BUILDING A COHESIVE RURAL CAMPUS: IMPORTANT TRUST FACTORS BETWEEN PRINCIPALS AND TEACHERS

by

Kelley Porter

A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Educational Leadership

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Canyon, Texas

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Scholarly Delivery Framework

The research focus of this scholarly delivery is trust between a principal and teachers. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study article that could be used for teaching doctoral or master's candidates in the field of educational leadership. The title of this article is "Gaining Trust: A Case Study of Relationship Building between the Single Campus Administrator and Teachers." The case represents how hiring a principal who can build trust between the two different groups of teachers can improve the morale and performance of a PreK-12 school. The final scholarly deliverable is an empirical article. The title is "Building a Cohesive Rural Campus: Important Trust Factors between Principals and Teachers." The case study is about the factors that are important to build trust between a principal and the teachers on campus. The study looked at the factors from the teachers' perspectives as well as the principal's perspective.

IRB Approval

**Academic Research
Environmental Health and Safety
WEST TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY.**

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS
Letter of Approval

April 1, 2021

Dr. Harper:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal **#2021.03.017** for your study titled, **"Trust Between Rural Principals and K-12 Teachers,"** meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Human Subject Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **March 31, 2022.**

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A Continuing Review form along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study termination and/or loss of funding.
2. **Completion Report:** At the conclusion of the research project (including data analysis and final written papers), a Close out form must be submitted to AR-EHS.
3. **Unanticipated Problems and Adverse Events:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.13AR, unanticipated problems and serious adverse events must be reported to AR-EHS.
4. **Reports of Potential Non-Compliance:** Pursuant to SOP No. 15.99.05.W1.05AR, potential non-compliance, including deviations from the protocol and violations, must be reported to the IRB office immediately.
5. **Amendments:** Changes to the protocol must be requested by submitting an Amendment form to AR-EHS for review by the IRB. The Amendment must be approved by the IRB before being implemented. Amendments do not extend time granted on the initial approval
6. **Consent Forms:** When using a consent form, only the IRB approved form is allowed.
7. **Audit:** Any proposal may be subject to audit by the IRB Administrator during the life of the study. Investigators are responsible for maintaining complete and accurate records for five years and making them available for inspection upon request.
8. **Recruitment:** All recruitment materials must be approved by the IRB. Recruitment materials distributed to potential participants must use the approved text and include the study's IRB number, approval date, and expiration dates in the following format: WTAMU IRB##-##-## Approved: ##/##/#### Expiration Date: ##/##/####.
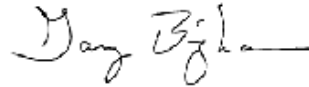
9. **FERPA and PPRA:** Investigators conducting research with students must have appropriate approvals from the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA)

administrator at the institution where the research will be conducted in accordance with the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) if applicable to the research being proposed. The Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) protects the rights of parents in students ensuring that written parental consent is required for participation in surveys, analysis, or evaluation that ask questions falling into categories of protected information.

Sixty days prior to the expiration of this proposal, you will receive a notification of the approaching expiration date at which time you will need to submit an Amendment/Continuation/Close out form.

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,

Dr. Gary Bigham
Chair, WTAMU IRB

Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and Compliance

Acknowledgments

Over the course of this three-year journey, I have received support and encouragement from several individuals. To begin with, I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Irma Harper. She was an excellent chair and is now someone I consider a mentor, colleague, and friend. Her guidance has made this an enjoyable learning experience, one that I will never forget. I would also like to thank the other members of my committee, Dr. Bridget Whaley and Dr. Gary Bigham. Both of whom shared insight and helpful advice.

I would also like to thank my cohort. We became like family and continuously helped one another through the trials and tribulations of these past three years. I am very grateful to each and everyone in the cohort. Finally, I would like to thank my family. I am eternally grateful for the patience and support as I juggled school, work, and home. Gavin, Hannah, Duncan, and Lexi, you were all very supportive and understanding when I had homework to do during the evenings or weekends, and for that, I say Thank you!

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**Gaining Trust: A Case Study of Relationship Building between
the Single Campus Administrator and Teachers**

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Author Note

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Abstract

Trust is the key to a successful school environment. Rural principals have a unique opportunity to gain trust between elementary and secondary teachers to make a positive impact not only on the students but on the community. The purpose of this article is to describe how hiring a principal who can build trust between the two different groups of teachers can improve the morale and performance of a PreK-12 school.

Keywords: rural, principal, teachers, trust, relationships

Gaining Trust: A Case Study of Relationship Building between

the Single Campus Administrator and Teachers

Trust is the building block of lasting relationships. Brown (2014) stated that meaningful relationships are a necessity to achieve the high expectations schools hold for all students. Brown (2014) further stated that trust is the foundation of those relationships and trust allows each person to be the best they can be. A study conducted by Louis (2007) looked at rural and suburban schools and the issue of trust. Louis found that the two districts designated as rural exhibited a higher level of trust among teachers-administrators, and teachers-teachers than their urban counterparts. This study indicated that teachers in the rural districts felt that the administration listened to the faculty and were in touch with the needs of the school even though there was distension about other issues (Louis, 2007). In interviews with the teachers from the suburban districts, Louis reported that words like power, isolation, secretive, and manipulation. The teachers from the rural districts used words like honesty, openness, collaborative, and respect (Louis, 2007). Rural schools pride themselves on being small and relationship-oriented; those relationships are built on trust.

Rural Education

In the report, "Why Rural Matters 2018-19: The Time Is Now", it indicated that nearly 7.5 million public school students were enrolled in rural school districts during the 2016-17 school year—or nearly one of every seven students across the country (Showalter et al., 2019). According to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2017), 22.8% of rural children in the United States were

living in poverty compared to 17.7% of urban children. Showalter et al. (2019) indicated that students living in the high poverty rural areas have much larger performance gaps and therefore perform much worse on the state assessments. When it comes to college readiness, approximately half of the rural students even attempt the ACT or SAT, and even less attempt dual enrollment courses (Showalter et al., 2019).

Rural schools experience many challenges. From classroom size to out-of-school opportunities and college preparedness, rural students tend to have different experiences than their urban and suburban counterparts (American Institute for Research, 2019). It is interesting to note that rural schools have a higher graduation rate than the national average, but fewer students enroll in college and complete their programs (National Student Center Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Rural schools also struggle with staffing issues. The U.S. Department of Education reported that there are consistent staffing problems in rural schools (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Rural communities face limitations in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers for reasons such as funding issues, limited teacher supply, lack of rigorous training and certification options, and geographic and social isolation.

Rural Principals

Principals in the urban, suburban, and rural schools struggle with meeting the work-load of the principalship; however, rural principals face a unique set of challenges associated with their role (Hardwick-Franco, 2018; Parson et al., 2016). Because rural districts have smaller student populations, limited resources, and less funding, rural principals are often responsible for overseeing a multitude of grade levels and often serve as the sole leader of their campuses (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Rural principals serve

in an assortment of roles and hold various responsibilities that include disciplinarian,

manager, instructional leader, human resource department, the school-to-community

liaison, custodian or bus driver, etc. (Hansen, 2018; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Even

though the rural principal serves multiple roles daily the salary for the rural principal is

lower than the city, suburban, and town counterparts (Hussar et al., 2020).

Due to the unique challenges that a rural principal faces daily, it is critical that

they have a "trusting relationship" with their staff and faculty. In a case study on the

challenges for rural leaders conducted by du Plessis (2017), five rural principals were

interviewed as well as faculty and a school board member. Most of the five principals

agreed that all their actions were based on trust, performance and respect. Another

comment made in the study that was echoed by more than one person was the fact that

the principal was a person to be trusted at all times, even when mistakes were made (du

Plessis, 2017).

Principal-Teacher Trust

Relationships are an important part of any school. The relationships must be

formed between leadership and teachers as well as between teachers and students. Kars

and Inandi (2018) explored teachers trusting principals and how that trust affected the

organization as a whole. Student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and overall contentment

are due to teachers trusting the leadership abilities of the school principal (Kars & Inandi,

2018). Principals are the instructional leader of the campus, and teachers follow along if

they trust that the principal knows what they were doing. The study conducted by

Berkovich (2018) suggested that female teachers will trust a female principal easier and

quicker than a male principal. The study suggested that gender plays a much bigger role

in the trust relationship than other researchers give credit. Berkovich (2018) explained that the trust between the principal and teacher is a great predictor of the commitment the teacher has for the organization as a whole.

A study conducted by Bird et al. (2009) examined the level of teacher engagement based on the amount of trust felt between the teacher and principal at the school. The level of trust grew exponentially when a teacher felt that the principal was authentic in their decision-making ability (Bird et al., 2009). This deepens the support of the importance of principals building a trust relationship with his/her teachers. Engaged teachers will produce engaged students resulting in academic excellence (Bird et al., 2009).

Another study conducted by Brinia et al. (2014), suggested that authenticity was not the only important factor, but that emotional intelligence was needed. This study defined emotional intelligence as "our ability to recognize our emotions and those of other people, in order to motivate and manage ourselves and our relationships" (Brinia et al., 2014, p. 29). Many principals felt that emotions get in the way of the day-to-day operations and thus go through the motions without feelings (Brinia et al., 2014). Teachers are humans and they need to see that principals are humans too. Relationships are necessary for schools, not just for teacher and student, but leadership and teachers need to take the time to build relationships. Once the trust is established in the leadership-teacher relationship, teachers will put more energy into their work, and the organization will grow (Erdem & Aytac, 2019).

Principal Leadership Styles

There are several types of leadership styles, one specifically is servant leadership. Servant leadership is the "natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first, then learn to lead as a servant" (Cerit, 2009, p. 601). Cerit found that there was a strong correlation between job satisfaction and servant leadership style behaviors. However, there are many that feel servant leadership is the same as being naïve, weak and/or passive (Cerit, 2009). Another study conducted by Tschannen-Moran (2009) indicated that teachers conducted themselves professionally and had a high level of trust if the school principal was also professional and allowed for some flexibility. This study went further to state that when a principal was a rigid rule follower, the teachers did little more than the minimum required for students (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Guven and Iliskisi (2015) looked at the concept of attachment styles and trust between principals and teachers. As infants, we attach to our parents because they provide what we need. Parents provide everything early in life, and as a result most of the time there is a positive trust relationship. Teachers need to be able to rely on the leadership for assistance, praise, and support at any time during his/her stay on that particular campus. Guven and Iliskisi (2015) went further to study the relationship between the attachment styles and affective and cognitive components of trust. Both should be present in a principal-teacher relationship. The affective component is an emotional connection in which the principal cares about the well-being of the teachers. The cognitive component deals with integrity, ability, and capability of the principal (Guven & Iliskisi, 2015).

Collaborative Trust

Educational leaders are encouraged to gain input from all stakeholders. There are many times teachers feel as if they are left out of the equation when decisions are made that affect the world they operate in on a daily basis (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Hollingworth et al. found that teachers were more likely to accept changes and step out of their comfort zone if they feel like they are part of the decision-making process. An Australian study conducted by Starr (2011) over a three-year period found that principals try to anticipate and curb any resistance to the necessary changes that are needed to improve student performance. One teacher in the study conducted by Hollingworth et al. (2018) stated that principals could lay the foundation of trust by having an open-door communication policy. Principals need to be visible to staff members, students, and community members to ensure a positive school culture (Hollingworth et al., 2018). In a 2012 study conducted by Shen and Xia (2020), the results indicated that teachers who are included in the decision-making process feel that the change is made in a win-win situation. The study went further to say that when a principal makes unilateral decisions, such as teacher evaluations, teachers view the decision and a zero-sum situation (Shen & Xia, 2012).

Another avenue where collaborative trust is achieved is through professional learning communities. A study conducted by Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found that if teachers participated in professional learning communities, the level of trust was not as important between the principal and teacher because the teachers had a voice in the decision at hand. Professional learning communities allow for collaboration on tasks big and small. Principals can join the professional learning communities to share insight and

to gain insight into what teachers are thinking about a decision that leadership is considering. Teacher buy-in is huge when major changes need to be made to shift the direction of a school. A study conducted by Cranston (2011) showed that relational trust is what builds a successful professional learning community.

Principals should include all stakeholders in making decisions. In Cranston's study (2011), a principal stated that he is the center of the web that connects everyone else. Everyone has to trust the principal, and then from that trust, trust is extended to other members of the community (Cranston, 2011). Cranston went on to state that it doesn't matter if the principal is the most knowledgeable person in the room; the teachers have to trust the principal before they will listen. Cosner (2009) felt that the principal had to be the person to set the norms for interactions between the principal-teacher and the teacher-teacher during the professional learning community meetings. Teacher collaborative has been so important in the age of accountability. Teachers have to take ownership of what they do instead of just passing the buck, and Cosner (2009) pointed out that principals stated that trust-building was an important feature of school-wide reform. Once again, teachers have to buy-in to the ideas of principals, and trust is what leads to the buy-in.

Case Narrative

Grae Independent School District (GISD) is a single campus small, rural school district located in the Texas Panhandle. The primary source of income for those living in the attendance zone of GISD is based in the oil and gas industry. GISD has a population of 500 citizens, and the total school enrollment is 170 students PreK-12th grade. The school district employs one principal, 17 teachers, and 12 auxiliary staff members. In the

past 15 years, GISD experienced the attrition of six superintendents and four principals. The current superintendent, Sally James, served as the principal in the district for eight of those previous 15 years. She has worked hard to gain the trust of the teachers. Superintendent James has noticed that secondary and primary teachers are different in their approaches to teaching and communicating. She has also noticed that their trust level with administrators varied.

GISD needs to hire a new principal. This principal will serve the one PreK -12 campus. It is important to Superintendent James that she find a principal that values trust and can build a trusting relationship with and between both secondary and primary teachers. When she went through the candidates for the principal position, she noticed that the applicants did not have experience in both secondary and primary schools. She knew from experience, that this could be an issue. She was working to increase cohesiveness and morale as well as trust between these two groups.

The hiring committee for the new principal was comprised of the superintendent, an elementary teacher, a junior high teacher, and the athletic director. The committee agreed to interview three candidates. Candidate A was currently an elementary teacher in a neighboring town who was currently working on her principal certification. Candidate B was a coach in a small six-man district, who had a principal and superintendent's certification. Candidate C was another coach who had a principal certification. The interview process consisted of creating a presentation over state testing data, an email to introduce themselves to the staff and a 45 minute interview with the committee.

Candidate A, Allie Smith, appeared vibrant, and she was full of life during the interview. She used "google sheets and slides" to create her presentation and was

comfortable, presenting in front of the group. Ms. Smith quickly pointed out that according to the data she discovered, the school needed to focus on reading. She talked about a plan that she developed that focused on lower-level grades and the importance of reading. Ms. Smith answered all the questions with student/faculty focused answers. She spent time explaining that faculty should feel appreciated, and feel respected, for the system to work.

Candidate B, Boston Reed, came into the interview disheveled, and did not prepare a presentation but instead talked about the data. He stated that he was really looking to use this position, to move into a superintendent's position and he primarily answered questions as a superintendent would instead of the principal. Mr. Reed focused on budget and athletics as the key to a successful school. When asked about staff morale and cohesiveness, Mr. Reed stated that the staff figures out how to get along and they work together because they have no other option.

Candidate C, Charlie Johnson, came into the interview prepared, and he was cordial. Mr. Johnson stated that he would like for the committee to watch his power point presentation entirely before asking questions. The presentation restated the information from the data, and Mr. Johnson indicated that reading was an issue, but he stated that it was an issue across the entire state, so he felt that the school was in good shape. When it came time for the interview portion, Mr. Johnson focused on making the secondary school the "leaders of the faculty" just like we expect the students to set examples for the younger students, we should look to the secondary teachers to do the same. The committee quickly told him that several of the experienced teachers were in elementary and he stated that everyone could learn something.

The committee met after the interviews and decided to choose Candidate A, Allie Smith. The committee knew they were looking for someone to continue with the school's progress and she appeared to be the best candidate for this. Superintendent James was still concerned about Ms. Smith's lack of secondary experience, but she appeared to be a strong and capable leader who could bridge the gap between the primary and secondary teachers.

Mrs. Smith was excited about the job offer and accepted the position. She was slated to start the position in June; however, she started coming to GISD on her own time in May. This gave her an opportunity to see how teachers interacted with one another and with students. Mrs. Smith felt that she was going to be able to bring growth and comradery to the campus.

During the summer, Mrs. Smith worked with Superintendent James on making a plan for the school year. Superintendent James talked to her about the challenge of gaining respect and trust from all the teachers. She told her that since she was a primary level teacher that gaining trust from the secondary teachers could be difficult. Mrs. Smith accepted that it would be a challenge but she felt confident that could "win" over the secondary teachers.

Mrs. Smith developed a plan to recognize teachers monthly, and she put student recognitions in place for each grading period. Mrs. Smith met with each teacher individually and listened to concerns, comments, and questions that each brought to her. After the meetings, Mrs. Smith developed a plan to bring the two levels together as one campus. Her plan consisted of breaking down the blame game between the secondary and

elementary teachers. She made several different groupings for in-service, and they were also used throughout the year during various meetings.

The school year started, and Mrs. Smith was well received by both staff and parents. Mrs. Smith held community meetings to seek input on her ideas and to find out the desire of the community. Mrs. Smith held grade level professional learning community meetings on a regular basis and at times, invited other grade levels to the meetings to collaborate on ideas. One thing that seemed to bring everyone together was the idea of project-based learning. Once a semester, the students were given an entire week to focus on a project that helped someone in the community. The students were able to select a teacher as the advisor of the project, and the project reached across the curriculum and the grade levels. Elementary teachers were helping high school students, junior high students were working with elementary students, and it was amazing to see everyone come together.

At the end of the year, Mrs. Smith handed each staff member a survey and asked them to answer as truthfully as possible. Staff members could return the survey anonymously, or they could identify themselves. All 31 staff members returned the survey, and Mrs. Smith used the results to build on the relationships and modify and adjust what the staff felt didn't work. Mrs. Smith was able to retain all but one teacher, and for GISD that was a new record.

When the Superintendent James conducted her end of year conference with Mrs. Smith, she asked, "What was the one thing that made your year a successful year?" Mrs. Smith answered without hesitation that her year ran smoothly because she listened to the staff, and she took the time to form the relationships that were necessary. Mrs. Smith said

some of the relationships were hard to build, and she wasn't even sure that they were there until she got her surveys back. All the little extras she did throughout the year paid off, and she was gaining trust and building a cohesive campus.

Teaching Notes and Discussion Questions

Challenges of a Rural Principal

Principals in the urban, suburban, and rural schools struggle with meeting the work load of the principalship; however, rural principals face a unique set of challenges associated with their role (Hardwick-Franco, 2020; Parson et al., 2016). Mrs. Smith was chosen as the GISD K-12 principal. This is her first principal position. What type of challenges are ahead for her as a new rural school principal? Use the following resources for an applied research approach to this question:

- Hardwick-Franco, K. G. (2019). Educational leadership is different in the country; What support does the rural school principal need? *International Journal of Leadership in Education, 22*(3), 301–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/13603124.2018.1450997

- Parson, L., Hunter, C. A., & Kallio, B. (2016). Exploring educational leadership in rural schools. *Planning & Changing, 47*(1/2), 63-81 http://education.illinoisstate.edu/planning/articles/vol47.php

How can Mrs. Smith overcome these challenges?

Leadership Styles and Building Trust

Teacher perception of principal leadership influences how the teacher performs in the classroom by affecting a teacher's efficacy, commitment, trust, collaboration, and the overall school culture (Butz, 2010). Mrs. Smith felt that listening to her staff and forming relationships was the key to her success during her first year. What type of leadership did

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Mrs. Smith exhibit, and how was it perceived by her staff? What is the best leadership style for building trust between the principal, and staff and why? How would a principal use that leadership style to build trust among the staff when previous issues have existed between the prior principal and staff?

Collaborative Trust

The number one job of any leader is to inspire trust. It's to release the creativity and capacity of individuals to give their best and to create a high-trust environment in which they can effectively work with others. (Covey, 2006, p.298). Mrs. Smith was willing to meet with the superintendent, and work collaboratively on a plan to break down some of the barriers between the two groups of teachers. One idea that Mrs. Smith initiated was the introduction of projects that could span the grade levels. Using the quote by Covey, in small groups, discuss how Mrs. Smith added to her ability to build trust with this simple activity. What other activities could Mrs. Smith use to build collaborative trust?

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**Building a Cohesive Rural Campus: Important Trust Factors
between Principals and Teachers**

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Abstract

Background: In the rural pre-kindergarten-12 (PreK-12) one campus districts, principals face the unique challenge of working with all grade levels on a daily basis. There are many times the principal of the PreK-12 school comes in with either elementary experience or secondary, rarely do they have both. The demands of the job require expertise in both elementary and secondary schools. The principal in this setting should gain the trust of each teacher so that the campus is successful. **Purpose:** Teachers need to be able to rely on the principal for assistance, praise, and support at any time during his/her stay on that particular campus. The purpose of this study was to identify the important trust factors from the perception of the teachers and the principal. **Findings:** The themes that were generated from the data were benevolence, honesty, open communication, reliability, competency, and collaboration. According to the focus group of teachers, the reliability of the principal was the most important factor in the development of trust. The principal in the study identified the factors of benevolence, honesty, openness, and collaboration as the most important factors from the principal's perspective. **Conclusions:** Education demands a high level of trust between the principal and the teachers on a campus. Trust is the most important relationship-building concept needed between the principal and teachers. Trust will lead to the group working towards the common goal of improving education overall for all students

   Keywords: rural principal, teacher-principal trust, trust, collective trust, rural school

Building a Cohesive Rural Campus: Important Trust Factors between Principals and Teachers

Principals have one of the most difficult jobs in education today. They are expected to be instructional leaders, disciplinarians, and managers. As the instructional leader, a principal should evaluate teachers, evaluate and determine the campus curriculum, and assess all student data based on student progress (duPlessis, 2017). In addition, the rural principal should juggle these duties as well as serving in an assortment of roles and hold various responsibilities that include the human resource department, the school-to-community liaison, custodian, or bus driver, etc. (Hansen, 2018; Wieczorek & Manard, 2018).

In the rural pre-kindergarten-12 (PreK-12) one campus districts, principals face the unique challenge of working with all grade levels on a daily basis. There are many times the principal of the PreK-12 school comes in with either elementary experience or secondary, rarely do they have both. The demands of the job require expertise in both elementary and secondary schools. The principal in this setting should gain the trust of each teacher so that the campus is successful. Merriam-Webster defines trust as "to rely on the accuracy of or to place confidence in someone or something." Trust is the building block of lasting relationships. Brown (2014) stated that meaningful relationships are a necessity to achieve the high expectations schools hold for all students. Brown further stated that trust is the foundation of those relationships, and trust allows each person to be the best they can be.

This study examined the importance of the different factors of trust, as described by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000), between principals and teachers. The factors of

trust they defined were benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness. Do teachers of different grade levels rank the importance of the factors of trust differently? If so, how does a principal of a pre-kindergarten -12 campus gain the trust of each teacher so the school can be successful.

Statement of Purpose

Education demands a high level of trust between the principal and the teachers on a campus. Guven and Iliskisi (2015) looked at the concept of attachment styles and trust between principals and teachers. As infants, we attach to our parents because they provide everything we need early in life, and as a result, most of the time, there is a positive trust relationship. Teachers need to be able to rely on the principal for assistance, praise, and support at any time during his/her stay on that particular campus. Guven and Iliskisi (2015) went further to study the relationship between the attachment styles and affective and cognitive components of trust. Both should be present in a principal-teacher relationship. The affective component is an emotional connection in which the principal cares about the well-being of the teachers. The cognitive component deals with the integrity, ability, and capability of the principal (Guven & Iliskisi, 2015). The overarching research question for this study was, "How does a rural PreK-12 principal meet the trust needs of teachers?" The sub research questions were,

- What factors contribute to the development of trust between a teacher and a principal, according to the perspective of teachers?
- What factors contribute to the development of trust between a teacher and a principal, according to the perspective of the principal?

Conceptual Framework: Collective Trust

The concepts of collective trust: benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness, create the conceptual framework of this study. Parents blindly entrust their most precious possession(s) to teachers every day to provide guidance, instruction, and protection while at school (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). However, what does trust look like inside the school building? Faculty trust of the parents, staff, students, and especially the principal serves as the building block for any successful school (Adams, 2013). Individuals within the school should make themselves vulnerable and should be willing to take risks to build collective trust (Hoy et al., 2006). Collective trust is the term used to describe the trust between group members (Forsyth et al., 2011). This trust is based on the "perceived openness, honesty, benevolence, reliability, and competence of the trustee" (Adams, 2013, p. 366).

The most common element in collective trust is benevolence (Hoy et al., 2006). Teachers should first feel that the principal cares about their well-being as a person (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). This sense of care for the well-being allows the teacher to lower his/her guard and feel protected when there is a feeling of vulnerability while exploring new ideas. The teacher should have enough trust in the principal to be willing to experiment with new instructional methods and strategies to continue to improve and do what is right for all learners (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). Trust is built between the two parties in the school system when respect and genuine care for the individual are present (Lesinger et al., 2017). A study by Burke et al. (2007) determined that teachers are more motivated, work harder, and work more persistently when the administrator is perceived as benevolent.

Early in life, individuals begin to learn what to expect from one another. This predictability leads to the next facet of trust, reliability. Administrators show they are reliable to teachers by being dependable and predictable in decisions. When an administrator is reliable in decision making, the teacher develops a greater sense of confidence in his/her own ability to make decisions (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). The education system is one comprised of "give and take", and when the teachers can rely on the administrator there is a sense of confidence and peace of mind (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

In the age of high stakes testing and accountability, integrity is needed more than ever. Another trust facet, honesty, looks at the character, integrity, and authenticity of the administrator (Hoy et al., 2006). A teacher should have the confidence that the administrator's word can be relied on and that it will accurately predict his/her future actions to trust the administrator (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). It is important for teachers to feel that the administrator will accept responsibility for the progress of the school without placing the blame solely on the teachers. When the administrator, can show honesty in the good, and the bad situations, trust is built (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b).

Principals should share information with all stakeholders. Open communication is a necessity for trust. Openness from the principal to the teacher leads to openness on the part of the teacher (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). The principal is the instructional leader, but there are times when they need to draw on the expertise of the staff. Open communication makes this a natural step and helps identify new strategies and methods (Burke et al., 2007). By opening the lines of communication, teachers feel more

comfortable discussing problems and different solutions before they get out of hand (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). This sense of openness makes the principal more approachable and trustworthy.

The above-mentioned facets focus on the feelings and emotions of the teachers. The last facet, competency, examines the hard truth of whether or not the principal knows what they are doing and whether they can get the job done. The principal should "adopt knowledge, skills, work habits, and systems that enable them to achieve the myriad tasks necessary to operate and lead a school" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b, p. 262). Leaders should use precautions when showing teachers they are competent. A principal who wants to lead by the use of power will cause distrust within the staff (Tschannen-Moran, 2009). "Competence in school leadership requires not only inspiring teachers in their commitment to students but challenging and supporting teachers who fall short in their duty to improve their instructional practice (Tschannen-Moran, 2009).

Principals

Every school district experiences turnover of teachers and administrators. It is much easier to replace the few teachers that leave than to replace the one administrator that will run the campus. Principals should quickly prove to the teachers that they are capable and trustworthy. In a study conducted by Northfield (2014), he found that a new principal who had a positive professional reputation gained trust and acceptance from the staff regardless of the previous principal. New campus principals also reported that it took a great deal of effort to get buy-in from the current staff (Northfield, 2014).

Principals not only have to prove themselves when they arrive on a new campus but on a continual basis. Studies show that principals affect student outcomes, but the

effect is indirect (Farnsworth et al., 2019; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Robinson et al., 2008). These studies showed a principal's leadership affects numerous variables that, in turn, affect student achievement. There are times that a principal should enact unpopular changes to help with student outcomes.

The school culture that the principal has created with the staff will impact how the changes are enacted and received (Hollingworth et al., 2018). The first way for a principal to build a positive and effective school culture is trust. A positive school culture is one in which staff members are committed to student achievement, parents are involved, share a common vision, and collaboratively work toward common goals (Hollingworth et al., 2018). All principals face this challenge, no matter the size or location of the campus.

Many principals lead their campus in isolation from other principals or members of the central administration staff (Chhuon et al., 2008). Central administration hands down the expectations and mandates for the campus principals. In turn, those principals are expected to gain the trust of the staff and see that the goals are achieved. The findings of Chhuon et al. indicated that the actions of central administration are critical in the trust-building process that occurs further down the line. One of the principals from the study stated that the central administration was great at handing out tasks but terrible at giving support to achieve the tasks at hand. The principal should feel supported and should have trust in his/her superior in order to feel the freedom to work on campus to do whatever is necessary to meet the goals.

Rural Education

The report, "Why Rural Matters 2018-19: The Time Is Now", indicates that nearly 7.5 million public school students were enrolled in rural school districts during the 2016-17 school year—or nearly one of every seven students across the country (Showalter et al., 2019). According to the United States Department of Agriculture Economic Research Service (2017), 22.8% of rural children in the United States were living in poverty compared to 17.7% of urban children. Showalter et al. (2019) indicated that students living in high poverty rural areas have much larger performance gaps and therefore perform much worse on the state assessments. When it comes to college readiness, approximately half of the rural students even attempt the ACT or SAT, and even less attempt dual enrollment courses (Showalter et al., 2019).

Rural schools experience many challenges. From classroom size to out-of-school opportunities and college preparedness, rural students tend to have different experiences than their urban and suburban counterparts (American Institute for Research, 2019). It is interesting to note that rural schools have a higher high school graduation rate than the national average, but fewer students enroll in college and complete their programs (National Student Center Clearinghouse Research Center, 2018). Rural schools also struggle with staffing issues. The U.S. Department of Education reported that there are consistent staffing problems in rural schools (Education Commission of the States, 2016). Rural communities face limitations in recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers for reasons such as funding issues, limited teacher supply, lack of rigorous training and certification options, and geographic and social isolation.

Rural school communities pride themselves on creating a feeling of family bonds (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Their study went further to state that for some rural

communities, the school is the community; many students ride a bus for 20 minutes or longer just to get to school. Rural principals went on to state that they not only had to build trust with the staff but with the entire community. One stated, "In a rural setting you have to be visible at all times" (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018, p. 9).

Rural Principals

Principals in the urban, suburban, and rural schools struggle with meeting the workload of the principalship; however, rural principals face a unique set of challenges associated with their role (Hardwick-Franco, 2019; Parson et al., 2016). Because rural districts have smaller student populations, limited resources, and less funding, rural principals are often responsible for over-seeing a multitude of grade levels and often serve as the sole leader of their campuses (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). Rural principals serve in an assortment of roles and hold various responsibilities that include disciplinarian, manager, instructional leader, human resource department, the school-to-community liaison, custodian or bus driver, etc. (Hansen, 2018; Wieczorek & Maynard, 2018). It is difficult for the rural principal to keep up with all their job duties due to the multiple roles they fulfill for the school and community (Wieczorek & Manard, 2018). In a study conducted by Canales et al. (2008) the dual role of a superintendent/principal was examined. The study surveyed the superintendent/principal, teachers, and the school board; the common theme was the need to prioritize the responsibilities. Even though the rural principal serves multiple roles daily, the salary for the rural principal is lower than the city, suburban, and town counterparts (Hussar et al., 2020).

Due to the unique challenges that a rural principal faces daily, it is critical that they have a "trusting relationship" with their staff and faculty. In a case study on the

challenges for rural leaders conducted by du Plessis (2017), five rural principals were interviewed as well as faculty and a school board member. The principals agreed, "All our actions are based on trust, performance, and respect" (du Plessis, 2017, p.5). Another comment made in the study that was echoed by more than one person was the fact that the principal was a person to be trusted at all times, even when mistakes were made (du Plessis, 2017).

Highly effective schools are led by a principal who has the required knowledge, skills, beliefs, and dispositions necessary to improve teacher quality (Fusarelli & Militello, 2012). However, rural school districts struggle with the recruitment and retention of principals. Many rural schools have a high concentration of low socio-economic or migrant students, financial hardships, and extremely low principal salaries, all of which add to the difficulty of hiring a principal. Several studies (DeAngelis & White, 2011; Halsey & Drummond, 2014; Hansen, 2018) demonstrated a much higher principal turnover rate for rural schools and significant challenges to recruit and retain quality principals.

It takes a certain type of individual to commit to the challenges of being a rural principal. Beesley and Clark (2015) found that the individual looking to become a rural principal should value a close-knit community and desire to interact with students and the community on a daily basis. Beesley and Clark's study also cited that many of the rural principals lack advanced degrees when compared to other principals.

There is a concern about the attrition rate of rural principals. In a study conducted by Hansen (2018), six rural principals were interviewed about why they decided to leave the job. One theme that became evident was the workload and lack of support. Principals

in the study felt that they were so busy doing a little of everything all the time that they never did anything well. One principal stated that the time to create relationships and to have conversations was always cut short. Another principal noted that he felt as if he were alone on an island and did not have a colleague that he trusted to ask for help (Hansen, 2018).

Professional development has been determined to be a benefit to rural principals. In a study conducted by Stewart and Matthews (2018), rural Utah principals rated the attendance of leadership academies as the most beneficial professional development. They went on further to state that while the academies were useful, it was very difficult to leave campus numerous times for meetings. Another eye-opening piece of data from this study was that small rural principals reported collaborating at least two hours less with teachers than the medium-sized rural school principal. This was attributed to the fact that many of the principals from the study who are in small rural schools were also teachers. In another study conducted by Salazar (2007), rural principals across seven states were surveyed about professional development. According to the results, the area of focus that was the highest was building team commitment at 65.3%. The items that landed at the bottom of the list dealt with management. It was clear in Salazar's study that rural principals were primarily concerned with leadership strategies that would help nurture a collaborative environment.

Decision-Making

Principals should include all stakeholders in making decisions. According to Cranston (2011), a principal stated that he is the center of the web that connects everyone else. Everyone has to trust the principal, and then from that trust, trust is extended to

other members of the community (Cranston, 2011). Cranston went on to state that it doesn't matter if the principal is the most knowledgeable person in the room; the teachers have to trust the principal before they will listen. A study conducted by Mayworm and Sharkey (2014) solidified the idea that when parents are involved in the decision-making process, through the relationships built between the administrators and families, it becomes easier to make the correct ethical decisions because everyone is on the same page. Those relationships between all the parties involved in the education of a student revolve around trust.

Cosner (2009) felt that the principal had to be the person to set the norms for interactions between the principal-teacher and the teacher-teacher during the professional learning community meetings. Teacher collaboratives are important especially in regard to accountability. Teachers have to take ownership of what they do instead of just passing the buck, and Cosner (2009) pointed out that principals stated that trust-building was an important feature of school-wide reform. The study by Dirks and Ferrin (2002) examined participative decision making (PDM) and found that when principals use PDM, teachers respond with confidence. Participative decision making ensures that the principal has confidence in, and concern, and respect for the teacher.

A principal strives to remain transparent with the staff in all decisions; however, there is a fine line that they walk when sharing information. There are times that the principal should make judgement about how much information to share with teachers as part of the decision-making process (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016). The principal should lay the trust foundation with the staff prior to this type of situation so that they trust the

principal to make the best decision for the greater good, even when they are not privy to all the background information.

Trust

Trust is a challenging concept; it can take years to gain it and only seconds to lose it. "Trust, an essential element in all satisfying relationships, is a fragile thing, easier to break than to build" (Walker et al., 2011, p. 473). Trust is found in many different levels of society, such as individual trust, interpersonal trust, and organizational trust (Meyers et al., 2017). There are several studies on the different levels and importance of trust in different countries, but the one thing that is universal is the mechanisms to form and maintain trusting relationships (Kramer, 2010; Meyers et al., 2017). Individuals struggle to trust others due to the level of vulnerability required. Everyone involved in the relationship should be willing to share personal information (Meyers et al., 2017).

An added difficulty in building trust occurs when there is a level of power involved in the relationship, for example, a leader and the team. "Leaders and those who hold positional power need to model the courage it takes to confront and discuss difficult issues, especially if these can evoke emotional reactions" (Meyers et al., 2017, p. 225). The power of more opportunities for growth intensifies the differential power levels and allows for lapses in ethical judgment by administrators (Morris, 2019). Arciniega et al. (2019) stated that even Steve Jobs, one of the best leaders, did not believe that rules applied to him as they did to everyone else. He was above the rules. In the same study, they further investigated the fact that people who self-report high levels of achievement are far more likely to make unethical decisions if it helps themselves even though it damages the trust of their followers.

Trust in the educational setting involves multiple facets due to the number of people involved in the workings of one school campus. The principal is viewed as the trust broker for the staff, students, parents, and community (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016). In this study, one principal stated that mutual trust was extremely important. He went on to say, "We respond to people's requests based on the assumption of mutual trust" (Kutsyuruba et al., 2016, p. 356). The school should have trust between the teachers and principal before it can build trust between the school and the parents (Adams et al., 2009; Khalifa, 2012). The study conducted by Adams and colleagues (2009) found that regardless of the size of the school, the level of poverty, and the ethnic make-up, school leaders can build trust by ensuring that policies are aligned and practices are consistent and effective.

Principal-Teacher Trust

Relationships are an important part of any school. The relationships should be formed between leadership and teachers as well as between teachers and students. Kars and Inandi (2018) explored teachers trusting principals and how that trust affected the organization as a whole. Student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and overall contentment are due to teachers trusting the leadership abilities of the school principal (Kars & Inandi, 2018). Principals are the instructional leader of the campus, and teachers follow along if they trust that the principal knows what they are doing. The study conducted by Berkovich (2018) suggested that female teachers will trust a female principal easier and quicker than a male principal. The study suggested that gender plays a much bigger role in the trust relationship than other researchers give credit. Berkovich (2018) goes on to explain that the trust between the principal and teacher is a great predictor of the

commitment the teacher has for the organization as a whole. In a study conducted by Barnett and McCormick (2004), the findings support the idea that one-to-one relationships between the principal and individual teachers set the tone for the leadership of the school.

Researchers suggested that when trust exists between colleagues, individuals feel safe (Cosner, 2009). Teachers observe the principal and develop levels of trust with the principal, and over time, those perceptions are verified by other teachers who share the same perceptions (Forsyth et al., 2006). "Perceptions of high trust within a school have been tied to teachers' sense of a collaborative work environment, engagement in organizational citizenship behaviors, and improvement in academic productivity" (Chhuon et al., 2008, p. 231.)

"Principals work with, for, and through teachers, as they lead schools and in order to accomplish shared educational objectives" (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a, p. 68). The principal is charged with engaging with teachers regularly and effectively with clear intent so that they make necessary changes to instructional practices (Coldren & Spillane, 2007; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). The findings of the study conducted by Tschannen-Moran & Gareis (2015b) were that a principal is more likely to be trusted when they are approachable and is open to suggestions and ideas from all the stakeholders.

There are times when the truth is not pretty. There has to be a certain level of trust between the principal and teacher that allows for honest and open discussions. One participant in the study conducted by Kutsyuruba et al. (2016) stated that you should be able to tell people the truth about areas in which they can improve. Teachers also want to

have enough trust in the principal to be able to ask for help when they are failing (Macmillan et al., 2004). Macmillan and colleagues went on to explain that teachers and principals should have a mutual amount of trust in each other; the principal trusts the teacher to teach without constant supervision, and the teacher trusts the principal to provide positive as well as negative support continually.

Engagement

A study conducted by Bird et al. (2009) examined the level of teacher engagement based on the amount of trust felt between the teacher and principal at the school. The level of trust grew exponentially when a teacher felt that the principal was authentic in his/her decision-making ability (Bird et al., 2009). This deepens the support of the importance of principals building a trust relationship with their teachers. Engaged teachers will produce engaged students resulting in academic excellence (Bird et al., 2009). In the presence of a trusting and supporting environment, teachers will do their best work and be 100 percent engaged (Forsyth et al., 2006).

Teachers need to attend continuing education courses to stay in touch with the latest and greatest techniques and strategies. According to the study conducted by Bogler and Somech (2004), the more a teacher perceives that they have opportunities for professional growth, the more they will strive to do things for the good of the entire organization. The study also found that if a teacher believes that they can make a difference in the life of a student in the classroom, the more committed that teacher will be. Principals are the ones to direct the teachers towards the professional development that will help them as well as the overall campus.

Teachers often go above and beyond what is normally expected of them when they feel that the principal's shared vision for the campus is important. Hoy et al. (2008) described this characteristic as citizenship behavior. They further state that teachers will go the extra mile to help raise student achievement. The teacher's sense of efficacy is directly linked to overall student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Collaboration

School age, leaders are encouraged to gain input from all stakeholders. There are many times teachers felt as if they were left out of the equation when decisions are made that affect the world they operate in on a daily basis (Hollingworth et al., 2018). Hollingworth et al. (2018) found that teachers were more likely to accept changes and step out of their comfort zone if they feel like they are part of the decision-making process. An Australian study conducted by Starr (2011) over a three-year period found that principals try to anticipate and curb any resistance to the necessary changes that are needed to improve student performance. One teacher in the study conducted by Hollingworth et al. (2018) stated that principals could lay the foundation of trust by having an open-door communication policy. Principals need to be visible to staff members, students, and community members to ensure a positive school culture (Hollingworth et al., 2018). In a study conducted by Shen and Xia (2012), results indicated that teachers who are included in the decision-making process feel that the change is made in a win-win situation. The study went further to say that when a principal makes unilateral decisions, such as teacher evaluations, teachers view the decision and a zero-sum situation.

Administrators should also consult parents and community members when making decisions for the school. The administrator should make sure that the decisions that arise from this group are not self-serving decisions. Members of these committees often at times have agendas to ensure their child receives special privileges or that they somehow benefit from the group's decision. The business owner may propose that he will offer students the ability to observe or intern with his company, provided the school will, in turn, only use his company for select services. The administrator should make the ethical decision to turn down this offer due to the legal requirements to bid out professional work. The administrator is the person the committee depends on to make the ethical choice. The administrator is expected to "reconcile the conflicts of interest that occur between the organization and the stakeholders" (Caldwell et al., 2008).

Another avenue where collaborative trust is achieved is through professional learning communities. A study conducted by Wahlstrom and Louis (2008) found that if teachers participated in professional learning communities, then the level of trust was not as important between the principal and teacher because the teachers had a voice in the decision at hand. Professional learning communities allow for collaboration on tasks big and small. Principals can join the professional learning communities to share insight and to gain insight into what teachers are thinking about a decision that leadership is considering. Teacher buy-in is huge when major changes need to be made to shift the direction of a school. A study conducted by Cranston (2011) indicated that relational trust is what builds a successful professional learning community.

Teachers want to feel that they have a voice in decisions and that they are taken seriously. In a study conducted by Balyer (2017), teachers voiced concern about the fact

that teachers are also college graduates and might have ideas worth listening to. In the same study, another teacher stated that teaching is teamwork, and we should trust our leader to lead the team in the right direction. Sharing leadership with teachers reduced the feeling of isolation for many teachers (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Edwards-Groves et al. (2016) conducted a study examining some teachers as the middle leader. The concept of teacher leaders is growing in popularity and necessity. The principal cannot be everywhere all the time, so the teacher (middle leader) helps ensure that the staff remains focused on the common goals (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008).

Ethics/Emotions

Ethics is an important aspect of trust between teachers and principals. Principals serve as the moral agent for the school (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015). This study further stated that the principal not only faces right vs. wrong decisions but should also determine between right vs. right dilemmas. The principal should remove the emotional attachment, if it exists, to any of the teachers when making an impartial decision. Teachers trust the principal to be fair and just when making decisions (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). A principal who can effectively frame an issue in light of what is best for kids and who can judge the situation unbiased and focus on the outcome will win the trust of the faculty (Bogler & Somech, 2004; Hoy et al., 2008, Wang & Bird, 2011).

Administrators face ethical dilemmas and challenges daily in the K-12 school setting. Ethical decisions are sometimes routine, and other times, extremely challenging in nature. Administrators in the small, rural K-12 setting many times make the decision alone with the help of another colleague. The driving force for the administrator should be to maintain what is best for the child and teacher they oversee. "Educational leaders

should protect and ethically foster the growth of students and teachers" (Jones et al., 2020, p. 150). For the organization to run smoothly and effectively, the administrator needs to gain the trust of those in the organization by exhibiting a high positive ethical standard.

There are times when the administrator may decide to make an unethical decision for self-betterment or to show a sense of power to his/her followers. Power can become a slippery slope, and the administrator can quickly slide down the slope of unethical choices. Therefore, the leaders should remember why they took on the leadership role. Covey (2004) stated that leadership is "communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves. (p.98)" According to Caldwell et al. (2008), ethical leaders have a servant mindset to add value to the organization and to their followers. School employees will move mountains for administrators they feel they can trust and who will make the tough ethical decisions every time they are faced with a dilemma or challenge.

Another study conducted by Brinia et al. (2014) suggested that authenticity was not the only important factor, but that emotional intelligence was needed. This study defined emotional intelligence as "our ability to recognize our emotions and those of other people, in order to motivate and manage ourselves and our relationships" (Brinia et al., 2014, p. 29). Many principals feel that emotions get in the way of the day-to-day operations and thus go through the motions without feelings (Brinia et al., 2014). Teachers are humans, and they need to see that principals are humans too. Relationships are necessary for schools, not just for teachers and students but, also for leadership and teachers. Time needs to be taken to build those relationships. Once the trust is established

in the leadership-teacher relationship, teachers will put more energy into their work and the organization will grow (Erdem & Aytac, 2019).

In a case study conducted by Harris (2004), the focus was on leadership as an emotional process. Harris looked at one high school with 34 teachers and 600 students. Her findings implied that there are three emotional conditions required for school improvement to occur. The first condition was a school climate of trust in which the teachers felt included and valued. Harris noted that the second condition necessary was space for positive relationships to develop. The positive relationships not only had to occur between the principal and teachers but also between the teachers and parents (Harris, 2004). The last condition could only occur if the first two conditions exist. The teachers began to take on leadership roles without fear of persecution or ridicule. "In essence, this means a high degree of emotional exposure and trust, which is at the heart of successful and sustainable school improvement" (Harris, 2004, p. 402). Harris noted that the emotional work required courage, humility, and perseverance not only on the part of the leader but on the part of everyone involved.

Method

Research Design

A qualitative case study was chosen as an appropriate approach for this study. The study took place in a rural school district in west Texas. One of the key components of qualitative research is identifying patterns and actions that contribute to a phenomenon (Yin, 2018). Therefore, in this study, qualitative methods allowed for a better understanding of teacher and administrator perspectives on the factors that influence trust between teachers and administrators. The potential benefit of this qualitative study is that

it can lead to the discovery of factors that could contribute to the development of trust between teacher and administrator according to the perspectives of both groups.

A single-case study approach was used. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview with a rural school's sole principal and a focus group consisting of the teachers from the same district. A single-case study also allows for flexibility. To answer the main research question of this study, a common, single-case study is being selected to capture how a rural PreK-12 principal meets the trust needs of teachers (Creswell, 2014).

Participation Population

The setting of the study is Grae Independent School District (pseudonym: GISD). GISD consists of a single campus PreK-12 with one principal and 17 teachers. To create the study sample population, purposive sampling was used. The participants were chosen based on their direct link to the topic of study and their ability to provide a wealth of data on the subject (Leavy, 2017). Because of the specificity of the study to PreK-12, one administrator campuses, and the small participation pool, only one administrator participated. The one campus administrator had a one-on-one interview, and the teachers took part in a focus group. The administrator chosen was the sole principal at GISD. The teachers selected were from the teaching staff at GISD. The diversity in campus levels was important due to the different perspectives needed to successfully answer the study's research questions. Each teacher had been with the district for a full year prior to the study.

Data Collection

  A pre-questionnaire, an individual interview, and a focus group were used to collect data. The pre-questionnaire was completed by all participants. The pre-questionnaire gathered background information, such as demographics, teaching background, and previous experience. Since the participants completed this pre-questionnaire in advance, it allowed more time to be spent on the interviews.

  The interview protocol consisted of open-ended questions that were developed with the intent of answering the research questions. The interview guide was adapted, with permission, from the interview guide developed by Dr. Cynthia Smith-Ough. The interview with the principal lasted approximately 30 minutes and was scheduled to accommodate the principal's schedule and to avoid interview fatigue. The purpose of the interview was to get the principal's perspective on the important factors of trust and how they gain the trust of teachers.

  The purpose of the focus group was to gather data from different participant's perspectives (Stalmeijer et al., 2014). For this study, one focus group was used and consisted of six participants who have served as full-time classroom teachers in GISD for at least one full year. The protocol for the focus group was developed to determine what factors contribute to the trust between a principal and their teachers.

Data Analysis

  The data were analyzed using The Framework Method. "The Framework Method sits within a broad family of analysis methods often termed thematic analysis or qualitative content analysis" (Gale et al., 2013, p. 2). The Framework Method is a seven-stage flexible tool. The first stages involve transcription, familiarization with the

interview, and coding. In the data analysis stage, it was important to create a working analytical framework. The codes were grouped into categories based on similarities and then applied to the analytical framework is applied. Charting was done to "strike a balance between reducing the data on the one hand and retaining the original meanings and 'feel' of the interviewees' words on the other" (Gale et al., 2013, p. 5). The final stage was the interpretation of the data.

Findings

The overarching research question for this study was "How does a rural PreK-12 principal meet the trust needs of teachers?" There were two sub-research questions that discussed the development of trust between a teacher and a principal. The first question was answered through the perspective of teachers, and the second question was answered through the perspective of the principal. The themes that were generated from the data were benevolence, honesty, open communication, reliability, competency, and collaboration.

What factors contribute to the development of trust between a teacher and a principal, according to the perspective of teachers?

According to the focus group of teachers, the reliability of the principal was the most important factor in the development of trust. Several of the teachers in the focus group related stories of Principal Gray being consistent and fair with both the teachers and the students. Mrs. Jones said, "If she said she was going to do it, she did it. She may not have even liked that decision." Benevolence, honesty, and competency tied for the second most important factor. Open communication was the next highest factor, followed

by collaboration. "Principal Gray would ask everybody how do you all feel about it?", according to Ms. Smith.

Mr. Jack felt that Principal Gray was reliable because she took care of an issue that occurred in his class while he was out. She said:

One of my classes acted terribly, from what I heard, but before I could even do anything about it, Principal Gray had already taken care of it and had the kids write apology notes to the substitute for how they behaved.

Many of the teachers commented on the practice of Principal Gray of asking the teachers to come in before school started and just talk about what they had going on in their own life and what she could do to help them. Ms. Booth said, "I feel that it's very important to get to know me; she would then know if something was happening, maybe in your personal life or something." Mr. Jack felt it was important that he was able to "share with Principal Gray the strengths and weaknesses that you feel that you have and that she was taking the time to get to know you." Mrs. Jones expressed that she thought it was important that she could communicate openly, and honestly with her principal and she said, "Principal Gray was transparent about concerns that she may have or concerns that I may have." All six teachers commented on the fact that Principal Gray was in it 100% for the kids and the staff. "She was never promoting herself; she had the kids at the top of her interest," according to Ms. Smith. Mrs. Doan and Ms. Booth echoed the sentiments that Principal Gray was great at building relationships. Ms. Booth ended her comments with, "She was really good at building relationships with her staff and students. I just think that lays the groundwork, and building those relationships is what really matters and builds trust." According to the focus group, Principal Gray took great strides to build trust

through several factors, and there was not just one that created the trust between the teachers and Principal Gray.

What factors contribute to the development of trust between a teacher and a principal, according to the perspective of the principal?

As the only principal on this PreK-12 campus, Principal Gray's answers supported the factors of benevolence, honesty, openness, and collaboration as the most important factors from the principal's perspective. Reliability came in next, and her competency was at the bottom of the list. Principal Gray referred to the need to adjust and change quickly during COVID. She talked about checking in on her teacher's wellbeing and taking care of many things for them instead of making them do extra work. "I had already premade the Zoom links for all the students, and I had a letter typed out with instructions, this way, my staff didn't have to freak out about getting everything ready. Principal Gray stated:

> At the beginning of the year, I like to have all my teachers come in and tell me their needs. They can tell me exactly what they need and how they need it; I also like to know about their families.

Once Principal Gray laid the foundation for the relationship between her and her staff, it allowed for her to have hard conversations with teachers when necessary. This allowed for open and honest communication between the principal and the teacher. Principal Gray said:

> It's not always a gotcha time; at times, people have to hear the hard words. I think that whenever you are open and honest with them, like that, they do trust you more, because after all, we are they for the kids.

Principal Gray spoke about the fact that she uses a principal survey that can be anonymous if teachers so choose, "The survey talks about how our staff works together and things we need to work on to get better as a staff. I feel those really gave me some good feedback every year." Principal Gray made sure that the staff knew she appreciated them. She stated:

> I used a lot of tangible gifts, scratch-off tickets, breakfasts, and lunches together. I also send out Thank You notes to the spouses every year to thank them for allowing their spouse to be at school so many hours and allowing them to be a part of our world so much rather than their home life so much.

Discussion

Principals have one of the hardest jobs in education. They must be exceptional multi-taskers while holding the campus together. Principals must be able to rely on the teachers to trust them with daily decisions and operations so that the campus can run smoothly. Trust is crucial between the teachers and the principal to ensure that everyone is working towards one common goal. This study reveals the important factors necessary to build that trust.

Summary

The purpose of the study was to learn what factors are important in the building of a trusting relationship between a PreK-12 principal and teachers. Rural principals are extremely busy and must be able to rely on the fact that the faculty trusts the decisions made for the campus. In this age of high-stakes testing, it is of the utmost importance that teachers and the principal all work towards one common goal. The only way that will happen is if each party trusts the other party involved. Principals must know what factors

are important to teachers when it comes to trust so they can build that relationship quickly and maintain a strong, trusting relationship.

This study was in line with the concepts of *Collective Trust* by Forsyth et al. (2011), who found that there were five factors of collective trust. My study found all five factors, benevolence, openness, honesty, reliability, and competency, to be important to both the teachers and the principal. However, one factor that Forsyth et al. (2011), does not mention as a common theme in my study was collaboration. Collaboration was a trust factor in the works of Cosner (2009) when looking at the trust between the teacher and principal during the age of accountability. This study echoes the findings that collaboration is extremely important when trying to get teachers and the principal moving towards a common goal.

According to Sendjaya and Pekerti (2010), leaders who put the needs of the followers first, and help the followers have a sense of purpose, gain more trust from followers. The focus group gave many different examples of Principal Gray putting the needs of the teachers and/or students before her own. Hoy et al. (2006) found that benevolence was the most common element in collective trust. However, my study PreK-12 teachers found reliability was higher than benevolence. While the teachers did appreciate the care and concern that Principal Gray showed them, they needed to know her word was reliable. Our education system is comprised of "give and take", and when the teachers can rely on the administrator, there is a sense of confidence and peace of mind (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Mr. Jack supported this idea when he said, "…and then trusting you to do your job and taking care of things that you're supposed to be taking care of." Benevolence, honesty, and competency were all equally important to

the focus group. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2000) found that when the administrator exhibits honesty in the good and the bad situations, trust is built. "I've had five principals in my lifetime, and she was really the first one that sat down and listened to what I had to say," according to Mrs. Jones. Trust is built between the two parties in the school system when respect and genuine care for the individual are present (Lesinger et al., 2017).

Teachers must first feel that the principal cares about their well-being as a person (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015a). Burke et al. (2007) found that teachers are more motivated, work harder, and work more persistently when the administrator is perceived as benevolent. Principal Gray spoke to her integrity when she talked about her open-door policy. A study showed that teachers must have confidence that the administrator's word can be relied on and that it will accurately predict his/her future actions to trust the administrator (Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2015b). Principals must gain the trust of the teachers in order to build a positive and effective school culture. The rural principal faces numerous and difficult challenges, and it takes a special person to commit to those challenges. Tschannen-Moran and Gareis (2015a) found that a principal was more likely to be trusted when they are approachable and open to suggestions and ideas from all stakeholders.

Trust between the administrator and the teachers has been studied for many years and by many people. A positive school culture is one in which staff members are committed to student achievement, parents are involved, share a common vision, and collaboratively work toward common goals (Hollingworth et al., 2018). All principals face this challenge, no matter the size or location of the campus. Trust must be built between the teachers and principal, and it must be genuine between the two parties. Kars

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and Inandi (2018) found that when teachers trust the leadership of the principal, student outcomes, teacher satisfaction, and overall contentment increase.

Implications

For successful student achievement, teachers should have trust in the principal. An implication of this study is that rural principals should attend conferences or workshops to learn new ways to conduct team-building activities. When the principal takes the time to build these relationships early, it will be easier to have open communications, good or bad, later. A second implication is that principals should see that staff morale is important. The principal should work to be fair and just in his/her decisions and explain the reasoning behind them to the teachers. The rural principal does wear many hats, but they should not forget to slow down and acknowledge the work of each teacher. Teachers appreciate hearing "Good Job," and they also appreciate acknowledgement of the hard work they do every day for students.

Principals need to exhibit the idea that every decision is the best decision for the staff and students. Teachers can accept change, criticism, and extra work if they trust that the principal is only doing what is best for kids. Again, the busy rural principal should take the time to communicate the reasons and ideas behind new programs, initiatives, and changes. The principal could send out weekly news updates, hold quick informal meetings during lunch, or just have open casual conversations with the staff. There are times it is easier and quicker to have a faculty meeting to ask everyone to work harder when in reality, only a few need to hear this message. The principal needs to take the time to have tough conversations one on one. The principal should maintain a character of integrity. Trust is vital in the school world, and integrity will carry the principal

through the good and bad times. The principal should make the time to have an open-door policy. The principal should be able to manage their time to be visible and approachable.

Strengths and Limitations

This study has strengths due to the rich data derived from the qualitative case study research design. The semi-structured interviews allowed for the issues of trust to be examined in detail and in depth. The information gained from this study is applicable to other rural schools which can serve as a guide for hiring principals in a small school district that has one principal serving the entire school.

This study also has limitations. It was conducted on a single PreK-12 campus. The principal interviewed, accepted another position out of the district, but the teachers may have still been hesitant to answer with complete honesty. As the current superintendent of the district in the study, the participants and may have given guarded answers for that reason. This study was conducted during the last month of a tense school year due to the global pandemic, and those circumstances could have affected the answers given during the study.

Conclusion

"Building trust takes time, a resource that educators often fall short of when pressed by high-stakes accountability and demands" (Chhuon et al., 2008, p. 273). Trust is the most important relationship-building concept needed between the principal and teachers. Trust will lead to the group working towards the common goal of improving education overall for all students. The rural principal must slow down and take time to

form relationships with each teacher and staff member if they plan to be successful. Within the relationships, trust will form and will increase the capacity of the campus.

Education is an ever-changing world. Through all the chaos, one thing that remains constant is the need for relationships based on trust.   "Trust is built on daily interaction; every day you have to be a consistent person" (Cranston, 2011, p. 67). The principal is charged with being able to stand back and see the whole picture and then share the steps to reach the goal with teachers (Kutsyuruba & Walker, 2015). "Leadership is a dialogue, not a monologue" (Barnett & McCormick, 2004). Teachers trust that the principal will share the decision-making roles with them, and in turn, the principal trusts that they will be open and honest in their responses. Trust is the essential element for a successful school.

The rural principal takes on a huge responsibility when they accept the job. The responsibilities are like no other principal; they are typically the only administrator on the campus, and often the only principal in the district. However, one thing that remains true regardless of the size or location of the school is the fact that the principal and teacher must trust each other if the students are to succeed.

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