacher retention.

Practitioner Implications

Further insight into the reasons why teachers stay and the effective principal leadership practices that contribute to high teacher retention rates could have implications for schools across the country as teacher shortages continue to be a concern. Current and aspiring school leaders as well as division-level leaders should consider the findings of this study as well as the implications, to create a positive and supportive school culture where teachers choose to stay. For context, implications are included with matching finding numbers.

Implication One:

Principals can influence teacher retention by fostering personal connections with teachers as a leadership practice (finding 1).

Principals should make it a priority to create a positive environment where teachers feel a sense of belonging. The ways principals can foster personal connections with teachers include increasing visibility throughout the day and having daily interactions with teachers to simply check in. Principals should also consider having an open-door policy to listen to teachers' concerns and then follow up with support. It is also recommended that principals find ways to recognize teachers for the positive work they do, host staff socials, and send handwritten cards to offer encouragement, support, or to simply say thank you.

Implication Two:

Principals can influence teacher retention by providing mentoring support to teachers as a leadership practice (finding 2).

Current and aspiring leaders should establish mentoring support for novice teachers and consider support that continues for second- and third-year teachers. Mentoring should start on day one and can include a formal assigned mentor or peer support through teacher teams.

Meetings should take place throughout the school year to provide the novice teachers with ongoing individualized support to meet their needs. Principals should consider placing novice teachers in a classroom next to a veteran teacher. Supervising administrators should visit the classrooms of novice teachers early in the school year to provide growth producing feedback and to address early concerns. Novice teachers should also be provided with the opportunity to observe veteran teachers and reflect with their mentor or supervising administrator on instructional strategies observed and ways these can be implemented in their own classrooms.

Implication Three:

Principals can influence teacher retention by placing an emphasis on school wide communication as a leadership practice (finding 3).

Principals should work with their administrative team to ensure everyone is consistent in communicating the shared school vision. Principals should also start the school year, sharing the school priorities as well as division goals with staff. The school goals should be based on student data as well as feedback from teachers. Principals should collaborate with department chairs, teacher leaders, and other informal teacher leaders to share ideas, get feedback, and to increase communication. Administrators should ensure they are consistently in classrooms providing growth producing feedback to teachers that aligns with the school vision and goals. Principals can also emphasize schoolwide communication through a weekly newsletter and regular faculty meetings where the school goals are revisited, and teachers share instructional strategies that align with the school goals.

Implication Four:

Principals can influence teacher retention by prioritizing collaborative learning teams as a leadership practice (finding 4).

Principals should build in time during the school day for collaborative learning teams to meet and this could be done before the school year starts by adjusting the master schedule to allow for this time for teams to meet. Administrators should provide support to these teams and help facilitate data discussions. This focus on collaborative learning teams also supports novice teachers as they are guaranteed time during the school day to ask questions of their peers and get support as well as feedback. Allocating this time for collaborative learning teams to meet, plan, and engage in data dialogues also supports increased student academic achievement.

Implication Five:

Principals can influence teacher retention by encouraging teacher voice as a leadership practice (finding 5).

Principals should review the annual survey results to capture teacher voice as well as common themes shared by teachers. Additionally, principals should lean on department chairs to serve as a conduit between school leadership and staff. Ideas should be shared with department chairs so that they can survey their departments and bring feedback to the administrative team. Principals should also seek input from veteran teachers and those with institutional knowledge before making a major decision. It is also recommended that principals send staff surveys throughout the year as another way to encourage teacher voice.

Implication Six:

Principals can influence teacher retention by focusing on high quality instruction as a leadership practice (finding 6).

Principals and school leaders should provide feedback to teachers that are aligned to Tier 1 strategies to include resources and supports for teachers. Principals should work with the administrative team to make sure they have normed their feedback to teachers to support

improved student outcomes. Principals should also ensure the professional development offerings are high quality and administrators should follow up with teachers after the professional development training and offer ongoing support. When principals or administrators observe high quality instruction in classrooms, those teachers should be encouraged to share these instructional strategies with their peers at faculty meetings.

Implication Seven:

Principals can influence teacher retention by protecting time for teachers to manage their workload as a leadership practice (finding 7).

Principals should consider allocating time during the school day for collaborative learning teams to meet. Principals should also consider reviewing the professional development requirements and objectives from the division and finding ways to infuse those responsibilities with what the school requires of teachers to help manage the workload. Regarding novice teachers, principals should consider offering novice teachers and their mentor a professional day where a substitute teacher is assigned to their classrooms so that they can observe veteran teachers and reflect on strategies the novice teacher might want to consider implementing.

Implication Eight:

Principals can influence teacher retention by aligning professional development to school goals as a leadership practice (finding 8).

Principals should plan high quality, effective professional development opportunities for teachers based on school data and feedback from teachers. The planned professional development each year should be based on school priorities and goals. Principals and administrators should ensure that when observing classrooms, feedback provided to teachers aligns with both the professional development that was provided and the school goals.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While the information from this qualitative research study will provide additional data to support research on teacher retention and the role of the principal, the findings from this study might not be generalizable to other school divisions as the study was conducted in a large suburban school division in Virginia. In addition, more credibility could be given to this study if teachers at the schools were included as participants. Suggestions for future research could include a study that includes teachers as participants at schools with an 85% or higher teacher retention rate to see if they perceive the same or different leadership practices influence their decision to stay or leave. This would provide the researcher an opportunity to gain insight into the lived experiences of teachers and the meaning they make out of these experiences.

Future research could also include a similar study at elementary and middle schools within the participating school division to compare findings and determine if principals at these levels perceive the same or different leadership practices that influence teacher retention.

Future research could also take a longitudinal approach to determine whether teachers stay long-term at schools under the leadership practices highlighted in this study. Findings from such a study could strengthen the research on this subject and could result in a research-based framework for schools illustrating leadership practices that result in increased teacher retention rates.

Conclusion

My goal was to investigate how high school principals perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention, and the results of this study suggest that when principals place a priority on supporting teachers by creating a positive school culture, teachers stay. The findings from this study are supported by current literature on the topic of teacher retention and the

impact of principal leadership practices. As the leader of the school, the principal plays a key role in teacher retention and schools led by supportive administrative teams have higher morale, thus directly impacting retention rates (Allensworth et al., 2019; Becker & Grob, 2021; Burkhauser, 2017; Ford et al., 2019; Grissom et al., 2021; Hughes & O'Reilly, 2015; Player et al., 2017; Shell et al., 2023).

My research journey into the realm of principal leadership practices and teacher retention was deeply personal. As an educator for over twenty years, I've witnessed firsthand the challenges and rewards of teaching, and the impact a supportive school leader can have on a teacher's well-being and career satisfaction. This study, and its findings, felt like a confirmation of the power of positive leadership to foster a thriving and stable teaching workforce. The results resonate with my own experiences and observations, highlighting the importance of creating a culture where teachers feel valued, supported, and empowered. This research provides a roadmap for school leaders seeking to not only improve retention but also foster a more positive and fulfilling work environment for teachers.

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Appendix A: Impactful Literature Review Table

Author/Year	Title/Purpose/Goal	Method/Data Source and research questions	Themes/Connections to Topic	Recommendations
García, E., & Weiss, E. (2020).	A Policy Agenda to Address the Teacher Shortage in US Public Schools.: The Sixth and Final Report in the Perfect Storm in the Teacher Labor Market Series	Policy agenda	Includes reasons why teachers leave and recommendations to increase teacher retention.	<p>Teachers who have left the profession say that they were not included in decision making regarding school or classroom policy.</p> <p>Recommendations to increase teacher retention include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -increase teacher autonomy and influence -provide teachers with more time for collaboration with professional development. -improving working conditions.
Grissom, Jason A., Anna J. Egalite, and Constance A. Lindsay. (2021).	How Principals Affect Students and Schools: A Systematic Synthesis of Two Decades of Research.	Research Report	<p>A study by Burkhauser (2017) includes data that looks at the principals' impacts on teachers' reports of their working conditions and finds effective principals focus on working conditions, time for teachers to do their work, and access to PD. P. 2</p> <p>Note: consider using the table on page xvi that shows Principal Skills and Behaviors to improve school outcomes</p>	<p>“From the large, diverse body of research we synthesize, which includes both quantitative and qualitative studies, we identify three overlapping realms of skills and expertise that school leaders need to be successful: instruction, people, and the organization.” (pg. xv).</p> <p>Principal behaviors that suggest positive school outcomes: engaging in instructionally focused interactions with teachers, building a positive school climate, facilitating positive collaboration and professional learning communities, managing personnel and resources strategically.” Pg xv</p>
Becker, J. & Grob, L. (2021)	The School Principal and Teacher Retention.	Policy Brief	<p>According to the research reviewed, there are five focus areas principal should prioritize to increase teacher retention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Develop a shared vision. -Create a culture of trust. -Encourage shared instructional leadership. -Promote safe working conditions. -Minimize excessive paperwork required of teachers. 	<p>“While there is a lot of research on relational trust, there is less research on the relationship between principal behaviors, relational trust, and teacher retention.”</p> <p>Recommendations include: regularly reviewing the school’s mission and vision, increase time in classrooms observing and providing feedback to teachers, schedule one-on-one time with teachers to hear concerns and ideas, provide professional development opportunities that focus on improving classroom management, develop systems to streamline processes for teachers.</p>
Reitman, Galit C., and Belinda Dunnick Karge (2019)	Investing in Teacher Support Leads to Teacher Retention: Six Supports Administrators Should Consider for New Teachers.	Research Study	<p>“Six themes emerged from the data that must be present to encourage teachers to remain in the profession. These themes include individual relationships, pedagogical knowledge, teacher perceptions of professional competence, mentoring, professional learning, and reflection.” (p. 17)</p>	<p>Strong teacher prep programs and support from school administrators is not enough to retain teachers.</p> <p>“The conclusions of this study confirm Chapman's (1984) findings that retention is related to factors beyond the influence of teacher preparation programs or school site administrators. The program provided these participants with the support described in the six themes; thus it can be inferred that these themes, when implemented with fidelity, will result in improved retention of teachers.” (p. 17)</p>

			<p>Educational leaders must ensure teachers are provided with support from day one.</p> <p>Additionally, support should be ongoing until the teacher has demonstrated mastery in the six themes noted within this study.</p> <p>This support should start over if a teacher moves to another school or another grade level.</p>	<p>School leaders need to ensure new teachers have five years of ongoing support that includes research based professional development and individualized support.</p>
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System for Tracking Sources:

Principal Leadership

Why Teachers Stay

Why Teachers Leave

Appendix B: Potential Participant Email

Subject Line: Participation in Research Study, Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention (IRB-24-1169)

Dear [Recipient's Name],

I hope this message finds you well. My name is Heather Abney, and I am a doctoral student in the program of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech. I am reaching out to invite you to participate in a research study titled " "Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention" (IRB-24-1169).

This study aims to investigate how public high school principals perceive leadership practices that influence teacher retention. Your insights and experiences are invaluable in understanding the opportunities and challenges for practicing and aspiring school leaders in public schools.

Participation Details

- **Who:** Licensed practicing public high school principals.
- **What:** Participation involves a one-on-one interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes. There is the possibility of follow-up emails to seek clarification or verification of participant responses.
- **How:** All interviews will be conducted via Zoom. Audio recordings and transcriptions will be used for data analysis.
- **Confidentiality:** All data will be securely stored, and identifiers will be replaced with pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Why Participate? While there are no direct benefits to you, your participation will contribute to a deeper understanding of the principal leadership practices that influence teacher retention, potentially informing future policies and practices.

If you are interested in participating or have any questions, please respond to this email or contact me directly at heatherabney7@vt.edu. Your involvement would be greatly appreciated and will contribute significantly to the field of educational leadership.

Thank you for considering this opportunity.

Warm regards,

Heather Abney
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Virginia Tech

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Page 1

Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention

Time of the Interview:

Date:

Zoom setting for Participant:

Interviewer: Heather Abney

1. Confirm receipt of information sheet (emailed to participant before the meeting)
2. Turn on the Zoom record.
3. Change participant name to pseudonym.
4. Follow script below.

Thank you for meeting with me today. I appreciate your time and willingness to participate in this study. The interview today centers around your lived experiences as high school principals and your perceptions of leadership practices that influence teacher retention.

The interview will take 60-90 minutes, and you will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality. As you answer the questions, I may do some follow up questioning and even repeat some of your responses to make sure I correctly capture your responses to each question.

If you are ready, let's begin.




(Follow the interview protocol on page 2 which outlines questions to be asked and includes probing questions).

Principals' Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention

Interview Questions and Probes
Question 1 is: Consider any actions you have taken as a school leader to foster a supportive working environment. What response have you received from teachers because of these actions? Are there any observations you have made that support your perception of this impact?
Question 2 is: How do you see yourself as a leader who has fostered teacher retention?
Question 3: How have you been purposeful in creating professional development opportunities for teachers? Talk about some of the student outcomes because of these opportunities.
Question 4: Discuss the ways you seek feedback from teachers as you make schoolwide decisions.
Question 5: How do you coach your administrative team to be leaders that create a supportive environment for teachers they supervise?
Question 6: From a leadership perspective what are the primary challenges novice teachers face? In your conversations with all teachers, what do they say are their greatest challenges as educators?
Question 7: Tell me about two to three leadership practices you have employed to support teachers in these challenges? What was the impact of these leadership practices?
Question 8: Based on your perception, what were or are some of the specific outcomes have you observed related to teacher retention after implementing these changes?
Question 9: What feedback or confirmation, if any, have you received from teachers regarding your leadership practices as an instructional leader?
Question 10: Can you think of a personal experience that highlights a successful leadership practice you've implemented to increase teacher retention?
Question 11: Is there anything additional you would like to share that we have not covered?

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

Appendix D: CITI Certificate

		Completion Date 30-Mar-2024 Expiration Date 30-Mar-2027 Record ID 62032748
This is to certify that:		
Heather Abney		
Has completed the following CITI Program course:		Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.
Social & Behavioral Research (Curriculum Group)		
Social & Behavioral Research (Course Learner Group)		
1 - Basic Course (Stage)		
Under requirements set by:		
Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University (Virginia Tech)		 Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative
		101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US www.citiprogram.org
Generated on 30-Mar-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w724c4d63-d9f3-4214-b316-f85d9a9d5c1c-62032748		

Appendix E: IRB Approval



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/sirc/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: December 4, 2024
TO: Charles L Lowery, Heather Lee Abney
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: Principals’ Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention
IRB NUMBER: 24-1169

Effective December 4, 2024, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104 (d) category(ies) 2(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: **Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 2(ii)**
Protocol Determination Date: **December 4, 2024**

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol.

Appendix F: School Division Approval

December 17, 2024

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that your request to conduct a study titled “Principals’ Perceptions of Leadership Practices that Influence Teacher Retention” in [REDACTED] has been reviewed by [REDACTED] leadership. Your proposal has met the standards required for research in [REDACTED] and has gained leadership approval.

Please keep the ensure appropriate protocols are followed and all identifying information has been removed in the final reporting of the study. Thank you for your interest in [REDACTED] as a research site, and as always, if you have any questions, please feel free to contact me. I wish you success with your research and doctoral coursework.

Sincerely,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]