

What Really Works? How Successful School Leaders Retain Teachers

by

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Educational Leadership

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Approval Page

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Abstract

This final composite explores the challenges and strategies campus-level leaders at high-poverty schools use to retain teachers. The first scholarly deliverable is a case study article that could be used to teach and grow aspiring principals through their master's or doctoral work in educational leadership. The title of this article is "We Turned Around a Struggling School, Now What?" This case explores the sustainability of school improvement work through the lens of retaining quality teachers after turnaround funding and initiatives end. The final scholarly deliverable is an empirical article titled "What Really Works, How Successful School Leaders Retain Teachers." This empirical article focuses on examining the unique challenges high-poverty campuses face when it comes to recruiting and retaining quality teachers.



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

April 20, 2023

Dr. Harper:

The West Texas A & M University Institutional Review Board is pleased to inform you that upon review, proposal #2023.04.003 for your study titled, “**What Really Works? How Successful School Leaders Retain Quality Teachers**” meets the requirements of the WTAMU Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) No. 15.99.05.W1.01AR Institutional Review Board (Use of Human Subjects in Research). Approval is granted for one calendar year. This approval expires on **April 20, 2024**.

Principal investigators assume the following responsibilities:

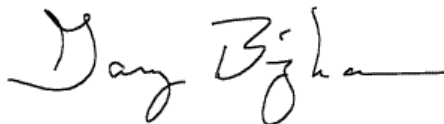
1. **Continuing Review:** The protocol must be renewed on or before the expiration date if the research project requires more than one year for completion. A [Continuing Review form](#) along with required documents must be submitted on or before the stated deadline. Failure to do so will result in study 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
Compliance



Dr. Angela Spaulding
Vice President of Research and

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We Turned Around a Struggling School: Now What?

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Abstract

When Tate Elementary School, a campus with changing demographics, fell into low-performing status, Principal Dunlop was brought in to oversee a four-million-dollar turnaround grant improvement cycle. Tate made significant gains and became an A-rated campus, and then Principal Dunlop was moved to a district-level role overseeing Tate, among others. A new administrative team was hired to continue the work at Tate. This team had less experience and was struggling to sustain their previous levels of success. This case study focuses on what is needed to maintain academic success in schools with high-poverty and significant teacher turnover. It also looks at growing novice administrators into successful transformational leaders.

Keywords: educational leadership, school improvement, sustainability, teacher retention

We Turned Around a Struggling School: Now What?

Throughout the nation and often with support from the federal government, state and district leaders are engaging in the critical work of turning around chronically underperforming schools (Sargrad et al., 2016). According to the Texas Education Agency (TEA; 2020), Texas provides annual academic accountability ratings to its public school districts; these ratings are based on state standardized tests; graduation rates, and college, career, and military readiness outcomes. They also examine student achievement, school progress, and closing achievement gaps among various student groups. Each campus is awarded a letter grade rating that corresponds with their accountability measures. If a campus receives a D or F rating, they are considered improvement required, and the district must take action.

While each school can take action to show required improvements, one program utilized in Texas is the *School Action Fund Grant*. According to the TEA (2020):

The purpose of the School Action Fund is to support districts with grant funds and technical assistance to plan and implement school action models. School Action Models are bold approaches by districts to increase the number of students in highly rated schools. (p.1)

In 2020, the TEA awarded 42 School Action Fund grants. "The resources provided by the grant could be used to enhance the school facilities, curriculum, and professional development aspects of the districts that receive them" (Hardy, p. 9). Though these funds are "welcomed" by the schools, the question of sustainability once the funds are depleted surfaces. Can these schools continue with their improvement efforts once the funds are gone? Hochbein (2012) stated, "As the practice of school turnaround becomes a prevalent

school improvement option, practitioners and policymakers need to understand not only the best practices for implementation but also the long-term effects of this short-term strategy" (p.93).

When a school is academically low performing, intervention is needed. It is common practice for state education agencies to take struggling schools and provide them with additional funding to improve their academic performance. In Texas, School Action Fund Grants are awarded to these schools. These funds help with educational school improvement efforts, but what happens when the grants end and these extra funds are no longer available to the school campus? This case study focuses on identifying and ensuring the long-term sustainability of the initiatives that advance student performance and make the school a better place to work and learn.

Setting

Tate Elementary has a long and interesting history in an urban Texas school district. Founded in 1956, Tate came to life in an affluent neighborhood. It was a thriving school that could house up to 800 students. Over the years, many of the *who's who* of the community went through the doors of Tate. However, time moved on, and so did community growth. By the mid-2000s, Tate's neighborhood was declining like others of its time. A community revitalization plan across town forced a large population of high-poverty families into the Tate neighborhood, and its landscaping drastically changed. By 2013, the neighborhood demographics that fed into Tate held the highest crime rates in the entire county.

Many of Tate's long-time teachers left as the community changed and the school suffered. In 2015, the school was given an unacceptable rating from the state education

agency and was the fourth lowest-performing school out of 30 elementary schools in the district. Principal Beth Dunlop and her team of highly effective teachers were brought into the campus to turn the school around and implement a four-million-dollar School Action Fund Grant the state had awarded Tate to improve academic performance.

Characters

Beth Dunlop had been in the same district for 19 years. She taught at the most affluent elementary school in the community for 6 years, then moved into an assistant principal role and eventually as principal at the highest poverty campus in the district. These experiences gave her a wide array of backgrounds that helped define her belief that not only could all students be successful but that it was up to the administration and teaching staff to ensure that students had a quality experience regardless of demographics.

The challenge of bringing up the academic performance at Tate was by far the most daunting experience in her education career. Through her years at her two previous principalships, Principal Dunlop had developed a loyal team of exemplary teachers who respected her leadership style and moved from campus to campus with her to schools that needed improvement. Tate's large size and frequent teacher turnover held several teachers aligned with and against the others. When Principal Dunlop took over, 50% of the fifth-grade class could not read on grade level, nor could they pass the state-mandated reading and math assessments. Due to the location and demographics of the campus, it was a somewhat toxic environment where the students' daily struggles were used to excuse their low performance.

Once in place, Principal Dunlop and her leadership team made sweeping changes. In order to cut out wasted time, every staff member was given a job description that was student-centered. A new organizational chart was developed. The staff handbook was created to clear up misconceptions and implement non-negotiables. With the financial help of the School Action Fund Grant, funds were utilized to incentivize teachers for performance by doubling their annual value-added awards based on student growth. All staff members were given bi-annual retention bonuses. Highly effective retired teachers were brought on to support intervention and mentor the alternative certified teachers. Grant funds provided incentives for parental involvement programs such as "Parent University." Also, additional support staff such as teaching assistants, communities, in-school support staff, and an additional assistant principal were put into place. Through these changes and the overall change in culture and expectations, Tate moved from one of the lowest campuses in the district to a state-recognized A-rated campus in only three years. The summer after Tate Elementary received an A rating, Principal Dunlop received a promotion to the central office and began supervising the Tate campus and 18 other schools.

When Principal Dunlop was called to take over Tate, she knew she could not get the job done without her former instructional coach, Harriet Nelson, by her side in the assistant principal role. Two years prior, the two had worked together, and Mrs. Nelson was an outstanding instructional leader. She had worked as a campus coach at the Educational Service Center and had been a stellar classroom teacher. She was more than willing to come on board and be a part of the massive changes that needed to take place. Each year as the campus grew and improved, Mrs. Nelson was credited with being the

"wizard behind the curtain." She was primarily responsible for the incredible growth taking place on the campus. At the end of her third year at Tate, and coincidentally the end of the additional grant funding, Principal Dunlop accepted the promotion to central office administration. It was clear that Mrs. Nelson was the logical replacement as the new principal at Tate.

One of the biggest supporters of Mrs. Nelson was a fifth-grade master teacher, Samantha Stevens. Mrs. Stevens had worked at high-need campuses for the past 6 years and had experienced academic student growth and increased standardized test scores at both previous schools. She was a leader among her colleagues, and she was an extraordinarily driven and innovative educator. Mrs. Stevens held district-wide leadership positions and was regularly assigned to mentor new teachers and grow student teachers from the local university program. She had completed her instructional leadership master's degree. She was a natural fit to step into the assistant principal role that became available when Mrs. Nelson moved into the principal position. While Mrs. Stevens and Mrs. Nelson were outstanding educators, they were both brand new to their current leadership role, plus, they were on one of the toughest campuses in the district. They knew they had a difficult challenge ahead of them because the grant funding that had provided Tate all the additional support was coming to an end, and they would start the school year without these funds.

The Case

The spring of 2019 school year would be filled with many critical data opportunities for the "A" rated Tate campus. Supervisor Dunlop attended monthly data meetings with the Tate leadership team to review data and "problem-solve" situations.

The sessions started positively, and one included a large celebration for the state scores that led to the A rating. As the year went on, the meeting tone changed. The leadership team became frustrated with the lack of grant-funded resources from the previous 3 years. Several staff members had contacted Supervisor Dunlop about overall changes in the campus culture; they were comfortable contacting her because she was their previous principal and always had an open-door policy. The calls were unfavorable, and the staff became more frustrated with changes and perceived lack of support of the "old ways" that made them successful. When Supervisor Dunlop tried to work through issues with Principal Nelson, there became a level of frustration that Supervisor Dunlop was keenly aware of and tried to navigate carefully. This tenuous situation was complicated because they had a preciously close relationship, and the success of Tate was their success story.

During the May monthly meeting, a key piece of data was set to be evaluated, the "Organizational Health Inventory" (OHI). This data came from an 88-question survey given directly to the campus teaching staff. It provided the campus with a clear picture of how communication, autonomy, goal focus, and seven other vital areas were doing. This data piece had been in place for the previous 5 years, so there was a plethora of historical data available for the team to utilize when digging into the results. Once the meeting began and the data were shared, it became clear that the data reflected a significant drop from the previous 2 years in all areas and a 35-point composite drop. Principal Nelson was visibly upset by the data. "Obviously, the staff is not happy, and I may not be the right person leading the campus," she stated. Supervisor Dunlop talked the team through each area and assured them that there was an implementation dip anytime a significant change occurred. Principal Nelson struggled to remain engaged throughout the meeting

and was visibly frustrated. At the end of the session, they set a time to look at the results again when things were less emotionally driven, and additional support would be put in place for the team from the district level to help them navigate the changes. Supervisor Dunlop was frustrated with herself. Had she provided enough support? Was the team ready to take on such a significant challenge? Had she misread the situation, and most importantly? How would she help them and save the school and staff she loved so much? Supervisor Dunlop had always placed value on the OHI results, which was especially concerning to her.

The next meeting for Supervisor Dunlop and Principal Nelson was scheduled to look at the recent state assessment results. Mrs. Dunlop was hopeful this meeting would be positive as the previous years' teaching staff and the received the A rating were both still in place, and data predictions looked promising. Once the meeting began and data disaggregation took place, the results were far from good. The grade and subject level data declined in all areas except 5th-grade science. They were concerned that the 5th-grade ELAR (English, Language Arts, and Reading) scores would drop since Mrs. Stevens moved out of the classroom for a leadership role, but the drop was more significant than anticipated. Mrs. Nelson was again distraught and highly defensive. The campus would drop from the coveted "A" rating to a "C" rating, which would draw negative attention to the campus, not to mention the undoing of all the hard work and success previously achieved. Mrs. Nelson stated, "The loss of the additional assistant principal caused the remaining team to spend too much time on discipline and not instructional supervision." She also said, "Since the grant funding is gone, we lost some support staff and the intervention team." These were both attributed to the previous 3 years' growth. This,

coupled with the earlier drop in OHI scores, showed that the campus was no longer heading in the right direction. Now, Supervisor Dunlop has some decisions to make to get things back on track. How can they identify the staff's needs to ensure that those needs are met? What are their options in the current budget to sustain the programs that grew the campus through the long-gone grant funding? Most importantly, how can Supervisor Dunlop grow and support Principal Nelson through the difficult times that lay ahead?

Teacher Notes

Ensuring the highest quality education for all students should be the goal of every campus leader. However, schools across the country continue to struggle. Hochbein (2012) stated, "A new type of school improvement strategy has entered the lexicon of educational reformers and policymakers. Borrowed from the vocabulary and methods of the corporate sector, school turnaround has become a commonly proposed solution to chronically low-performing schools" (p.92). Taking a low-performing campus and turning it into a successful one is a daunting challenge, but an even bigger feat is to sustain that success. According to Hambrick Hitt and Meyers (2018):

Relatively little is understood about change, not just during the initial turnaround stage but that endures on the larger journey as the school becomes a healthy organization for adults and students. This lack of understanding is likely due to the lack of data sources because schools struggle to attain turnaround, let alone maintain improvement and continue to grow. (p.4)

So, it begs the question of why this topic is so elusive to so many school leaders.

Hochbein (2012) discovered, "Research related to school turnaround has relied substantially upon case studies. These case studies often focus on successful turnarounds

and report immediate outcomes, failing to provide information about the sustainability of the results" (p.91).

School Action Fund campuses work through the Effective Schools Framework created by the TEA (2020). This framework focuses on on-campus culture, data-driven instruction, and leadership. Schaffer et al. (2012) uncovered similar focus areas when studying successful turnaround. They found that highly reliable school change focuses on the three critical areas of appearance, attendance, and achievement. These three areas identified vital best practices such as data-driven instruction, building maintenance, campus culture, and, most importantly, effective teacher recruitment, retention, and training.

The Effective Schools Framework crafted by the TEA (2020) focused the majority of professional development opportunities embedded in the process on the principal and campus leadership team. This training focus reinforces the belief that the campus leader is the most critical component in school success. Successful leaders understand the importance of quality teachers and that their presence is essential for successful school improvement. Galindo et al. (2016) stated, "An intervention might only show similar effects in schools where the personnel are equally responsive and in the presence of veteran leaders who are experienced in motivating teachers and encouraging faculty involvement" (p.226). Leaders must understand and implement all the components needed for successful change while ensuring the campus culture supports their most important resource, the teachers. This campus transformation will require a transformational leader.

Transformational Leadership

The connection between leaders and followers has been identified as a critical component to understanding what makes leaders successful. Burns' (1978) study was the early work that strongly linked the relationship of the two group's needs, goals, and well-being together, and the transformational approach was born. According to Kendrick (2011), "Expertly crafted and practiced, transformational leadership focuses on the followers, motivates them to achieve a higher performance level and helps develop the leader within each individual" (p. 14). Kendrick (2011) also identified four different factors involved in transformational leadership theory: Inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, idealized influence or charisma, and intellectual stimulation. While Burns (1978) made the original correlation between transformational leadership and the far more common transactional approach, others have continued to delve into the connection between the two, such as the following specifics (as cited in Shatzer et al., 2013). Bass and Avolio (1994) stated:

Included in the transformational leadership theory are two additional leadership elements with subsets of practices: transactional leadership and non-leadership. Transactional leadership is based on a simple exchange relationship with followers, including the practices of contingent reward and management by exception-active. Non-Leadership is the absence of leadership, which includes management by exception-passive and laissez-faire leadership. (p.448)

Transactional leaders and non-leaders should recognize where they fall between the approaches to grow into the more popular and arguably more effective transformational leadership role.

The transformational leadership theory can be applied to many settings but is especially applicable in current high-stakes educational situations. In studies by Leithwood et al. (2006) and Murphy et al. (1983), the academic correlation was described in the following statement, "Conversely, transformational leadership has been proposed by some researchers as being ideal for school principals because instructional leadership lacks a uniform conceptual model, and recent changes in school reform call for a leader with transformational abilities" (as cited by Shatzer et al., 2013, p.446). The strengths of the transformational approach primarily focus on the positive impact on the group's followers. "One example of a leader who utilized transformational leadership is Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart. He regularly traveled across the country to visit stores and personally meet with associates expressing his appreciation for what they did for the company" (Kendrick, 2011, p.14).

Research demonstrates the transformational leadership approach can positively impact organizations and proves itself worthy of the popularity it holds. Additionally, it has been shown to have encouraging results in overall organizational success. "Because the use of work units with an innovation remit is likely to increase in the future, the importance of transformational leadership as a means to unlock work unit innovation performance is also likely to increase" (Sheehan et al., 2020, p.406). Drawbacks to the approach are also noteworthy; they include close links to inherent leadership trait approaches previously discussed and a lack of theoretical precision. "Similarly, Ross and Gray (2006) collected data from elementary schools in Canada and found that transformational leadership had strong direct effects on teacher commitment and teacher

self-efficacy, but weaker indirect effects on student achievement" (as cited by Shatzer et al., 2013, p.448).

Discussion Questions

1. What implications does this case study offer for schools and districts struggling to meet state accountability standards?
2. In response to the experiences of Principal Nelson, what can principal preparation programs do to better prepare principal candidates to successfully navigate the challenges that come with leading a struggling school?
3. What aspects of transformational leadership can be applied to this scenario? How could it (a) positively impact the struggles at Tate Elementary and (b) increase teacher retention?
4. How might the school district's decision-making impact the situation at Tate, first from a resource allocation perspective and second from a leadership selection perspective? What are some ways these decisions could be altered to improve Tate?
5. What are three areas which Principal Nelson could solicit feedback from the staff to help her identify areas to improve the culture at Tate? How can she build the trust needed with the team to get authentic feedback?
6. Retaining quality teachers is crucial to ensuring success on the campus. Brainstorm a list of what teachers value and develop three action steps around those values within the campus control that Principal Nelson could use to keep the quality staff employed at Tate.

7. What can Supervisor Dunlop do to coach and grow Principal Nelson? Identify three areas to be prioritized for coaching. Once identified, create an ongoing coaching document to be utilized in the monthly meetings.
8. How can Principal Nelson better engage the stakeholders at Tate? What types of events, activities, communication systems, and feedback opportunities, among other things, could be utilized to increase engagement?
9. The principal is responsible for the resource allocation on the campus. What funding sources are available for schools like Tate, and what can those sources be used to support? What are creative or non-traditional ways to fund highly successful programs or initiatives? What are ways to evaluate current expenditures to ensure campus funds are utilized most effectively?

Activities

1. Have the students break into groups of three to four. Set the timer for 5 minutes to brainstorm all the things they have experienced that contribute to a successful school. Once a list has been created, have the students prioritize the list from most to least important. Identify the five critical components of a thriving campus from the prioritized list. Each group will share a 5 minute presentation of their top five factors. Once the presentations are completed, the groups will need to be prepared to defend their selections or make adjustments to their thinking as the group narrows the list to five as a whole class group.
2. Based on the previous activity, the class will use the *top five* list to determine what needs to be in place to ensure they are successfully executed on the campus. Look at the following criteria for each of the five (as applicable), financial cost and resource

- allocation, climate and culture of the campus, leadership skills needed, instructional best practices, curriculum needs, building-wide systems, supports, and human resource needs. Create a matrix or chart that displays each success criterion and the needed pieces that must be in place to accomplish the goal of successful campus implementation. Plan to allow ample time for thoughtful discussion and potential *tweaks* to the original list of needed.
3. Divide the class into five groups. Each group will be given an overview of the following five leadership philosophies situational, authentic, servant, transformational, and adaptive from the Northouse (2019) text, *Leadership: Theory to Practice*. After reading through the text, each group will apply their assigned philosophy to the Tate scenario and either defend or debunk the usefulness of their philosophy in this situation. They will present their rationale to the class group and answer questions and elicit feedback on their position.
 4. Have the class break into partner pairs. One partner will take on the role of Principal Nelson, and one will take on the part of Supervisor Dunlop. They will take 5 minutes to prepare for their upcoming "data meeting." Once they are ready, they will take 15 minutes to role-play the encounter. Please plan to address academic concerns, OHI data related to ongoing teacher complaints, and systems to address student behavior increases due to staff cutting tied to the grant funds that are no longer accessible.

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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigates leadership practices that positively affect teacher retention rates in high-poverty schools, focusing on climate, culture, support systems, and relationships. It also explores how influential school leaders can be identified and replicated to retain effective teachers. **Research Method:** This qualitative study explores teachers' perspectives on campus leadership in high-poverty and challenging schools. Utilizing a case study design, it investigates successful campus leaders' systems, supports, and skills through in-depth focus interviews. **Findings:** The findings in this study indicated that successful principals increased teacher job satisfaction by building positive relationships through (a) increased trust, (b) communication, (c) personal support, and (d) ensuring that teachers were valued. Furthermore, the teachers interviewed emphasized the importance of support from their principal for both instructional and behavioral needs. In addition, this study found that challenges of teacher retention in high-poverty schools will require additional resources and support for areas such as (a) closing the gap for struggling students, (b) financial support, (c) support for students' personal needs like attendance and nutrition and (d) proactive support for students and their families struggling with behavioral problems. **Conclusion:** The study emphasizes the importance of quality leaders in high-poverty campuses, emphasizing interpersonal and systemic leadership practices. Teachers' examples of principal support create a supportive campus culture through effective communication and understanding expectations for success. Teachers seek leaders who help them grow as instructional experts and maintain order, ensuring fidelity in instructional delivery and, as a result, increasing retention.

Keywords: leadership, high-poverty, teacher retention, culture, interpersonal skills

What Really Works? How Successful School Leaders Retain Teachers

School leaders are under increasing pressure to ensure that effective teachers, who are vital to student and school success, remain in the classroom. A 2021 survey showed that almost 1 in 4 teachers planned to make a job-related change at the end of that school year (Steiner & Woo, 2021). The nearly 25% turnover rate is an increase from the pre-pandemic national turnover average of 16% (NCES, 2019). High teacher attrition rates can negatively impact the school's academic success and disrupt the campus's collegiality, which can inspire more teachers to leave. High teacher turnover rates can create an ongoing cycle, particularly in schools identified as high-poverty campuses (Gujarati, 2012).

The attrition rate of teachers is particularly concerning in high-poverty schools. Of all the challenges facing schools today, the poverty level growing in neighborhoods and classrooms around the country is likely the most significant obstacle. It is often argued that poverty, more than any other variable, determines the academic performance disparities across groups. Children from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to have parents with low-wage jobs increasing the likelihood of their moving from place to place, with student mobility compromising learning opportunities for students (Ullucci & Howard, 2015). Students from low-income backgrounds are also less likely to have access to medical care, which can allow vision, dental, hearing, and other health ailments (including asthma) to go untreated. An increasing number of students attending schools are homeless, exceeding more than one million (National Center for Homeless Education, 2023). The data also points out that students from impoverished backgrounds are more likely to have lower educational outcomes and problems with emotional development and

delayed social skills, which provides more significant challenges towards achieving academic success (Noguera, 2010).

Retaining teachers in highly impoverished schools is critical. However, these economically depressed areas continue to find it challenging to staff classrooms. High-poverty campuses often have turnover rates nearly 50% greater than other schools across their state or region (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Often, these classrooms have inexperienced young teachers with limited interaction with students from high-poverty backgrounds (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The obstacles these teachers face dramatically increase the chance they will, at a minimum, leave these schools for more affluent areas and, at worst, leave the profession entirely (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to determine which leadership practices exhibited by school principals positively affect teacher retention rates in high-poverty schools. This study focused on the teacher retention practices of the school leaders (principals) who were administrators at high-poverty schools. This included how they created the school climate and culture for their respective schools, systems for support of instructional and transformational practices, and support of new and struggling teachers. The study also examined relationships through a post-pandemic lens and how the practices of influential school leaders could be identified and replicated by leaders struggling to retain effective teachers.

For the purpose of this study, high-poverty schools were defined as *Title 1 schools*. Title 1 schools are schools where children from low-income families make up at

least 40% of the campus enrollment. They can access additional federal funds to operate school-wide programs that serve all children in the school. These programs strive to raise the achievement of the lowest-achieving students.

Research Questions

This research study answered the following research questions:

RQ1. What leadership practices do principals in high-poverty schools use to promote teacher retention according to the perspective of teachers?

RQ2. What are the challenges of teacher retention in high-poverty schools according to the perspective of teachers?

For this study, leadership practices were defined as the activities and strategies administrators use to create a working environment for teachers that promotes retention in schools of poverty, thus keeping the teachers from leaving their campuses to more affluent campuses or the profession entirely. By asking teachers in high-poverty schools their perspective on leadership practices, this study adds a unique perspective to the literature. This study analyzed why teachers stay in these schools and what school leaders do to make them want to stay. This distinctive perspective will add to the literature and help administrators with retention practices.

Theoretical Framework

This study aimed to determine which principal leadership practices affect teacher retention rates in high-poverty schools. These practices directly affect a teacher's job satisfaction level, determining their decision to stay in their present position. Due to these practices, this study is guided by the transformational leadership theory. This theory was chosen because the leader works with the followers to identify the changes needed and makes transformational changes (Campos, 2020). These transformational changes are

critical, especially in teacher retention in a high-poverty school. The transformational leadership theory has four components that will guide the study: a) idealized influence, b) inspirational motivation, c) intellectual stimulation, and d) individual consideration (Farnsworth et al., 2020). During the data collection and analysis, these components aided in understanding the leadership practices' impact on the followers.

The connection between leaders and followers has been identified as critical to understanding what makes leaders successful. Burns' (1978) study was the early work strongly linking the relationship between the two groups' needs, goals, and well-being, and the transformational approach was born. According to Kendrick (2011), "Expertly crafted and practiced, transformational leadership focuses on the followers, motivates them to achieve a higher performance level, and helps develop the leader within each individual." (p. 14). Van der Vyver et al. (2020) suggested that transformational leadership is associated with higher levels of professional well-being and less stress. Van der Vyver et al. (2020) endorses that leaders should recognize and be ready to utilize these characteristics as they develop their leadership skill set and prepare themselves to assume more complicated school leadership assignments such as turnaround opportunities.

The transformational leadership theory can be applied to many settings, primarily in high-stakes educational situations. Leithwood et al. (2006) and Murphy et al. (1983) described the academic correlation as follows, "Conversely, transformational leadership has been proposed by some researchers as being ideal for school principals because instructional leadership lacks a uniform conceptual model, and recent changes in school reform call for a leader with transformational abilities" (as cited by Shatzer et al., 2013,

p.446). The strengths of the transformational approach primarily focus on the positive impact on the group's followers. "One example of a leader who utilized transformational leadership is Sam Walton, founder of Wal-Mart. He regularly traveled across the country to visit stores and personally met with associates expressing his appreciation for what they did for the company" (Kendrick, 2011, p. 14). Research demonstrates that the transformational leadership approach can positively impact organizations and proves itself worthy of the popularity it holds.

Additionally, transformational leadership has been shown to encourage overall organizational success. Sheehan et al. (2020) found that potential future growth in innovation-focused work highlights the significance of transformational leadership for unlocking increased performance. Transformational leadership accentuates group-oriented, higher-level needs and goals and can incite change and increase innovation among staff members. Where traditional leadership work primarily focuses on the leader's effects on the individual follower, transformational leadership theory centers on change and innovation for a whole group, such as a struggling school. Transformational leaders often increase team creativity and performance through delegation and improve development by cultivating a sense of autonomy and providing opportunities for teachers to learn and grow (Jiang & Chen, 2018).

Based on the research, this transformational leadership theoretical framework is aligned with enhancing leadership practices and improving organizational outcomes like improving teacher turnover rates and increasing the school's overall success. This study looks to identify what behaviors principals utilize to reduce teacher turnover through transformational leadership practices. These practices include inspirational motivation,

individualized consideration, idealized influence or charisma, intellectual stimulation (Kendrick, 2011), cultivating a sense of autonomy, and providing opportunities for teachers to learn and grow (Jiang & Chen, 2018).

Review of Literature

This literature review examines the transformational leadership practices exhibited by school principals in their efforts to retain teachers, with a focus on poverty, school culture, and teacher retention. Best practices such as ensuring a positive climate, protecting teacher time and well-being, fostering relationships built on trust, prioritizing instructional leadership, and utilizing strong interpersonal skills were examined to determine how to retain quality teachers. This review also explored teacher retention challenges, especially in high-poverty schools.

Effective School Leadership

How leaders spend their time directly affects their most valuable resource, their teachers. The research around school leadership has been examined in detail throughout the years, resulting in various practices, processes, and systems used by masses of principals. Mendel's (2012) research revealed that teachers regarded school leaders as effective when high-quality instructional practices and a strong vision or mission were established. As a result, it ensured that all students could safely and successfully learn. Quality school leaders create and implement a trusting and supportive working environment that includes mutual respect, giving practical and timely feedback, ensuring transparency in communicating the school vision, and sustaining procedures that improve the school environment (New Teacher Center, 2014a). Additional requirements placed on

school leaders that affect teacher retention and school success are those policy and performance expectations set at the state and national levels.

There are also state and federal mandates that support a school leader's quest for a positive school culture. According to Onjoro et al. (2015), these expectations significantly influence teachers. While expectations have always been in place to some degree, the federal Race to the Top Initiative, which provided states and local education agencies the authority to implement evaluation systems dependent upon student test scores, has tremendously affected classroom teachers (Cronin 2016). Under this initiative, states and local education agencies can apply consequences related to student performance outcomes, including loss of tenure protections or even termination. They also can provide rewards, including but not limited to bonuses, salary increases, and leadership opportunities based on a teacher's overall performance rating (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017).

Effective school leaders are adept at tackling the challenges of today's schools through the implementation of leadership best practices. These practices increase teachers' engagement and commitment as they accomplish vital work in their schools. The transformational skill set employed by successful leaders who use their influence to inspire, motivate, and ensure the intellectual stimulation of their teachers is a tool that is essential to retaining quality teachers at high poverty and highly challenging campuses.

School Leaders and Poverty

To succeed, the ability to assess and interpret the specific challenges faced by a high-poverty campus is a vital skill that the campus leader must possess. According to (Suitts, 2010), public schools identified as highpoverty have historically faced significant

additional challenges such as a widened achievement gap, weaker instructional teams, increased student instability, and reduced resources; these factors are highly detrimental to student academic achievement. According to (Ford 2020), a culture of improvement in high-poverty schools must involve a shared understanding of the challenges among all stakeholders, from administrators to students. This understanding must include the internal and external forces, which range from student performance to the influence of the community's socio-economic conditions on the school environment and student learning.

Once these challenges have been identified and acknowledged, school leaders must determine the best course of action and beliefs that will be needed to minimize their impact on student success. (Savoy-Helaire, 2022) conducted a leadership skill study that included thirty-three school leaders across the country. The study was able to determine the four following qualities that were shared among the group:

- Their beliefs about student potential drive their work,
- They place instruction at the base of their managerial duties,
- They place emphasis on building the capacity of all the adults in the building, and
- They observe and evaluate what leads to success and what can be learned from failure. (p. 57)

The study also found that when school leaders believed in their students' potential, they were likelier to set high expectations and get teachers to excel. They also made school-wide decisions concerning procedures and schedules focused on capitalizing on student and teacher learning opportunities. They put robust systems in place to help teachers

grow into problem solvers who readily share knowledge and skills with their counterparts, increasing the entire school's success (Savoy-Helaire, 2022).

Instructional Leadership.

Bellibaş et al. (2021) reported that the idea of instructional leadership was identified as a vital component of educational leadership in the 1970s when researchers began examining what separated a successful school from a struggling one. Their research specifically focused on the characteristics of high-performing schools in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Their research determined that principals at high-performing schools practiced instructional leadership and prioritized concentrating on improving teaching and learning. Additional information provided by Cronin (2016) surmised that instructional school leaders are tasked with making critical staffing decisions, such as hiring teachers with skills necessary for improving students' performance. In summary, instructional leadership focuses on the degree to which principals address teaching and learning.

A highly competent instructional leader is a critical component of a successful school (Kalkan et al., 2020). Instructional leaders ensure increased time exists for instruction, a focus on literacy, and curriculum coherence. Furthermore, they are responsible for raising students' achievement by improving their skill levels and identifying the essential resources. School leaders focusing on instructional leadership could gain the overall organizational image and institutional identity through increased student academic success. Woulfin and Weiner (2019) identified that instructional leadership alone is not enough; a successful school leader must also trigger change, which motivates teachers, staff, and the broader school community. This change must

create a heightened sense of urgency for reforming schools and will also require the transformational skills addressed in this study.

School Leaders and Positive School Cultures

According to Peterson and Deal (1998), culture is the underground network of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built over time as people work together, solve problems and confront organizational challenges. These expectations and values shape how people think, feel, and act in schools. School leaders develop the climate and culture that can establish quality collaboration with the local community to make a school an attractive recruiting ground for talented teachers (Normore, 2004). Additional components of positive campus culture are apparent when leaders foster risk-taking and collegiality while celebrating the successes of teachers and students at the school.

The work of school leaders has become complicated by the increasing teacher turnover rates. Many schools with a poor culture cannot retain highly effective teachers for long (Holmes et al., 2019). As a result, recruiting and retaining quality teachers is a true challenge. Novice teachers often look for work environments where they can build relationships with their colleagues and community. This type of work environment is highly motivating. It is likely to foster professional growth that can lead to job advancement, which is very appealing when accepting a teaching position (Holmes et al., 2019).

Effective school leaders acknowledge that support for new teachers must be provided early on, and the role of the school leader in providing the support is critical (Perrachione et al., 2008). Teachers view the school leader and the stimulus of the school's atmosphere as a significant factor in their decision to leave or stay (Perrachione et al., 2008). When teachers felt they had a supportive environment, clear expectations,

and a sense of community, they were likelier to remain at the campus and increase their years in the profession (Sedivy-Benton & McGill, 2012).

School Leaders and Teacher Retention

Classroom instruction delivered by high-quality teachers is the backbone of every successful school. Bellibaş et al. (2021) found that it has become conventional wisdom that the teacher is the most decisive factor in ensuring positive student learning outcomes. They also determined that factors beyond basic qualifications affect teacher quality. In studies of our nation's high-poverty, urban schools, it is unsurprising that they urgently need dedicated and skilled teachers willing to invest a long-term commitment to make a substantial difference in quality and student performance. Even though the need is obvious, recruiting and retaining these quality teachers is not nearly as straightforward. Non-traditional programs such as emergency certification and other teacher recruiting programs have successfully placed teachers in urban schools.

The loss of many teachers has the most detrimental impact on schools in low socio-economic areas. Byrne-Jiménez and Orr (2012) found that urban schools often experience high turnover rates among teachers and their leaders. Certo and Fox (2002) conducted research in which teachers described the work environments that led them to perceive teaching as less valued as a profession. Low salaries, unsupportive administration, overly demanding schedules, increased policies relating to high-stakes testing, and few opportunities for job-sharing characterized these work environments.

School climate and organization play a more critical role in teacher retention than some people realize. The quality of the daily working conditions can determine whether a teacher decides to stay or go. Hughes (2012) found that of the reasons cited by first and

second-year teachers for why they are leaving the profession, six of the top eight reasons related to school climate. The salary was the most cited reason (82%), followed by disruptive students (58%), administrative support (43%), lack of parental involvement (42%), working conditions (38%), lack of professional prestige (31%), personal reasons (30%), and lack of collegiality (19%). Similarly, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) reported that the top four reasons given for dissatisfaction among beginning teachers who left were poor salary (78.5%), student discipline problems (34.9%), inadequate administrative support (26.1%), and poor student motivation (17%) (p. 247). These statistics reaffirm the belief that the teacher's working environment is critical to their longevity in the classroom.

Districts and schools are constantly looking for viable options for recruiting and retaining their instructional staff. Leaders are struggling to maintain state-imposed standards for teaching quality while continuously recruiting bright new teachers and seeking to keep their most effective existing teachers. Guarino et al. (2006) found that it is vitally important that school leaders select teacher candidates with the following psychological characteristics: self-efficacy, personality, enthusiasm, emotional intelligence, emotional labor, and mindfulness. Thanks to these traits, they are equipped to be more successful in challenging situations and may stay on campus and in the profession for an extended period. This issue is exacerbated by the lack of much-needed monetary resources that could be utilized to increase teacher salaries and make the profession more appealing. When salaries cannot be increased, the role of the school environment becomes even more critical. These environments are often impacted by the demographics of the neighborhoods they serve, such as wealth, urban/rural status, and

minority status. This impact can cause schools in the most at-risk areas to lack the teachers needed to succeed and place schools in situations where turnarounds are necessary to improve the school. Several trends to improve teacher retention and effectiveness have emerged, including compensation, teacher preparation programs, administration, induction, and mentoring programs.

As leaders seek ways to solve the problem, they must ask themselves what available and successful options can immediately be implemented. One study examined the impact of quality professional development on teacher retention efforts. Hill (2021) reported that clear communication and an understanding of students and staff should ensure that professional development practices are aligned to be successful. It ensures that teachers' valuable time is utilized in ways that best affect their practice and student success.

Springer et al. (2016) found that monetary incentives could positively impact teacher retention. Even though working conditions, policies supporting teachers' needs, and the financial ability of schools to ensure access to much-needed resources play a tremendous role, salary supplements can be vital in the battle to retrain top-tier teachers. Hill and Jones (2020) disclosed that teacher performance pay is becoming increasingly common in the United States. Goodwin et al. (2019) found that age, prior work experience in other fields, and working years impact teacher retention. However, it does not guarantee that teachers will stay in the profession. Instead, leaders must strive to sustain high motivation levels while providing support and ensuring systems are in place where communication and collegiality can be utilized to improve working conditions.

Learning what good leaders are doing to retain quality teachers in high-poverty schools can help other school leaders and policymakers find ways to combat the problem. Those insights can help schools create an environment that will inspire quality teachers to remain in the field for several decades with passion and expertise and where students will experience sustained academic success (Kelchtermans, 2017).

In contrast, when a positive culture is not a part of the fabric, the consequences can be devastating. High teacher turnover rates indicate poor leadership and management abilities in schools, often reflected by increasing student behavioral issues, inept teaching, and reduced student performance on standardized tests (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). The research further indicates effective leadership and competent management produce high levels of teacher retention because teachers experience growth in their knowledge and skill base, have higher prospects of career development, and have a positive work environment (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Teachers often begin their careers with big aspirations for success in the classroom with the opportunity to advance their careers (Leithwood et al., 2004). A school culture that presents challenges will not be attractive to teachers new to the profession or those looking for improved opportunities in this competitive job market. School culture offers a broad spectrum of leadership challenges that should be addressed for teachers to embrace and support the leadership (Moore et al., 2018). Struggles based on the lack of a strong culture can correlate with a high rate of teacher turnover (Simon, 2015).

Struggling schools in high-poverty areas often battle the perception of failure that the community and stakeholders have come to believe about the campus over time. Antoniou et al. (2016) accentuated the importance of considering the perceptions of all

school stakeholders as the change-facilitation process of school improvement proceeded. The culture of the local school is a decisive factor in school improvement. Practices in school culture critically impact the outcome of organizational improvement efforts, emphasizing the importance of principals building an organization supporting a professional and collaborative culture (Nehez et al., 2022). Hajisoteriou et al. (2018) compiled research and stressed that collaboration, communication, and networking with all stakeholders in culturally diverse schools are critical to change and improvement. They also noted that while the school was at the center of change, it did not act alone. In order to sustain progress in struggling schools, quality teacher recruitment and retention are critical. According to the research of Pogodzinski et al. (2013), a teacher who perceives a more favorable climate with higher degrees of professional fit and collective responsibility among colleagues is more likely to remain teaching within their schools. Mulford and Moreno (2006) addressed the role of leadership in their study:

Many successful leaders in schools that serve highly diverse student populations enact practices that promote the school in families and expand the amount of students' social capital valued by the schools—quality, equity, and social justice. These practices include building powerful forms of teaching and learning, creating strong school communities, and nurturing educational culture development. (p. 210)

Methodology

Research Design

The qualitative research approach best fits the needs of this study, as it took a deep dive into the teachers' perspective on how their campus leadership supports and retains their expertise at high-poverty and highly challenging schools. According to

Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative research is defined as research that studies the nature of phenomena. It is an option that can be utilized when the researcher seeks to discover why something may or may not be observed, the complex relationship that can be uncovered through the study, and improvements that can be made with specific interventions. The nature of the study, which investigated the systems, supports, and skills that highly successful campus leaders utilize, was best understood through data portrayed through a case study instead of a quantitative approach focusing on numeric data (Busetto et al., 2020). This method was selected because high-poverty school teachers' perspectives and experience are critical in understanding how and why these leaders' strategies successfully address their schools' challenges. It also aimed to provide insight into how these practices can be replicated at other campuses with similar demographics.

An exploratory case study design was most appropriate for conducting focus group teacher interviews. This design was suitable for gaining a deeper understanding of teachers' perceptions and their experiences related to the support provided by their campus leaders (Chopard & Przybylski, 2021). According to Chopard and Przybylski (2021), case study research includes multiple sources of evidence; this study consisted of documents such as state and district accountability and retention data, which aided in determining which teachers meet the research criteria to participate in the systematic interviewing of selected staff members. These varied sources provided evidence that painted a clear picture of the school's practices that have helped them achieve success more significantly than that of schools with a similar demographic makeup. Focus group interviews with the researcher and the study participants were conducted in this exploratory case study.

An exploratory case study design allows researchers to gain access to more in-depth information using focus group interviews. The exploratory model is an effective way to understand better a program or phenomenon of interest, such as leadership best practices (Chopard & Przybylski, 2021). The focus group interviews helped gain additional insight into the school leaders' structure, dynamics, and daily routines. Other case study designs were investigated but did not meet the unique needs of the study. According to Chopard and Przybylski (2021), exploratory case studies are valuable when seeking to answer specific research questions, testing hypotheses, and when the research design indicates the need for a more in-depth and focused analysis to gain the desired information. This study aimed to shed light on specific systemic practices that have yet to be pinpointed in previous studies. As a result, a focused qualitative exploratory case study was the most appropriate method and design for this study.

Participant Population

This study utilized purposeful sampling in choosing the sample population. According to Andrade (2021), "a purposive sample is one whose characteristics are defined for a purpose that is relevant to the study" (p. 87). The participants in this study deliberately included elementary school teachers from a school district in the west Texas area, identified as a high-poverty district with over 40% of its students meeting the federal Title 1 funding criteria by residing in a low socio-economic household based on free and reduced lunch application qualification data. The participants were teachers whose experience ranged from first-year teachers to veteran educators with more than 20 years of experience on the campus. This helped ensure that the teachers had the needed knowledge regarding the research topic due to their tenure and firsthand experience as a

teacher retained by campus leadership. It is important to note that even though the selected campuses met the convenience sampling criteria, the individual participants were purposefully selected to ensure they met the study criteria. Andrade (2021) stated, "Research based on convenience and purposive samples can be important and necessary, such as when sociocultural and other factors are expected to influence outcomes" (p.88).

To participate in this study, specific criteria were required. The teachers eligible to participate were employed in a full-time position in a school that met the requirements to qualify for Title 1 federal funding. The participant criterion helped determine similarities and differences between the schools and how they operate. They were also located within a similar geographic location and a part of the study's chosen school district. While each teacher had a different experience in the school they serve and the neighborhood in which they reside, each participant provided insight into the similar challenges of retaining quality teachers, yielding a multiple case study. Qualifying elementary schools were selected by utilizing the Academic Performance Report (TAPR). The TAPR helped identify campuses, demographics, teachers' years of experience, and socio-economic status.

In order to recruit study participants, an e-mail invitation was sent to this population to participate in this study. It focused on their experiences, practices, perspectives, and observations. The participant recruitment process was as follows:

- 1) The TAPR database and campus staff rosters were utilized to verify the eligibility criteria of the teachers.
- 2) An e-mail was sent to qualifying teachers. The e-mail contained a self-introduction, the purpose of the research, an invitation to participate in the study,

informed consent, a survey to gather demographic information, and the corresponding link.

3) Six to eight teachers per campus were eligible to participate. If more than eight respond with interest, then names will be randomly drawn to narrow down the participants, and an alternate list will be created for those not selected.

The characteristics of the participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Study Participants

Participant	Years Teaching	Years at campus	Years under the current leader	# of Students served	Grade Level/Content	Campus % Economically Disadvantaged
Amelia	10	5	5	40	4 th	96%
Brandy	7	6	6	30	5 th	96%
Kami	4	3	3	36	Special Services	96%
Jane	21	2	2	276	Instructional Coach	96%
Tammy	15	2	2	150	PreK-5 th	41.2%
Brenda	11	4	4	64	5 th	78%
Angie	13	12	4	41	3 rd and 4 th	41.2%
Janet	23	14	3	24	4 th	78%
Anna	14	12	4	528	Pk-5 th	78%
Lana	20	17	8	41	3 rd math/science	41.2%
Abby	15	15	8	45	4 th	41.2%
Anneke	19	2	2	600	Instructional coach	41.2%
Melinda	21	8	7	276	Instructional Coach	96%
Ashley	11	7	7	18	PreK Co-teach	96%
Kaci	28	5	5	39	4 th	96%
Carrie	22	8	2	41	3 rd	41.2%
Asha	1	9	7	39	3 rd	41.2%
Katie	8	8	2	42	5 th	41.2%
Kendra	12	10	4	40	2 nd	78%
Layla	13	3	3	39	3 rd	78%
Barbara	5	5	4	20	Special Services	78%
Mandy	13	12	4	41	3 rd and 4 th	78%
Krista	19	4	4	529	PE	78%

Note: This table shows the selected teacher participants and their pre-survey responses.

Data Collection

Data were gathered through in-depth focus group interviews of six to eight teachers employed at three campuses. Acocella (2012) defined focus groups as a non-standard information-gathering technique based on an informal discussion among a group. This group is led by a moderator who collects non-verbal and verbal information from the conversation to analyze the data in detail. The interview was designed around the overarching research questions and the sub-research questions under each topic.

Acocella (2012) stated:

Group discussions often proceed by means of association of ideas. In these cases, a sort of chain effect is created as one intervention paves the way to the next and encourages the formulation of different interpretations resulting in better final knowledge of the topic investigated. (p.1132)

As a result, interviews were semi-structured in design. This interview/discussion format included open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility throughout the process. This flexibility included varying the order of questions, asking questions that may emerge during the interview, and extending the time if needed. Two focus groups were conducted and were comprised of a mixture of selected participants from each of the three campuses. Follow-up interviews were scheduled after the initial focus groups concluded to gather clarifying information or probe further on topics of importance.

The participants were asked a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured interview process that will pertain to the purpose of the study and answer the research questions by determining teachers' perceptions of the systems and supports put in place by campus leadership to maintain as employees on the campus. The focus group

discussion was held virtually to accommodate the participants and was recorded for transcription. The interviews lasted a minimum of an hour. The role of the researcher was to facilitate the focus groups and ensure that the participants were confident and comfortable throughout the process. This allowed the process to move along smoothly and increased the depth of responses from the interviewees.

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the focus groups, transcription and analysis of the data collected occurred. Of the several options available for analysis, the Framework Method by Gale et al. (2013) best suited the research goals. The Framework Method is comprised of seven steps or stages. The first stage listed above is transcribing the data collected from the three focus groups and any additional interviews that may take place. Due to the use of virtual meetings, the transcription was completed by the virtual meeting software and checked for accuracy. Data familiarization occurred, and the accuracy was checked during Step 2 of the process. Once Steps 1 and 2 were completed, the data were coded to identify vital information that included what teachers value, how they feel, what they need, and other areas of focus uncovered in the process. As stated by Gale et al. (2013), "coding aims to classify all of the data so that it can be compared systematically with other parts of the data set" (p.4). This will also aid in data interpretation as the study continues.

Once the coding was complete, the process focused on developing a working analytical framework during Step 4. Codes were grouped or indexed as ideas, beliefs, and commonalities were identified. Application of the framework took place in Step 5. According to Gale et al. (2013), after the indexing is completed, the data can then be

charted and organized into categories of the framework matrix as the summarization of the data begins to take shape. Once Steps 1 through 6 have been completed, data was interpreted into results in the final stage to gain understanding. Gale et al. (2013) described this process "gradually, characteristics of and differences between the data are identified, perhaps generating typologies, interrogating theoretical concepts (either prior concepts or ones emerging from the data) or mapping connections between categories to explore relationships and/or causality" (p.5). Step 7 also helped determine the highly successful retention strategies and systems the three campus leaders utilize so that others can share and replicate them.

Findings

Leadership Practices

The first research question investigated was, "What leadership practices do principals in high-poverty schools use to promote teacher retention according to the perspective of teachers?" Two themes emerged from this question; the first was building positive relationships. Theme #1 is supported by four subcategories: trust, communication, personal support, and value. The second theme addressed support and was clarified through the instructional and behavior support subcategories.

Theme #1 Building Positive Relationship

The first theme the teachers identified was the importance of campus leaders building positive relationships throughout the campus. Teachers emphasized the significance of cultivating trust between the principal and teachers. Trust can manifest itself in various ways in the school setting. Mandy stated that her principal "gives us a lot of autonomy in our classroom. I don't feel like she's constantly hovering over and watching what we're doing. She trusts us that we know what's best for our students."

Amelia gave an example of her principal trusting her expertise; she stated, "I'll come up with some big idea, and then she's just like, ok, you go for it, and that's huge." In a more traditional approach to trust, Melinda appreciated her principal's professionalism and confidentiality by stating, "I feel like I can tell her personal things in confidence, and I don't feel like she's going to run around and then tell other staff members, and that's nice." Finally, Kendra shared that her principal "has our back when we are in meetings with parents. She lets the parents know that she does trust us. She trusts her staff."

A critical component of relationship building is effective lines of communication. The teachers identified several ways their principal fostered an environment where various forms of communication flourish. Layla said her principal was "very good about making staff comfortable enough to talk to her." Brenda shared her principal's check-in system for ongoing communication. She said, "She pulls each of us in, talks to us, and asks us how we're doing personally, in the classroom, and in our lives. She wants to know how she can help us be better teachers; that's valuable for me."

Amelia mentioned, "If she doesn't know the answer, she's going to find it, and I can trust that she will do that." Abby shared examples of how her principal solicits feedback from staff, "How can I help you? What can I do? I'm here to support you. Do we need to make some changes here and there?" Layla also noticed that strong communication had an impact outside the classroom. She said, "Our parents know they're welcome here, too." Jane also mentioned teachers at her school feel heard.

Teachers put time and effort into their practice, and when leaders see that contribution, assign value to teachers as professionals, and ensure they know their worth, it tremendously impacts the level of support teachers feel. Brandy stated, "My principal

comes down the hall and will say, 'How are you? How are you doing?' And she always says, 'Is there anything you need from me?' And I love that that makes me feel valued." Anneke mentioned that her principal "is constantly asking, for my opinion, our opinion." If she has an idea, she always bounces it off somebody else, and as a result, she has a way of making us all feel like we're on an equal, equal-level playing field." Mandy stated that her principal knows her people, which gives her insight into placing the right people in different positions. She knows who will thrive and succeed in part due to the strong relationships she has fostered throughout the campus.

The teachers at all three schools interviewed emphasized how their principal's personalized support impacted their job satisfaction and overall well-being. Jane shared, "She just has a way of helping you figure it out, putting the ball in your court, and you feel confident about moving on and solving whatever the issue might be." Anneke stated, "If we need something or need help, we can ask her. It's never like, no, sorry, we can't do that. It's she's going to find a way to either help us or get us what we need, always. " Carrie mentioned that she felt appreciated, and her principal had a compassionate understanding attitude and always had their back. She noted that she was also in tune with their needs and provided morale-boosting incentives when needed. Katie also mentioned, "She's personable, bubbly, warm, compassionate, confident, and focused on words of affirmation. She makes you feel good, and good principals see what kind of help teachers need and understand what they can focus on and let go." The teachers emphasized the way their principal's support made them feel. Melinda shared, "When you walk away, you don't feel dumb or that that was a stupid question. You feel better and more confident about the decision you're trying to make."

Theme #2 Support

The second theme identified by teachers was the importance of leadership support in their daily work with instruction and dealing with student behavioral issues. The teachers interviewed identified the vital component of instructional leadership by their principals on their Title 1 campus as a critical piece that impacted job performance and satisfaction. Kaci shared that their principal and her team "used data-driven instruction to form groups for RTI [response to intervention]." She continued by saying, "During PLCs [professional learning communities], we look carefully at students who need additional instructional support in specific areas and what they lack in the classroom. We are very intentional with our time." The teacher also mentioned that her principal made sure that they looked at their data daily, and because she knew the students so well, she knew exactly what their strengths and weaknesses were when they met for their PLCs. This allowed them to talk about the students struggling with a specific skill or content area and what could be done to support them. Jane shared that her principal's leadership skills and work with campus culture had created an environment where the students had bought in 100% to the campus-wide expectations; as a result, they wanted to work hard to both please their teachers and experience success. Brandy mentioned that because her principal digs into that data with their team weekly, they are able to identify needs quickly, ask the tough questions, and look at trends constantly to drive instruction.

Another type of support teachers valued deeply was the support they received from their principals when students exhibited behavior problems in the classroom. Janet stated that her principal was effective at "helping us identify students when we evaluate

behavior-related data to make sure they're getting the proper programs and supports they need to be successful." Jane shared that at her campus:

The staff knows how to divide and conquer, and we identify the person on campus that a child may need to connect with; it could be the PE teacher, SEL specialist, counselor, or another staff member. When new students check-in, they are oriented to the campus expectations. Through this process, they can see that we will work alongside them and support them as they adjust.

Jane also shared, "My principal is great at building relationships with those families that need the extra love and support." Janet mentioned that at her school, they could always go back to the drawing board and try different options until they found the one that worked best for the student or situation. The principal wholeheartedly supported this type of innovation. Brenda mentioned, "If you need help with a student, she doesn't make you feel like you can't control your classroom." Layla also shared the importance of her principal's willingness to provide breaks for struggling students outside of the classroom, giving them a change of setting where they can calm down and return later to a fresh start.

Teacher Retention Challenges

The second research question was, "What are the challenges of teacher retention in high-poverty schools according to the perspective of teachers?" As teachers responded during their focus group interviews, the one recurring theme was the lack of resources and support needed emerged. The following four subcategories were identified in this theme: closing the gap for struggling students, financial deficiency, and the lacking

personal needs of students and families, such as nutrition, attendance, and behavioral support.

Theme #3 Resource/Supports Needed

Teachers identified several areas they saw as challenges in their day-to-day work in high-poverty classrooms. One of the most profound challenges was closing the learning gap and ensuring students achieved the same level as their affluent peers. For example, Mandy stated, "To close the achievement gap, hiring multiple interventionists is crucial for us; we couldn't do it without all the extra hands at our school." Brandy stressed the importance of their campus philosophy that "all means all" because of this belief, the teachers were relentless in their mission to ensure that every student showed academic growth and had what they needed to be successful. Jane shared that "even when the STAAR assessment was complete, the expectation was that quality instruction continued throughout the campus for all students." Jane stated:

Our students need structure and thrive on it, and that structure is an expectation on our campus. When you walk into a classroom, you are going to see high engagement, and you're going to see students learning. There's no time for off-task behavior.

The lack of financial resources has long been a struggle for public schools; this challenge is even more apparent at high-poverty campuses. Layla shared that even though money was tight, her principal had become innovative. She stated, "If we need something or need help, we can ask her, and it's never like, no, sorry, we can't do that. She's going to find a way to either help us or get us what we need, always." Janet shared the concern that "when funding cuts occur next year, not having the manpower needed to ensure that

student's needs are met is an immense source of stress." Brandy mentioned that when students on her campus exhibited need, her principal was adept at finding ways to help; for example, when posed with a problem, "she would find resources and contact her support systems to see if they can help solve the problem. She knows who to contact to meet the vast needs of the campus." Melinda shared that the decisions her principal had to make with the limited resources she had allocated went directly to ensuring student success. She said, "My principal is really good about using the money on people that can help make those small groups happen instead of just buying more things that may not have the same level of impact."

One of the most significant challenges facing high-poverty schools identified by the teachers interviewed was the lack of support students come to school with regarding their personal needs, such as nutrition and school attendance. Amelia shared the concern that "consistently getting the students to school was a big challenge for them." She also shared that her campus principal addressed food insecurity by ensuring that all students get breakfast every morning, and the principal provided that we have a food pantry in our school. The principal would send backpacks with food home for the weekend and holidays with students. Katie shared one way they tried to support the students. She said, "At the beginning of the year, families are sent home a survey to identify what students need. Once the campus knows their needs, they can purchase those items, such as clothing, socks, underwear, and jackets." Melinda shared,

The students need stability. They know that when they get to school, they will be fed, and they will learn; they want to be here. It is a concern that they have no control over whether someone is going to bring them.

Jane shared that her principal has "found partnerships with local churches that are coming in to help assist students and staff. It's about knowing who to contact and who to have on campus to help support the students when needed."

Student behaviors that negatively impact learning have been increasing in classrooms post-pandemic. Brenda explained how she has dealt with several challenging students in her classroom due to poor behavior. These students have needed additional support from her administration. Jane shared that eventually, the students buy into the expectations in her classroom, but it can be a bumpy road to get there. Tammy mentioned that they want those students struggling with behavioral concerns to succeed in school. It was very impactful when her principal checked in regularly with these students and their families. This was a positive influence on the school and teachers.

Additional Findings

One insight uncovered through this study was the importance of hiring teachers with certain qualities to teach in high-poverty schools. Teachers from two of the schools that were interviewed shared the importance of ensuring that new staff members were a good match for the needs of the schools. Jane mentioned success is "all about staff and having the right people on their campus." Anneke stressed:

It is essential to communicate with people before they come to your campus.

When conducting interviews, we make it clear what our expectations are. For example, these are the things that we do here, and this is how we work together to get our students where they need to be. Being able to communicate those expectations and other duties as assigned before people are brought onto our

campus helps to ensure they understand the culture on our campus and lets them know how we function as a staff.

Jane shared, "It's expected that they jump on board with the culture that's been created and work alongside us to ensure success for all students." This finding is related to the work of Guarino et al. (2006), who found that specific personal and psychological characteristics enable individuals to succeed in challenging situations and stay on challenging campuses and in the profession for extended periods.

Discussion

School leaders face increasing pressure to retain effective teachers. A high teacher attrition rate negatively impacts academic success and disrupts collegiality, especially in high-poverty schools. Keeping teachers in these schools is crucial, but staffing classrooms in these economically depressed areas is challenging due to high turnover rates and inexperienced young teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). These obstacles increase the likelihood of teachers leaving the profession altogether. This study's research questions helped to identify practical ways for school leaders to address and overcome these challenges.

What leadership practices do principals in high-poverty schools use to promote teacher retention according to the perspective of teachers?

The first theme that emerged was the importance of building positive relationships supported by trust, communication, personal support, and value. Teachers appreciated the principal's professionalism, confidentiality, and support in meetings with parents. The results indicated that effective communication was crucial, with teachers expressing satisfaction with the principal's check-in system. These findings are supported by previous studies by (Hajisoteriou et al., 2018; Nehez et al., 2022), who found that

clear communication and collaborative culture were vital for teacher retention. Teachers appreciated the principal's openness to feedback and commitment to fostering multiple levels of trust.

This study demonstrated a correlation between teachers at all three schools who praised their principal's personalized support for job satisfaction and overall well-being. The principal's leadership skills and support were crucial for job performance and satisfaction. These results align with the work of Jiang and Chen (2018), who highlighted the success of transformational leaders who cultivate a sense of autonomy and increase teacher satisfaction through opportunities for ongoing learning and professional growth.

The second theme teachers emphasized was the importance of leadership support in their daily work with instruction and dealing with student behavioral issues. The principals on these Title 1 campuses use data-driven instruction to form groups for RTI and focus on students who need additional support in specific areas. They analyzed their data daily and identified students' strengths and weaknesses, creating an environment where students buy into campus-wide expectations. This analysis is supported by Bellibaş et al. (2021), and Woulfin and Weiner (2019), who identified that successful high-poverty school leaders must set high expectations for staff and students while removing obstacles that inhibit quality instruction. The participants reported that the principals also provided support when students exhibited behavior problems in the classroom. They helped identify students and provided the proper programs and support they needed.

What are the challenges of teacher retention in high-poverty schools according to the perspective of teachers?

The study supported that teacher retention challenges in high-poverty schools include closing the learning gap for struggling students, financial deficiency, and personal needs such as nutrition, attendance, and behavioral support. The data suggest that despite funding cuts, principals found innovative ways to address student needs, such as finding resources and creating support systems. These practices are supported by Sheehan et al. (2020), who identified innovation as a critical component of successful transformational leadership. The data suggests that addressing the personal needs of the students, such as nutrition and attendance, is crucial for the school and teachers.

One of the biggest challenges identified by the teachers was support. It is important to note that even though support was recognized as a critical leadership practice that promoted teacher retention, it was also a challenge. Providing support through additional staff members to provide small group instruction is costly. When teacher morale begins to wane, and principals want to provide activities or treats to help mitigate the stress, these things can be expensive. All three campuses identified the lack of funds to provide such support as a challenge that was only predicted to increase with looming budget cuts and rising costs.

This study was guided by the theoretical framework of transformational leadership, which emphasizes the importance of leaders working with followers to identify and implement necessary changes, particularly in high-poverty schools. The theory consists of four components: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individual consideration. These components increase the

understanding of the impact of leadership practices on followers and their well-being which was a key finding of this study. Transformational leaders, like the ones discussed in this study, often increase team collegiality and performance through trusting and positive relationships while cultivating a sense of autonomy and providing opportunities for teachers to learn and grow despite the challenges they may encounter. This study endorses this by recognizing key transformationally aligned behaviors utilized by the principals in the study to reduce teacher turnover and increase job satisfaction through these practices.

Interpretation of Results

The study's results reaffirmed the importance of having quality leaders at high-poverty campuses. The interpersonal and systemic leadership practices that the teachers identified were congruent with previous leadership studies (Perrachione et al., 2008; Sedivy-Benton & McGill, 2012). One revelation of the study was the specificity of the teachers' examples of how their principals supported them as teachers and people. These detailed examples could help leaders create a roadmap to success when crafting a campus culture that teachers want to remain a part of regardless of the myriad of challenges they may face.

The results also made it clear that teachers want to do and be their best to guarantee the success of their students. They are looking for leaders who will help them grow as instructional experts while maintaining order in the building so that instruction can be delivered with fidelity every day. These findings are supported by previous studies by Cronin (2016) and Kalkan et al. (2020), who identified the importance of quality

instructional leadership when making scheduling, hiring, and data-driven teaching decisions.

The study emphasized the importance of hiring teachers with specific qualities (Guarino et al.,2006) for high-poverty schools. Teachers emphasized the need for a good match between new staff members and the school's needs, and effective communication and understanding of expectations are crucial for staff success. The significance of this revelation can be a game-changing strategy for principals who have experienced significant teacher turnover at their schools. If leaders can proactively hire teachers who understand the challenges from the beginning, there is a greater chance they will be willing to remain at the school for the tenure of that leader and possibly longer.

Limitations

There are three significant limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the study focused on three high-poverty schools in the same geographical area. Even though the population was purposefully sampled, the sample size limits the generalizability of the research and, as a result, limits the generalization to a larger population that may not represent the small group of teachers interviewed in the focus groups in the study. Future studies that expand the sample size could provide additional insight into this area. Second, the researcher's presence during data collection could have affected the subjects' responses. This presence could have generated bias during the study's analysis phase, specifically as they incorporated the nuances observed during the interviews. Finally, while all participants were guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality, the focus group setting could have impacted their comfort level to speak freely, particularly when addressing challenges on campus. Additional studies of this type

could hide the participant's identity or have a proctor facilitate the focus groups to increase confidentiality and decrease research bias.

Implications for Practice

The results of this study have important implications for principals looking for practical ways to impact their campus culture positively. While it is often thought that building positive and supportive relationships happens automatically (Holmes et al., 2019), this study provides further evidence that leaders can deliberately identify areas essential to teachers to set the direction of the culture on their campus (Normore, 2004). These results build on existing evidence of the importance of supporting teachers identified in the Perrachione et al. (2008) study. Principals would benefit from modeling and training in how to build relationships with and support their teachers, parents, and students. This study provides guidance to principals in critical areas that teachers find most important such as communication, trust, and support of healthy work-life balance.

The study also revealed the importance of principals' instructional and behavioral support that teachers need to complete their job-related duties. These results should be considered when principals are developing campus-wide behavior management systems and how they evaluate and that support continuous improvement in instruction and student learning. These conclusions corroborated the previous research of Hughes (2012) and Ingersoll and Smith (2003), who found classroom behavioral disruption and lack of instructional support from administrators as reasons teachers cited as areas of job dissatisfaction that cause them to leave the profession. Campus leaders could use the findings from this research to improve the practices that impact the day-to-day routines,

priorities, and procedures and better tailor them to meet the needs identified as vital by the teachers interviewed.

Conclusion and Future Research Recommendations

Retaining teachers has never been more difficult but more critical to success for all students. The research examined leadership practices in high-poverty schools to promote teacher retention. Based on the results, further research should focus on building positive interpersonal relationships between administrators and teachers and leadership supports in daily instruction and dealing with student behavioral issues. Furthermore, teachers found value in leaders that found innovative ways to address student needs, such as finding resources and creating support systems. Additional research that can provide campus-level leaders with tools to help them generate support systems or tap into successful existing systems would be beneficial. Finally, with the emerging importance of hiring teachers in high-poverty schools that understand the challenges and expectations from the onset, further studies could help leaders hone in on critical traits when looking at applicants for employment. The experience and insight of the teachers in the three schools interviewed make clear that leaders who ensure their teachers and students are supported can successfully recruit and retain quality educators. As a result, they can maintain markedly successful schools while overcoming the challenges of leading a high-poverty school.

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