The Role Of School Leadership In Teacher Retention In Title 1 Schools

LaTonya Wright Bolden

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The Role of School Leadership in Teacher Retention in Title 1 Schools

By

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative study was to examine the ways in which teachers’ perceptions of school leadership, particularly principals, impact the attrition and the retention of highly qualified educators. The focus of this study was the analysis of teachers’ views of the various philosophies of leadership and how the practices which stem from those philosophies affect the efficacy of the teachers. Because of the correlation between teacher retention and leadership styles, the behavioral leadership model of principals developed by Urick and Bowers (2014) was used as a conceptual framework for the study.

The findings of this research indicated that while the interactions with school leaders affect the morale and, in some cases, the stress levels of the teachers, the participants are intrinsically motivated to remain in Title 1 schools. Such motivators included family dynamics, senses of community, and sociological ideologies. While most of the leader-member exchanges were positive and of high quality, there is a need for teacher-driven, differentiated professional development such as flexible meetings through online platforms and apps so that more time could be allotted for collaborative and individual planning. Even though the state evaluation rubric encompasses ten performance standards, the teachers who participated in this study wanted a more detailed feedback system that allows consistent, ongoing dialogue between the leaders and the teachers. Consistent, quality leader-member exchanges are needed to help to build levels of trust and mutual understanding.

Keywords: attrition, professional learning communities, highly qualified teachers, retention, student engagement, instructional coaching, autonomy, efficacy
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Educational Leadership

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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

According to the United States Department of Education, over half a million teachers move from their schools or leave the profession every year. This level of teacher turnover costs districts across the country approximately 2.2 billion dollars annually (Owens, 2014). The lack of retention is most prevalent in high poverty schools in which 20% of teachers leave each school year. The focus of this study was to analyze teachers’ views of the philosophies of leadership and how the practices associated with those philosophies affect teacher efficacy. The goals of this work were to ascertain not only why teachers leave schools but what motivates them to remain in their current positions.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) asserts that 33 percent of newly hired teachers leave the profession in 3 years; 50% abandon the field within 5 years (Lewis, 2003). And the statistics for teachers working in schools serving economically disadvantaged students are much more alarming costing school districts billions of dollars. The research conducted by NCES shows a dramatic increase in the number of “leavers” as the number of students who receive free or reduced lunch increases. Schools in which over 75 percent of the students receive free or reduced lunch experienced 12.2 percent turnover as opposed to schools with under 34 percent of students receiving lunch benefits with a 5.9 percent turnover rate (National Center of Education, 2014). While predictions can be made about the decrease of highly qualified educators on a national level, most of the factors that catalyze teacher turnover are problems and challenges at a school or district. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission reported that 44% of teachers leave the profession in the state within the first five
years which is comparable to the national average of 50 percent (Owens, 2015). Over 53,000 teachers responded to an online survey and were asked to rank the factors that contributed to their decision to leave their positions in the state of Georgia with 1 being the most prominent and 8 being the least prominent.

Figure 1.1: Georgia Department of Education, 2015.

The answers were grouped into three tiers. The first tier related to student mandated testing and teacher evaluation tools. The second tier was about the levels of teacher participation in school- and district-level decisions and how those decisions impacted their responsibilities and duties. The third tier related to the quality of support, school resources, and organizational leadership while the last tier was about teacher preparation programs in the state. During the open-ended portion of the interview, respondents wrote that “strong leadership could and does insulate classroom teachers from many of these other potential stressors becoming too burdensome” (Owens, 2015). Additional research can be helpful in understanding not only the specific ways in which leaders can attract and retain qualified teachers but how this insulation takes place and how it affects the everyday practices of teachers.

Smith and Reed (2010) claimed that “organizations that acknowledge the unique cultural influences on diverse groups can more fully facilitate their leadership development” (p. 97).
Leadership development models that encompass a variety of cultures and points of view can add to the vitality of organizations.

Fullan (2000) stated:

Good teaching is at the center of successful schools, and that the practices and beliefs of principals related to instruction determine their success as instructional leaders. How principals acquire the skills they need to become accomplished leaders is dependent on their experiences as teachers. (p. 160)

The geographic focus on this study was the state of Georgia. Some states, including Georgia, require little or no teaching experience to become an administrator. Only 37 states have outlined teaching experience as a distinct criterion to obtain initial licensure as a school administrator (Scott, 2018). Scott suggests that principals lacking extensive classroom experience may need more training either through traditional or nontraditional means on how to better support teachers. He writes:

Leadership is found to have one of the greatest impacts on student learning — second only to classroom instruction. However, many districts are challenged by high rates of turnover, resulting in shortages and inexperienced principals leading high-need schools. As states look at ways to support schools and districts, many turn to policies surrounding preparation and licensure in an effort to better equip leaders entering the field to be successful. (Scott, Education Commission of the States, 2018)

Even though individual districts specify that administrators are required to have at least three years of experience as a classroom teacher, the state of Georgia does not require applicants for licensure to have teaching experience (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2018).
George (2015) identified eight factors that are important in employee retention: (a) team management, (b) conducive and creative environment, (c) social support, (d) professional development opportunities, (e) autonomy, (f) financial compensation, (g) crafted workload, and (h) work-life balance. Of the eight factors, autonomy plays a significant role in overall employee retention and the implications of the research can be helpful in the area of teacher retention. Characteristics of autonomy may differ among educators with some valuing this aspect more than others. Teachers who value autonomy may place high importance on being given the space and the resources to be creative and may feel more supported in those environments. While financial compensation is not dictated by individual school leaders, the other factors, such as team management, conducive and creative environment, and team management, are indicative of the culture that the principal has created. If teachers feel as if they are a part of the decision-making process within the school, the level of efficacy and empowerment can increase.

Statement of the Problem

Even though there have been exit surveys and interviews conducted in the state of Georgia to clarify the reasons why teachers leave their positions, there is not sufficient research on the specific practices that school leaders employ to retain highly qualified teachers. Research suggests that school leaders who consistently evaluate their methods of personnel support have higher rates of teacher retention (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 216). These leaders are not apprehensive about difficult conversations and seek the team approach to settle conflicts. In Leadership, Burns (1978) states that “the distribution of conflict may take various forms, and the shape of leadership may follow suit, but leadership in turn chisels and enlarges or narrows the cleavages among subleaders and followers” (p. 260). The exit surveys can give information about groups of teachers but provide little information about the schools and its leadership.
models. Other factors related to school climate and perceptions of students and parents were considered in the most recent teacher surveys for the state of Georgia. The survey instrument featured mostly multiple choice or rank of importance style questions. There were few open-ended questions that allowed the exiting teachers to voice their perspectives.

A major emphasis of this study was within Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Title 1 schools, which include over 21 million children nationwide, are considered underserved due to the lack of staff and support to address student needs (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). According to the Department of Education, approximately 14 million of the 21 million children serviced by Title 1 identify as African-American or Hispanic (United States Department of Education, 2017). Teacher turnover is directly correlated to student achievement, student behavior, school safety, and building maintenance as resources are being transferred (Hanushek, Rivkin, and Schiman, 2016). A problem that is experienced by economically challenged schools is that most of the educational policy makers are not in touch with the sociocultural environment of most of the students and teachers who must deal with the ramifications of their solutions (Bell and Stevenson, 2016). Teacher efficacy and empowerment is not linear concept that can be addressed using one methodology.

**Purpose of the study**

According to Kotter (2012), there are eight steps to systemic change within organizations. These steps include:

(a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) creating the guiding coalition, (c) developing a vision and strategy, (d) communicating the change vision, (e) empowering team members for collective action, (f) generating short-term wins, (g) consolidating gains and producing more change, and h) anchoring new approaches in the culture. (p. 23)
The problem is extremely urgent within the K-12 sphere as districts across the country are experiencing teacher shortages in core subjects (Cross, 2017). Cross defines a teacher shortage area as “an area of specific grade, subject matter or discipline classification, or a geographic area in which the Secretary determines that there is an inadequate supply of elementary or secondary school teachers” (p. 4). In order to enact systemic change and establish the sense of urgency, the areas of shortages are defined according to discipline and geographic location.

The purpose of this study is to identify the practices of school leaders that increase teacher retention, particularly in Title 1 schools. The objective is to not only identify specific practices that influence teacher turnover but the role that leadership plays in the teacher’s decision to remain at the school or in the profession. Research suggests that principals may need more training on how to better support teachers regardless of the amount of classroom experience that they may have prior to their administrative role. Sutcher, Podolsky, and Espinoza (2017) claim that:

> principals play a critical role in addressing widespread teacher shortages by creating school environments that attract and retain competent teachers…and the most effective principals assume a range of responsibilities, including setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and leading instruction. (p. 12)

Some districts in Georgia are taking innovative approaches to provide support to incoming principals. For instance, in Gwinnett County, Georgia, novice principals are paired with retired principals for one-on-one coaching for 4 hours a month to strategize on ways that facilitate teacher and student empowerment (Mendels, 2012).
Research Questions

Maxwell (2005) writes that research questions “serve two main functions: to help you focus the study (the questions’ relationship to your goals and conceptual framework) and to give you guidance for how to conduct it (their relationship to methods and validity)” (p. 229).

The concerns about teacher retention led to three guiding questions:

1. From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention?
2. How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?
3. How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was based on research done by Urick and Bowers (2014) that explored the impact of leadership styles on teacher retention making a distinction between transactional and transformative leadership models. Urick and Bowers’ work embodies the characteristics of the moral leadership, path-goal, and leader-member exchange theories. By understanding the perception of the different styles of the school leaders, Urick and Bowers’ study examined the extent of the influence of leaders on teachers’ decisions to remain at a school or to transfer. Urick and Bowers (2014) viewed the relationships between teachers and principals as mutually beneficial. In the study, the teachers were also grouped as integrated, balkanized, limited, or transitioned so that the principals’ and the teachers’ styles could be compared (Urick and Bowers, 2014). The comparison of the principals’ leadership styles and the teachers’ styles is a strength of this framework in that it examines the interaction
and the relationship between the teachers and the principals. Urick and Bowers (2014) asserted that if the teacher perceived the principals as supportive, the teacher would feel more empowered and committed to the position. This sense of efficacy with explicit pathways for increased responsibility and leadership directly correlate to teacher retention.

Urick and Bowers’ (2014) research was significant to the study in that it emphasized the relationship between school building leaders and teachers and how the dynamics of those relationship aid or impede student achievement. As an extension of the research conducted in 2014, Urick (2016) outlined five measurable effective leadership behaviors: “[the] establishment of goals, promoting and participating in teacher development, planning, coordinating and evaluating instruction and managerial tasks of resourcing, and creating a safe and orderly environment” (Urick, 2016, p. 99). None of these goals can be achieved in isolation and are dependent on healthy relationships between leaders and staff members. The behaviors are also interrelated in that each requires at least a part of the others. Creating a safe and orderly environment, for example, depends on planning and the establishment of school-wide goals. How leaders coordinate and evaluate instruction determines the level of engagement that teachers will have in professional development.

In Urick’s (2016) work, the distinction between transformational leadership and instructional leadership is discussed. She writes, “Principals who are transformational leaders offer teachers a climate with a mission, professional growth, and a sense of community” (Urick, 2016, p. 100). In transformational models of leadership, the leader creates an environment in which the followers can be empowered and thrive. The health of the organization is dependent on that leader’s ability to produce other leaders who will continue the established mission. However, Urick asserted that instructional leaders “build a positive climate through professional
development and coordination and attainment of instructional goals” (p. 101). Therefore, the leader is not creating a climate but building a climate with the followers that is goal centered. With instructional leadership, the shared common instructional goal is the focal point, not the climate. The positive climate is a byproduct of the synergetic work that is being done within the school. When this leadership is shared, teachers “share responsibility for organizational change and leadership around instruction” (p. 103). Northouse (2016) claims that “when leaders and followers have good exchanges, they feel better and accomplish more, and the organization prospers” (p. 142). This shared leadership model is based on the quality of the leader-member exchange and echoes the work done by Urick and Bowers. When the leader-member exchange is high, there is a sense of collective responsibility within the organization that is not only linked to staff retention but organizational health.

Northouse writes of phases of leadership making in which the role of the leader evolves over time. In Phase 1, the leader is a stranger to the followers and his or her main objective may be self-motivated. By Phase 2 relationships have developed as the leader moves into the stage of an acquaintance. The full personhoods of the leader and the followers may be recognized but not embraced at this point. By Phase 3, the leader-member exchange is high, and the leader and the followers are considered partners who are invested in the well-being of the group (Northouse, 2016). The conceptual framework that Urick in her work suggested coincides with this model of leadership dynamics suggested by Northouse. Each of the core leadership behaviors changes according to the type of leadership displayed. Even though the leadership styles of both the principals and leaders are discussed in the works of Urick and Bowers and Northouse, both models fail to discuss particular behavioral practices that make the leadership effective and the perception of those practices by followers. Using teacher voice, the goal of the study was to
examine how teachers view themselves and their roles as teachers and leaders within the context of their organizations. The aim was to also explore the specific practices that leaders employ that teacher perceive as supportive and empowering.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

The scope of this study included middle and high school teachers who are working in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Specific pedagogical implications could not be made because the content areas of the participants vary. The goal was to have teacher participants who teach in a variety of content areas represented in schools. Even though number of years of teaching experience was a consideration, it was not a major component of the research questions. Even though teacher turnover is a national issue, the research design was specific to school districts in the city of Atlanta and surrounding suburbs. Atlanta is a rapidly growing city with 90,650 people migrating there annually (Niesse, 2017). Therefore, the exponential growth has caused massive teacher shortages across multiple subject areas. District leaders throughout the metropolitan area are seeking new models of recruitment and retention.

One main limitation of the study was that it was concentrated on a particular geographic location. The nuisances with human capital in a major city like Atlanta may not be applicable to rural areas. This limits the scope of the study to urban areas that are rapidly developing and with districts with a diverse population. This study does not address the particular concerns of teachers serving in more homogeneous populations and those working in more rural areas. The assumptions made with this study were that teacher efficacy was related to the practices of school leaders. It was also assumed that the level of efficacy would increase in correlation to the years of classroom experience.
Significance and Rationale for the Study

The significance of this study was to document how the leadership styles and practices of school leaders were perceived by teachers. Researching the topic of how school leadership played a role in recruiting, retaining, and empowering teachers, the study focused on how leaders’ practices affect teacher perception and retention. Even though some factors such as financial compensation are regulated by state and local government, other factors such as autonomy, team management, and social support can vary according to the school and its leaders.

Even though teacher turnover is a national concern, it is particularly alarming in schools serving low-income student populations in Title 1 schools. Student achievement could increase if the teachers who replace those leaving are highly qualified. In schools that are considered underserved, teachers may not have the same credentials and experience as their predecessors. Teacher turnover also poses a challenge to schools as they implement programs and attempt to build consistent cohesion.

Definition of terms

Attrition: When a teacher leaves teaching profession entirely, either to take another job outside of teaching, for personal reasons as child rearing, health problems, family moves, and retirement (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006, p.18).

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs): A group of educators that meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve teaching skills and the academic performance of students (EdGlossary, 2014).

Highly Qualified Teachers: To be considered highly qualified, a teacher must: 1) have a bachelor’s degree, 2) obtain a clear, renewable license in the state in which he/she practices, and 3) prove that they are knowledgeable of the content through the passing score on a state approved test,
a major in the subject area, or a graduate degree related to the content (Department of Education, 2004).

**Instructional Coaching:** A practice in which an individual or a team of persons is advising a school on how to improve its academic program, instructional effectiveness, and student performance (EdGlossary, 2014).

**Student Engagement:** The belief that learning improves when students are inquisitive, interested, or inspired, and that learning tends to suffer when students are bored, dispassionate, disaffected, or otherwise “disengaged” (EdGlossary, 2014).

**Teacher Retention:** The active measures taken by a school and/or district to empower teachers to remain in their current positions (EdGlossary, 2014).

**Teacher Efficacy:** Teacher Efficacy is the “judgement of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Tschannen-Moran and Hoy, 2001, p. 783).

**Conclusion**

According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), sense-making is essential to transformative leadership. School leaders who consistently evaluate their methods heighten teacher retention (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 216). They are not afraid to have difficult conversations and seek the team approach to solve conflicts. In *Leadership*, Burns (1978) stated that “the distribution of conflict may take various forms, and the shape of leadership may follow suit, but leadership in turn chisels and enlarges or narrows the cleavages among subleaders and followers” (p. 260). School leaders need to seek ways to engage teachers in meaningful conversation that affect retention. Using the collectivist approach, they experience greater teacher buy-in with initiatives which lead to teachers acting as confident leaders themselves.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the study was addressing teachers’ perceptions of leadership practices and other factors that inform their decisions to remain in their current positions, there were emergent themes that were presented as the prior work done in this area was researched. The main topics that were addressed in this literature review are: the impact of teacher turnover, the elements impacting teacher retention, reasons for leaving the teaching profession, disadvantaged schools, leadership and teacher morale, teacher empowerment and efficacy, leadership styles and the role of gender, teacher preparation programs and retention, and financial incentives on retention.

The Impact of Teacher Turnover

Turnover is defined either as “teachers moving from one school to another, that is, movers, or teachers leaving the profession altogether prior to retirement age, that is, leavers.” (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2016, p. 84). According to Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, the school culture dictates how the teachers are retained and developed. Moreover, it is the responsibility of the leaders to drive the climate of the school. The quantitative study of Papay, Bacher-Hicks, Page, and Marinell (2017) examined how teacher turnover affected 16 urban districts across the United States. The unique contribution of the study conducted by Papay et al. (2017) was not only that it included participants from different geographic locations but also that it differentiated novice teachers from veteran teachers in order to determine reasons for mobility. The participants were also separated according to their method of leaving, whether the teachers resigned from their positions, took a temporary leave of absence, or if the teacher transferred to a different school in the same district. The movement of the teachers in the study was voluntary.
and did not include data from teachers who had been terminated (Papay et al., 2017). The study concluded that “13% to 35% of novices left their district after one year, while 44% to 74% left within five years” (Papay et al., 2017, p. 435).

Every district has distinct challenges that are unique to that district. Administrators involved in the Papay et al. (2017) study expressed concern that teachers were leaving challenging schools in urban districts to work in schools in suburban areas with “more desirable conditions” (p. 436). While other quantitative studies have focused on district-level transfers within a school system, this study was unique in that it provided an over-arching view of teacher retention. When studying teacher retention, context matters. While turnover is a national issue, the work of Papay et al. (2017) emphasized the need to explore the issues with a contextual lens and that in order to tackle those challenges, restorative work must be done that is tailored to the districts and the schools that struggle with high teacher turnover (p. 440). Adnot, Dee, Katz, and Wykcoff (2016) examined the intersection of teacher turnover, teacher quality, and student achievement within the DC public school district. Using IMPACT, a teacher evaluation and compensation-scaled system used by the District of Columbia that supports professional growth by outlining specific courses of action, Adnot et al. explored how the perception of teacher effectiveness directly impacted teacher turnover in that district. IMPACT is an evaluative tool which provides feedback to teachers in four areas: instructional practice, student achievement, instructional culture, and collaboration (District of Columbia Public Schools, 2009). On the influence of evaluative methods, such as IMPACT, on teacher retention, it is suggested that “IMPACT was directly intended to influence the quality composition of the DCPS teacher workforce, and the results from Adnot et al., combined with those from previous
studies, certainly suggest that turnover under IMPACT may be having a positive impact” (Di Carlos, 2016).

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2014), 33% of newly hired teachers leave the profession in 3 years. And the statistics for teachers working in schools serving economically disadvantaged students are much more alarming, with attrition costing school districts billions of dollars (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, p. 3). The percentage of turnover of teachers who worked in schools with more than 75% of the student population receiving free or reduced lunch was nearly double the percentage of turnover for teachers in schools with less than 34% of free and reduced lunch recipients (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014, p. 4). While predictions can be made about the decrease of highly qualified educators on a national level, most of the factors that catalyze teacher turnover are issues at a particular school or district which are highlighted in the study conducted by Donitsa-Schmidt and Zuzovsky (2016).

The work of Donitsa-Schmidt and Zuzovsky (2016) examined teacher retention qualitatively and quantitatively. This study benefited the conversation by demonstrating that “teacher shortage can be inferred not only by the number of teachers who were recruited to the school (the quantitative aspect) and by their qualifications (the qualitative aspect), but also by the extent to which the teaching loads of existing teachers were increased—a sign of the difficulty involved in recruiting a new teacher” (p. 84). Lack of pathways for leadership and development are prevalent in schools nationwide (Donitsa-Schmidt & Zuzovsky, 2016). Even though teacher turnover is systemic, school leaders are generally responsible for the management of personnel. Donitsa-Schmidt and Zuzovsky claimed that “coping with teacher shortage at the school level is
usually in the hands of the school principals, who utilize various strategies in order to ensure that all teaching positions in their schools are filled” (p. 85).

**New Teacher Retention and Recruitment**

New teachers are a diverse group of beginning teachers who are “directly out of college, individuals previously employed in other careers, teachers who had transferred to new schools, and experienced teachers returning to the workforce” (Corwin & Grady, 1997, p. 5). Corwin and Grady (1997) also assert that the three characteristics that are reflected during most career changes are: “changes in the definition of oneself, experiences in a totally new situation, and major changes in one’s interpersonal support network” (p. 6). Entering into the teaching profession has been correlated to entering adulthood as the new teacher attempts to understand her or his role within the profession (Heck & Williams, 1984).

One recruitment model that has been prevalent in urban settings has been the teacher residency, a hybrid of the traditional model of preparation that includes an undergraduate degree in education with a teaching certificate and the alternative teacher preparation models such as lateral entry programs that allow uncertified teachers to gain certification while teaching (Marshall & Scott, 2015). Based on the medical residency model, the teacher resident works closely with an experienced teacher for an academic year while taking course work on pedagogy at a university that has partnered with the district (Guha, Hyler, & Hammond, 2017). Residency programs offer financial incentives that include “living stipends, student loan forgiveness, and/or tuition remittance in exchange for residents’ commitment to teaching in the district for a specified period of time, typically three to five years” (Guha, Hyler, & Hammond, 2017, p. 33). Marshall and Scott (2015) write that the purpose of an urban teacher residency is to “train and retain effective teachers” and that “extended pre-service classroom experience with urban
students has been linked to teacher retention and teacher retention has been linked to successful student outcomes” (p. 31). Haberman (1995) identified ten characteristics that should be exhibited by teachers in urban settings have been used in the development of teacher residency programs in Philadelphia and Boston. Potential teachers for the residency were screened based on the ten characteristics of:

- persistence, organization and planning, how they value student learning, ability to translate theory to practice, ability to connect with at-risk students, ability to relate to students, ability to survive in a large depersonalized bureaucracy, ability to understand teacher and student success, and ability to handle making mistakes in the classroom.

(Marshall & Scott, 2015, p. 33)

The screening process included a series of interviews, writing exercises, and demonstration lessons not only for the district to evaluate the strength of the candidate but for the potential teacher to preview what the job of the classroom teacher would entail (Marshall & Scott, 2015).

**Elements Impacting Teacher Retention**

The work of Billingsley (2013) makes connections between retention and Even though Billingsley’s mixed method study focused on the needs of special educators, it can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of the elements that may improve teacher retention such as administrative support, professional learning, and school climate and dynamics as it relates to the effect that practices have on retention. Teachers who receive rewards are more likely to remain in their positions (Billingsley, 2013). Billingsley (2013) wrote that “poor working conditions lead teachers to feel that efforts do not make a difference (e.g. low self-efficacy). It is these feelings of ‘inconsequentiality’ that lead to stress and burnout” (p. 33). Billingsley’s work
emphasized the structural supports that school leaders implemented that may support teachers in varying disciplines as shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1—Billingsley’s Leadership Model of Retention of Special Educators

Billingsley (2013) illustrated how such factors as principal support, job design, and the recruiting and hiring processes coincided with special education teacher efficacy (Billingsley, 2013, p. 118). After recruiting the teachers, the leadership must ensure that professional development opportunities are in place while providing the tools to create a supportive working environment.

**Reasons for Leaving**

Generally, human resources departments in organizations give exit surveys to employees who are leaving. Previous work on teacher mobility focused more on why teachers left instead of why they stayed. George (2015) identified eight factors that are important in employee
retention: team management, conducive and creative environment, social support and professional development opportunities, autonomy, financial compensation, crafted workload, and work-life balance (p. 162). While financial compensation is not dictated by individual school leaders, the other factors, such as conducive and creative environment and team management, are indicative of the culture that the principal has created (George, 2015, p. 170). Both innovation and consistency are vital to student achievement. It has been assumed that less qualified teachers are the ones who typically leave schools. However, recent findings have concluded that it is highly qualified teachers who leave, particularly in schools that serve economically disadvantaged students (Adot et al., 2016, p. 128). Therefore, teacher retention and empowerment are essential to closing the student achievement gap and providing more resources to the schools and students who need them the most.

Management is a major factor in employee retention. George (2015) asserted, “Professional workers need to feel that their professional knowledge and skills are valued and that they are able to make decisions about issues which they perceive are within their professional domain” (p. 104). The implication is that employees value facilitation more than direction with managers placing value on their ability and creativity related to the position. George (2015) also emphasized the need for the employee to feel supported by his or her manager as more important than feeling supported by the entire organization. In school settings, even if teachers are not comfortable with decisions made by district leaders, teachers were more likely to remain at a school if they felt supported by the principal (Papay et al., 2017, p. 79).

Employees tend to also remain in work spaces where the resources are plentiful, and the manager exhibits degrees of flexibility. George (2015) claimed that “managers can influence the working environment by ensuring that professional groups have access to sufficient resources and that
flexibility within the organization is reciprocal” (p. 163), and the key components of a healthy work environment “would appear to be the availability of sufficient resources to perform the job, flexibility and a pleasant or fun place to work” (p. 105). By doing this, the leader emphasizes the personhood of the teacher, not merely the skill set.

Kelchtermans’ (2017) study evaluated the reasons that teachers make the decision to leave a school. The author separated the influencing systemic external of the organization and internal factors within the teachers. He claimed that by focusing on the internal factors, the teachers become overworked and it creates a great deal of pressure if expectations set by the district and school are not met (Kelchtermans, 2017, p. 961). Kelchtermans also asserted:

When teachers internalized the accountability pressure and accepted test scores as the most important measure of success and value as a teacher…it led to a sense of failure, self-doubt and turnover. Students constitute the ultimate source for teachers’ self-esteem, their sense of professional (and personal) live fulfillment, as well as for their recognition as a proper teacher. Feeling that one can’t live up the self-imposed (or internalized) standards or ambitions eventually results in turnover. (p. 968)

However, if there is a focus on the external factors, such as the socioeconomic class and the intellectual ability of the students, the teachers may experience a low sense of efficacy and self-esteem. This could lead to little motivation for the teacher to be a change agent as the external factors are beyond his or her control. The author asserted that there should be a balance in the way the factors are explored. Too much focus on either the internal or external factors can cause a lack of true understanding of the complexity of teacher retention issue (Kelchtermans, 2017).
Disadvantaged Schools

Baker et al. (2017) defines disadvantaged schools as “those with higher than average student needs in their labor-market location and lower than average resources when state and local revenues are combined” (p. 1). It is estimated that more than 1.5 million children are educated in 55 disadvantaged school districts across 20 states (Baker, 2017). Baker asserts that “many of the most disadvantaged districts are in states with highly regressive funding distribution systems, such as Arizona and Illinois, but they also are found in states with flat (e.g., California) and more progressive systems (e.g., Georgia, Massachusetts, Ohio and Utah)” (p. 4). Djonko-Moore (2016) claimed that the teachers’ perceptions of the school environment are a predictor of the likelihood of retention correlating school climate to teacher mobility. The findings of the study suggested that teachers’ beliefs about minority and poor students affect the mobility rate, and that rate could be decreased if district leaders understood the psychological effects of teachers’ relationships with others in the school community. In the study, 730 teachers were sampled from K-12 schools in the United States. All of the participants taught in schools that were considered high poverty meaning that at least 75% of the students received free or reduced lunch (Djonko-Moore, 2016). The teachers’ perceptions of the students in relation to achievement and behavior, the parents, and community had the greatest effect on mobility, according to the study. Djonko-Moore (2016) suggested that more extensive professional development be done by districts to help teacher understand the specific issues of the community in which they serve.

The movement of teachers and students from disadvantaged schools to schools with more resources is articulated by Marion and Gonzales (2014) when they wrote:
Good students flow to the advantaged schools because of their reputation; resources flow
with the new students; good teachers want to teach at the advantaged schools. Each gain
triggers new gains, much like a small sound into a microphone near a speaker grows
quickly into a loud screech. The disadvantaged, on the other hand, become locked in a
downward spiral in which each loss triggers new losses. Thus, choice increases the
disparity between advantaged and disadvantaged schools rather than stimulating
competition over ideas. (p. 245)

Teacher turnover has more far reaching effects than just on district budgets. It is directly
correlated to student achievement, student behavior, school safety, and building maintenance as
resources are being transferred. According to Bell and Stevenson (2015), “educational issues are
presented as little more than technical ‘problems’ requiring a technical solution” (p. 29). The
problem is that most of the educational policy makers are not in touch with the sociocultural
environment of most of the students and teachers who have to deal with the ramifications of their
solutions. The solutions may be a quick fix but do not address the deeper issues of economic and
racial disparity.

**Leadership and Teacher Morale**

One of the themes that emerged in the review of the literature was teacher leadership and
empowerment. The principal who embodies an adaptive leadership philosophy endeavors to be a
democratic leader who seeks to find leadership in the teachers on his or her staff (Marion and
Gonzales, 2014). Marion and Gonzales (2014) asserted that “leaders and teachers who are close
to the action must be able to respond uniquely to unique problems; they must interact directly
with the environmental conditions that create problems” (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p.110).
Individual meetings with those teachers who are considering leaving the school validates that
they are valuable members of the team who are not easily replaced (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). The effective principal also seeks avenues for teachers to become leaders in the school, encouraging them to create and implement new projects that would benefit students.

Administrative support is an essential component of teacher retention and empowerment (Djonko-Moore, 2016). Teaching is sometimes a burdensome profession filled with constant changes and never-ending paperwork. While transformative leadership has a collectivist approach, school principals mainly are responsible for building culture and inspiring collaboration (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). Teachers who have positive relationships with colleagues are less likely to leave the school. Perceptions of school leadership are based on how effective the leaders are in bringing every stakeholder to the decision table and holding each accountable (Kelchtermans, 2017). Without that inclusivity, teachers tend to feel alienated and unappreciated which leads to turnover. School working conditions generally rely on six factors: “teacher influence, administration, staff relations, students, facilities, and safety” (Boyd et al., 2011, p. 306). The findings of this study correlates to Goler, Gale, Harrington, and Grant’s (2018) assertion that people do not quit jobs but quit bosses. Similarly, teachers do not quit schools, they quit principals.

Because of the interconnectivity of schools, relationships within the organization help to influence the culture (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). If situations could be rectified in which the teacher could be moved to a different grade level or teach a different subject, the changes can possibly be made. The teacher who is undecided can be placed in positions in which he or she could grow and thrive. By doing this, the leader emphasizes the personhood of the teacher, not merely the skill set (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). Using the collectivist approach, the study’s
participants experienced greater teacher buy-in with initiatives which led to teachers acting as confident leaders themselves.

Table 1. Conceptual Framework of Different Leadership Styles of Principal Behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Core Leadership Behaviors</th>
<th>Transformational Leadership (Bass &amp; Avolio, 1990, 1993; Leithwood, 1994; Leithwood &amp; Sun, 2012)</th>
<th>Instructional Leadership (Hallinger &amp; Murphy, 1985)</th>
<th>Shared Instructional Leadership (Marks &amp; Priny, 2003; Priny, Marks, &amp; Bowers, 2009)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicate mission</td>
<td>Inspirational motivation, idealized influence; build school vision and goals, demonstrate high performance expectations</td>
<td>Articulate and communicate clear school goals, high expectations</td>
<td>Strong principal leadership to facilitate growth and direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promote professional growth</td>
<td>Individual consideration, intellectual stimulation; offer individualized support</td>
<td>Promote professional development for teachers</td>
<td>Provide opportunities for teacher growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build sense of community</td>
<td>Idealized influence, intellectual stimulation; rewards; symbolize professional practices and values, develop structures to foster participation in school decisions</td>
<td>Maintain high visibility, provide incentives for teachers, provide incentives for learning</td>
<td>Principal and teachers discuss alternatives for instructional practices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinate the instructional program</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinate curriculum, evaluate instruction, monitor student progress, protect instructional time</td>
<td>Maintain congruency of educational program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Share instructional leadership with teachers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers responsible for change, leadership roles for teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2.2—Urick and Bowers’ Conceptual Framework of Leadership Styles of Principal Behavior (Urick and Bowers, 2014, p. 104).

With this framework displayed as Figure 2.2, there is a progression from transformational leadership to instructional leadership to shared leadership. In school in which there is shared instructional leadership, the quality of the leader-member exchange is high (Urick and Bowers, 2014). Teacher input is integrated in each of the core leadership behaviors because the teachers are viewed as partners in the process. When the leadership shifts from transformational to shared
instructional, the quality of the leader-member exchange is enhanced, allowing for greater opportunities for personal and organizational growth (Urick and Bowers, 2014).

**Teacher Empowerment and Efficacy**

Djonko-Moore (2016) claimed that “a teacher who perceives a high degree of autonomy but has a poor perception of his or her students’ behavior may make a different career decision than a teacher who experiences low autonomy and has a poor perception or his or her students’ behavior” (Djonko-Moore, 2016, p. 1069). Autonomy also plays a role in job satisfaction. Djonko-Moore asserted that teachers tend to be more satisfied in schools in which they have more creative control in their classrooms and flexibility with the curriculum and with collaboration. Forced collaborations within the school building dampen staff morale (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). Collaborations that are organic and meaningful may enable teachers to create experiences which enhance their classrooms. Opportunities to contribute to school wide decisions such as lesson mapping, student scheduling, and professional development topics could aid in teacher retention. Some mandates are dictated by the federal and state government and cannot be eradicated by the school (Marion and Gonzales, 2014).

One of the emergent themes throughout the literature was professional learning communities or PLCs. PLCs are “school-wide initiatives in which educators share information about learning difficulties of individual students and engage interactively in interdisciplinary, cross-functional efforts to address the needs of those individuals” (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 253). These clusters or complex adaptive systems work to foster student achievement by concentrating on the strength and improvement areas of teachers and students (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 237). PLCs work to create a smaller culture within a culture where teachers can freely collaborate with other thinkers, express frustrations, assess lessons and pedagogical
practices, and analyze student work and data which increase teacher ownership and efficacy (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 238). Having strong professional learning communities provides additional support when teachers feel overwhelmed and assists teachers with research-based instructional strategies.

Duff’s (2013) work explored how each style of leadership affects employee productivity and job satisfaction. While most prior research focused on student behaviors and teacher characteristics influencing retention, Duff used industrial-organization psychology to evaluate how school leaders’ personalities affect the school environment. The lower the person-job fit for the principal, the more likely turnover will occur among members of the organization. The research done by Player, Youngs, Perrone, and Grogan (2017) made the distinction between the retention in charter schools and traditional public schools. The study also emphasized the need for effective leadership in low-income schools in urban, suburban, and rural areas. Teachers who reported positive leadership and a clear mission and vision in their schools were less likely to transfer to other similar schools (p. 334). However, career mobility still occurred with teachers moving into more administrative roles. Contrary to their hypothesis, Player et al. (2017) asserted that principal leadership alone does not predict retention. There were many factors that influenced teachers’ decisions. The limitation of this study was that it did not account for life-altering events such as getting married, having children, and attending graduate school. These events generally have an impact on teacher mobility.

The work of Player et al. (2017) reinforced the sense-making that is asserted in the writings of Marion and Gonzales (2014). The school leaders consistently evaluated their methods to employ practices that heighten teacher retention (Marion and Gonzales, 2014, p. 216). They were not afraid to have difficult conversations and sought the team approach to
solve conflicts (Marion and Gonzales, 2014). In Leadership, Burns (1978) stated that “the
distribution of conflict may take various forms, and the shape of leadership may follow suit, but
leadership in turn chisels and enlarges or narrows the cleavages among subleaders and
followers” (p. 260).

**Leadership Styles and the Role of Gender**

Another emergent theme on the study of leadership styles is the role that gender plays in
leadership. According to the National Center for Education Statistics for the 2015-2016 year, 54
percent of school principals are women which is 10 percent higher than 1999-2000 school year.
Research suggests that women are more likely to employ a servant leadership style. The work of
Duff (2013) explored whether gender played a role in team dynamics. The author compared the
role of gender on transformational, transactional, and servant leadership. Because of gender
roles and norms, female leaders generally employ either transformational or servant models of
leadership (p. 208). These models of leadership address challenges by using a team approach.
Transactional leadership focuses on employee rewards based on employer’s critique and a set list
of criteria (Burns, 1978). The power of the working relationship lies within the employer as they
set the guidelines for performance. Transformational leadership allows a deeper connection
between employer and employee as the employer motivates the staff to reach organizational
goals (Burns, 1978).

**Special Education Teachers and Retention**

According to the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC), a highly
qualified special education teacher is one who:

(a) holds a 4-year college degree, or higher (b) has a major or equivalent in the special
education area(s) of exceptionality (ies) for which he/she provides consultative
services, or passes the teacher certification examinations (Praxis II) in the appropriate special education area(s) of exceptionality (ies) at the P-12 grade levels (c) holds a Georgia clear, renewable professional P-12 teaching certificate issued with a consultative descriptor that defines the area of exceptionality(ies) for which the special education teacher is qualified (d) obtains a teaching assignment that is appropriate for the consultative descriptor and the area(s) of exceptionality(ies) listed on the certificate. (GaPSC, 2014)

Those who are not certified as special education teachers are considered regular education teachers who must not only obtain a Bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution but must pass the required content area assessments that are related to the teaching assignment (GaPSC, 2014).

The level of support that special education students receive varies in alignment with their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). IEPs are the tangible products of the collaboration between schools and parents according to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (Winterman et.al, 2014). According to Johnson (2016), current trends in education incorporate an inclusive classroom model in which students with and without disabilities are taught together. Moreover, Johnson claims that it is the general education teacher who often makes the initial referral for the student to receive special education services. She asserts, “General education teachers have the most contact with students and are most likely to initiate a referral after collecting data and trying different strategies to support a student’s learning” (p. 26).

She also claims that most programs for general educators:
leave very little space for additional hours and require only one introductory course in special education…with undergraduates in education today only have a basic level of knowledge about special education, inclusion, and IEPs…yet they have a vital role in the IEP process. (p. 26)

In an inclusive classroom setting, it is the role of both the general education and the special education teacher to share the responsibility of meeting the needs of the students with Exceptional Learning Needs (ELN) (Johnson, 2016). Under the IDEA, there are 13 disability categories under which students from the ages of three to twenty-one can receive services and are considered students with ELNs. These categories are: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment (including blindness) (Iris Center, Vanderbilt University, 2019).

The work of Bauwens & Friend (1989) introduced the role of cooperative teaching in models of inclusion:

Cooperative teaching (or co-teaching) refers to an educational approach in which general and special educators work in a coactive and coordinated fashion to jointly teach heterogeneous groups of students in educationally integrated settings 15 (i.e. general classroom). In cooperative teaching both general and special educators are simultaneously present in the general classroom, maintaining joint responsibilities for specified education instruction that is to occur within that setting. (p. 18)

Vittek (2015) advocated for reform in special education teacher retention programs reporting 13% of special education teachers leave the profession each year (p. 4). When special
education teachers leave, those positions often are being filled by substitutes or those who are not special education certified (p. 5). Vittek (2015) reinforced the preconceived notion that teachers with less than five years of experience have a higher turnover rate than veteran teachers (p. 5). With the added paperwork and stressors of those in special education, Vittek’s (2015) work cited that these two factors heavily influence teachers’ decisions to leave the field. Participants interviewed in Vittek’s (2015) study claimed that, unlike regular education teachers, they were often asked to complete additional tasks in the school community without compensation (p. 6). Vittek asserted that administrative support and mentoring are key factors in teacher retention and the management of job-related stressors (p. 6). Those involved in the study who participated in extensive new teacher support programs through the school and developed consistent mentoring relationships were more likely to maintain their position.

**Financial Incentives on Retention**

In order to increase teacher retention, many districts have offered financial incentives to teachers who decide to remain in their current positions (Kelchtermans, 2017). The work of Shifrer, Turley, and Heard (2017) provided an overview of how these incentives have affected retention and student achievement nationally. With this study, the researchers discussed how financial awards could increase teacher retention and student achievement and whether the size of the award affected teachers’ decisions to remain in the district. Billingsley’s (2013) research asserted that job satisfaction increased when teachers were given rewards for outstanding performance. In a similar study, Shifrer et al. (2017) used data from teachers in Grades 3 through 8 consisting of 12,000 participants with most of the teachers working in disadvantaged schools. The authors claimed that the amount of the award was not as influential as the school
conditions that made the award possible, reinforcing that school climate is more essential to retention than financial incentives are beneficial (p. 1139).

Focusing on the state of Tennessee, Springer, Swain, and Rodriguez (2016) related the use of teacher bonuses to student achievement and as a predictor of mobility. They concluded that while teacher financial rewards were helpful, they did not guarantee retention. The state of Tennessee implemented teacher bonuses of $5000 for highly qualified teachers in Priority Schools. Because the trend had been that teachers leave low-performing schools at higher rates than high performing schools, the bonuses could encourage those to remain in the profession (Springer et al., 2016). The participants in the study were divided between subject areas and whether their subject was evaluated by a state standardized test. One of the main conclusions drawn from the study was that while there were significant levels of attrition among teachers in tested subject areas, there was no effect that the bonuses had on those not in tested areas (p. 235). The authors claimed that this still created a huge problem with turnover as most of the teaching work force did not teach tested subjects.

Conclusion

This literature review emphasized the effect of teacher turnover on districts across the United States as well as the role of leadership on teacher empowerment. The available literature focused on teacher mobility and potential reasons that teachers left their positions in search of other opportunities. On-the-job stressors and burdens with little support were an emergent theme throughout the literature. Billingley’s work with special education teachers focused on supports that needed to be implemented to avoid massive teacher flight in order to provide consistent teams within schools. His theory asserted that if teachers worked in environments that they perceive to be effective and with leaders that they perceive to be supportive, the likelihood of
them remaining in their positions would increase. In the current literature, a high value has been placed on the role of the school leaders in teachers’ decisions. No available literature was found on individual’s teachers’ perceptions of efficacy and the effect of leadership on their sense of empowerment, particularly in schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area that are considered high needs or underserved. The prevalent theme of the current literature is why teachers leave. The goal of this research is to discuss the reasons that teachers remain in Title 1 schools despite the internal and external job stressors.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted as a phenomenological qualitative study in the state of Georgia with a particular emphasis on teachers who choose to remain in underserved schools. This approach allowed for a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions and experiences and provided a way to develop theory from the data about the reasons that teachers in Title 1 schools remain in their positions. The reason that schools are designated as Title 1 is they meet specific parameters set by the federal government that are based on student and community demographics (United States Department of Education, 2018). Understanding the demography of the schools was essential to evaluating the school climate. The interviewing portion of the study was comprised of teachers who work with grades 9-12 in high schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Participants had a varied degree of classroom experience which offered different perspectives of self-efficacy and leadership practices. The research methodology including the data sampling and analysis, the selection of participants, and ethical concerns are discussed in this chapter.

Qualitative data can be comprised of several interviews and responses to answer research questions that may or may not have predetermined variables (Creswell, 2015, p. 16). Therefore, the number of respondents can be small. In qualitative research, the researcher collects data “to learn from the participants in the study and develop forms, called protocols, for recording data as the study proceeds” (Creswell, 2015, p. 16). During the course of the study and as responses are collected, the open-ended research questions and the protocol may change. In a qualitative study, the researchers are interested in “understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (Merriam,
In order to gather information about one’s perspective, a qualitative study may allow the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Osbourne (1994) writes, “Phenomenological methods attempt to explore conscious experience directly through a specialized form of introspection…” (p. 171). Even though the participants may have a shared experience, their perspectives of that experience may vary according to the individual. The phenomenological approach was most appropriate for this study as it allows for open ended questions that generate data that is used for contextual analysis.

In qualitative research, “sections may be missing…and the format may be more of a literary opening with a personal vignette or passage, an unfolding story, the use of extensive quotes from participants, and personal reflections from the researcher” (Creswell, 2015, p. 19).

Whether a study will be quantitative or qualitative depends on the research problem and the intended audience. For instance, if a researcher wanted to gather information on the attitudes about cyberbullying among teenagers, he or she could employ qualitative methods to analyze the data. However, if a researcher wanted to know the correlation between ethnicities of students and their enrollment and performance in Advanced Placement courses in high school, a quantitative approach would be most appropriate and useful for the question and the intended audience.

**Research Questions**

The problems of teacher retention in Title I schools led to three guiding questions:

1. From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention?
2. How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?
3. How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

**Setting**

There are twenty-nine counties within the Atlanta metropolitan area that spans fifty miles in every direction (Metro Atlanta Chamber, 2018). According to the United States Census Bureau’s statistics for 2018, more than 75,000 people moved to the metropolitan Atlanta area in 2017-2018 making the city’s population growth the 4th largest in the United States. Moreover, from 2010 to 2018, 663,201 people have migrated to the Atlanta area causing major development and expansion in the educational, real estate, transportation, and hospitality sectors (Metro Atlanta Chamber, 2018). School districts were created and aligned according to geographic location. Each county has its own school district that establishes its own protocol for leadership and program implementation for new initiatives. Such an influx of new residents has a great impact on schools, who must respond to changes on many levels. “Real change means a continuing interaction of attitudes, behavior, and institutions, monitored by alterations in individual and collective hierarchies of values” (Burns, 1978, p. 413).

**The Researcher**

The researcher has worked in education for the 18 years as a classroom teacher, instructional coach, and technology specialist. For the past six years, the researcher worked in primarily in the south and west regions of the Atlanta metropolitan area. She received a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and Physics and a Master’s degree in Education. Even though the researcher currently works as the Coordinator for Blended Learning at a private school in midtown Atlanta, the bulk of her experience in education has been in the public school sector, primarily in Title 1 schools. No participant in this study had a direct relationship with the researcher, reducing potential conflicts of
interests and bias. This factor was one reason why the research was not conducted at one or two school sites or within schools with which the researcher has had a professional relationship as an educator. She has received the necessary training as specified by the University of New England to conduct this study, including certification on ethical approaches to research.

**Participants/Sampling**

School leaders and teachers have to navigate through a myriad of complex systems that are intersected within their organizations. The leader and the teachers are asked to work collaboratively to maintain stability and equilibrium within the organization. Fullan wrote that the most effective leaders “pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building, and strive for coherence—with energy, enthusiasm, and hopefulness” (Fullan, p. 11). The study sample consisted of educators in high schools serving grades 9-12 in the Atlanta metropolitan area that are considered high-needs or Title 1. The educators included in the study had at least five years of classroom experience and currently worked as a full-time teacher in a high needs school. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 describes high needs schools as:

- within the top quartile of elementary and secondary schools statewide, as ranked by the number of unfilled, available teacher positions; or
- is located in an area where at least 30 percent of students come from families with incomes below the poverty line; or
- an area with a high percentage of out-of-field-teachers, high teacher turnover rate, or a high percentage of teachers who are not certified or licensed.

Participants were invited using social media platforms, particularly Facebook groups, to participate in an interview. This type of sampling was chosen not only because it was convenient but because of the variety of the participants. Using social media allowed the researcher to have
access to a high number of respondents with diverse experiences and from different backgrounds. Facebook groups are categorized as closed, secret, or public based on what the administrators indicate (Facebook, 2019). The Facebook groups used were Black Educators Rock (BER) and The Professional Association of Georgia Educators (PAGE). BER and PAGE are closed groups and require an administrators’ approval for membership. With almost 13,000 members on Facebook, PAGE’s core objective is to “provide professional learning for educators that will enhance professional competence and confidence, build leadership qualities, and lead to higher academic achievement for students” (Professional Association of Educators, 2019). The mission of the Black Educators Rock’s platform is to “cultivate the educational experiences and accomplishments of minority students and professionals through the development and use of instructional and motivational methods that will increase levels of capacity, motivation, and student achievement” (Black Educators Rock, 2018). The administrators for PAGE and Black Educators Rock agreed to allow the platforms to be used to invite participants in the study.

After responding to the invitation, interviews were conducted consisting of teachers on a voluntary basis. Both PAGE and Black Educators Rock are not aligned with any district and the teachers’ participation in the online discussions are strictly voluntary, according to Facebook’s data policy (Facebook, 2019). This method of inviting participants is known as purposeful sampling. With purposeful sampling, the strategy is one in which “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 235).

The criteria for the participants was that they must have at least five years of teaching experience and must currently work in a school that is designated as Title 1. According to the Georgia Department of Education, there are 1498 schools in the state that have received the Title
1 distinction and receive Title 1 funds. The participant sampling pool was limited to the participants that were solicited for this study. A consent form was required for each participant prior to the study taking place. While approximately 9-12 participants were estimated by the researcher based on the participants’ initial indications of interest and outlined participant criteria, ten participants were interviewed for this study.

The school districts within the state of Georgia generally require that dissertation candidates, research firms, and nonprofit organizations complete an application to conduct research studies, surveys, evaluations, and to request to obtain data to support research activities (Fulton County Schools Research and Accountability, 2019). Proposals are reviewed by the Directors of Accountability for compliance with Federal regulations concerned with records, privacy, and participation in research studies, as well as to ensure that the research studies do not interfere with instruction or require excessive student or staff time (Fulton County Schools Research and Accountability, 2019). Currently, the districts will only consider research that is aligned with the districts’ strategic plans, has the potential to benefit the students, and incorporates timely feedback of results to the district leadership (Georgia Department of Education, 2018). As part of the electronic application for each district, researchers are required to submit an institutional IRB approval letter, letters of support, copies of consent forms, and copies of all printed materials, surveys, or tests. Research proposals are accepted by the district’s Department of Research and Program Evaluation (DRPE) (Fulton County Schools Research and Accountability, 2019). DRPE reviews each proposal based on a standard rubric and responds via email to the researcher within approximately five weeks of the submission date (Fulton County Schools Research and Accountability, 2019). The committee may approve, deny, or request modifications to the research proposals. However, district approval for this study was not
necessary as it only involved individual teachers who would meet in a private meeting room in an industrial working space in midtown Atlanta.

**Data**

**Interviews**

After the participants indicated an interest on the social media platforms, a series of private, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a secure location in an office space in midtown Atlanta. Semi-structured interviews were scheduled ahead of time and included a set of pre-determined questions (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). However, because the interview was semi-structured, it allowed for the researcher to ask additional questions based on the dialogue with the participant (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The reason that this location was selected was because of its geographic centrality and the study required that the participants travel from their places of employment. Conducting the interviews in a central location and not within the teachers’ school eased “legitimate concerns about expressing dissent or negative opinions…” (Elmwood & Martin, 2000, p. 656). The focus of the interview questions was the reasons that the participants had remained in their respective positions and the conditions and practices that give them the motivation and drive to do so. During the interview it was essential to establish a rapport with the participants. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) assert that rapport:

- involves trust and a respect for the interviewee and the information he or she shares. It is also the means of establishing a safe and comfortable environment for sharing the interviewee's personal experiences and attitudes as they actually occurred. It is through the connection of many ‘truths’ that interview research contributes to our knowledge of the meaning of the human experience. (p. 316)
The questions were open-ended which allowed the researcher to correlate the responses to the research questions. Therefore, this qualitative study examined how teachers viewed their respective school leadership and themselves as leaders in the classroom and was guided by the research questions (Table 3.1).

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<th>Constructs</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Research Question (s)</th>
<th>Instrument</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher Background and Experiences</td>
<td>Teachers in the study: a. have 5 years of classroom experience, b. work in schools that have been identified as Title 1, and c. live and serve in the Atlanta metropolitan area.</td>
<td>From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school and district leadership practices encourage teacher retention?</td>
<td>Open Ended Questions 1-4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Philosophies and Practices</td>
<td>Theories of Leadership: a. Transactional b. Transformative-Adaptive</td>
<td>From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school and district leadership practices encourage teacher retention? Using the conceptual framework of Urick and Bowers (2014), how do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?</td>
<td>Open Ended Questions 5-8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of self and purpose</td>
<td>Indicators of Empowerment: a. Transitions from classroom teaching positions to coaching and administrative roles</td>
<td>How does the teacher’s perception of the leadership of the principal affect the efficacy of the teacher according to</td>
<td>Open Ended Questions 9-14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The interviews took place before and after school to minimize disruptions to the work day. Interviews of teachers was conducted on a voluntary basis and as a result to their response to the post on the social media groups, PAGE and BER. The participants were asked about their own sense of efficacy and how it impacted their decision to remain in their current position. This study employed the dominant approach in which “researchers must collect, analyze and report data without compromising the identities of their respondents” (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1636). First, the issue of confidentiality was addressed at the beginning of the interview. Second, confidentiality was ensured through the creation of a clean data set. A clean data set “does not contain information that identifies respondents, such as a name or address (such identifying information might be stored elsewhere, in separate, protected files)” (Kaiser, 2009, p. 1637). During the process, confidentiality was guaranteed, and participants were made aware of their rights with written consent forms that were completed prior to the interview. This written consent explained the role of the researcher and the participant along with guidelines on confidentiality and research integrity. The interviews were slated to last for one hour with a focus on fourteen open-
ended questions. The interviews were recorded using Pear Note, an application that allowed both audio, visual, and text to be linked together, after gaining permission from the participants. At the interview’s conclusion, member checking was used. Lincoln and Guba (1985) assert that member checking is a valid method of increasing research reliability (p. 314). Using the member checking method allowed the interviewee the chance to address errors and to provide supplemental information.


**Analysis**

Instead of focusing on why teachers leave their position, this study examined the reasons why teachers remain. Researching the topic of how school leadership played a role in recruiting, retaining, and empowering teachers, the primary purpose of the study was how leaders’ common practices affect teacher morale and retention. Even though some factors such as financial compensation are regulated by state and local government, the other factors can vary according
to the school and its leaders. Since the focus of the study was identifying the factors that are conducive to teacher retention, the use of George’s (2015) eight factors was prevalent in the interviewing questions.

The interviews were transcribed using the service Rev and coded in order to determine emergent themes and patterns. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describe coding as the process of “moving from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on the previous one…with the lowest level as the raw text and the highest level is your research concerns” (p. 39). As shown in Figure 3.1, the researcher incorporated the steps of grounded coding theory which are raw text, relevant text, repeating ideas, themes, theoretical constructs, theoretical narrative, and research concerns (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003).

Figure 3.2. Steps for coding leading to grounded theory.
In qualitative studies, “different participants often use the same or similar words and phrases to express the same ideas…called repeating ideas and can shed light on our research concerns” (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 41). Repeating ideas were prevalent during group interviews and “influence people to say what they really don’t mean” (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003, p. 42). One of the reasons that the researcher chose to employ the single interview method was to alleviate the influence of other participants on the data analysis. When the repeating ideas were placed together, themes emerged that turned in theoretical constructs. From these constructs, a theoretical narrative of the participants’ perspectives was derived. Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describe the theoretical narrative as the “culminating step that provides the bridge between the researchers’ concerns and the participants’ subjective experience. It tells the story of the participants’ subjective experience, using their own words as much as possible” (p. 42). The qualitative grounded theory coding methodology was rather different from coding in quantitative research, which consisted of applying a preestablished set of categories to the data according to explicit, unambiguous rules with the primary goal being to generate frequency counts of the items in each category” (Maxwell, 2008, p. 241). The goal of coding was not to count the frequency of terms but to break down the participants’ answers into workable fragments. From these fragments, the researcher discovered emergent themes and gained a general understanding of the teachers’ perspectives. The data was placed into distinct categories which was essential in establishing correlations between themes.

**Participants’ Rights**

Once approval was granted from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the University of New England, the researcher solicited responses to the survey to potential participants through
social media platforms that are specific to educators in Atlanta. Based on the responses, an interviewing schedule was created within a two-week timeframe.

Participants were interviewed separately in a private room in an office space in midtown Atlanta with a closed door to ensure confidentiality. The interviews were recorded according the guidelines set by the University of New England. No interview was conducted without the expressed written and oral consent of the participant. Once transcribed, a copy of the interview was sent to the participant for review. Since these were single interviews, participants were not allowed to view the interview notes or transcribed documents of other participants or any notes on the group of individuals collectively.

**Limitations of the Research Design**

The nuisances with human capital in a major city like Atlanta may not be applicable to rural areas. Recently Houston Independent School District (HISD) reported an increase in teacher retention with some schools in economically challenged areas seeing 90 percent teacher retention from the 2017-2018 to the 2018-2019 school year (Carpenter, 2018). The specific reasons for this outcome have yet to be determined but would be valuable in understanding the issue of retention in schools within low income areas.

The study was limited to high school teachers and did not include middle or elementary school educators. Factors such as scheduling and teachers’ roles and responsibilities may differ according to grade level. Because the participants were invited through social media platforms, this study excluded teachers who are not active members of the online groups. Because the focus was solely on teachers’ perceptions of themselves and leadership practices, external factors that may influence the levels of job stressors such as physical workplace conditions and district budgetary constraints were not explored in this study.
Ethical Concerns and Conflicts of Interest

Maintaining the integrity of the study was a priority. To ensure that the results were valid and reliable, the researcher followed the methods outlined in this chapter. The consent form was read to each participant and signed by each participant prior to the interview in addition to the participant receiving the consent form via email. The letter of consent followed U.S. federal guidelines, as outlined by Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2008) including, “a fair explanation of procedures, description of risks reasonably to be expected, a description of benefits reasonably to be expected, an offer of inquiry regarding the procedures, and an instruction that the person is free to withdraw” (p. 75). There were no risks to human subjects associated with the study. Meeting the criteria of years of teaching experience and service in a Title 1 school qualified them as eligible participants in the study. In order to minimize breaches of confidentiality, all recorded materials will be erased after three years following the final approval by the research committee and were stored using NVivo qualitative data analysis software.

Conclusion

The aim of this qualitative study was to examine the ways in which teachers’ perceptions of school leadership, particularly principals, impacted the attrition and the retention of highly qualified educators. The focus of this study was the analysis of teachers’ views of the various philosophies of leadership and how the practices which stem from the philosophies affected the efficacy of the teachers. The aim was to also explore the specific practices that leaders employ that teacher perceive as supportive and empowering. Using open ended questions, the researcher was able to raise research concerns with the exact responses from the teachers by developing a theoretical narrative that reflected the perspectives of the teachers.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore middle and high school teachers’ perceptions of the practices of their school leaders as well as their own sense of efficacy. Individual, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain rich and in-depth data about the teachers’ experiences with not only their current administration but school leaders that they have interacted with in the past. Because the interview questions were open-ended, it allowed the researcher to gain insight on the perceptions of the teachers and provided teacher voice. When appropriate, the researcher did ask additional probing questions in order to gather sufficient data.

Participants

The purpose of this study was to identify the practices of school leaders that increase teacher retention, particularly in Title 1 schools. The geographic focus of the study was in the metropolitan Atlanta area which encompasses nine counties: Fulton, Dekalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, Clayton, Coweta, Douglas, Fayette, and Henry. The objective was to not only identify specific practices that influence teacher turnover but the role that leadership played in the teacher’s decision to remain at the school or in the profession.

Participants in the study were chosen based on two criteria. Participants were required to: 1) have five or more years of teaching experience and 2) currently teach in a Title 1 school in the Atlanta metropolitan area which includes the nine counties: Fulton, Dekalb, Gwinnett, Cobb, Clayton, Coweta, Douglas, Fayette, and Henry. Participants were invited using an open access Facebook group, Black Educators Rock, in order to participate in the interview. The researcher chose to use social media not only because it is convenient but because of the variety of the
participants. Using social media allowed me to have access to a high number of respondents with diverse experiences and from different backgrounds.

Employing this open-access social media platform provided me with access to a high number of respondents with diverse experiences and from different backgrounds. Because the Facebook group is open access, it allows teachers of all races and ethnicities in the state of Georgia to join and to participate in the group discussions. The group’s guidelines allow for posting without the approval of a network administrator. After the participants indicated an interest by responding to an open post, a series of private, semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone and recorded through the Rev application. Interviews of teachers were conducted on a voluntary basis and as a result of their response to the post on the Facebook group Black Educators Rock-Georgia. Prior to the interview, participants were given a consent form via email which required a digital signature.

The focus of the interview questions was on the reasons why the participants remained in their respective positions and the conditions and practices that gave them the motivation and drive to do so. The interviews occurred before and after school to minimize disruptions to the workday.

The participants were asked about their own sense of efficacy and how it impacted their decision to remain in their current position. The interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes to one hour with a focus on thirteen open-ended questions. The interviews were recorded using Rev, an application which software enables researchers to transcribe, captions, subtitles, and translate content in one simple interface, after gaining permission from the participants. At the interview’s conclusion, member checking was used. Using the member checking method allowed the interviewee the chance to address errors and to provide supplemental information.
All participants were educators with at least five years of classroom experience and were currently teaching in a school that has been identified as Title 1. The use of three letter pseudonyms were given to the participants to ensure that their privacy and identity were protected. Table 4.1 provides a descriptive profile of the participants, including their pseudonyms, years of teaching experience, years spent at their current school, and their teaching certification area.

Table 4.1 Study Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years of Teaching Experience</th>
<th>Years in a Title 1 School</th>
<th>Teaching Certification Area(s)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>OWY</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EHU</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Science, Mathematics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVI</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Special Education, Science, Reading, English, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>XVM</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>English, Reading, Social Studies, Special Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAQ</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Language Arts, Reading, Science, Social Studies, Leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SWR</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Science</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZCG</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Leadership, Social Studies, Language Arts, Reading, Instructional Coaching</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TDP</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Special Education, English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JFL</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>Language Arts, Math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBK</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>French, English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Method of Analysis**

The data was collected through ten individual, semi-structured interviews. Interviews were recorded using the Rev application and transcribed by the researcher. The time length of the interviews ranged from 27-59 minutes. A copy of the transcriptions was emailed to each participant for member checking to ensure accuracy of the data.
After member checking was completed, the researcher analyzed the transcripts in order to find emergent themes surrounding specific practices of school leaders that the teacher perceive as being correlational to teacher morale as well as statements regarding their own sense of efficacy as an educator.

Coding

Auerbach and Silverstein (2003) describes coding as the process of “moving from raw text to research concerns in small steps, each step building on the previous one…with the lowest level as the raw text and the highest level is your research concerns” (p. 39). In this study, the researcher incorporated the steps of grounded coding theory which are raw text, relevant text, repeating ideas, themes, theoretical constructs, theoretical narrative, and research concerns (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). The study participants provided the raw text based on their lived experiences. From these experiences, the researcher was able to identify recurring ideas and themes that served as the foundation for theoretical constructs. The theoretical constructs woven together depicted a narrative that addressed and directed the research concerns.

Statements from the transcript that provided information about the participants’ perceptions of leadership and efficacy were extracted by the researcher. After organizing the statements by the participant’s name, unrelated topics and statements were deleted. After hand coding the data, the researcher was able to create a color-coded list that was related to the emergent themes.

From this thorough analysis, 18 codes were discovered. These 18 codes were divided into themes that related to teacher empowerment and efficacy as well as the perception of quality leadership. After a thorough cleaning of the data, it was interpreted using the three research
questions crafted for the study and the conceptual framework developed by Urick and Bowers (2014).

**Presentation of Results**

The statements of the participants were organized into four prevalent themes (Table 4.2). Teachers’ overall perceptions of principals was the first theme. During the interview, participants referred to terms that correlate with perceptions of leadership a total of 478 times. From this theme, three subthemes and five subbranches emerged.

The second dominant theme was motivation for retention with personal experiences, sense of call and duty, and community building as subthemes. The three subbranches were community and parental influences, proximity to home and cultural identity, and sociopolitical involvement. During the interview, participants referred to terms that correlation with motivation and community a total of 384 times.

The third theme was about teachers’ perceptions of their own efficacy. From this theme, three subthemes and four subbranches emerged. The three subthemes were definition of roles and tasks associated with the position, relationships with students and colleagues, and professional development opportunities. The subbranches associated with this theme were clearly defined expectations and outcomes, maintenance of team structure, opportunities to lead teachers, and voice in school decisions and subject area placement. Participants referenced terms related to their own sense of efficacy 311 times during the interviews.

Teachers’ recommendations for improving teacher retention was the fourth theme. Three subthemes and four subbranches were found within this theme. The wrap around method of support, teacher leader development models, and multi-layered feedback from leadership were the subthemes. Subbranches included consistent and informal feedback, teacher designed and
led professional development, positive outlook and focus, and feedback and dialogue among stakeholder groups. During the interview process, participants referred to terms that correlated with retention improvement efforts 243 times.

Table 4.2 Themes, Subthemes, and Subbranches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Theme</th>
<th>Subtheme</th>
<th>Subbranch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 1: Teachers’ Perceptions of Principals</td>
<td>• Leadership Practices</td>
<td>a. Daily practices that create orderly learning environments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Philosophy of Leadership</td>
<td>b. Approaches to learning and discipline of students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Culture Creation</td>
<td>c. Transactional versus Transformative styles of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Consistency with stakeholders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>e. Constructive feedback and coaching cycles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 2: Motivation for Retention</td>
<td>• Personal Experiences</td>
<td>a. Parental and community influences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Sense of Call and Duty</td>
<td>b. Proximity to home and known culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Community Building</td>
<td>c. Sociopolitical involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 3: Teachers’ Perception of Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>• Definition of role and tasks associated with the position and stress</td>
<td>a. Clearly defined expectations and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>management</td>
<td>b. Maintenance of team Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Relationship with students and colleagues</td>
<td>c. Opportunities to lead teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mentoring and professional development opportunities</td>
<td>d. Voice in school decisions and subject area placement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4: Teachers’ Recommendation for Improving</td>
<td>• Wrap Around method of support</td>
<td>a. Consistent, informal feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Retention and Empowerment</td>
<td>• Teacher Leader development models</td>
<td>b. Teacher-led and teacher-designed professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Leadership multi-layered Feedback</td>
<td>c. Positive outlook and focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>d. Feedback and dialogue among each stakeholder group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The problem of teacher retention in Title I schools led to three guiding questions for the study:

1. From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention?

2. How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?

3. How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

**Theme 1: Teachers’ Perceptions of Principals**

This theme correlated with research questions 1 and 2 that asked the study participants to specify which practices employed and which philosophies held by principals affect teacher retention. Each study participant explained their perceptions of not only their current leaders but those who they have experienced in the past. The descriptions of their perceptions included: daily practices that create orderly learning environments, approaches to learning and discipline of students, transactional versus transformative styles of leadership, consistency with stakeholders, and constructive feedback and coaching cycles.

**Leadership Practices.** During the interview, participants discussed the leadership practices of their principals 98 times. While some participants expressed that they had positive interactions with their principals and felt supported, some indicated that they have had negative experiences. Even though the participants had a variety of experiences regarding the leadership practices of principals, they all stressed the importance of teacher-centered school leadership. OWY says that her principals consistently ask teachers, “How can we support you? What do you need from us to help you be great? And they actually listen for the answer.”
Practices that create orderly learning environments. Practices which create and encourage orderly learning environments were emphasized throughout the interviews. XVM asserted, “Disorderly environments hinder creativity because I feel like once you have that under control, it gives teachers a lot of breathing room to be creative.” In fact, statements about school structure and learning environments were expressed 77 times during the study. EHU indicated that practices correlate to creating a stable learning environment by saying, “No one rises to low expectations. I love that we have norms. I set very high standards for the kids and what my principal advocates reinforces that. They believe that correction should come from the classroom teacher.” While some participants expressed the need for teachers to create norms for learning environments, some were appreciative of the additional measures taken by the school and district leadership to provide support. For ZCG, those norms are reinforced by additional staff members who are provided by the district. She shared:

We also have what’s called administrative assistants and they are like the APs in training. They are walking the building constantly. So therefore, as soon as issues arise, whether it’s first thing in the morning at breakfast, during class changes as the kids are walking in the hall, whatever this situation is, they are able to address it right away. And that’s supportive.

Having established norms regarding student behavior was correlational to teacher retention according to RVI who claimed:

We don’t want to suspend students because we don’t want them in the street and at home, we would rather have them in the school. But now we’ve decided that in our school, without the proper behavior it might not be good for the other students and it’s running away our teachers.
Participants like KAQ discussed how she did not feel supported by administration at her school when it came to daily practices and stated concerns like not having clear procedures for fire drills and having no key to her classroom. KAQ said, “I don’t even have a key to my own classroom. So I have to get someone to come and lock and unlock my door. When leadership does things like that, I don’t feel supported.”

**Approaches to learning and discipline of students.** When asked about specific practices of their principals, ZCG gave an example of disciplinary support in the classroom. He stated:

It is made clear to students what the expectations are in respect to their behavior. If a student attempts to disrupt a class, it is addressed right away. In a colleague’s classroom, the assistant principal was observing in the classroom. The teacher has very good classroom management, but a particular student was attempting to disrupt the class and the assistant principal told my colleague, you know what, it’s okay. We’re not going to have this behavior. He asked her to take the student to the office, called the parent, let the parent know what has happened, and the parent can come and see me, and we will send him home. And the assistant principal watched her class. They address behavioral issues right as they are happening.

According to some participants, leadership practices not only affected student disciplinary norms but the approach to learning and the academic environment as well. KAQ said, “I don’t even know what curriculum to use. We have books stacked everywhere and I was supposed to guess by osmosis which textbooks I'm supposed to be using. No instruction about curriculum is ever given. It's just a mess.” Out of the 10 participants, three expressed that they perceived a lack of support due to leadership not creating clear norms for student behavior and curriculum development and implementation.
Philosophy of Leadership. According to Bass (1985), transactional leaders "mostly consider how to marginally improve and maintain the quantity and quality of performance, how to substitute one goal for another, how to reduce resistance to particular actions, and how to implement decisions" (p. 27). On the other hand, Bass writes that transformational leaders: attempt and succeed in raising colleagues, subordinates, followers, clients, or constituencies to a greater awareness about the issues of consequence. This heightening of awareness requires a leader with vision, self-confidence, and inner strength to argue successfully for what he [sic] sees is right or good, not for what is popular or is acceptable according to established wisdom of the time (p. 17).

Kuhnert and Lewis (1987) explain that transactional leadership involves a mutual exchange and a level of codependence. They explain that “transactional leaders engage their followers in a relationship of mutual dependence in which the contributions of both sides are acknowledged and rewarded...transactional leaders clarify the roles followers must play and the task requirements followers must complete in order to reach their personal goals while fulfilling the mission of the organization” (p. 649). Transformational leadership is centered around virtues and ideas and not merely an exchange. Kuhnert and Lewis assert that “key behaviors of successful transformational leaders may include articulating goals, building an image, demonstrating confidence, and arousing motivation. These behaviors can convince and motivate followers without bartering for goods and rights, which characterizes transactional leadership” (p. 650).

Transactional versus transformative styles of leadership. Without using the words “transactional” and “transformational”, interview participants made the distinctions between the two philosophies of leadership. Each participant expressed the desire to have a school leader
who embraced the transformational leadership model. OWY stated, “Our principal does not micromanage us. She gives us the freedom to choose what’s best for our team. She believes in the power of the content areas. As a content team, we can decide what’s best for our students.” XVM cited that she felt that her principal not only listened to teachers’ concerns but provided platforms for them to express their ideas openly and confidentially. XVM explained, “I feel as if I can bring my concerns directly to the principal as well as the assistant principals and the deans. We have different platforms and we can share our concerns. Our principal listens more than she talks.” JFL expressed that her principal employs a more transactional style of leadership which affects how teachers are promoted. She said:

He is very selective about the people that he chooses. Yes, there are opportunities, but only certain people are allowed to embrace those opportunities. Under this administration, he's promoted only one person from the staff for the Administration Assistant position. In other roles he more or less designates who he wants to do things based on criteria that no one knows about.

JFL also expressed feeling “stuck” in the classroom with no avenues for advancement at her current school and that other teachers have left the school to be considered for instructional coaching and administrative positions.

**School Culture Creation.** Even though school-based administration has been generally tasked with the creation of school culture, teachers are used to maintaining cultural norms. According to Charlotte Danielson (2007), “teachers often hold the institutional memory; they are the custodians of the school culture” (p. 15). Louis and Wahlstrom (2011) claim that organizations with “stronger cultures are more adaptable, have higher member motivation and commitment, are more cooperative and better able to resolve conflicts, have greater capacity for
innovation, and are more effective in achieving their goals” (p. 52). During the interview process, participants were asked to describe their perceptions of the school’s culture and how it affects their sense of efficacy as an educator. The participants referenced school culture specifically 94 times during the interviews. This included interactions with stakeholders and constructive feedback and coaching cycles.

Relevancy and Consistency with stakeholders. School stakeholders include administrators, teachers, students, parents, and members of the school community. How the school leader interacted with the diverse school community was prevalent in how the participants perceived the school culture overall. While some participants indicated that diversity was being embraced, some felt that cultural differences were not addressed. JFL said:

We have Black, White, and Hispanic children. When I think about culture, we need to create an environment where all children, regardless of their race, can feel like they're meeting some level of success while understanding what's happening in African American culture, what's happening in Hispanic or Latino culture and how it actually impacts the learning.

NBK discussed the issue of diversity at her school by saying:

Our leaders realize cultural differences, but it's the elephant in the room. It's something that we know we need to do better in, but nothing is really being done to address the issue. We've had several different forums where we were supposed to discuss the culture. We sit and we can talk about it all day, but nothing really happens because honestly, how do you address the culture or how do you fix the culture within the school?
Five of the ten participants spoke of how the lack of consistency with stakeholders can affect not only their sense of empowerment as a teacher but the empowerment of the students. JFL explained:

We classify the children as TAG and advanced and that's how the children refer to each other, as either TAG or on level. No, it wasn't us. It was the on-level kids. No, it wasn’t us. It was the TAG kids. That's how they classify each other. They identify different sets of children. And I don't really like that because to me it creates a culture where if I'm not TAG and advanced, I'm not smart enough or I'm not good enough and I don't add value to your school because I'm not a part of the elite group of TAG and advanced students.

JFL discussed how she felt that her school leaders have done little to address the issue of diversity in the Talented and Gifted (TAG) program and diversity in the leadership team to make it more reflective of the school demographic.

*Constructive feedback and coaching cycles.* Eight of the ten participants expressed the importance of feedback and coaching to culture building. XVM asserted:

We have professional development every Friday and we get our support that way. Each session is optional and is based on conversations that you have with the instructional coaches. Our school has turned feedback and coaching into a workable strategy that we see in our school culture every day. We have the mentality that: we all need to improve.

According to KAQ, the cycle of feedback does not need to be linear. KAQ explained:

I think if the feedback is constructive, it can absolutely help. And if doesn’t only have to come from administrators. I've gotten more insight from my peers more so than from people who are supposed to be in a position to provide me with that feedback. Teachers can also give administrators valuable feedback as well.
KAQ related a past experience in which she and members of her content team were given feedback from an evaluating supervisor during the last week of school with no opportunity to make corrections or revisions. KAQ recounted:

Having multiple walkthroughs and giving cycles of feedback to teachers and to the school community helps the culture of the school. Waiting until the last week of school or until formal evaluations to offer feedback speaks volumes. It doesn’t allow me to improve or be reflective as an educator. It means that you are just coming to evaluate me, not support me.

During the interview process, six of the ten participants described positive feedback and coaching cycles in their school while four cited that they received little to no feedback other than the standard state evaluation.

**Theme 2: Motivation for Retention**

This theme correlated with research questions 2 and 3 that asked the study participants to express their own sense of efficacy and their motivation to remain at their current school. Participants were asked about their motivation for retention which led them to draw upon personal experiences with administration and parents, parental and community influences, sociopolitical perspectives, and cultural familiarity.

**Personal Experiences.** Six out of the ten participants highlighted personal interactions that they have had with members of the school community as reasons for their retention. ZCG discussed how the goals for retention were explicitly outlined by her principal. She stated, “Our principal says that he wants everybody to stay in this building unless you’re getting promoted or you’re retiring. And if you want to get promoted, he would help us with that.” Participant OWY
described that her school has a “we’re all in this together” mentality and the uniqueness of each person was embraced. She said:

If I’m missing a day, someone from the administrative team will contact me to check on me, not to chastise me for being out. They will ask, Is everything okay? How are you doing? Do you need my help? My assistant principal is especially connected. So if he sees me maybe have a different attitude, he will be like, let me check in on her. Interactions like that relieve my stress level so I can teach.

Some participants spoke about how their principals were intentional and open not only about retention but avenues for teacher growth. RVI asserted:

My school has made a concerted effort to stop the teachers from leaving. They really are working hard to try to retain the teachers. I feel so supported in that way. When I feel that I’m qualified for a position, whether it’s in the building or somewhere else, I feel at ease to apply for that position or let the leadership know that I would like to do something different.

Participant SWR described how supportive her administration was when she dealt with the illness of her child. She explained:

I don't think people realize how much support from your administration and support from the parents help with the stress levels of the job. I have been in situations where it was not so, and my stress level and my mental health definitely were affected by that. Just to know that you have someone on your side, to know that you have someone supporting you and that support is genuine. It takes away half of the stress levels of being a teacher in general. Now you only have to worry about the regular stuff.
Parental and community influences. Five of the ten participants discussed how family members not only motivated them to begin a teaching career but encouraged them to continue in the field. OWY said, “My parents were math teachers. I saw them in action, and they were very loyal. That’s the foundation of it all. They stayed at their schools until they retired after 30 years and have encouraged me to continue.” SWR cited that her mother was her primary motivator and encourager. She said:

My mom is a retired elementary school teacher with 30 years of experience. She would come home, and I would see how stressed she was. And I would say, Oh, I'll never be a teacher. But the way it all plays out is that I ended up in the classroom after I taught in grad school. And I figured out that I actually do love teaching and I'm glad I did it. But I think I have that same passion, that same spark, just like my mom and her mother. It runs in the family.

KAQ further explained how her mother and experiences with family members still motivate her to teach:

My mother influenced me to become a teacher and to continue teaching. But when I knew I wanted to be a teacher, I was about three turning four and my God sister was at my house and she's two years younger than me. And I thought I taught her how to say a word. The joy that I got from thinking, Oh, I taught her how to do that, that I did that. I knew right then that this is what I want to do. I want that kind of excitement all the time.

So I knew then that I was going to be a teacher.

For Participant XVM it was her sister that served as a motivating force. She explained,

“Teaching came later in life. My sister teaches in an underserved elementary school so I was just
talking to her and listening to some of her stories...It just sparked my interest. We still enjoy swapping stories about students.” EHU said:

I've been teaching since I was 11 years old with my siblings in the house helping them with the equivalent of the state tests here or the milestones. The love of the profession, the art of teaching was in me since I was young back home in my country with my brothers and sisters.

**Sense of call and duty.** The participants used coded terms related to this subtheme 151 times throughout the interview process. Each of the participants identified as either African American or Latinx and have been working in Title 1 schools for at least five years. Sociopolitical implications and cultural familiarity were identified as subbranches of this particular subtheme.

**Sociopolitical implications.** A common theme among all of the participants was the perceived sense of place and how identity may play a role in learning. XVM said:

I think it’s very important for students to have teachers that look like them, and that’s one of my suggestions for our current administration. We have a lot of Hispanic students, but we don’t have hardly any Hispanic teachers that teach math, science and social studies. Having teachers who look like students has compelled me to stay. I don’t think I would go into a completely different environment. If I do leave, it’s going to be like an environment that I’m in now because I can relate to the students, and I just understand what they’re going through, and I’m very comfortable where I work.

SWR further explained the need for diverse representation in the classroom by saying:

I truly feel like I have stayed in his profession specifically for the kids. They are my driving force. And one of the reasons why I went into the classroom was because I
wanted the students to see more scientists that looked like me. I wanted to go into those high needs schools so they can see themselves as scientists. All scientists are not white males with scraggly hair in a lab coat. They look like me. I do feel like I have a purpose with making sure that I'm delivering that message to them. I think what also drives me to stay in the classroom is just knowing that there are teachers who are just as passionate as I am about the things that are needed for low income schools.

Participants like JFL felt that teaching allows them to give back to the community as their teachers did for them. She says:

I felt like teaching is a gift given by God to my community. I will always be indebted to my teachers and to my community. Some teachers have to learn to be teachers and some teachers are born to be teachers. And I feel that I am gifted and that God gave me the ability to reach and teach those in my community. So teaching is something that is very invigorating for me and it is fulfilling.

The sense of community and culture was the main motivator for TDP who explains:

While these students may not be related to me, I think of them as my children and my grandchildren. They look like my children and grandchildren. How I would want an educator to respond to my children and grandchildren? I am going to try to impart as a teacher to the students who I may touch with my resources, my savvy, my knowledge. I want to be open and available to my students to tap into my resources, my riches, not my money, but my intellectual riches.

NBK spoke about her ability to teach content in context to underserved students by saying:

My ultimate dream would be to have my own school and where students can learn things in context of their real-world experiences. We live in a racial world. They need to know
things in the context of their blackness and they need to know the history. They need to understand the application of what they're learning, real world applications, whether it's math, science, or English. I feel that I am not teaching the content but how to navigate in this racially charged society.

**Proximity to familiar culture.** All of the participants expressed that they can relate to students personally and that those relationships enhance the classroom environment. TDP expressed:

I identify with the population and in addition to that, I actually live in the neighborhood. I want the product that's coming out of here to be successful because if they're successful, they're going to keep my neighborhood safe for me to live in. It used to be years ago that teachers, particularly African American teachers, lived among their students. They need to know that I am with them. Truly. I'm with them in the classroom and I'm with them in the community. I am them.

OWY declared that she felt “invested in the school” because of the location by saying that her school was “two exits from my house. It’s in my community.” Childhood experiences also serve as motivators for participants like NBK who said:

I think it has to do with the fact that I myself grew up in a tough neighborhood, in the projects. I grew up with many different challenges in the home and education was a ticket for me to get a better life. And that ticket opened doors. I understand those children, unlike someone who might come from a higher socioeconomic status and they're trying to teach these children. They may not be able to relate. But I can relate because I lived the life that many of them are living. I realize why I'm here because I'm better prepared to deal with some of the things because they're going through what I went through. So for
me, Title 1 is not challenging. It's not that hard for me because I understand the children and I understand that struggle.

Like NBK, participant SWR draws upon her childhood experiences to make connections with the students. She expressed:

It’s the kids that make me want to come every day. They truly do. I just want to keep building those relationships with them. Keep building rapport and making sure that I'm not only teaching them science, but I'm teaching them how to navigate life. I want to make sure that they are productive citizens that are able to get through life’s struggles. I truly feel like this is what God put as one of my purposes on this earth…It is not to say that some of the things that go on in education don't bother me because they really truly do every single day. Sometimes there's only so much that you can do and you just try to make sure that you're doing your part. At least you know that you're doing your part and you're here for the kids. If not me, who else?

RVI said she believed that by teaching through culture and a shared experience, she has been able to overcome some of the obstacles that are associated with teaching at a Title 1 high school. She declared:

Life is literacy. And books. To be able to offer the classroom as a platform, to open up poor students to different worlds through literature, that's probably one of my biggest triumphs. The other thing is just being able to talk about the emotional and mental challenges by giving them solutions because I faced those same emotional and mental and social issues growing up. I grew up in a dysfunctional home where there was alcoholism. There was violence and all kinds of things. I'm able to help them navigate through those difficult challenges because I had to navigate through them.
Theme 3: Teachers’ Perception of Self-Efficacy

This theme correlated with research question 3 that asked the study participants to specify which practices employed by principals supports their sense of efficacy. Coded words and phrases related to this theme were used 68 times throughout the interview process. The descriptions of their perceptions included: definition of roles and tasks regarding the position and stress management, relationship building with students and colleagues, and mentoring and professional development opportunities.

**Definition of roles and tasks associated with the position and stress management.**

ZCG correlated the level of stress that she experienced as a teacher to leadership practices at the school level, particularly when the roles and tasks associated with the position were not clearly defined. She recounted an instance in which her sense of efficacy was low due to the demands of a Title 1 school and the lack of clarity of roles in the school. She explained:

In a prior school, the stress level was through the roof, not just for me, but for most. I actually doubted my ability as an educator even though I have experienced working in other districts in Georgia. I have experienced coaching teachers to be successful. I have experienced motivating kids in the classroom and experience as an administrator who has been able to lead buildings and teach teachers and coach teachers. But in this prior experience I really doubted my efficacy as a teacher because the goal posts were always being moved. Everything kept changing without any explanation.

ZCG emphasized that not only were roles and expectations constantly shifting but the lack of recognition for achievements added to the stress levels. She related:

There was never consistent recognition of the great things that we were doing. And even the almighty test scores, once those came back in this particular school year, there was no
recognition of the fact that my grade level team came out with the second highest level of
growth in the county. We were so disappointed.

NBK described the stressors that she and colleagues experienced under a previous administration
who she perceived as not supportive of the teachers or the students. She recounted:

I was constantly out sick. One teacher had a stroke while she was at work. Another
teacher had shortness of breath, heart palpitations, and an anxiety attack. Another
colleague’s blood pressure elevated to the point that he had to leave school and be placed
in the hospital. Things like that are just really unfortunate. We all know that teaching
is a hard job, but to experience all of that and then not to be recognized when you’re
doing the work is absolutely disheartening.

While all of the participants indicated that their stress levels were high, nine of the ten indicated
that leadership practices play a role in the reduction of stressors associated with the position.

**Clearly established expectations and outcomes.** The state of Georgia currently uses the
TKES (Teacher Keys Effectiveness System) to evaluate teachers. The evaluation is based on ten
performance standards in the areas of professional knowledge, instructional planning,
instructional strategies, differentiated instruction, assessment strategies, assessment uses, positive
learning environment, academically challenging environment, professionalism, and
communication (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). Educators are evaluated by receiving
a score of 1 to 4 in each area, with a Level 1 being that the standard was not demonstrated to a
Level 4 meaning that the teacher expertly demonstrated the standard. In 2016, the state of
Georgia decreased the number of mandated tests for students which subsequently reduced the
“weight of student test scores on TKES reduced from 50% to 30%, with the remaining 20%
coming from Professional Growth, allowing the evaluation system to become more of a coaching
tool” (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). Study participants discussed how their leaders evaluated them both informally and formally using the TKES. RVI recounted an instance in which she was dissatisfied with the way that she was evaluated and how she and her administrator handled the situation. She explained:

My assistant principal is my evaluator and I questioned her about getting 3s in two areas on my TKES. She explained to me, ‘if you’re getting a four, you’re going above and beyond. Actually, you’re teaching and you’re mentoring.’ I didn’t feel as though I had an opportunity to mentor. I’m sure I mentored, but they wanted to see something on paper that was mentorship. Most of the teachers in the building will take a new teacher who comes in and they will show them the things that they think they need to know in order to be successful in that environment. And I do that all the time, but it’s not documented. I asked her specifically, ‘What would you like to see?’ And she said, ‘I would like for you to do more concrete staff development and presenting to others. I would like to see you teaching other teachers more.’ And she provided opportunities for me to teach literacy strategies during the teacher workdays. She gave me feedback on those and how I could improve.

SWR discussed how her primary evaluator, who is also her assistant principal, has extensive conversations with teachers about not only how they will be evaluated but ways in which they can improve. She states that the expectations were clear and the evaluations did not “feel like ‘gotcha’ moments. He uses what he sees and what I provide as artifacts equally and as coaching tools. He understands that he cannot get an adequate picture of what I do in an entire school year during a 20-minute observation.” However, one participant explained the way that her perception
changes when expectations were not clear and highlighted her current experience at her school. KAQ explained:

When your expectations aren't clear in what you want, it affects not only teacher morale but student achievement, particularly when you have new teachers. How do you get what you want if you don’t model that or set the standard? You have to say what you want and model that. Some school leaders don’t do that and then penalize teachers for it. It all starts and ends with transparent conversations in which both the teacher and the leader are willing to listen.

Relationship with students and colleagues. The participants used coded terms related to this subtheme 168 times throughout the interview process. Building relationships with others, particularly with other teachers, was indicated as a vital component of their sense of efficacy as a teacher. During the interview, the participants also provided examples of practices that school leaders can employed that they believe have encouraged and discouraged teacher empowerment.

Community building and maintenance of team structure. Six of the ten study participants used the word “family” to describe their team structure and their relationships with students. OWY described the way that she and her content team build community.

With our students, we not only do math, we have motivational Mondays. We watched a video today and it talks about discovering your passion. We have the students journal so that the students can gather thoughts and work on their writing skills. We try to create a safe space that are not just about math; it’s about establishing relationships. Because it’s more than just numbers in here. It’s beyond that. And we want the students to know that this is a safe place where they can share and come see us after school or before school.
OWY further indicated that her principal’s philosophy of leadership and emphasis on teaming “shape the dynamics of the school by encouraging us to have close relationships and that camaraderie inspires us to be better.” According to RVI, relationship building among teachers was correlated to retention. She declared, “The relationships with other teachers are key. That’s the part I love. Principals come and go. Teachers are embedded in the school. We will still be there. The leadership turns over at a much faster rate.” Participants indicated that organic collaboration and community building among teacher teams filtered into their work in the classroom with students. ZCG explained:

> When I build with other teachers, I am allowed to be what I consider my best teacher and work as a facilitator. I believe in allowing students to really have as much ownership of their learning as possible. And I just have found that makes for a much better classroom culture. It makes for a much better relationship between us as teacher and student.

NBK explained that building relationships are easier when the objective is clear and without distraction. NBK said:

> The more we focus on the politics, the less likely teachers will be able to stay in the classroom. We will all be able to stand. Standing together in a Title 1 school is an example of excellence. I'm actually working on a memoir that will focus on the relationships that I have built in education for the past 30 years.

**Mentoring and professional development opportunities.** Among the ten study participants, the average number of years of classroom teaching experience was 18.4 with an average of 14.6 years of teaching experience in a Title 1 school. Being given opportunities to lead other teachers and having a voice in school decisions and subject area placements were indicated as a crucial element to their retention in their current positions.
**Opportunities to lead teachers.** Several participants discussed the opportunities to lead and mentor other teachers and staff members within their school. OWY specifically discussed her participation in her school’s mentor program:

We have a mentor program that I work with for the new teachers and we meet once a week to check in to talk about their needs. I help new teachers to get acclimated to what our school is about first because culture is important. Then if they have other needs outside of the regular teaching expectations, I can provide on the spot help because it can get overwhelming. We also have a team of retired teachers that are on staff solely for the benefit of assisting teachers.

XVM stated, “I recently joined the Teacher Leadership Committee to change the dynamic of our school culture. Our school gives teachers opportunities to join these teams and they are vital to the school’s mission and culture.” One participant discussed how she was encouraged not only to share best practices within her school but to share with those outside of her school as well.

SWR said:

After presenting at department and whole faculty meetings, my principal encouraged me to present at the Georgia Science Teachers Association. Anyone can take a leadership role at my school. That opportunity goes out to everyone. I will be actually presenting at a state-wide conference in a few months.

Because the study participants had years of experience, the level of job satisfaction that they felt was correlated to the amount of leadership that they were encouraged to provide to others.

**Voice in school decisions and subject area placements.** RVI recounted an instance in which she was unhappy with her teaching assignment and felt that she would be of better use in another subject area. She described how she was able to have an open dialogue with her
principal that resulted in her reassignment to new content area. Now she is not only leading the content area team in her school, she is providing leadership and professional development to other teams in her district. OWY stated:

Our principal is not someone who micromanages us. She gives us the freedom to choose what’s best for our team. She believes in the power of the different content areas. And as a content team for the math department, we can get together and decide what’s best for our students. We decide as a team what’s best for us as a team and those teams have a voice in overall course of action for the school.

OWY further explained:

I have the respect and the freedom to be able to implement the things that I want to implement as a teacher and as a professional. So, my voice is being valued. If I go someplace else, I probably won’t get that. I am growing, my colleagues are growing, and our students are growing so that means I’m in a good spot.

NBK described how she and her colleagues were able to determine how faculty and professional learning community meetings took place. She said, “As teachers we were able to advocate having two time slots that we can attend faculty and professional learning meetings so that we are just not bombarded with meetings. And that gives us time to plan and prepare for learning.” To participants like SWR having autonomy in the classroom and having a voice in curriculum was key to self-efficacy and empowerment. SWR declared:

Leaders merely dictating to teachers what needs to be done is like a mechanic telling a doctor what to do or vice versa. I think that teachers need the autonomy to just to be able to teach. They've gone to school. They've gone through the certification process, passed
the necessary tests and gone through the coursework. Let teachers be and we will see true reform.

Eight of the ten study participants indicated autonomy as a critical component of teacher retention and as a motivator for them to remain in their current position.

**Theme 4: Teachers’ Recommendation for Improving Teacher Retention and Empowerment**

This theme correlated with research questions 2 and 3 in that participants were asked to discuss ways that practices can be used to increase teacher retention in their respective schools based on their experiences and perceptions.

**Wrap Around method of support.** Used in the mental health community, the wrap around approach is a holistic methodology that builds on an individual’s unique strengths to create a quality plan for improvement (Winter & Metz, 2009). Positive outlook and focus, teacher-led and designed professional development, and cyclic feedback were the subthemes that emerged under this theme. Perceptions of support were mentioned 112 times by participants during the interview process.

**Positive outlook and focus.** When discussing recommendations for leadership practices, eight of the ten participants highlighted instances in which the positive outlook of the leader made a difference in the outcome of a situation. ZCG described an experience during her tenure as an instructional coach in which the school leadership team worked together with the teachers to enact change. She related:

The first time that I walked into this building, the principal and the assistant principal were in a planning meeting for the social studies and the ELA teachers. And they did the same thing for the math and science teachers. They were talking to the teachers about
what the results of recent formative assessments. They were asking them what they thought about their results in a nonthreatening manner. They were talking to them about next steps and what did they think would be a good fit as far as the data was concerned. They were asking their colleagues to provide suggestions and it was not in a punitive manner. They could speak the content language, but they did not readily offer suggestions.

As a result, ZCG correlated the student growth on the test scores to the adaptive leadership approach of the administrative team. She explained:

> You can probably guess what the results were at the end of the year. In eighth grade, we had one teacher who had a 30% proficiency the year before come out with 60% proficiency. Another teacher who had a 70% proficiency the year before came out with a 100% proficiency in social studies. A brand-new teacher came out with an 80% proficiency in social studies. They did this by using the data as an exciting way of collaboration and encouragement and not stress and punishment.

JFL indicated that she does not feel supported by her current administration but sees an opportunity for support through the use of instructional coaches. Even though there is not one for her content area (science), she expressed how she has seen it work in math. And as the science department chair, she has recently advocated placing science instructional coaches in all middle schools in her district as a part of the school improvement plan. She states:

> Our math instructional coach models the lesson for the teachers. Then she observes and supports the teacher to make sure she or he understands the content and the practice. But for science, we do not have a coach and no administrator who strictly handles our
department. Other administrators try to be resourceful and try to help. But it would be helpful for morale to have leaders who could embrace our content.

SWR further explained the need for transparent school leadership that focuses on teacher empowerment. She declared:

Leaders in education need to make sure that they have their teachers’ back and that they treat them fairly. If not, they're going to lose some really good, smart, passionate candidates just because they feel as though that they don't have that support and they feel as though that the workload is too overwhelming. There are some things you just can't do anything about in teaching in terms of the workload. But there are definitely ways to make it easier on you. The number one key to teacher retention is for a teacher to feel as though they are supported. To know that the administrator has your back no matter what is key.

Participant RVI spoke of the importance of making investments in teachers and that an investment is critical to retention. RVI described quality school leadership by stating:

Leaders should know who’s in their classrooms. And the only way to truly know is to work alongside, not just in front. True leaders know that they cannot push this cart up the hill without those people, and they let these people know that we’re in this together. Let them know that they’re appreciated by giving them time to reflect and recharge. I truly feel appreciated when time and consideration are given back to me. Leaders should let teachers know that we’re not getting rid of you. We’re just helping you to become a better educator and a better leader. Because you’re the leader in that classroom. The pillars of the school are the leaders who can teach and impact others.
**Teacher Leader development models.** Study participants expressed the recommendation for initiatives, feedback, and conversations that are teacher led and teacher driven.

**Teacher-led and teacher-designed professional development.** Participants recommended that more opportunities be afforded for professional development led by teachers and for teachers as a means of sparking innovation. OWY expressed, “An innovator and a great leader doesn’t have to do everything. You empower the people who want to do it and you just oversee it.” EHU spoke about the annual conference that her school hosts which invites teachers to share research based best practices in the classroom to other educators. The event started five years ago as just a school initiative but has expanded to include schools and teachers across the state. EHU recounted:

> We had workshops and conferences taught by our colleagues who facilitated everything. After my first year of facilitating a workshop, I collaborated with a teacher in another district. Together we have facilitated workshops at this conference and conferences around the country as a team. It has been an amazing experience and the feedback from the teachers have been overwhelmingly positive. And all of this started from the vision that our former principal and a few teachers had of an experience led by teachers for teachers.

Nine of the ten study participants recommended that teachers should be at the forefront of the content of professional development for the school and for the district.

**Leadership multi-layered feedback.** Even though formal is usually given using the TKES evaluation system, study participants discussed the use of consistent, informal feedback and that feedback should include all members of the school community.
**Consistent, informal feedback.** Seven of the ten participants expressed the importance of consistent feedback from school leaders that informs their practice. EHU explained:

By them coming to visit our classrooms more, it makes it easier to receive that feedback. If you never see them and then they show up all of a sudden, it’s difficult to have meaningful conversations and make necessary changes. If informal visits can be made before the formal ones you are able to address any questions about things that you’ve done. They are able to voice any concerns before it gets to the formal stage.

RVI emphasized the need for variation in how teachers are evaluated and redirected. In her school, plans for improvement for teachers are uniquely tailored to that teacher. She stated:

Our students are fluid. They’re not stationary, they’re growing, they’re changing, and the way we deal with one we can’t deal with the other one the same way. Plans for improvement for teachers should be unique too. Each of us has different areas of improvement. For me, it might be differentiating instruction but for one team member it may be creating quality assessments or for another it may be analyzing data. We have this one size fits all mentality when it comes to giving feedback and evaluations.

Feedback should be a constant dialogue.

For participants, a leader having a solid background in the content area helped in having those consistent conversations about improved instruction. ZCG cited:

There are administrators in a building who are not comfortable with instructional data and cannot speak to pedagogy. That’s problematic because if they can’t speak to content, it shows right away and they’re uncomfortable with having those conversations with teachers. And teachers pick up on that right away.
**Feedback and dialogue among each stakeholder group.** Study participants recommended that there should be constant dialogue between each stakeholder group in the school community. ZCG stated, “I think if we can get that part across to leaders that they have to be people who are relatable to their school community and not just to the folks above them...and they have to be seen as advocates for their teachers”. JFL expressed the need for difficult conversations to be had in each group and with clear paths to communication. She explains:

> We are supposed to have this chain of command. The first level would be to talk to my eighth-grade administrator in hopes of getting it resolved. But my assistant principal does not like to address any uncomfortable situations. It is always avoided. Instead of addressing teachers personally, he gave me a letter to read to them at a department meeting, calling some teachers out. And when I told him that we needed to debrief from the meeting, he abruptly says, oh yeah, let me go and see if lunch is out here. So that's a conversation that we'll never have again because he does the avoidance thing. If I take it to his administrator which is the principal, then it will be, Well did you talk to your AP? I did. Well what did he say? He said absolutely nothing.

NBK has expanded her vision to create meaningful conversations among stakeholders by working with her administration to create spaces for dialogue. Her reasoning for doing so is that:

> Conversations need to happen between teachers, administrators, district level directors, parents, and community members to make some school improvement. So far it has been that parents complain to the principals, students complain to the teachers, and community members complain to district leaders. I am working within my school to create spaces for we can all come together. Cause we really are a team.
Summary of the Findings

The purpose of this study was to identify the practices of school leaders that increase teacher retention, particularly in Title 1 schools. The objective was to not only identify specific practices that influence teacher turnover but the role that leadership plays in the teacher’s decision to remain at the school or in the profession. The concerns about teacher retention in Title 1 schools led to three distinct questions: From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention? How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior? How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

During the course of the study, interview participants responded to questions about their perceptions of leadership practices employed by school leaders that they have encountered and how those practices have affected their retention and sense of efficacy. This focus of this study was on teachers working in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area who have at least five years of classroom experience and who have remained in their schools. Through the data analysis, four distinct themes emerged. The first theme was the teachers’ perceptions of the leadership practices of the principal. These perceptions may have included current and former principals that they have encountered. The results showed that daily practices employed by principals that not only focus on culture but practices that create orderly learning environments were crucial to retention. The four elements of staff cohesion, staff conflict, staff empowerment, and staff culture were prevalent themes throughout the interview process as displayed in Figure 4.1.
Moreover, when the principal used a more adaptive, transformative approach to leadership with the use of teaming and coaching cycles, participants felt more motivated to remain in their current positions.

The second theme that emerged was the motivation for retention. The research participants relayed personal experiences that heavily impacted their decisions to remain in the Title 1 classroom. More than half of the participants expressed that they felt a sense of a call of duty to their school based on the student demographics and culture of the school community. All of the participants identified as African American or Latinx and felt that they shared a connection with the students due to a shared racial identity and cultural experience. Seven of the ten participants shared that their families not only encouraged them to become educators but that their families also continue to motivate them to continue in the field.

The third theme was teachers’ perception of self-efficacy. While the participants discussed the ways in which principals have created avenues to teachers to exhibit leadership
within the school and beyond, all of the participants felt that they were leaders in their classrooms and that the relationships that they sought organically within the school were the most meaningful to them as practitioners. The average classroom teaching experience was 18.4 years with an average of 14.6 years of teaching experience in a Title 1 school among the ten participants. The results indicate that the more voice in school decisions and the more opportunities to lead that teachers are given, the more invested they feel in the school community.

The fourth theme was teachers’ recommendations for improving teacher retention and empowerment. The participants recommended consistent, informal feedback in conjunction with the state mandated TKES evaluative tool. They also recommended more open dialogue among stakeholders so that issues could be addressed on a wider scale. Teacher-led and teacher-designed professional development were suggested to increase teacher morale and efficacy.

Chapter Five will provide an interpretation of the findings, the implications of the study, and recommendations on how the findings can be used in the retention efforts at the school and district levels with an emphasis on continued research proposals.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The objective of this study was to identify the specific practices of urban principals that increase teacher retention, particularly in schools that have been designated as Title 1. The intention was to not only examine particular leadership behaviors that influenced teacher turnover but the ways in which leadership impacted teachers’ decisions to remain at the school or in the profession. Three distinct questions were posed to evaluate the perceptions and the relationships between principals and teachers: From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention? How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior? How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them? The questions served as a compass throughout the research process as the study was designed and conducted.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on work by Urick and Bowers (2014) that examined the effect that leadership styles and practices had on teacher retention. Urick and Bowers’ research was significant in that it contrasted transformative and transactional leadership models. Incorporating the characteristics of moral leadership, path-goal, and leader-member exchange theories, the work of Urick and Bowers sought to make distinctions between various types of leadership. Urick and Bowers’ study analyzed the impact of school leaders on teachers’ decisions to transfer or remain at a school. Urick and Bowers characterized the link between school leaders and teachers as symbiotic and based on perception. Teachers involved in the study were also grouped as integrated, balkanized, limited, or transitioned so that the principals’ and teachers' styles could be analyzed (Urick and Bowers, 2014). The comparison of the
principals’ leadership styles and the teachers’ perceptions was a strength of this framework in that it examines the interaction and the relationship between the teachers and principals. According to Urick and Bowers (2014) if the teacher perceives that the school leader is supportive and invested in her or his development as a professional, the teacher would have a greater sense of efficacy and empowerment. Therefore, he or she would be more inclined to remain in their positions.

The work of Urick and Bowers (2014) was significant to the study in that it focused on the relationship between school leaders and teachers and how those relationships not only impact teacher retention but also student achievement. Urick (2016) indicated five measurable effective leadership behaviors: “[the] establishment of goals, promoting and participating in teacher development, planning, coordinating and evaluating instruction and managerial tasks of resourcing, and creating a safe and orderly environment” (Urick, 2016, p. 99). Each of these goals work in conjunction with the others and are indicative of the relationship between school leaders and faculty members. The questions posed during the interview process of the study evaluated the health of the relationships between the principals and the participants and their perceptions of the principals’ leadership practices. The questions also gathered information about how their identity as a teacher has evolved and how principals have helped them to develop efficacy. Hattie (2012) argues that teacher efficacy makes the most significant impact on student achievement and has a greater effect on a student than parental engagement and home environment. He also claims that the level of confidence that a teacher has in his or ability in the classroom is an indicator of not only student success but teacher retention in schools.
Interpretation of Findings

The problem of teacher retention in middle and high schools classified as Title 1 in the metropolitan Atlanta area led to three guiding research questions:

1. From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention?

2. How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?

3. How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

The work of Urick and Bowers (2014) was utilized as a conceptual framework for the study and as a means to analyze the perceptions of the teachers who served as participants in the study.

The first question posed in this study was: From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention? There were three questions that were asked during the interview process that provided data for this research question. The three questions were: 1) What are some practices that you would suggest that school leaders, particularly principals, employ to increase teacher morale? Which practices have been helpful to you as a teacher? 2) If you could describe an ideal school leader, what characteristics would she or he have? 3) Urick (2016) stated that there are five measurable effective leadership behaviors: a) the establishment of common goals; b) the promotion of teacher development; c) the planning, coordination, and evaluation of instruction; d) the management of school resources and tasks; e) the creation of a safe and orderly learning environment. Even though these behaviors cannot solely operate in isolation with principals, which do you perceive to be the most empowering to you as a teacher and why?
The responses to these three questions by the participants indicated that the creation of an orderly and safe learning environment was significant to teachers in Title 1 schools. When asked about the five measurable effect leadership behaviors, nine of the ten participants stated that the creation of a safe and orderly learning environment had the most effect on them as a teacher. The data reflected that the participants that a lack of structure in the organization stifled teacher creativity. Moreover, in schools without clearly stated, well-established norms, the participants experienced more stress and exhibited a lower sense of efficacy. This finding coincided with Billingsley’s (2013) and Boyd’s (2011) works that asserted that teachers experienced low self-efficacy in poor working conditions and in environments in which they felt that the external factors are beyond his or her control.

The second guiding research question for the study was: How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior? There were four interview questions asked to the participants that addressed this guiding question. The four interview questions were: 1) In what ways do you or do you not feel supported by the current administration at your school? 2) How do you feel that the feedback that you receive from school leaders, particularly from evaluating administrators, helps you in your practice as a professional? 3) How has the level of support that you have received from your administration affected your stress level? 4) In what ways does your school provide avenues for teachers to exhibit leadership?

Eight of the ten participants stated that they felt supported by their current administration. The perception of support by school leaders was correlational to the avenues for teachers to exhibit leadership. The two participants who said that they did not feel supported also indicated that they felt that there were no opportunities for them to display leadership in their school. The
descriptions of the characteristics of their school leaders were consistent with the qualities of transactional leadership. The feelings of alienation and burnout expressed by these two participants was evident in the work of Kelchtermans (2017) that claimed that the perceptions of the quality of school leaders was based on the adaptivity of their leadership and the degree of teacher inclusivity.

The third guiding question of the study was: How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them? Three interview questions addressed this question. The three interview questions were: 1) How do you exert a positive influence on both the academic and the personal development of your students?: 2) Using the state’s TKES evaluation tool, how would you describe yourself overall as an educator? 3) Current research indicates that 50 percent of classroom teachers leave teaching within five years. What has compelled you to remain in your current teaching assignment for at least five years?

Nine of the ten participants evaluated themselves as proficient and distinguished on all ten TKES performance standards which indicated a high sense of teacher efficacy. According to the data, there were a number of factors that motivated the teachers to remain in their current position which include administrative support, family and community support, a sense of higher purpose and call, and relationships with students and colleagues. When asked, all of the participants said that it was the community of students and teachers that motivated them the most to stay in their current positions and that commitment was not related to their perceptions of the school leadership.

The data revealed that eight of the ten of the study participants cited socio political reasons for motivation to remain in Title 1 schools. Seven of the ten participants also indicated
that they grew up in similar socioeconomic backgrounds as the students they served and desired to be a change agent. There was a consistency in the findings of this study and the work Player et. al (2017) that claimed that principal leadership in isolation does not predict retention, particularly in underserved schools, in which teachers may have a plethora of experiences that impact mobility.

The data indicated that nine of the ten participants recommended the employment of consistent, informal feedback while encouraging teacher autonomy. This finding was consistent with Djonko-Moore (2016) who asserted that teachers experienced greater job satisfaction in schools that stress autonomy and creative freedom. This recommendation was also aligned with George’s (2015) eight factors of employee retention which included team management, conducive and creative environment, social support, professional development opportunities, autonomy, financial compensation, crafted workload, and work-life balance. All of the participants recommended that there should be more teacher-led and teacher-driven professional development which would give them opportunities to learn and to lead.

**Implications**

In this study, the majority of the participants felt supported at the school level by the administration. Most of the teachers described principals with transformative leadership practices and collectivist approaches to conflict. Having a leader willing to stand with them in challenging situations was important to them. It was also important to cite that the teachers expressed the need to have difficult conversations about school culture and performance. The teachers felt that they had a voice in school decisions and a level of autonomy in the classroom. The desire to teach without distractions from disruptive students and bureaucracy was prevalent throughout the study. The teachers constantly felt the weight of handling student behaviors and
felt the need to have additional supports in the schools such as deans of students and administration assistants, particularly in Title 1 settings. Having these supports in place along with established school norms and procedures were essential in the creation of safe and orderly learning environments that inspire creativity in teachers and students.

While the behaviors and practices of the principals were emphasized by the interview questions, nine of the ten teachers interviewed indicated that they were able to remain motivated even when the practices were perceived as less supportive. Each of the ten participants experienced at least one negative experience with a school leader. And while this negative experience affected their stress levels, the teachers ultimately decided to remain in their current assignments. Six of the ten participants described a temporary loss in teacher confidence as a result of the perceived lack of support. However, this feeling was alleviated as the administration at the school changed. Because of the experience levels of the teachers, they had seen tremendous turnover in administrative positions. Since the principal mobility in the Atlanta metropolitan area is high, teachers are not inclined to make employment decisions based solely on the actions and behaviors of school leaders. In a five year span, all of the participants experienced changes in administrative teams at their school. Six of the ten participants have welcomed at least two new principals within a five year period. Because of the fluctuations, teachers have embraced a “this too shall pass” attitude with leadership in order to remain consistent in practice.

Teachers in this study expressed a shared identity with the students in regard to race, family background and structure, and values. Based on the interviews, nine of the ten teachers stated that they saw themselves in the students and regarded their students as extended members of their families. Because of this shared identity, a community has been formed with explicit and
implicit norms. The data shows that teachers have played an integral part of building their respective school communities. Therefore, it is more difficult for them to leave the community that they have established and nurtured.

The findings of the study indicated that there are some concerns with how teachers felt they are evaluated. The participants felt more supported when the contact with their leaders are consistent and less formal. The idea of personhood was prevalent throughout the interview process. Teachers felt more confident in the classroom with leaders who valued them not only as a skilled professional but as a human being. Multiple opportunities for teachers and principals to work closely together on common goals was suggested by the participants. Even though the participants understood the time constraints and the pressures that principals experienced, they felt that this collaboration would be mutually beneficial. Leaders who allowed flexibility with planning and meeting times were viewed as appreciative of the staff members. The participants in the study identified themselves as advocates of innovation and sought creative ways to collaborate with other educators inside and outside of the school building.

Each of the participants in the study embraced opportunities to exhibit leadership in their schools. They generally identified and responded to a particular need in the school community. In most instances, their initiatives were welcomed by the school leader. However, in some cases, the request to tackle additional tasks were completely rejected without explanation. The criteria used to select teachers for school leadership was not clear which led the teachers to perceive bias in the process. When favoritism was perceived and practices were deemed as unfair, the level of trust between the teacher and the leader was severely damaged. The findings of this study indicated that teachers felt the most supported when leaders are transparent and affirming while empowering them to explore opportunities to lead and coach others.
Recommendations for Action

Based on the literature presented in Chapter 2 and the data collected in this qualitative study, recommendations are provided. The recommendations are specific to three groups within the organization; principals, teachers, and district leaders.

**Recommendations for School Principals.** It is understood that principals deal with external factors that are beyond their control. However, there are aspects of the school culture that they shape that affects teachers tremendously. Even if teachers are not in agreement with district and state level decisions and policies, they are more likely to stay in schools led by a principal that they perceive as supportive (Papay et al., 2017). Providing teachers with consistent, informal feedback is a recommended way to offer support. Weekly or biweekly visits to classrooms engaging with teachers and students not only creates a collegial, collaborative environment but allows the principal to collect formative data that could improve the quality of instruction. Being able to see the classroom through a teacher’s lens by modeling research-based strategies and working side by side with teachers is a way to offer support without judgment.

Another recommendation for principals is to establish teacher leadership councils or programs within the school. Teachers need to feel that their professional knowledge is valued and that they have a voice in the decisions that will ultimately affect them (George, 2015). Administrative teams could identify areas of improvement within the school and solicit teachers for ideas and leadership in those areas. Allowing teachers to take ownership of not only what happens in their classrooms, but other facets of the organizations, may encourage the teachers to become more invested in the school as a whole.

The third recommendation for principals is to provide teacher-led and teacher-driven professional development. It is understood that some professional development is dictated by the
state or the district. However, there are opportunities for schools to create their own modes of teacher development. Allowing teachers to assess their own strengths and weaknesses to determine the course of their professional development can increase teacher efficacy. Teacher-led professional development is also cost effective as human capital within the school walls would be utilized.

**Recommendations for Teachers.** Collaborative work within the professional learning communities or PLCs help to create pockets within the school community where teachers can evaluate pedagogy and vent frustrations. Periodic meetings with content area PLCs are generally mandatory in most districts in the state of Georgia. It is recommended that teachers meet with other educators outside of their subject and content areas. Joining a formal teacher advocacy organization such as PAGE (Professional Association of Georgia Educators) or participating in a social media group such as Georgia Educators Rock allows teachers to exchange ideas across the state. These platforms also provide extensive information on federal and state educational policy changes that affect teachers and students.

This study showed that most participants had a desire to share with and lead other educators. Even if the opportunity to share with other educators is not available at the school, it is recommended that the teacher seek other avenues to lead. The state of Georgia and the city of Atlanta hosts numerous educational conferences each year that encourage teachers to submit presentation proposals. There are platforms that allow teachers to present their knowledge and mentor others through webinars and Skype sessions.

**Recommendations for District Leadership.** Duff’s (2013) research analyzed how different styles of leadership impacts employee job satisfaction and levels of productivity. By using industrial-organizational psychology, Duff dissected how the different personalities of
school leaders affected the school community as a whole and explored the effect that leader personalities had on retention. It was asserted that the lower the person-job fit for the principal, the more likely turnover would occur with team members in the organization.

The first recommendation for district leadership is to provide ongoing training to school principals, particularly in the areas of culture building and performance evaluation. It would be advantageous to have a mentoring program for school leaders beyond the first three years of an appointed principalship. This study found that mobility of school leaders not only causes a disruption of the school culture but is a growing concern for teachers. Participants involved in this study expressed that they are hesitant to invest in leaders who may be transferred to other schools or placed in different positions within one or two years of service. The majority of participants have had at least three changes in their administrative teams within the past five years. Having an established mentorship program would increase collaboration and promote professional growth.

The second recommendation for district leadership is to create ladders of leadership for teachers within the district. This could include opportunities for mentoring and instructional coaching as well as administrative tasks. States like New Jersey have created extended ladders for teacher leadership with distinct pathways for teachers to explore options beyond the traditional classroom setting (New Jersey Principals and Supervisors Association, 2015). As a result, the state of New Jersey has been ranked in the top ten states for teacher retention while the state of Georgia has been ranked #30 (Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017). Teacher-leader endorsement programs that lead to concrete opportunities to design curriculum, implement initiatives, and lead other professionals could stimulate the growth potential of teachers within the district.
Recommendations for Further Study

This study included ten participants in the Atlanta metropolitan area with at least five years of teaching experience in a middle or high school that has been designated as Title 1. All of the participants identified as female and African American or Latinx. Conducting future studies with participants of diverse genders and races would expand the scope of the study. It would be advantageous to analyze if the perceptions of school leaders changed if those parameters were expanded. Teachers’ perceptions in Title 1 schools in other urban areas as well as in Title 1 schools in rural communities would be useful to study to understand this phenomenon.

Summary and Conclusion

Previous studies have examined the relationships between school leaders and teachers and how those relationships impact teacher retention. And while exit surveys and interviews have been conducted in the state of Georgia to explain the reasons for teacher turnover, there was not sufficient research on the particular practices used by school principals to encourage teacher retention. Urick and Bowers’ (2014) work describe correlations between leadership models, teacher efficacy, and retention. With this framework, there is a gradual evolution from transformational leadership to instructional leadership to shared leadership. Schools that embody the qualities of shared instructional leadership have consistent and quality communication between the school leader and team members which heighten professional growth (Urick and Bowers, 2014). While exit surveys conducted by the state provide a glimpse of some of the reasons for teacher mobility, what is missing from those studies is the voice of the teacher with clear explanations about the quality of the leader-member exchanges outlined in the framework of Urick and Bowers (2014) and how those exchanges affected their decision to leave the
classroom. The benefit of this study is that the focus is not on why teachers leave classrooms in Title 1 schools but why they remain.

The data from this research indicates that while the interactions with school leaders affect the morale and, in some cases, the stress levels of the teachers, the participants interviewed are intrinsically motivated to remain in Title 1 schools. Most of the participants are motivated by forces outside of the school such as their families, communities, and sociological ideologies. The majority of the participants felt supported by their school leaders and expressed ways in which their principals created avenues for them to exhibit leadership within the school and beyond.

The data suggested that while most of the leader-member exchanges were positive and of high quality, there is a need for teacher-driven, differentiated professional development. The methods through which professional development is delivered is typically through traditional, face to face interactions. The data indicated that teachers would benefit from flexible meetings through online platforms and apps so that more time could be allotted for collaborative and individual planning.

The data also suggested that teachers desired more feedback on a consistent basis. Even though the TKES evaluation rubric encompasses ten performance standards, the teachers who participated in this study wanted a more detailed feedback system that allows consistent, ongoing dialogue between the leaders and the teachers. In order to create a supportive environment that fosters innovation, classroom visits from principals should not be for the sole purpose of a formal evaluation. Consistent, quality leader-member exchanges help to build levels of trust and mutual understanding.
Teachers, principals, and district leaders can benefit from the findings of this study as it can help them collaboratively shape programs that are beneficial to all stakeholders in the school community. Teacher turnover is a national problem that has received more attention recently as teacher shortages continue to plague schools. The problem of retention will progressively worsen if the voices and the needs of teachers are ignored. Heightening awareness of the issue is a positive step in the process of increasing teacher retention and career satisfaction.
References


APPENDIX A - Invitation to Participate

Invitation to Participate in Research Study

June 8, 2019

Study Title: The Role of School Leadership in Teacher Retention in Title 1 Schools

Principal Investigator: LaTonya Bolden, Doctoral Candidate, University New England

Dear Potential Study Participant,

I am inviting you to participate in a qualitative study discussing teachers’ perceptions of the leadership practices of school principals in relation to the sense of teacher efficacy. To participate in this study, you must: 1) have five or more years of teaching experience and 2) currently teach in a Title 1 school in the Atlanta metropolitan area. Your participation in this study is voluntary. Furthermore, your participation is anonymous and your identity will not be shared with anyone.

Study's Purpose: The purpose of this study is to identify the practices of school leaders that increase teacher retention, particularly in Title 1 schools. The objective is to not only identify specific practices that influence teacher turnover but the role that leadership plays in the teacher’s decision to remain at the school or in the profession.

Research Questions: The following research questions will guide the study:
1. From the teacher’s perspective, what specific school leadership practices employed by principals encourage teacher retention?
2. How do teachers in Title 1 schools in the Atlanta metropolitan area perceive the different leadership styles of principal behavior?
3. How do participants describe their level of efficacy in relation to how they view or characterize their principals’ actions towards them?

Procedures: Teachers who meet the criteria will be selected based on their expression of interest. An invitational post will be created by the researcher on Black Educators Rock and the Professional Association of Georgia Educators Facebook group platforms. Interviews with the selected participants will be organized and conducted at a secured location.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality of all participants will be protected in compliance with the University of New England' research with human participants policies and procedures. Only the researcher of the study will have access to the information. The identity of the school, school district, and yourself will be protected throughout the study and thereafter. A clean data set will be created to protect your identity.

Compensation: No monetary or non-monetary compensation will be provided for your time or responses.
Questions: If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and your participation, please do not hesitate to contact me, the researcher, via email at lbolden@une.edu, or via phone at (910) 984-5843. You may also contact the researcher's advisor at the University of New England at mcollay@une.edu or by telephone at (207) 602-2010.

Thank you for your valuable time and willingness to participate in this research study. Your contribution not only supports my dissertation study but also informs the current research on the role of school leadership on teacher retention in urban areas.

Sincerely,

LaTonya Wright Bolden

LaTonya Wright Bolden
Doctoral Candidate, Educational Leadership
University New England
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Role of School Leadership Practices in Teacher Retention in Title 1 Schools

Principal Investigator(s): LaTonya Bolden

Introduction:

- Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?
The purpose of this study is to identify the practices of school leaders that increase teacher retention, particularly in Title 1 schools. The objective is to not only identify specific practices that influence teacher turnover but the role that leadership plays in the decision to remain at the school or in the profession.

Who will be in this study?
To participate in this study, you must: 1) have five or more years of teaching experience and 2) currently teach in a Title 1 school in the Atlanta metropolitan area.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be selected for interviews that will consist of individual, semi-structured, and in an open-ended format to explore in-depth perceptions of school leadership styles and teacher efficacy. Interviews will be transcribed and shared for member checking to have an opportunity to clarify any misunderstanding of intended responses. Prior to the interview, you will be given a consent form via email which will require a digital signature. At the beginning of the interview, we will review the consent form to ensure you are aware of your rights, and have a chance to ask any questions you may have.
What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?
There are no foreseeable psychological, social, physical, legal, or economic risks associated with participation in this study. There is no risk of group harm since your interview will be conducted individually with only the researcher. Some of the topics discussed may be uncomfortable. In the event you feel uncomfortable, please inform the researcher and every attempt will be made to ease the discomfort. Participation in this study is voluntary and you may choose to end your participation in this study at any time.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?
There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study.

What will it cost me?
There are no costs to the participants of this study. Interviews will be held during non-instructional hours.

How will my privacy be protected?
This study is confidential. I will not collect or retain any information about your identity. The records of this study will be kept confidential. Any physical research records will be kept in a locked file, and all electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Only the researcher, the researcher’s advisor and the IRB committee at UNE will have access to these recordings and they will only be used for educational purposes. Upon conclusion of the study, all recordings will be destroyed. We will not include any information in any report we may publish that would make it possible to identify you.

How will my data be kept confidential?
- The interview(s) will be recorded and then transcribed using a transcription service (Rev.com). This transcription service keeps all files securely encrypted and requires all transcribers to sign confidentiality agreements.
- Rev only retains personal data as long as is necessary for us to provide transcription services, unless a longer retention period is required or permitted by law. Unless otherwise requested, Rev will delete all related files after transcription.
- Rev delivers annual information security and privacy training to employees and contractors and requires new workers to complete training before accessing confidential data. Privacy by design concepts are conveyed to Rev.com development organization and incorporated into the software development process in adherence to the new California Consumer Privacy Act of 2018.
- All employees of Rev are required to sign a non-disclosure agreement which ensures that all confidential information will not be used for any purpose other than performing the Rev.com Services on the client’s behalf. Rev.com shall keep all confidential information in a secure place as to prevent unauthorized access to it and will not sell,
market, disclose, or otherwise make available any confidential information publicly or to any third party for any purpose.

- All notes, recordings, and digital transcriptions will be kept on password protected files in my home office and would only be accessible to me, my committee, and the Institutional Research Board. The list with your name and pseudonym will be kept in a different secure location, accessible only to me.
- All computer files will be kept on a password-protected computer located in my home office, accessible only to me, my committee, and the UNE Institutional Research Board.

**What are my rights as a research participant?**

- Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.
- Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with the University of New England.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.
  - If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
- If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

**What other options do I have?**

- You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**

- The researcher conducting this study is LaTonya Bolden.
  - For more information regarding this study, please contact 910-984-5843.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact the researcher's advisor at the University of New England, Dr. Michelle Collay via email at mcollay@une.edu.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.
Will I receive a copy of this consent form?
  ● You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant’s Statement
I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

____________________________________________________________________
Participant’s signature or
Legally authorized representative

____________________________________________________________________
Printed name

Researcher’s Statement
The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

August 10, 2019
Researcher’s signature

LaTonya W Bolden
Printed name
Appendix C—Schwarzer, Schmitz, and Daytner Teacher Efficacy Scale

1. I am convinced that I am able to successfully teach all relevant subject content to even the most difficult students.
2. I know that I can maintain a positive relationship with parents even when tensions arise.
3. When I try really hard, I am able to reach even the most difficult students.
4. I am convinced that, as time goes by, I will continue to become more and more capable of helping to address my students ‘needs.
5. Even if I get disrupted while teaching, I am confident that I can maintain my composure and continue to teach well.
6. I am confident in my ability to be responsive to my students ‘needs even if I am having a bad day.
7. If I try hard enough, I know that I can exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of my students.
8. I am convinced that I can develop creative ways to cope with system constraints (such as budget cuts and other administrative problems) and continue to teach well.
9. I know that I can motivate my students to participate in innovative projects.
10. I know that I can carry out innovative projects even when I am opposed by skeptical colleagues.

Response format:
(1) not at all true, (2) barely true, (3) moderately true, (4) exactly true
Appendix D— Teachers’ Perception of Leadership and Empowerment Interview Questions

Section I. Teacher Background and Experience

1. How many years have you been an educator in the Atlanta metropolitan area?
2. How many years have you been at your current campus/school?
3. Which teacher certification (s) do you hold?
4. What is your current assignment?

Section II. Teacher Perception of Principals and Leadership Behaviors

5. Do you currently feel supported by the current administration at your school? In what ways do you or do you not feel supported?
6. Urick (2016) stated that there are five measurable effective leadership behaviors: 1) the establishment of common goals; 2) the promotion of teacher development; 3) the planning, coordination, and evaluation of instruction; 4) the management of school resources and tasks; 5) the creation of a safe and orderly learning environment. Even though these behaviors cannot solely operate in isolation with principals, which do you perceive to be the most empowering to you as a teacher?
7. What are some practices that you would suggest that school leaders, particularly principals, employ to increase teacher morale? Which practices have been helpful to you as a teacher?
8. Do you feel that the feedback that you receive from school leaders, particularly principals, helps you in your practice as a professional?

Section III. Teacher Efficacy, Empowerment, and Identity

9. How has the level of support that you have received from your principal affected your stress level?
10. How do you exert a positive influence on both the personal and academic development of your students?
11. Do you think that your school provides avenues for teachers to exhibit leadership? In what ways?
12. If you could create an ideal school leader, what characteristics would she or he have?
13. Using the state’s TKES evaluation tool, how would you describe yourself overall as an educator?
14. Current research indicates that 50 percent of classroom teachers leave teaching within five years. What has compelled you to remain in your current teaching assignment for at least five years?
### Appendix E—Georgia Teacher Keys Effectiveness System Rubric

**Georgia Department of Education • TAPS Performance Standards and Rubrics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard 1: Professional Knowledge</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher demonstrates an understanding of the curriculum, subject content, pedagogical knowledge, and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.</td>
<td>In addition to meeting the requirements for Level III, the teacher consistently demonstrates understanding of the curriculum, subject content, pedagogical knowledge, and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.</td>
<td>Level III is the expected level of performance.</td>
<td>The teacher consistently demonstrates understanding of the curriculum, subject content, pedagogical knowledge, and the needs of students by providing relevant learning experiences.</td>
<td>The teacher inadequately demonstrates understanding of the curriculum, subject content, pedagogical knowledge, and student needs, or does not use the knowledge in practice.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard 2: Instructional Planning</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher plans using state and local school district curricula and standards, effective strategies, resources, and data to address the differentiated needs of all students.</td>
<td>In addition to meeting the requirements for Level III, the teacher consistently plans using state and local school district curricula and standards, effective strategies, resources, and data to address the differentiated needs of all students.</td>
<td>Level III is the expected level of performance.</td>
<td>The teacher inconsistently uses state and local school district curricula and standards, or inconsistently uses effective strategies, resources, or data in planning to meet the needs of all students.</td>
<td>The teacher does not plan, or plans without adequately using state and local school district curricula and standards, or without using effective strategies, resources, or data to meet the needs of all students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard 3: Instructional Strategies</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher promotes student learning by using research-based instructional strategies relevant to the content to engage students in active learning and to facilitate the students’ acquisition of key knowledge and skills.</td>
<td>In addition to meeting the requirements for Level III, the teacher consistently promotes student learning by using research-based instructional strategies relevant to the content to engage students in active learning, and to facilitate the students’ acquisition of key skills.</td>
<td>Level III is the expected level of performance.</td>
<td>The teacher inconsistently uses research-based instructional strategies. The strategies used are sometimes not appropriate for the content area or do not engage students in active learning or for the acquisition of key skills.</td>
<td>The teacher does not use research-based instructional strategies, nor are the instructional strategies relevant to the content area. The strategies do not engage students in active learning or acquisition of key skills.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard 4: Differentiated Instruction</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher challenges and supports each student’s learning by providing appropriate content and developing skills which address individual learning differences.</td>
<td>In addition to meeting the requirements for Level III, the teacher consistently challenges and supports each student’s learning by providing appropriate content and developing skills which address individual learning differences.</td>
<td>Level III is the expected level of performance.</td>
<td>The teacher inconsistently challenges students by providing appropriate content or by developing skills which address individual learning differences.</td>
<td>The teacher does not challenge students by providing appropriate content or by developing skills which address individual learning differences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Standard 5: Assessment Strategies</th>
<th>Level IV</th>
<th>Level III</th>
<th>Level II</th>
<th>Level I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The teacher systematically chooses a variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies and instruments that are valid and appropriate for the content and student population.</td>
<td>In addition to meeting the requirements for Level III, the teacher consistently chooses a variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies and instruments that are valid and appropriate for the content and student population.</td>
<td>Level III is the expected level of performance.</td>
<td>The teacher inconsistently chooses a variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies or the instruments are sometimes not appropriate for the content and student population.</td>
<td>The teacher chooses an inadequate variety of diagnostic, formative, and summative assessment strategies or the instruments are not appropriate for the content or student population.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F: IRB Approval

To: LaTonya Bolden

Cc: Michelle Collay, Ph.D.
    Brianna Parsons, Ed.D.

From: Lliam Harrison, M.A., J.D. CIM

Date: August 7, 2019

Project # & Title: 19.07.24-017 The Role of School Leadership Practices in Teacher Retention in Title 1 Schools

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects has reviewed the materials submitted in connection with the above captioned project and has determined that the proposed work is exempt from IRB review and oversight as defined by 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2).

Additional IRB review and approval is not required for this protocol as submitted. If you wish to change your protocol at any time, including after any subsequent review by any other IRB, you must first submit the changes for review.

Please contact Lliam Harrison at (207) 602-2244 or wharrison@une.edu with any questions.

Sincerely,

William R. Harrison, M.A., J.D. CIM
Director of Research Integrity

IRB#: 19.07.24-017
Submission Date: 07/23/19
Status: Exempt, 45 CFR 46.104 (d)(2)