

**A CASE STUDY OF RURAL PRINCIPALS' EVALUATIVE PRACTICES USING  
THE TEXAS TEACHER EVALUATION AND SUPPORT SYSTEM**

by

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A Scholarly Delivery Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

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## **Scholarly Delivery Framework**

The research focus of the scholarly delivery is leadership, specifically instructional leadership, with teacher evaluators as the primary subjects and the practices and strategies they employ using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System to improve instructional practices on their campuses. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study article that can be used for teaching doctoral or master's candidates in the field of educational leadership. The title of this article is "Improving Teacher Evaluation to Improve Student Outcomes at El Camino High School." The case focuses on the importance that teacher evaluations have on student academic achievement. Students reading the case must examine the data and the narrative, express further questions and plans for obtaining added information, and develop a plan to help school leaders improve their teacher evaluation process to support student learning. The final scholarly deliverable is an empirical article titled "A Case Study of Rural Principals' Evaluative Practices Using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System." This empirical article focuses on the strategies and practices teacher evaluators employ in the evaluation process to improve instructional practices on their campuses.



**INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS  
Letter of Approval**

June 1, 2021

Dr. Bigham:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2021.05.004 for your study titled, “A Case Study of Rural Principals Evaluative Practices Using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System,” 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 **May 30, 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,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Angela Spaulding". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent initial 'A'.

Dr. Angela Spaulding  
Vice President of Research and Compliance

## **Acknowledgments**

Completing an empirical article in a doctoral program is not something a person accomplishes alone. I was blessed mightily with a robust support system. The process of earning a doctoral degree is an absolute honor.

First, I would like to thank my immediate family. My wife, Lynn, has always provided stability and a belief in me to accomplish my goals and has been patient and supportive throughout this time. To my children, Jackson and Reid, thank you for the sacrifices you made for me to reach this ambition. The ongoing support from my family has fueled the inspiration to complete this process. I hope this accomplishment serves as inspiration for goals you may have in the future. To my dad, Warren, thank you for the encouragement. You have instilled drive and determination to become successful in life. I hope I provide the same example to my children.

The journey through the scholarly deliverable process was guided by my professors. I appreciate my Committee Chair, Dr. Gary Bigham, for his scholarly and professional manner. He kept a high level of energy, optimism, and enthusiasm during this work. I would also like to thank Dr. Irma Harper and Dr. Ray Barbosa for serving on my committee and reviewing this work. Their colleagues in the West Texas A&M Educational Leadership area created meaningful experiences and challenges in their courses.

Finally, I say thank you to all my friends and colleagues behind the scenes, both district and university, who helped encourage me throughout the process. To achieve anything great, you must trust the process and enjoy the experience.

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**Improving Teacher Evaluation to Improve Student Outcomes at El Camino High  
School**

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## **Abstract**

This case study focuses on the importance that teacher evaluations have on student academic achievement. El Camino High School is a school that is suffering from low academic achievement and a flawed teacher evaluation system, according to a recent teacher survey. Wide-ranging information is given about the school, the administrators, and the community. Students must examine the data and the narrative, express further questions and plans for obtaining added information, and develop a plan to help school leaders improve their teacher evaluation process to support student learning.

*Keywords:* instructional leadership, teacher evaluation, teacher effectiveness

## **Improving Teacher Evaluation to Improve Student Outcomes at El Camino High School**

School leaders are responsible for fostering student growth, providing teacher development, ensuring a safe climate and positive culture for their schools, and developing individual professional growth (Fox et al., 2015; Wise, 2015). These responsibilities can be overwhelming, especially with the many issues that campus and district leaders experience. Some of the growing issues faced by principals include an increase in test accountability, job-related tasks, and expectations such as instructional leadership (Wise, 2015).

Instructional leadership is critical when accomplishing the goals of student achievement and test accountability. This type of leadership refers to having clear educational goals for students and evaluating and supporting instruction in the classroom. Leadership at the campus level should be connected to the vision statement of the campus and should be clear. The campus leadership can have a sustained positive impact on student learning, either directly or indirectly; directly, which means by directly encouraging students and indirectly by influencing the organization (Day et al., 2016; ten Bruggengate et al., 2012).

### **Purpose**

Improving student performance is at the center of this case study. There is a vast corpus of research that supports various ideas and combinations of those ideas that will increase student performance. One way for the administration to secure teachers are successfully working toward increased student achievement is through consistent and

targeted teacher evaluations. This case study focuses on the quest for quality teacher evaluations in a setting that is complacent with the status quo.

### **Case Narrative**

El Camino High School (ECHS), built in the late 1980s, has seen many changes over the past 30 years. There was a steady stream of new arrivals to the area due to the economic opportunities offered by the city nearby. The small-town feel that embodies the district draws people from outlying areas that like city convenience without city headaches. In its early days, ECHS was quintessentially rural. The Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter had been among the most prominent in the state. The Technology Student Association produced top prize winners annually, and the Auto-tech Engine-building team competed against other schools nationally.

Recently, the school had begun to take on a more suburban feel; the addition of new programs, like a boys and girls soccer team and Byte Club (a technology club that promotes computer program coding and custom computer building, added to this feeling). The student organizations and sports teams were still thriving. They were more numerous and varied. The student population was also changing. ECHS was almost exclusively white in its early days. Today, the school was much more diverse: 72% White, 20% Hispanic, 5% Black, and the remaining 3% claiming two or more ethnicities. The student body was a modest 450 students when the campus first opened but had swelled to over 900 in their current year.

The school was a consistent performer academically, though it was not the preferred type of consistency. ECHS had not shown significant student growth in most academic disciplines in years, and their comparison schools group outperformed them

significantly. The El Camino community seemed to pay little attention to ECHS's academic performance.

### *A Typical Day*

It is early in the school year, and Mr. Hinkel had his walkie-talkie in hand while he was perusing the vivacious commons during the underclassmen's lunch hour at ECHS. He was fielding the concerns of a student over this week's football contest against one of their regional rivals. Mr. Hinkel asked the student for evidence to support why he insisted that the opposing team had an edge in the running back position. Five years ago, Mr. Hinkel would regularly coach his forensic science students to think in the same manner. He would say, "It is okay to have an idea of what you think happened. However, if you don't have proof, it is nothing more than an opinion."

Mr. Hinkel is one of three administrators at ECHS, and he thoroughly enjoys the time that he gets to spend with students. He is the newly hired principal and relishes getting out of the office and engaging the students. The other two administrators at ECHS relieve Mr. Hinkel of some disciplinary and attendance duties so that he can handle some of the other pressing needs of the school business. Over the next week, Mr. Hinkel needs to attend the school's cross-country meet, prepare the announcement of the homecoming king and queen at Friday night's football game, and host a career-shadowing student who wants to be a high school principal when she is older. He requires the energy of a child and the wisdom of age to keep it all together, and he enjoys the balancing act.

Mrs. Knowles has been an assistant principal at ECHS for seven years. She, like Mr. Hinkel, enjoys getting to interact with students and is quick with a smile when approached by students. Working the lunch hour with Mr. Hinkel has been deemed a

necessary part of their outreach to students. She feels the same way today around students as she did when she was in her classroom. She finds the company of students preferable to that of adults. Mrs. Knowles views her role as an administrator as merely an extension of the classroom, and that is her focus. Her philosophy of discipline has always been less about consequences and more about her “problem-students,” figuring out how to function and work with peers and authority in their environment. The teachers at ECHS find her easy to bring their problems to but doubt that she is the most effective disciplinarian on the campus, with students or with faculty.

Mr. Walsh is the longest-serving administrator at ECHS and is in the final steps of placing a student in in-school suspension over an insubordination incident with a teacher rather than in the commons with his cohorts. He has served under three other principals at ECHS and has seen all sorts of education initiatives come and go. He had high hopes of being the new principal at ECHS when Mr. Hinkel was hired. Mr. Walsh’s focus was more on sports and extracurricular activities rather than academics.

Mr. Walsh’s children are both students at ECHS. His daughter is a tennis player who is about to graduate, and his son is a freshman on the football team. Ever the educator, Mr. Walsh moonlights as a youth sports referee and a concealed-carry handgun license instructor. He views his role on the campus as the disciplinarian. He has a reputation among the students as a menacing presence in the hallways and in his office. The faculty often get frustrated with him because they think he performs many of his duties with a cold and robotic sentiment.

### *The Case*

Mr. Hinkel had a scheduled meeting with his assistant principals during the upperclassmen's lunch period today. These meetings served as a way for the administrators to take a break from the firefight of running a school and afforded them a regular time to handle the more global issues that school leaders needed to address. These meetings helped to avoid some of the miscommunication headaches that could occur when a cohesive message fails to solidify from the administration. The focus of today's meeting was on ways to improve the quality of teacher evaluations. Since Mr. Hinkel knew that classroom instruction was the key to student achievement, he brought along the campus' academic performance report from the last two years. He felt this would ignite a need for change in the process.

Mr. Hinkel had experience with teacher evaluations both as a teacher and an administrator. Previously he served as a science teacher at ECHS before being hired away as an assistant principal five years ago at another high school. As a teacher, he recalled the previous principal describing the teacher evaluation process as a "dog and pony show." This expression referred to the ritual of the administrators coming into the classroom to fulfill their policy obligation in regards to performing a teacher evaluation, but nothing more. The teacher evaluation process, on the surface, appeared to be authentic but, it was nothing more than a circus. Mr. Hinkel thrived in that environment as a teacher because of his bias toward action and a sense of moral obligation to his students. That was not the case for all teachers on the campus then or now. Mr. Hinkel, for the sake of his students, worried that his administrative team was ill-prepared to support ECHS's teachers in the evaluation process.

Mr. Hinkel walked into his office, where Mrs. Knowles and Mr. Walsh were joking about the day's events while lunching on the fajitas that Mr. Hinkel had ordered. Mr. Hinkel sat down and exchanged pleasantries before starting in on the day's agenda. He was well-read on moving organizations toward a common goal, but practicing the theory was different. Although experience is the best teacher, it is costly, and this was his first opportunity to try out what he had learned. Mr. Hinkel laid two years of Academic Performance Reports on the table, which indicated that ECHS was well below the state average in their English and Math scores. He asked his team, "What can we do to increase our state-mandated testing scores?"

A cursory examination of the Academic Performance Report for ECHS quickly confirmed a need for academic improvement. A firm believer in the axiom that you should "measure what you care about," Mr. Hinkel thought that his team could do more to support their students and teachers. He knew from his experience as a teacher at ECHS that measurement of teacher performance in the classroom was not happening. If Mr. Hinkel was to live up to his moral ideal of caring for the students of ECHS, there were going to need to be some changes in the systems that the administrative team was using to evaluate teachers' classroom performance.

Mr. Hinkel asked his two assistant principals what they thought. Immediately, Mr. Walsh stated, "It is those kids we had for the last two years. They didn't care about academics." Mrs. Knowles adamantly disagreed by stating, "The students here at ECHS are amazing. It is the teachers. They do not work hard enough for our students." It was obvious that Mr. Hinkel had a tough job ahead of him.

In the hopes of showing a correlation between student achievement and teacher evaluations, Mr. Hinkel shared with the administrators a survey that he had given to his teachers earlier in the school year. The survey was titled “Teacher Attitudes Toward Teacher Evaluation.” The survey indicated that 61% of the faculty valued the feedback they received from their professional evaluation. There were 54% that felt that the school leaders valued the teacher evaluation process. Only 53% felt that their teacher evaluation caused them to reflect upon their teaching practices. It was alarming to find that only 52% felt that their school leaders gave them meaningful feedback during the teacher evaluation process. Finally, 64% felt their evaluator asked them to reflect upon their lesson to find an area to improve. Mr. Hinkel said, “Now what do you think. What should we do?”

Mrs. Knowles, ever the optimist, said, “Maybe we can do a better job with the teacher evaluations? I’ve wanted to make the evaluation process better, but figuring in the time to make that happen seems to get crowded out by all the other things we have to do.” Mr. Hinkel nodded with approval while he mused the opportunities that a willing administrative team can present when building a more meaningful evaluation practice. Mrs. Knowles quipped at the principal, “Maybe we have fewer meetings to find the time for this?”

“I know this may not be what you want to hear, but if I had a nickel for every initiative that’s found its way into El Camino to improve learning, I might be retired by now.” Mr. Walsh uttered to the group with a smirk.

We have a talented group of teachers here, and I don’t know that reforming our evaluation process is an effective use of our time. I think focusing on the students

may be a better idea. The kids aren't what they used to be. That's what I see and what our teachers are saying.

Mr. Hinkel bobbed his head to show that he was listening to what Mr. Walsh had to say.

Mr. Hinkel prized honest feedback from his team. He also had been warned by his superintendent that he might have an equilibrium to find when it came to Mr. Walsh. Mrs. Knowles showed a tendency to support initiatives from previous principals and thoroughly enjoyed her role at El Camino. Mr. Walsh had applied for the principal's position at El Camino and may have some contempt for Mr. Hinkel and his success in the hiring process. Mr. Hinkel felt a moral imperative, even though he may have some resistance to the idea. Mr. Hinkel finally stated, "In order to raise our student academic achievement, something has to change. Our first focus area will be the teacher evaluation process. Now, let's get busy!"

### **Teaching Notes**

While many different leadership theories can be employed to improve student outcomes in this situation (Day et al., 2016; Thoonen et al., 2011), Northouse (2019) found that transformational leadership was successful in improving outcomes for students by improving teacher practices. Robinson et al. (2008) supported the idea that transformational leadership helped to increase student outcomes when combined with instructional leadership, particularly when leaders emphasized relationships and sharpened their skills in student learning and teaching. While instructional leadership is a positive way to increase student outcomes from the organizational perspective, it is not the only way. An eclectic set of leadership skills will be beneficial in this circumstance.

Transformational leadership is considered one of the most comprehensive methods that leaders can use to move their organizations to accomplish lofty goals. Transformational leadership is built on the idea that leaders need to adjust to the motivations of their followers and help those followers increase their commitment to the goals of the organizations through a shared vision and empowerment of the members of the organization to meet those objectives (Anderson et al., 2017). The transformational leader is viewed by employees as committed to the vision of the organization and develops belief and assurance among their employees. Transformational leaders produce a strong sense of resolve among their followers and help the followers to achieve more than they thought was feasible (Gambrell et al., 2011).

Transformational leadership offers several advantages. The first strength is the considerable amount of research that has been conducted on this method from numerous angles. People are also engrossed with the idea of transformational leadership because of its intuitive appeal and the way that it fits into people's ideas of what leadership should be. There is a chemistry to transformational leadership that occurs between the leader and the followers that breeds an idea of shared leadership. Meaning, leadership is not charged only to the leader; it is shared in the organization. Transformational leadership spurs followers to achieve more for the collective good of the organization (Gambrell et al., 2011) and urges team members to be morally sound. Finally, Yukl (1999) noted that transformational leadership yields subordinates that correlate positively with fulfillment and performance.

## **Discussion Questions**

Students can increase their understanding and gain knowledge from their classmates when they process the case as a class or in small discussion groups. The subsequent questions and activities can be utilized to encourage reflection, analysis, and dialogue.

1. What are some ways that an effective teacher evaluator can help improve teachers' instructional practices?
2. How do principals develop a culture that values the improvement of student outcomes? Are these practices best communicated to the campus as a whole, a professional learning community, or even the individual faculty-member?
3. What are the major andragogical alarms that appeared in the case narrative, and what are some ways that Mr. Hinkel addresses these concerns with Mrs. Knowles and Mr. Walsh?
4. Are there any considerations that should be made in the context of Mr. Hinkel having less administrative experience than his other administrative team members?
5. What are some of the interpersonal skills that may need development in Mrs. Knowles and Mr. Walsh regarding their relationships with faculty on the campus?
6. What are some leadership theories that could be applied to help Mr. Hinkel and his faculty improve student achievement on the ECHS campus?

## Teaching Activities

1. Create a table of probable concerns that Mr. Hinkel might have with his administrative team in terms of the faculty's perception of them and develop descriptive and probing questions.
2. Role-play the conversation that might happen between Mr. Hinkel, Mrs. Knowles, and Mr. Walsh concerning teacher evaluation practices at ECHS. Ask class members to submit questions that Mr. Hinkel might ask of Mrs. Knowles and Mr. Walsh.
3. Use a local school district principal evaluation instrument to assess the probable practices of Mrs. Knowles and Mr. Walsh in their roles as teacher evaluators. Note applicable indicators of desired and undesirable behaviors in the margins.
4. Use a local school improvement plan to model the goals and what a teacher evaluation improvement plan might look like for the administrators of ECHS.

This case was developed for use in a course on instructional leadership with an emphasis on student performance and teacher evaluation. Wide-ranging information is given about the school, the administrators, teachers' attitudes, and the community. Students must examine the data and the narrative, express further questions and plans for obtaining added information, and develop a plan to help school leaders improve their teacher evaluation process to support student learning. In their replies to this situation, students will be able to demonstrate their capacity to:

- identify applicable leadership theories that could be beneficial to this situation;

- interpret school performance data;
- utilize exploratory practices on school improvement;
- identify prospects to improve teacher evaluation;
- fit interpersonal managerial skills to specific needs;
- fit practical managerial skills to specific needs; and
- convey ideas plainly and appropriately in spoken and written form.

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**A Case Study of Rural Principals' Evaluative Practices Using the Texas Teacher  
Evaluation and Support System**

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## Abstract

**Background:** The study of effective school leaders and teacher evaluators has been a topic of interest to researchers for decades. While there have been a number of studies performed on urban schools, this study seeks to add to the body of research through the perspective of rural schools. **Purpose:** The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies and practices teacher evaluators employ in the evaluation process to improve instructional practices on their campuses. **Findings:** The study highlights the important role that relationships, communication, organization, training, targeted feedback, and calibration play in creating an environment. While each principal noted the factors above are important to the evaluation process, they differed in their beliefs and approaches to improving teacher performance. **Conclusions:** Findings suggest that principals must use a variety of tools and methods to engage teachers in the evaluation process, which in turn, will help improve their instructional practices.

*Keywords:* educational leadership, teacher development, school principals, multiple case study, teacher evaluation

## **A Case Study of Rural Principals' Evaluative Practices Using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System**

Successful schools are led by influential leaders who enhance student academic success by empowering their teachers and staff with the necessary tools, motivation, and ownership to support the mission (Clifford et al., 2014). This leadership responsibility is daunting, especially if sufficient resources are not available. One resource that is instrumental in this process is teacher evaluations. The historical purposes of teacher evaluations are to serve as a professional development tool and as a quality assurance instrument (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The question is, are these tools of measurement successful?

School reform has focused on the redesign of teacher evaluations. Most research in this area has been conducted in urban and suburban settings (Giles, 2017). Research in rural schools is limited. Rural schools have many challenges, including limited capacity and a lack of alignment between policy demands and the realities of rural school communities (Battelle for Kids, 2016). These present several issues for rural school leaders, especially in the area of teacher evaluations. While conforming to teacher evaluation policy reforms, are these evaluations producing results that lead to practices that enhance instruction and student achievement?

### **Statement of the Problem**

The research focuses this qualitative research proposal sought to address was leadership, specifically instructional leadership, with teacher evaluators as the primary subjects and the practices and strategies they employ using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) to improve instructional practices on their campuses. A

study by Witziers et al. (2003) confirmed the idea that school leadership has an impact on student outcomes, although it may be small. However, a small impact from the principal is relevant because the impact stems from just one person. Gallagher's (2004) results found that teacher evaluation scores could be a reliable identifier of instructional systems that influence student learning.

While most public school districts in Texas use some form of the T-TESS, there is a wide array of practices that take place in this process between the teacher and the evaluator in different districts and on campuses across the state. Bearing in mind how vital school improvement is, rural schools in Texas are confronted with the dilemma of making the most of the interaction that occurs between the teacher and evaluator.

Training is in place in Texas to certify that appraisers are qualified to evaluate teachers. However, there is room for improvement. To best understand this challenge and potential room for improvement, this study sought to answer, "What are the strategies and practices teacher evaluators employ in the evaluation process to improve instructional practices on their campuses?"

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework serves as a blueprint for a study (Grant & Osanloo, 2016). It guides and leads the study. The theoretical framework for this study is based on transformational leadership. The style of leadership that school leaders employ has an impact on success in their organizations. According to ten Bruggengate et al. (2012), the leadership methods utilized in their organization are vital to engaging faculty to participate in solving problems, conflict management, and building consensus. According

to Northouse (2019), leadership studies have gained traction in contemporary times, and for a good reason. Sound leadership is pivotal to an organization's success.

### ***Transformational Leadership***

Transformational leadership is considered one of the most comprehensive methods that leaders can use to move their organizations to accomplish lofty goals. Transformational leadership, like some other practices, is built on the idea that leaders need to adjust to the motivations of their followers and help those followers increase their commitment to the goals of the organizations through a shared vision and empowerment of the members of the organization to meet those objectives (Anderson et al., 2017). The transformational leader is viewed as committed to the vision of the organization, developing belief and assurance among employees. Transformational leaders produce a strong sense of resolve among their followers and help the followers to achieve more than they thought was feasible (Gambrell et al., 2011), and its application by school leaders was found to be successful in improving student outcomes (Thoonen et al., 2011).

Transformational leadership offers several advantages. The first strength is the considerable amount of research that has been conducted on this method from numerous angles. People are engrossed with the idea of transformational leadership because of its intuitive appeal and the way that it fits into people's ideas of what leadership should be. There is a chemistry to transformational leadership that occurs between the leader and the followers that breeds an idea of shared leadership. Leadership is not charged only to the leader; it is shared in the organization. Transformational leadership spurs followers to achieve more for the collective good of the organization (Gambrell et al., 2011) and urges

team members to be morally sound. Finally, Yukl (1999) noted that transformational leadership yields subordinates that correlate positively with fulfillment and performance.

In terms of leadership coaching, transformational leadership is an effective way of building the skills of new and experienced evaluators alike. The transformational model is fruitful because it involves advancing the evaluator's knowledge and beliefs while also developing the competencies of the evaluator and their organization (Klar et al., 2019). Transformational leadership translates well to the evaluation process because of the relationship between the evaluator and the teacher. The transformational approach helps to move an organization by supporting the teacher to move in the organization's desired direction (Northouse, 2019).

### **Review of the Literature**

The literature review addresses school leadership and its effect on student outcomes, rural school leadership, professional development, coaching practices employed by principals, and practices and strategies employed in evaluation feedback. In addition, a review of the literature of rural school leadership and the challenges and opportunities that rural schools present will be conveyed.

#### ***School Leadership***

School leaders are responsible for fostering student growth, providing teacher development, ensuring a safe climate and positive culture for their schools, and developing individual professional growth (Fox et al., 2015; Wise, 2015). These responsibilities can be overwhelming, especially with the many issues that campus and district leaders experience. Some of the growing issues faced by principals include an increase in test accountability, disconnect between the internal and external publics,

poverty, and job-related tasks and expectations such as instructional leadership (Wise, 2015). These demands are compounded for a rural school leader.

Wood et al. (2013) identified struggles presented in the rural setting, which include greater and higher demands of the principal from the community, federal and state mandates, and the internal publics, with limited time and resources. In consideration of these struggles, it is important to note that the ultimate goal for any school leader is increasing student growth and academic achievement (Fox et al., 2015; Wise, 2015). Santamaria's (2008) research addressed the seemingly insurmountable task of school leaders needing self-efficacy and accountability to attain and sustain success in student achievement (as cited in Schrik & Wasonga, 2019).

### ***Rural School Leadership***

The National Center for Education Statistics (2006) defined rural schools as “census-defined rural territory that is less than or equal to five miles from an urbanized area, as well as rural territory that less than or equal to 2.5 miles from an urban cluster” and distances beyond. Nearly one-third of schools in the United States are classified as rural and contain almost a quarter of the country's students (Parsley & Barton, 2015).

Rural principals face diverse challenges unique to their settings, and there is limited research that targets this group (Preston et al., 2018). Rural school attendees uniquely lack when compared to their urban counterparts in a number of ways, including lack of access to more extensive educational prospects (Ballou & Podgursky, 1995; Johnson & Strange, 2007), decreased access to technology, and static community development (Monk, 2007; Walden, 2015). Harmon and Schafft (2009) contended that communities in rural areas lack stability and face challenges that are brought upon by the

multifaceted social issues that frequently accompany life in rural communities. Compared to urban areas, residents of rural communities attain lower levels of formal education (Bauch, 2001). The students in these areas show a lower propensity to pursue college education than students in urban areas (Herzog & Pittman, 1995).

Rural communities expect schools to play a central role in the community and with the student if it is to be successful (Harmon & Schafft, 2009; Israel et al., 2009). Building social capital between the school and community is preserved and bolstered by nurturing the robust sense of place and social capital of rural communities, inviting parental involvement, and utilizing community stakeholders as a resource (Bauch, 2001). Rural families frequently have deep-seated connections in the community and dense social networks that support community norms, morals, and viewpoints (Bauch, 2001).

The rural school principal is seen as an integral part of the rural community, and great expectations rest on the principal's shoulders by the constituents as a result (Preston et al., 2018). Rural communities demonstrate a solid identification and pride in their communities. Because schools mirror the attributes of the surrounding populations, the idea of reform in the school is frequently a contentious subject for rural principals (Preston et al., 2018). Due to the smaller enrollment of rural schools, principals report that they have the prospect for meaningful relationships with students, which yields greater consideration of the individual student, awareness of student learning, and evaluation of student needs (Renihan & Noonan, 2012). Rural communities gain from the perspective and exuberance that students can impart on local issues while acquiring a sense of place (Bauch, 2001).

### ***Professional Development and Coaching***

An assortment of evidence pointed to coaching teachers as a high-yield professional development prospect to improve instructional practices and greater student outcomes (Allen et al., 2011; Blazar & Kraft, 2015; Campbell & Malkus, 2011; Desimone, 2009; Neuman & Cunningham, 2009). Tilford (2010) concluded that campus leaders should consider six assertions when developing a professional development plan for their campuses. First, professional development should be embraced and allowed to become a part of the beliefs, experiences, and aspirations that embody the current leadership. Second, the lived experiences of school leaders are in their careers are personally tied to the style of leadership that they promote. Third, a willingness to change is imperative for school leaders if professional development is to be assimilated into the values of the school. Fourth, school leaders can engage with professional development at various points in their careers and with several school conditions by implementing either a developing, integrating, or culminating frame on professional development. Fifth, participating in student learning enhances the school leader's duty to professional development with the staff (Lynch, 2015). Finally, engagement inspires prospective teachers to pursue education as a career and enhances the resiliency and problem-solving orientation of the campus (Tilford, 2010).

### ***Practices and Strategies Employed in Evaluation Feedback***

Feedback can be described in many ways and has been examined in numerous methods under an array of research conditions. However, a lack of research on the feedback process between the teacher and evaluator has been established (Scheeler et al., 2004; Tang & Chow, 2007; Youngs & King, 2002). Feedback is commonly recognized as

information communicated that is specific to an individual's performance and follows the fulfillment of a task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ovando, 1994).

The body of research on feedback revealed practices that improve teacher performance. When teachers are provided with specific performance-based feedback, their instructional practices improve (Cornelius & Nagro, 2014; Feeney, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2009). The idea that appraisals must be practical and valuable is required for appraisers to give reliable and valid feedback on appraisals (Napier & Latham, 1986). When the teacher is questioned in a manner that encourages reflective higher-order cognitive processes, their teaching practices improve (Feeney, 2007; Tang & Chow, 2007). These practices encouraged teachers to engage in self-regulating methods that aid in the development of skills that enhance their performance in the classroom (Tang & Chow, 2007).

Impactful leaders recognize that sustaining a constructive campus environment while driving change is a difficult path that is important for school leaders to navigate (Waters et al., 2003). The balancing act of encouraging teachers to engage in reflective thought on instructional practices is vital to teacher evaluation. Teachers show a greater inclination to alter their practices in the future to benefit students if they are coached and asked to reflect on their practices (Peterson et al., 2009). Adult learners should be allowed time to think about new information (Collet, 2012; Matulich et al., 2008). With this evidence, it is no wonder that school leaders are eager to engage in reflective conversational exercises with teachers.

Texas principals have been empowered to increase their instructional leadership role through the use of the T-TESS appraisal instrument (Templeton et al., 2016). T-

TESS has determined that the principal is the primary instructional leadership coach of their campus. The Texas Education Agency (2016) asserted that a beneficial and accepted method of supporting educators during the goal-setting progression includes engaging teachers, through coaching led by T-TESS evaluators, to contemplate their instructional practices.

Teacher coaching is defined by Moen and Frederici (2012) as the creation of an encouraging and supportive relationship between the coach and the practitioner. The efficacy of teacher coaching programs and their impact on standardized test performance was revealed by a meta-analysis undertaken by Bangert-Drowns et al. (1983). The authors found that an increase in coaching time boosts achievement scores for students (Grissom et al., 2013). Bangert-Drowns et al. (1983) observed significant positive results of coaching in nine of the thirty studies. The average student gains 10 months on a grade-equivalent scale in a school year. Instructional coaching sessions with teachers yielded an impact of an additional 2.5 months of instruction on the grade-equivalent scale (Bangert-Drowns et al., 1983).

### **Method**

This study assessed Texas school principals' experiences and practices related to teacher evaluation and improving instructional practices and student outcomes on their campuses related to their role as principal through a qualitative approach. The experiences of the principal participants are critical in this study because of their unique rural circumstances and demands.

## **Research Design**

A multiple case study design was employed in this study. A case study design emphasizes a real-world case and investigates the case in a detailed, in-depth manner (Yin, 2018). The case study design was selected because of each principal's experiences unique local circumstances with the district. The various internal and external facets of context are notable because the researcher has revealed that rural contextual situations exhibit distinctive challenges for principals, including the community's continuous access to the principal (Hansen, 2018; Parsons et al., 2016), geographic remoteness (Hansen, 2018), and vast scope of obligations of rural principals (du Plessis, 2017).

## **Participants**

Participants for this study included elementary and secondary principals who were awarded "principal of the year" honors through the Texas Association of Secondary School Principals (TASSP) for the 2020-2021 school year. Eligible participants needed to occupy a full-time principal position in a school for at least one year and be classified as rural school principals.

There were three participants in the study, all of whom were assigned pseudonyms to maintain their anonymity and aid in the confidentiality of the data collected during the interview processes. Principal Anderson was a veteran principal in his 17th year in education. At the time of this study, he was the principal of a middle school and had previously served as a principal at the elementary level. Principal Baker was a veteran principal with 25 years of education experience. He had served as a high school principal for 11 years. Principal Carter was serving his 5th year as the principal of a high school and had been in education for a total of 14 years.

## **Data Collection**

Interviews of the three participants were conducted virtually to accommodate their schedules and to follow health guidelines due to concerns of COVID-19 at the time of the study. The interviewer used a semi-structured interview process and asked the participants a series of open-ended questions focused on the participants' practices regarding teacher evaluations. Interviews were recorded using GoToMeeting and lasted 30 to 45 minutes.

## **Data Analysis**

Data management commenced with compiling data. The data for each case included a questionnaire, interview protocols, and interview transcripts. Additionally, each interview was analyzed as an individual case, followed by all cases being cross-synthesized (Yin, 2018). The Framework Method (Gale et al., 2013) was utilized to analyze the data. The first step was transcribing the data. The researcher used GoToMeeting transcription software to transcribe the interviews verbatim. The second stage consisted of the familiarization by immersing into the data. This stage included reading transcripts and listening to audio recordings multiple times. The third step was coding. Inductive analysis was used by establishing codes from the participants' words and the meaning that is communicated by extended phrases (Saldaña & Omasta, 2018). The fourth step included grouping the codes based on similarities or building a "working analytical framework" (Gale et al., 2013). A provisional label for each group was formed. In the fifth step, a framework was developed by analyzing the data to find common themes. The next step involved the creation of a matrix to map out the data from the synthesized and coded data. The last step included interpreting the data built on the

findings identified in the matrix and any analytical memos logged during the research process.

## **Findings**

The research question focused on rural principals' strategies and practices employed in the evaluation process to improve instructional practices on their campuses. One theme, communication and relationships, emerged throughout the interview process among all three participating principals. A second theme appeared that emphasized developing a deliberate plan and schedule to execute the evaluation process. An organized approach is required because of the time and diligence that effective teacher evaluation requires. A less prominent theme in the study included T-TESS training, which is a training that all administrators are required to complete before they can evaluate teachers. Targeted feedback and calibration among evaluators on the campus and across the district also appeared to be important for evaluators to improve instructional practices on their campuses.

### **Theme #1: Communication and Relationships**

The rural school principals in this study consistently voiced that communication with teachers and the relationship that they build and have with those teachers is pivotal to the success to improving instructional practices on their campuses. The principal participants mentioned that understanding your communication style and the style of the teacher is important. Building positive relationships with teachers often involved finding the good things that teachers were doing in their instruction and recognizing them. The principal participants agreed that a proper questioning technique is essential and sometimes requires scripting questions to invite reflective conversations with teachers.

Finally, ensuring that the evaluated teachers understand that the evaluation process is about growth requires clear communication from the evaluator, and maintaining a positive relationship with the teacher allows for teacher growth.

Principal Anderson was a proponent of understanding his communication style and the communication style of his staff. Principal Anderson emphatically noted:

You've got to kind of look and feel what your communication style is and then try to learn everybody else's. Like, I could have the best idea ever, but if I can't communicate it to the 60 to 80 people that I'm responsible for, then my idea is not gonna go anywhere.

Principal Baker shared the same sentiment in his interview, "Whether it's with the teacher or administration, no one communicates exactly the same. The goal is to build a positive, good rapport with the teachers." Principal Anderson held communication style in such high regard that he asked his staff to fill out a communication survey at the beginning of the school year to better understand the communication styles of the teachers on his campus. Mr. Anderson utilized the data gained from the communication survey to be more effective in the evaluation.

Principals Baker and Clark repeatedly spoke about the importance of building positive relationships with their teachers. Principal Baker stated, "I try to give feedback on the initial walk-through that tells them they are doing something well. That way, the teacher walks into the first meeting about their feedback, knowing that they are doing well." Mr. Baker emphasized the significance of putting an encouraging perspective on all of his feedback, "Everything that we do, how do we put a positive spin on it? How can we get a better outcome in a positive way?" Mr. Baker affirmed later in the interview

when asked about how his evaluation practices have changed, “I think the key part is, once one has a positive relationship with the teacher, the evaluation turns to, I’m here to help you. How can I make it better?” Principal Clark liked to build relationships in a similar manner:

The culture where my time and my energy is going to go, hopefully, is in recognizing the job that they’re doing tied to instruction in their student achievement. Let’s celebrate those successes; let’s recognize them. I want the culture to celebrate their success in the classroom, tied to pedagogy and student achievement.

## **Theme #2: Deliberate, Organized Approach to Evaluation**

The rural school principals in the research all expressed the importance of utilizing a methodical line regarding the evaluation process. Principals face many trying circumstances when it comes to maintaining fidelity to the T-TESS timeline and structures. The requirements of the T-TESS itself command the rural school principal to manage their time wisely and make appropriate choices regarding each individual evaluation. Each principal provided several examples of how they approach these pressures and cited the value of following the T-TESS method. Principal Clark specified that the planning process needs to start early. He stated:

Well, I think the first thing I’ll say is it needs to be planned. You have to lay out an evaluation calendar at the start of the year. Otherwise, it’s not done in a timely manner. You’ll look up and it’ll be April. And you’re trying to cram in all your observations, and I know because I’ve done that before.

Principal Clark also referred to applying scripted questions to the evaluation procedure that tie back to the T-TESS rubric, “We have some scripted questions that we are working through in the planning domain. We very much follow the T-TESS plan for that, which is, you know, the reinforcement and refine model.” Principal Anderson reflected on evaluation follow-up organization:

I think the biggest thing that we miss out on as administrators is really having a good, solid follow-up time. I think it’s unfair to just say, Hey, go do this and get better and then not really have a plan to follow up.

Principal Anderson described how he approached different needs with teachers. A quick follow-up would be applied to something that needed to be addressed in the classroom urgently, while a longer time could be allowed to follow-up with less pressing needs.

Principal Baker held himself and his administrators to a high standard in terms of classroom walk-throughs. When Principal Baker was asked about the strategies and practices he recommended for teacher evaluation, he responded, “Be in the classroom. Just the presence makes a big difference. We do walk-throughs that are not on T-TESS. We’re in the classroom for every single teacher five times a week.” Mr. Clark summarized the importance of planning and how it applies to teacher growth:

So, at a minimum of four periods, which is half of our day, I'm going to spend working with one of our teachers. It forces you to spend time if you're going to be an instructional leader. As a principal, there's no shortcuts to that. You have to spend that time with them. And so, it really forces us to do that and to spend time in instructional leadership.

### **Theme #3: T-TESS Training, Targeted Feedback, and Calibration**

The T-TESS training process was emphasized by all three rural school principals. While they may have expressed some consternation about using T-TESS initially, the three principals agreed that there is inherent value in the training process concerning improving instructional practices on their campuses. Targeted feedback that is tied to the T-TESS allowed the principals to cite precise areas for improvement for teachers in their practices. Calibration, meaning that different evaluators across the district would yield similar results in evaluations, was also considered a strong training tool and validation process for the principals. Continual improvement of the evaluation process, and thus, instructional practices were valued by the cohort.

All three principals agreed that the T-TESS training was a necessity to performing effective teacher evaluations to improve instructional practices. An interesting extension of the training was how valuable calibration among different evaluators was to the rural school principals. Principal Clark remarked:

This wasn't formal training, but as a district, we want to ensure our calibration across administrators and evaluators on our campus. So, I'm with an elementary principal and a middle school principal and a curriculum director, a special education director, and other people who evaluate. We went through several classrooms and evaluated and discussed, and that was very powerful.

Principal Baker shared, "Besides the T-TESS training, of course, we calibrate as a district." Principal Baker added that he would perform about thirty walk-throughs with a new administrator to calibrate before he permits them to submit feedback to a teacher.

Both Principals Baker and Clark referred to the calibration practices within their districts as an informal extension of the T-TESS training that all teacher evaluators are required to complete prior to performing teacher evaluations.

The rural school principals felt that T-TESS allowed them to provide specific feedback to improve instructional practices. When asked about how his practices has changed since the inception of T-TESS, Principal Baker responded, “I actually believe it’s made us more aware as principals of more specific details as far as the individual features and how the teachers are teaching.” Principal Baker gave targeted feedback; he stated, “When I give immediate, targeted feedback in a walk-through I want to sit down and go through the feedback with them.” Principal Anderson shared a similar sentiment:

T-TESS having the number of structures that it has, allows you to point out with evidence and the language out of the rubric and tie it back directly to the instruction that the teachers are doing. It’s good for me to point, specifically, within the rubric and be able to say, ‘here are the targeted things that you need to work on’.

Principal Carter enhanced his targeted feedback by recording each class period length evaluation on his computer with audio and video because he felt like he was missing crucial pieces of the evaluation process due to scripting the evaluation. Principal Carter revealed:

And so, what I've gone to recently, is now we add video recording to everything. And so, everything's on video now, so what I write down is different, you know, when I'm scripting. So, and pause it, catch stuff, and then the teacher gets a copy of that video. I had a teacher this year tell me that was one of the most powerful

things in her career in professional growth was watching herself teach because it looked different to her from a third person view. I'm able to show what I see on video, and ask questions directly related to the rubric.

### **Discussion**

Being a school principal is a difficult, demanding, and complicated role that requires leaders to be focused on student success. Consequently, school leaders and scholars seek ways to increase student performance by developing teachers with the teacher evaluation process (Danielson & McGreal, 2000). The aim of this study was to add to the body of research that addresses the challenges that rural school leaders face when striving to improve teacher practices on their campuses through the evaluative process.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the strategies and practices teacher evaluators employ in the evaluation process to improve instructional practices on their campuses. This study relates specifically to award-winning, rural principals of secondary public schools in Texas. The intent of this study was to gain a greater understanding of how these rural school principals in Texas utilized the T-TESS to improve instructional practices on their campuses.

Through the data analysis of the responses, three main themes emerged: (a) communication and relationships, (b) deliberate, organized approach to evaluation, and (c) T-TESS training, targeted feedback, and calibration. The theme, communication and relationships, encompassed all the aspects of communication in the evaluation process and building positive relationships with campus teachers. Forming positive relationships

and communicating clearly with teachers required the principals to understand both the way they communicate and the way that individual teachers communicate. The principals also relied on pre-scripted questions to spur reflective thinking by teachers and to ensure that proper questioning technique was utilized.

The second theme, a deliberate and organized approach to evaluation, referred to laying out a schedule at the beginning of the school year regarding the evaluations process and following through with it. The principalship can be chaotic. A school administrator can start the day with a clear calendar and not get anything accomplished because various things that occur and require immediate attention. Scheduling teacher observations, conferences, and walk-throughs required deliberate planning and a willingness to follow through with the commitment. Prioritizing the teacher evaluation process in the principal's calendar ensured that a complete and thoughtful evaluation transpires. The principals advocated for following scripted questions and the T-TESS rubric to guide questions and conversations with teachers to stimulate reflective thoughts on their teaching practices.

The third theme involved the T-TESS training, targeted feedback, and calibration. The T-TESS teacher evaluator training process was esteemed by all three principal participants. While there were many aspects addressed during the T-TESS evaluator process, targeted feedback and calibration arose as strong points of the initial training and less formal trainings that followed in the principal's respective districts. Targeted feedback was touted as a strong point of the T-TESS as well as allowing principals to isolate specific skills that teachers may explore expanding their skills in. Calibration was a form of district training where a group of principals evaluated a teacher. After the

evaluation, the principals met to discuss the teacher's ratings and come to a consensus. Calibration helped to hone the skills of the principals and made them feel more confident in their abilities.

The T-TESS, according to the principals, provided a framework for communication that allows the appraiser to guide conversations with teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2016). The T-TESS framework also provides appraisers with specific practices that can be referenced, which is essential for teachers to think critically and improve on their instructional methods (Napier & Latham, 1986). The principals emphatically supported the idea of reflective conversation with teachers about their instructional practices, which is reinforced by literature from Collet (2012) and Cornelius and Nagro (2014). Of course, all of this reflective thought is difficult to implement if the principal has a poor relationship with the teacher (Waters et al., 2003).

The T-TESS has buoyed ongoing and continual communication loops that support principals' exertions to enhance teachers' instructional practices (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Coaching conversations charged teachers to engage students in learning and to scrutinize their instructional practices (Collet, 2012). Conducting a coaching discussion with a teacher about instructional practices is often a skill that needs to be developed within school leaders (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015). According to Stringer and Hourani (2016), school leaders emphasized the need for professional development in the areas of teacher appraisal and feedback and developing professional development for teachers, among others.

The principals mentioned how important feedback was for the teachers' growth. Feedback is commonly recognized as information communicated that is specific to an

individual's performance and follows the fulfillment of a task (Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Ovando, 1994). The body of research on feedback revealed some practices that improved teacher performance. When teachers are provided with specific performance-based feedback, their instructional practices improve (Cornelius & Nagro, 2014; Feeney, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2009). The idea that appraisals must be practical and valuable is required for appraisers to give reliable and valid feedback on appraisals (Napier & Latham, 1986). When the teacher is questioned in a manner that encourages reflective higher-order cognitive processes, their teaching practices improve (Feeney, 2007; Tang & Chow, 2007). These practices encouraged teachers to engage in self-regulating methods that aid in the development of skills that enhance their performance in the classroom (Tang & Chow, 2007), which is invaluable when applied to the benefit of students (Peterson et al., 2009).

## **Conclusions**

The principals in this study were very complimentary of T-TESS and clearly learned to apply it with the goal of improving instructional practices on their campuses (Texas Education Agency, 2016). Mastering the art of conversation and thoughtful questioning was considered a necessary skill by the principals and the literature (LeFevre & Robinson, 2015) in pursuit of improving teacher instructional practices. The principals cited an incessant desire to improve communication skills that impart sufficient conversational skills to engage teachers in instructional practices. This sentiment was also shared in the literature by Stringer and Hourani (2016), who highlighted the need for professional development for teacher appraisal and feedback conversations.

As noted in previous research (Cornelius & Nagro, 2014; Feeney, 2007; Weisberg et al., 2009), this study found that performance-based feedback to teachers about their instructional practices and asking questions that prompt reflection from teachers are critical practices to improving instruction in the classroom. The principals in this study found that encouraging teachers to contemplate their teaching methods in the evaluation process buoyed the development of proficiencies that improved instructional practices, an idea cited in the literature by Tang and Chow (2007).

The literature supports the idea of just how valuable that deliberate planning of spending time with teachers is. A supportive and encouraging rapport between the principal and the teacher is pivotal to the coaching relationship (Moen & Frederici, 2012), and the effectiveness of educator coaching programs and their effect on standardized test performance was brought to light by a meta-analysis by Bangert-Drowns et al. (1983). Grissom et al. (2013) found that an increase in coaching time boosted achievement scores for students and showed this practice to be an effective use of time.

Principals have gained the prospect of increasing their instructional leadership roles by employing T-TESS (Templeton et al., 2016). T-TESS has determined that principals are the primary instructional leadership coaches of their campuses. The Texas Education Agency (2016) included comparable language by asserting T-TESS evaluators that ask teachers to contemplate their instructional practices is considered a beneficial and accepted method to support educators during the goal-setting progression.

Calibration training is a practice the principals use to narrow the disparities that occur between different evaluators. Teacher evaluators will have a wide array of reasons

that they cite for rating teachers differently, including personal motivation, skill, and context (Kimball & Milanowski, 2009). To increase validity, Kimball and Milanowski, recommended evaluator training to standardize the ratings and increase efficacy (Gallagher, 2004; Kimball et al., 2004). Ballou and Springer (2015) found some similar problems with teacher ratings but suggested a different solution. The authors recommended a two-step process to confirm teachers that score too high above or below a prescribed level on their appraisal system scores. Some other recommendations that the authors make include: verification of which students on a teacher's roster are excluded from ratings to confirm that policy is being followed and administration of high-stakes tests by teachers other than the ones being evaluated (Ballou & Springer, 2015). The principals in this study were strong proponents of evaluator training to standardize the ratings and increase efficacy which was a practice suggested in the literature (Gallagher, 2004; Kimball et al., 2004).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

The principals in this study were selected as “Principal of the Year” finalists for their respective educational regions in Texas. This fact yields merit to the responses of the principals and their expertise in the evaluation process.

Limitations existed in this study. The first limitation was the small sample size of three participants. However, when the criteria for participants required award-winning principals in rural schools, the pool of candidates for inclusion in the study was small.

An added limitation in the research was trying to conduct a multiple case study in the heart of a global pandemic. Due to COVID-19, the interviews were not able to be

conducted in person. This limited the interviewer's ability to monitor non-verbal behaviors of the interviewees.

The timing of the study presented a third limitation. COVID-19 presented challenges to scheduling due to quarantines, illness, and other issues that arose from the pandemic. All interviews occurred after the conclusion of the school year for many districts.

### **Implications**

Results from this research yield important implications that could aid campus and district-level school leaders in the pursuit of greater learning outcomes for students in Texas public schools. The results of this study offer educational regional service centers, principal preparation programs, and district leader's awareness of the needs and supports of rural principals. Developers of teacher evaluation systems can employ findings from the research as well. While the research focused on Texas principals, the results from this study will benefit school leaders beyond Texas as well. Managers trusted with developing people in their charge will benefit from the generalizability of this study. While educators are a highly specific group, the findings of this research can be applied to a variety of organizations and practitioners of employee growth. Teachers could benefit from school leaders that are more skillful in their leadership practice. Finally, students could be the benefactors of improved educational outcomes because of the pursuit of enhanced teaching methods that affect school leadership can provide.

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