PRINCIPAL RETENTION: THE PERCEPTIONS OF VETERAN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS WHO REMAIN IN THEIR ROLES AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

by

COLETHA TUCKER JOHNSON

DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at
The University of Texas at Arlington
August 2021

Arlington, Texas

Supervising Committee:

Barbara Tobolowsky, Supervising Professor
Catherine Robert
Casey Brown

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT ARLINGTON

AUGUST 2021

Copyright © by Coletha Tucker Johnson 2021

All Rights Reserved

Abstract

PRINCIPAL RETENTION: THE PERCEPTIONS OF VETERAN SECONDARY PRINCIPALS WHO REMAIN IN THEIR ROLES AS INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERS

Coletha Johnson

The University of Texas at Arlington, 2021

Supervising Professor: Barbara Tobolowsky

The role of school principals has changed from being managers to instructional leaders. As a result, many principals do not feel prepared to lead under these conditions, in which some leave their campuses within the first five-years of service. Despite school districts implementing educational reforms to attract and retain principals, turnover persists and is more pervasive in secondary settings when compared to elementary campuses.

This study explored the perceptions of six veteran secondary principals (five-years or more at their campus) from two Texas school districts and whether self-confidence in their abilities or self-efficacy impacted their effectiveness as instructional leaders, thus influencing their retention. Efficacy was explored through Bandura's (1977) four sources of information (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasion, and physiological states). Findings suggested that self-efficacy was significant to the participants' success as instructional leaders and their decision to remain principals. While mastery and vicarious experiences were the most prevalent in building efficacy, verbal and social persuasion and

physiological states were implicitly connected to their confidence. This research adds insight to the limited literature regarding principal retention.

Acknowledgements

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13). Thank you, Lord, for planting a seed beyond my wildest dreams and giving me the ability to persevere to see it to fruition. I am forever grateful to you for being my constant provider, protector, and anchor throughout this journey.

To my chair, thank you Dr. Tobolowsky for reigniting the passion behind the why of my pursuit. This journey has been one of the most challenging things I have ever encountered, and your continual guidance and support encouraged me to push beyond and conquer all thoughts of defeat. I sincerely appreciate all your time and efforts in helping me finish strong.

Special thanks to my husband, Lekedrin Johnson. Thank you for your unwavering and steadfast love and support over the years. This accomplishment took longer than I anticipated. Yet, you always cheered me on and created time and space for me to succeed. What a God-given blessing you are to my life. Also, to my children, Madison, Mason, and Myles, thank you for your love and support and remember to always dream big. I love you all dearly.

Last, I would like to thank the mentors God placed throughout my life who inspired me to always reach for my fullest potential: My mother, Tamela Richard Tucker, grandmothers, Norvella Richard and Mildred Tucker, Genise Breathett, Jewell Renee Jones, Shirley Murry, Donna Sanders Simpson, and Tonia Williams Woods. Thank you for your love and support and know that I am forever grateful to God for you. I am truly who I am today because of your guidance, influence, and inspiration.

Table of Contents

Abstract iv
Acknowledgements vi
List of Tables ix
Chapter 1: Introduction 1
Theoretical Framework 5
Problem Statement 6
Purpose of the Study 6
Research Questions 7
Personal Biography 7
Definition of Key Terms 8
Significance of the Study 9
Summary 9
Chapter 2: Literature Review 10
Instructional Leadership 10
Principal Retention 15
Principal Turnover 25
Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy 28
Summary 29
Chapter 3: Methodology 31
Setting 31
Research Design 33
Data Analysis 36
Trustworthiness 37
Limitations 38
Summary 40
Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings 41
Steps Toward Preparation 41
Mentorship 42
Professional Development 46
Professional Learning Communities and Networking 52
Aspects of Instructional Leadership 55
Instructional Accountability 56
Data Analysis 57
Building and Maintaining Relationships 60
Associated Strengths and Challenges of Leading 62
Reasons for Becoming and Remaining Instructional Leaders 65
Why They Became Principals 65
Family 67
Empowering Others to Grow 68
Job Satisfaction 68
Fulfillment of Purpose 71

Sources of Motivation 73
Self-Awareness 73
Intrinsic Motivation 75
District Trust and Support 76
Summary 80
Chapter 5: Summary, Implications, and Conclusion 81
Summary of Findings 81
Implications of Practice 87
Implications of Theory 90
Recommendations for Future Research 91
Conclusion 93
References 95
Appendices 105
Appendix A: Principal Recruitment Letter 106
Appendix B: District Personnel Recruitment Letter 107
Appendix C: Principal Letter of Consent 108
Appendix D: District Personnel Letter of Consent 109
Appendix E: Principal Interview Protocol 110
Appendix F: District Personnel Interview Protocol 112
Appendix G: Reflection Note Template 113
Appendix H: Demographic Questionnaire 114
Appendix I: IRB Approval Letter 115
Biographical Information 116

List of Tables

Table 1 Texas Turnover Rates, 1989-2010 2

Table 2 Number of District Principals by Grade Levels 32

Table 3 Principal Demographic Information 34

Chapter 1

Introduction

In 2001, with heightened accountability and testing standards, the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) shifted principals' foci from being managers concerned with "buses, boilers, and books" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p.6) to being instructional leaders concerned with increasing student achievement (Mitani, 2019; Rizvi, 2008). Instructional leaders have been defined as individuals who create an environment conducive to learning (Hurtado & Suharningsih, 2018), improve curricular instructional design and delivery (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012), coach teachers to analyze student data to assess strengths and weaknesses (ESSA-TEA, 2017), and build effective teams that share a vision for the overall sake of increasing student academic success (Wallace Foundation, 2013; Moolenaar & Sleegers, 2015). Under NCLB, emphasis was given to or placed on retaining principals by ensuring that they had the instructional leadership skills necessary to support "teachers teaching and students learning" (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). The Act, however, did not specify what skills were necessary to be an effective instructional leader.

In 2015, *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA) replaced NCLB. Like its predecessor, ESSA focused on retaining principals who were effective in improving academic success for students and ensuring they had the necessary instructional leadership skills to "help teachers teach and to help students meet … challenging state academic standards" (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Even though Title II of ESSA provided funds for states to improve the quality and effectiveness of principals as instructional leaders (U.S. Department of Education, 2016), it did not define what specific leadership skills were needed for principals to be capable instructional leaders either. That information came in 2019, when the *Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals Act* (PREP) became law as an amendment of the *Higher Education Act of 1965*.

Overall, this policy provided information about critical skills principals needed considering their changing responsibilities and offered districts grants to develop leadership programs using research-based curriculum to support principals acquisition of those skills (McAuliffe & Kaine, 2018). PREP asserted that the necessary “leadership skills” (p. 58) to build principal efficacy included: (a) creating and maintaining data-driven professional learning communities (PLC), (b) providing teachers professional development (PD) to improve student academic achievement, (c) coaching teachers through the evaluation process, (d) providing teachers constructive feedback and support, and (e) increasing opportunities for teacher leadership.

However, despite these legal remedies to provide support, principals are not staying in their roles. In fact, one quarter of the country’s principals leave their jobs annually, with 50% leaving by their third year (Superville, 2014, 2019). Specifically, in Texas, turnover has been a historical issue. Within a 10-year period between 1989-2010, almost half of Texas principals left their position by their third year. Specifically, 49% of middle school principals and 53.2 % of high school principals left their role after three years of service. (See Table 1.) Around this same time, Fuller and Young (2009) also found that Texas principals assigned to secondary schools departed at a higher rate than those serving elementary schools. More recently, Superville (2019) reported that principal retention is low in schools. Likewise, Davis and Anderson (2020) conducted a study involving 1,113 new Texas principals and found half left their schools within two years. They, too, determined that administrator turnover was lower at elementary schools than secondary settings and is higher in urban schools.

Table 1

Texas Turnover Rates, 1989-2010

Schools	1st Year	3rd Year	5th Year

Elementary	12.9%	39.0%	60.6%
Middle	18.5%	49.0%	69.4%
High	20.3%	53.2%	72.7%
Average Total	**17.2%**	**47.1%**	**67.6%**

Source: Albert Shanker Institute, Fuller (2012).

To address these high attrition numbers, the Texas Administrative Code (TAC)[1] required principals to participate in ongoing growth activities to continually update their knowledge and skills in campus leadership and student learning (TAC, 2018). Additionally, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) created a strategic plan with the key priority to retain principals (ESSA-TEA, 2019, p. 5). This policy provided funds for Local Educational Agencies (LEA) to increase instructional effectiveness and improve the processes to access effective principals. Specifically, districts used funds to implement instructional leadership initiatives to train supervisors of principals and assistant principals. Training efforts were intended to build skills in areas such as coaching teachers through the evaluation and feedback cycle, analyzing student performance data to assess strengths and weaknesses, and establishing common language and best practices (ESSA-TEA, 2019, p. 47). Yet, turnover persists (Levin et al., 2019).

Studies show that principals leave their role for various reasons. For example, some leave because of sanctions stemming from NCLB (Mitani, 2019). Mitani's (2019) research revealed that inexperienced principals with two to three years in their role were more likely to leave than experienced principals due to accountability pressure from informal sanctions related to increasing student achievement. Still, other principals left because they did not receive

[1] The efforts are not limited to principals in the job. The TAC (2018) updated principal certification requirements to ensure new principals were better prepared to assume the role.

professional development (PD) (Ng & Szeto, 2016; Superville, 2014) to obtain skills for coaching teachers in using the curriculum effectively, supervising the special education program, and budgeting funds appropriately (Boone et al., 2008; Keith, 2011). Such skills are important to comprehensively lead a school effectively. Another reason for attrition is burnout from work-related stress (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Freidman, 2002). Some choose to retire (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014) because of challenges related to external national and state mandates to implement initiatives to address student subgroups' achievement gaps (Reames et al., 2014), while others go to less-demanding schools or leave for central office jobs (Mitani, 2019). Regardless of the reasons why principals leave their role, turnover continues to be an issue (Levin et al., 2019; Superville, 2019).

Principal departures lead to several negative ramifications. Most important, researchers argue that it adversely impacts student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019; Jacob et al., 2015; Partlow, 2007), as evidenced in declining scores at these institutions (Wills, 2016). Moreover, it contributes to a shortage of qualified principals (Ni et al., 2015; Sciarrapa & Mason, 2014), which further stifles students' abilities to reach their fullest potential (Collins & Kaine, 2019). Finally, turnover negatively causes states and districts to lose significant amounts of money (Brown & Schainker, 2008) to hire and train new principals[2].

By year 2022, the demand for elementary, middle, and high school principals will grow 6% nationwide due to population increases (NASSP, 2017). Knowing this, it is important to explore retention since principals are second to teachers in influencing student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005; Superville, 2019), with a 25% direct impact on student performance (Marzano et al., 2005; Nidus & Sadder, 2011; Payne & Wolfson, 2000). Previous studies have

[2] It costs school districts an estimated $75,000 to replace a principal (NASSP, 2017; Superville, 2014).

focused on the many reasons why principals leave. Limited research has explored why principals stay. Because retention is lower at the secondary levels (Fuller & Young, 2009), this research will focus on why secondary principals stay in their roles. Furthermore, since principals are more likely to depart within one to five years of service, veteran principals, or principals who have stayed in their schools for five or more years, will be the focus. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of veteran secondary principals regarding what they believe shapes and contributes to their retention as instructional leaders.

Theoretical Framework

Bandura's (1977) theory of self-efficacy relates to the confidence principals have in their own abilities and skills to be effective instructional leaders, which can facilitate or hinder a principal's decision to stay in their role. Bandura (1977, 1982, 1989) explained this belief affects the person's cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes (Bandura, 2012). Therefore, it is an appropriate lens for this study, which will explore what veteran principals perceive contributed to their persistence.

This conceptual framework consists of four sources of information in which one gains a sense of self (Bandura, 1977): master experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state. *Mastery Experiences* are when a person gains or loses confidence based on their ability to master a new challenge. The more a person experiences success they are likely to raise mastery expectations to repeat the behavior. Repeated failures lower expectations related to confidence. *Vicarious Experience* is when a person's expectations of themself increases because of observing another person's success in performing "threatening activities without adverse consequences" (Bandura, 1977, p. 197). The person persuades themself that through intense and persistent efforts they can also perform the task based on another person's success. *Verbal*

Persuasion refers to when a person gains confidence in their ability to cope and try harder to succeed based on verbal influences from others. As a result, personal efficacy increases as a person believes they can achieve what they are seeking (Bandura, 1982). Finally, *Physiological State* is when a person's level of confidence is based on emotional arousal surrounding stressful or taxing situations. The higher a person's arousal to frustration or anxiety, the likelihood their performance will be debilitated (Bandura, 1977). Information from the four sources will help determine if self-efficacy in some manner has shaped principals' decision to stay in their schools.

Problem Statement

Retention rates of school principals continue to be an issue despite the efforts of national and state reforms to support changing expectations associated with the shift from managerial to instructional leadership skills. In fact, about half of all principals leave their roles within one to five years on the job (Superville, 2019) and the numbers are even higher at the secondary level. Their departure unfavorably affects student performance (Jacob at el., 2015) because principals have an impact on student achievement (Marzano et al., 2005). Researchers have explored the reasons for high turnover and have noted burnout (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Freidman, 2002) and lack of PD (Ng & Szeto, 2016) to be among the reasons why principals leave. However, there is a gap in literature that explores why veteran secondary principals remain in their roles.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to better understand what veteran secondary principals of two Texas school districts perceived to be the reasons they remain in their roles as instructional leaders and whether their perceptions of self-efficacy shaped their decision to stay.

Research Questions

Using Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as a lens, this qualitative study focused on understanding the perceptions of what veteran secondary principals say contributed to their retention as instructional leaders. This research was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do veteran secondary principals perceive self-efficacy contributed to or hindered their role (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state) as instructional leaders?
2. What role did self-efficacy play in veteran secondary principals' experiences as instructional leaders?
3. What did veteran secondary principals perceive contributed to their lengthy tenure as instructional leaders?

Personal Biography

As an assistant principal with multiple years of experience at different grade levels, I am drawn to understanding the experiences veteran principals note as reasons for remaining in their role. I have encountered the leadership of multiple principals within my career as a teacher, school counselor, and an assistant principal. Throughout this time, I have witnessed principals leaving their role to accept a promotion at a higher grade-level school or at the district level, while others left after reassignment to another role or resigning in lieu of termination.

From these experiences, I saw principals respond to their school situations in different ways. Some principals displayed a high sense of self-efficacy in their skill sets which resulted in success as instructional leaders. Adversely, I also encountered principals who appeared less effective in addressing and overcoming professional obstacles.

As a person who is seeking the principalship, I am curious in knowing what veteran principals say helped them overcome the same obstacles that all new principals are most likely to experience. If I sought to leave that role within five years, I would hope it would be to further my career as opposed to being overwhelmed, burned out, or for lack of PD. This study helps me, and other aspiring principals, better understand this critical issue and provide insight from the veteran principal perspective on possible solutions school districts can consider as they continue to seek ways to increase retention.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following are definitions to key terms used in this research.

Instructional Leader: one who creates an environment conducive to learning (Murtedjo & Suharningsih, 2018); improves curricular instructional design and delivery (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012); analyzes data (ESSA-TEA, 2019); and builds effective teams that share a vision (Wallace Foundation, 2013; Moolenaar & Sleegers, 2015).

Turnover: the frequency in which an administrator changes roles or schools (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012).

Burnout: a prolonged, negative response to stressors in the workplace (Maslach, 2003); unmediated stress as it relates to lack of buffers and support systems (Friedman, 2002).

Self-Efficacy: how a person views their abilities and manages behavior after an analysis of information stemmed from mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977, 1982); self-beliefs that influence a person's cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes (Bandura, 2012).

Principal Self-Efficacy: the belief a principal has regarding their abilities to enact policies and procedures that promote the effectiveness of a school (Versland & Erickson, 2017).

Significance of the Study

This study is significant for various reasons. First, this study can provide research-based information districts can use to maintain or improve policies and practices to support the retention of new secondary principals. Second, the retention of principals avoids the overall financial strain that occurs when districts replace the ones who leave (NASSP, 2017) and helps maintain and increase student achievement (Mitani, 2019; Superville, 2019). Lastly, with most research exploring why principals leave, this study fills the gap in literature seeking to understand why veteran secondary principals stay and whether retention in some regard is linked to self-efficacy.

Summary

Although officials of national, state, and local levels have either developed or implemented educational reforms to address retaining principals, retention continues to be an issue that school districts must address. This chapter explained the different laws put in place over time to address retention, the various reasons why principals leave their role, and the negative impact exiting principals have on student achievement. Additionally, it explored Bandura's theory of self-efficacy and whether it is a contributing factor that shapes veteran secondary principals' decisions to remain in their role.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Principal retention is an issue, particularly at the secondary level. As a result, research has focused on why principals leave their roles and not why they stay. This study explores the presentations of veteran secondary principals who have stayed in their role for at least five years to get a better understanding of how they perceive their effectiveness as instructional leaders. This chapter presents an overview of literature related to instructional leadership, principal retention, and principal turnover. It concludes with examining Bandura's self-efficacy theory as the study's conceptual framework.

Instructional Leadership

This section provides the definition of instructional leadership and associated challenges, along with various ways Instructional Leadership (IL) can look like in a school setting.

Definitions

IL has been defined in many ways over the years. Youngs and King (2002) described it as the principal building school capacity or developing teachers' competency in maintaining high expectations in student learning via curriculum (Ediger, 2014), pedagogy, classroom management, and assessment. Shulstad (2009) viewed IL as principals creating an environment with clear expectations where "people can succeed" (p. 12). Whereas the Wallace Foundation (2013) associated it to five key responsibilities: (1) *Sharing* a vision of academic success; (2) *Creating* a climate conducive to learning; (3) *Cultivating* leadership in teachers and other staff member; (4) *Improving* instruction to support teachers in teaching their best; and (5) *Managing* people, data, and process for the improvement of a school. In summary, IL communicates the school's vision through purpose and standards, monitoring student and teacher work, and staff

recognition and development (DeBevoise, 1984; Dwyer, 1984). Specifically, it is when a principals' self-efficacy (Skaalvik, 2020) can determine effectiveness in evaluating teaching practices (Kraft & Gilmore, 2016) and analyzing data to assess strengths and weaknesses (ESSA-TEA, 2019) in student achievement.

Despite this general understanding, the changing definitions of IL over time have led some principals to voice how the ambiguity of the term makes it difficult to understand expectations and this makes them feel unprepared for their role (Keith, 2011; Rizvi, 2008). For example, Welton et al. (2015) studied 11 principals' perceptions of IL. The researchers claimed that the principals were distressed about not knowing how to guide their teachers in executing Differentiated Instruction (DI), which is needed to address cultural diversity. DI is an instructional design model where teachers focus on processes and procedures to ensure learning takes place for varied students. A teacher's ability to vary instruction to a diverse group of learners creates equitable opportunities for student achievement. The principals in the study did not feel equipped or confident in their own skills to assist the teachers in implementing the model effectively. This lack of competence and clarity led the principals to want more specific information and modeling of the strategy from the central office to assist teachers with implementing DI in their classrooms.

Kraft and Gilmour (2016) conducted a case study of 24 principals' perceptions of IL. They found that principals expressed having difficulty in finding balance between maintaining the functions of the school and working with teachers. As one principal noted, "we spend a lot of time on operations work, following up on phone calls and emails…. which pulls us away from the classroom or having conversations with teachers" (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016, p. 737). Another principal expressed, "if they want the principal to be an instructional leader, taking as much of

the operations out of their purview as possible is probably what needs to happen" (p. 738). The principals felt like the traditional functions associated with their role (Costello, 2015) impeded their progress in helping guide teachers effectively.

Additionally, Kraft and Gilmour (2016) found discrepancies between how the principals perceived IL and district expectations of its implementation. One principal explained,

> the way the role is described, the role of the principal, it says, 'instructional leader,' and you're told to give [teachers'] feedback. I don't think that there's been a lot of training and resources provided on what that looks like and how to do it well. (p. 735)

A different principal mentioned that districts could do more to help principals by "providing more models of how to structure a regular meeting with teachers; ideally, we should be getting feedback about our feedback" (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016, p. 738). Thus, the principals lacked guidance on how to handle the new dimensions associated with instructional leadership. Principals voiced that another reason part of the job was so challenging was because "some of our administrators haven't taught" (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016, p. 735). Kraft and Gilmour (2016) agreed that the lack of an "instructional lens" (p. 735) makes evaluating teachers difficult for some principals. As a result, the researchers made recommendations for districts to provide trainings and programs to help principals find balance between managerial and instructional expectations.

Both Welton et al. (2013) and Kraft and Gilmour (2016) reached similar conclusions that IL needs to be clearly defined to support principals' effectiveness. However, the definition must convey that IL implementation will differ from district to district to address students' needs in the context of their schools (Costello, 2015). Therefore, districts need to supply an understanding of

IL that is pertinent to them, or principals may continue to feel inadequate in curriculum delivery and teacher support (Costello, 2015).

As principals have grown to accept IL as their primary responsibility, studies have indicated that efforts have been made toward understanding and executing the concept. Reitzug et al. (2008) explained multiple ways IL was manifested in principals' daily work and the improvement of instruction in their schools. After interviewing 20 principals consisting of 17 females and 3 males (i.e., 13 elementary, two middle, four high, and one K-8), they identified four aspects of IL: (1) relational, (2) linear, (3) organic, and (4) prophetic.

Relational IL is when an increase in learning and improvement of instruction stem from the principal's ability to build relationships. As one principal noted:

> before we can ever…. help schools, it boils down to relationships…. it's the biggest thing as a leader…you've got to know your people…as far as test scores and…. political stuff…I really stay out of it…if you create a culture where kids feel loved, all that other stuff will work out. (Reitzug et al., 2008, pp. 697-698)

Therefore, the principal's efforts are to help students and teachers feel good about themselves, which could result in them taking pride in their work.

Linear IL is when there is alignment between cause-and-effect systems. In this aspect, one action, process, structure, or intervention leads to subsequent desired outcomes. The principal creates a chain of behavioral actions that will eventually lead to accomplished goals. A principal expressed, "the most important work I do is the instructional leadership piece…the state has now proposed content standards…we have aligned our curriculum…we selected our essential objectives...created criterion-referenced tests…. we're starting to look at the data" (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 699). Each of these actions should lead to increases in student learning.

Organic IL refers to when a principal's main approach begins with an examination and discussion with teachers of emerging issues from the school or societal contexts. As a result of conversations, instructional improvement occurs because of teachers' ongoing learning and reflection about their individual practices and the school's overall practice. One principal voiced, "They [the teachers] need to take ownership…'you guys are leaders...these are your scores. What do you think...Was that valuable? or was that a good way for me to spend that time?'…you get them [teachers] thinking...trusting…asking…growing across the board" (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 703). Instructional practices should improve because of teachers' self-reflection.

Finally, *Prophetic IL* is when the direct approach to IL is linked to a person's "calling" or purpose. Principals use their set of beliefs, morals, and convictions to develop the school's vision for academic goals. One principal stated, "we [principal and teachers] had to start talking about what we believed in... Is this good for kids, and in what ways? Is the curriculum good...Will this strategy work...Will this make kids feel more connected" (Reitzug et al., 2008, pp. 706-707)? By the principal and teachers talking to one another about their beliefs, principals can guide teachers in determining the focus for achievement and progress toward school improvement.

Another way IL has been conceptualized is by *Systems Thinking* (ST). Shaked and Schechter (2016) defined ST as a holistic approach to connecting everything together by "seeing the whole beyond the parts and seeing the parts in the context of the whole" (p. 181). In their study with 39 middle and high school principals, Shaked and Schechter (2016) explored how school leaders applied the ST concept to IL. For instance, one principal found how the separate events of teaching, learning, assessing, and improving curriculum and instruction were intertwined processes that formed holistic thinking toward overall school curriculum improvements. Another principal's approach to strengthening collaborative learning included

teachers using the PLC process to be resources to one another. This meant that teachers did not only focus on their position alone, but rather found additional ways to improve the entire campus. The teacher, in this case, was viewed as one part to the whole team. The findings from the research suggested that principals perceived ST as enhancing three areas of IL: (1) improving school curriculum, (2) developing school-based professional learning communities, and (3) using performance data. Furthermore, because of the worldview perspective that is taken to connect "events, peoples, and processes" (Shaked & Schechter, 2016, p. 100), principals viewed ST as a comprehensive approach to enable IL.

Considering the numerous ways IL can be interpreted, Reitzug et al. (2008) and Shaker and Schechter (2016) showed how IL can be conceptualized within a framework of leadership approaches. Both utilized methods to examine the perceptions of principals, who are essential to finding solutions in understanding and executing IL effectively.

Principal Retention

Principal attrition has been a recurring issue for school districts, which has led to considerable research on the topic (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Mitani, 2019; Ng & Szeto, 2016) with far fewer studies exploring why they stay (Fuller & Young, 2009; Ledesma, 2013). From influences related to increasing student achievement (Fuller & Young, 2009) to responding to a "calling" (Ledesma, 2013, p. 44), understanding the perceived reasons principals remain in their role is important because findings may assist in the development of legal mandates and district policies to strengthen retention practices. This section briefly explains the implications of supports (i.e., professional development, coaching and mentoring, and professional learning communities) that influence principals to stay in their roles.

Using 13 years of administrative data from the Texas Education Agency (TEA), Fuller and Young (2009) studied the relationship between factors that may influence principal retention of 16,544 newly hired principals. Key findings suggested that retaining rates were: (a) higher at elementary schools versus secondary schools, (b) influenced by student achievement rates in a principal's first year in the role, (c) higher in low-poverty schools as well as white suburban schools that are not economically disadvantaged, and (d) not heavily influenced by a principal's race, age, or gender.

In contrast to Fuller and Young's (2009) quantitative method, Cieminski (2018) conducted a qualitative study that identified practices and supports five districts used to retain principals. Of the 18 participants, six were veteran principals who served their schools for at least 10 years, five were new principals with one to four years of service, and seven were district-level administrators. Cieminski (2018) found that the school districts with the highest principal retention rates offered professional development, coaching and mentoring, and collegial relationships. Further, principals conveyed that *professional development* was differentiated and individualized to help them refine their instructional leadership skills. A veteran principal commented, "I don't think there is a one-size-fits-all something you would do. I think it really is about individualizing…Because my need with my experience is very different from a first-or-second year principal" (Cieminski, 2018, p. 32). The principals felt learning opportunities were specific to their own growth and development as instructional leaders, which helped keep them in their roles.

The principals also credited *coaching and mentoring* from a range of individuals as an effective support. For example, in one district, assistant superintendents offered coaching sessions with new principals where they checked-in regularly and provided guidance and funding

for principals' individual development. In another district, master and retired principals mentored novice principals through regular visitations and scheduled meetings to set and discuss goals.

Lastly, principals spoke about having *collegial relationships* with other principals, who influenced their desire to stay in their positions. Several noted how they called principals of the same grade level to get ideas, problem-solve, get advice, and ask questions. These relationships were described as "mutually supportive" and "a family," where they can "bounce ideas off of each other" (Cieminski, 2018, p. 34). Thus, principals were able to see the value in using colleagues as a support system, which gave them a sense of belonging as an instructional leader.

In summary, Fuller and Young (2009) gave a statistical viewpoint of circumstances and factors where principal retention is likely to be high. This information was complemented by Cieminski (2018), who identified specific supports that helped positively affect retention like professional development, coaching and mentoring, and collegial relationships. This research confirms the importance of seeking perceptions of principals to understand how intentional efforts strengthen retention.

Professional Development

Educational reforms have attempted to bring clarity to IL as principals experience challenges related to expectations (Cowie & Crawford, 2007; Jackson & Marriott, 2012; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Weller, 1982). Part of IL requires principals to provide professional development (PD) to support teachers (Brown & Schainker, 2008; Yang, 2014), align new initiatives (Peterson, 2002), influence curriculum design and delivery (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Ng & Szeto, 2016) and comprehensively improve student achievement (Houle, 2006; Payne & Wolfson, 2000). However, researchers argued that principals needed training to execute PD, and other elements of IL, effectively (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Freidman, 2002; National Center for

Education Statistics, 2013; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Pesncik, 2019; School Leaders Network, 2014; Superville, 2014). Jensen and Moller (2013) said that PD should be collaborative where principals meet with other principals to discuss school data and self-reflect. Houle (2006) claimed that PD is effective when it is hands-on and embedded in the job. Likewise, Peterson (2002) noted that PD should be carefully designed with variety of strategies. For instance, PD should target district and campus needs (Stewart & Matthews, 2015) with the understanding that principals' needs may differ serving an urban school (Houle, 2006; Jacob et al., 2015) versus a rural school (Jacob et al., 2015; Stewart & Matthews, 2015). Whether from a general to specific campus perspective, overall, researchers agree that PD is necessary for principals to be effective instructional leaders.

Jacob et al. (2015) conducted a study in Michigan using McREL's Balanced Leadership (BL) as a research-based framework to assess the impact PD had on several factors including principal efficacy. BL stems from 21 leadership responsibilities that have been identified as guiding practices to build principal effectiveness and improving student achievement. Jacob et al. (2015) recruited 126 principals from Michigan's northern, low-income, rural school districts. Sixty-two principals with the highest poverty rates were categorized as the treatment group who experienced 10 two-day BL PD training sessions over two years for free. The control group was comprised of the other 64 principals, who received PD as "business as usual" (p. 315), which included standard approaches to school improvement supplied by district and state. Jacob et al. (2015) found the treatment group displayed more efficacy because of BL PD. Specifically, they had higher ratings than the control group in categories such as: collaboration with staff, better school climate, and differentiated instructional practices. The researchers found that within three years, 14 of 62 principals in the treatment group left their schools, whereas 28 of 64 principals

from the control group left their schools. They concluded that principal retention proved to be greater in the treatment schools because of the formal training sessions that build leadership capacity.

Unlike Jacob et al.'s (2015) research-based approach to PD, Ng and Szeto (2016) focused on the perceptions of newly appointed secondary principals' experiences with their district's PD program after one year in their role. Under a new policy, school districts were to create a "Continuous PD for School Excellence" (Ng & Szeto, 2016, p. 2) to target leadership development of new and veteran principals. Researchers wanted to know what new principals perceived their roles, needs, and expectations to be in redesigning the district's PD structure to better serve principals. Data were collected in two phases. Phase one consisted of 32 of the 52 participants completing an open-ended questionnaire in which preliminary findings identified that the new principals faced several challenges. First, implementing new initiatives from reforms were difficult due to lack of management and leadership skills. Next, principals encountered trouble with understanding legal concepts regarding laws, specifically in handling things such as sexual harassment or student fighting. Last, principals voiced that they lacked skills to strategically empower strong teachers to assist with weak or underperforming teachers and noted a need to collaborate with experienced peers for human resource guidance.

Using the data from the initial work, phase two involved Ng and Szeto (2016) selecting 15 of the 32 new principals and conducting in-depth individual interviews to redevelop the district's PD plan (Ng & Szeto, 2016). Eight themes emerged that were used to restructure the PD program: (1) defining the principal's role in sustained development of creating an environment conducive to teaching and learning; (2) establishing coping strategies to deal with changing contexts of reforms, new initiatives, and building sustainability; (3) understanding legal

responsibilities; (4) managing human relationships; (5) interpreting budgets; (6) developing peer-networks; (7) providing mentor support; and (8) executing curriculum demands. Based on these conclusions, the district developed a targeted PD plan for administrator sustainability. The principals reported that the new PD program had several benefits, including opportunities for peer networking, which improved their practices in leading their schools. The studies discussed in this sub-section reflect how important PD is in the development and support of new principals.

Coaching and Mentoring

Researchers asserted that districts which provide coaching and mentoring to principals, increase IL effectiveness and retention (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018; James-Ward, 2013; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). These roles usually function from a district-level framework where experienced or past principals coach or mentor novice principals. Although the terms are sometimes used interchangeably (Malone, 2001; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014), they fill different roles. A coach is typically a “nonevaluative thought partner” and a mentor is one who models expectations (Psencik, 2019, p. 10).

Psencik (2019) declared that *coaching* is strategic and individualized to keep the principal “focused on the core work of instructional leadership” (p.11) through trust, patience, and confidentiality. It further has been defined as an on-going process between a principal and coach to maximize learning capacity and reach desired campus and district-level goals (James-Ward, 2013). Yarborough (2018) said coaching is helping leaders reflect on their experiences, gain insight, and use the insight to inform their leadership practice. Similarly, Malone (2001) explained coaching as a technical advisor who assists principals in collecting information from leadership profiles and reflective learning journals to develop plans and reach goals for personal improvement.

In a qualitative case study, James-Ward (2013) investigated the impact of coaching on student achievement and found that student achievement was impacted by principals being coached by individuals who were knowledgeable in curriculum and engaged in practical experiences. In short, four novice elementary principals from two districts shared experiences that stemmed from coaching sessions over three consecutive years. Participants met with coaches twice a month and received follow-up notes of agreed upon goals and next steps. Data were gathered from open-ended surveys, observations, and coaches' notes that revealed five benefits of coaching: (1) opportunity to learn things quickly; (2) becoming comfortable with the profession; (3) improving ability to provide meaningful feedback; (4) developing leadership skills; (5) and managing politics (James-Ward, 2013). Overall, principals perceived coaching as a valuable experience.

Likewise, Fink and Resnick (2001) shared how a district's use of an individualized coaching system over an 11-year period developed principals in IL and consistently improved student achievement. Principals were exposed to modeled behaviors from district administrators, evaluation processes to improve performance, and job-embedded experiences of "establishing goals and objectives, budgeting, examining instructional processes in classrooms, and analyzing data on individual student performance" (p. 603). This approach sustained a culture of learning for principals and maintained accountability for student achievement (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

On the other hand, *mentoring*, has been described as an internship that may help individuals establish networks of peers who provide support and guidance (Malone, 2001). Gimbel and Kefor (2018) illustrated the term as a relationship between a "less experienced mentee…and a more experienced mentor" (p. 25). Malone (2001) added that a mentor is a "seasoned leader [who] helps a protégé place theory and practice in the context of experience"

(p. 2). Furthermore, Sciarappa and Mason (2014) viewed mentoring as a formal method of support where socialization is facilitated to build principal skills and capacity. Researchers affirmed that mentoring is essential in principal development (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018) and strengthening IL skills (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014).

Sciarappa and Mason (2014) used an electronic survey to examine the perceived efficacy of 54 new principals of a national principal mentor training program. Aspiring mentors completed a three-day workshop and a nine-month internship for the purpose of "connecting trained mentors to new principals" (p. 55). As a result, the mentors' responsibility was to work with new principals to strengthen competencies, build leadership capacity, and develop job-embedded skills. Sciarappa and Mason (2014) found that mentoring is critical to a novice principal's development (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018) and proved to be instrumental in building efficacy and strengthening IL. Additionally, they asserted that the overall outcomes demonstrated the value in seeking principals' perceptions regarding continuous improvement (Sciarappa & Mason, 2014).

In a study where a state mandate required districts to develop formal mentoring and induction programs to support and retain new principals, Gimbel and Kefor (2018) explored eight mentor-mentee relationships (16 participants) and how the bond affected leadership practices in principals' first two years in their role. Initially, researchers used surveys to gather information from mentors and mentees alike that revealed several themes. First, new principals and mentors were very satisfied with the relationship indicating that "leaders matched or exceeded their expectations" (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018, p. 29). Next, relationships were most successful when the mentor and mentee communicated and collaborated frequently. Last, relationships "had significant positive impact" (p. 29) on new principals' job performance.

Gimbel and Kefor (2018) collected additional data with four of the mentor-mentee groups (eight participants) who volunteered for semi-structured interviews. The researchers wanted to explore the perceptions of principals to better understand the mentoring relationship. They found that effective mentoring increased retention. One principal voiced, “I think the goals are to keep principals…I can see why… Their jobs are so hard. And trying to create a relationship where you can have someone to count on and trust did it for me” (p. 32). Principals viewed the mentoring relationship as a reason they remained in their roles.

In general, Gimbel and Kefor (2018), James-Ward (2013), and Sciarappa and Mason (2014) agreed that coaching and mentoring are beneficial in building principal efficacy (Versland & Erickson, 2017) and retention. Conversely, the lack of supports can have negative consequences. For instance, Milford (2002) conducted research with 10 new high school principals in a rural district with no formal mentoring/coaching support. Data showed that principals felt overworked with no clear job description and little time for school improvement. Within two years, eight of the principals left their position for other administrative positions. Milford (2002) suggested the district create a more “formalized organizational socialization process” (p.14) to support new principals.

Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are described as positive cultures comprised of norms for accountability, values of support and collaboration, and agreed-upon collective commitments for continuous improvement of teaching and learning (Brown & Tobis, 2013; Cranston, 2009; Fink & Resnick, 2001; Habegger, 2008; Honig & Rainey; 2014). Typically, PLCs are established systems of professionals where principals facilitate culturally interdependent groups of teachers to improve instruction and learning (Brown & Tobis, 2013;

Dufour, 2015). PLCs have not only been found to be effective for teacher efficacy (Dufour, 2015; Dufour & Reeves, 2015), the framework also improves principals' IL development (Cranston, 2009; Honig & Rainey, 2014) and retention (Brown & Tobis, 2013).

Brown and Tobis (2013) shared the experiences of a district that gained national recognition for significant improvement of student achievement because of principals' collaboration through PLCs. Demographics of the district included predominantly low socioeconomically disadvantaged and English language learners. Initially, principal support was one-to-one that mimicked characteristics of coaching (James-Ward, 2013; Yarborough, 2018). When district leadership noticed benefits of collaboration between "coach and coachee" (James-Ward, 2013, p. 23.), leadership development for principals shifted to PLCs to enhance collaborative processes. The "Principals Breakfast Group" (Brown & Tobis, 2013, p. 8) met regularly to support one another in implementing inter-school programs for teachers and students and strategizing to improve student engagement and instructional practices. A veteran principal described the PLC involvement as, "something between group therapy and a think tank…we review an article or book we've all read…. we discuss news from the district office or help someone tease out how to deal with an issue at their school site" (Brown & Tobis, 2013, p. 8). The principals viewed their PLC experience as an effective support system.

Honig and Rainey (2014) also studied the PLC process by gathering data from principals participating in Principals Professional Learning Communities (PPLCs). District administrators from six school districts joined PPLCs comprised of four elementary groups, one middle, and one high school. Study team members observed 25 PPLCs where district administrators facilitated the meetings and 35 PPLCs gatherings without district representation. From observation notes and principal interviews, Honig and Rainey (2014) found when district

engagement was inconsistent or infrequent, principals' IL development was negatively affected. Whereas for district administrators who routinely met with their PPLCs to adapt an "instructional focus, which includes teaching practices, leadership practices, and organizational practices" (Honig & Rainey, p. 15), principals reported that district involvement strengthened IL skills.

Although Brown and Tobis' (2013) study about PLCs included only principals from a district only indirectly involved, Honig and Rainey's (2014) investigation provided a perspective of the impact district administrations can have when directly involved in the PLC process. Both studies demonstrate the important role PLCs can have in providing IL support to principals, especially when they are done correctly (Dufour & Reeves, 2015).

Principal Turnover

Turnover is defined as the frequency in which a principal changes roles or location in a school (Farley-Ripple, Solano, & McDuffie, 2012) and is widespread across the field of education. This section provides a brief overview of literature of principal turnover and factors associated with principals leaving.

Turnover is not always evidence of something being wrong. *Principal turnover* can be positive in cases where student performance needs improvement (Strickland-Cohen, McIntosh, & Horner, 2014), or a principal accepts a promotion with benefits and better salary (Partlow, 2007; Tran 2017). However, it can also result from negative experiences. For example, turnover occurs due to principals' adverse experiences leading schools of high-minority student populations (Gates et al., 2006), a school board or superintendent recommending replacing what they perceive to be a "weak" principal (Wills, 2016, p. 208), or negative working conditions in low-performing schools (Tran, 2017). It can also be the result of a principal's lack of motivation or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), job satisfaction, burnout (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012), or low

salary (Fuller & Young, 2009), as well as a lack of parent and community support (Norton, 2002). Fuller and Young (2009) identified other factors of turnover as accountability pressures, complexity and intensity of the job, and the lack of mentoring support and support from the Central Office.

While turnover can be voluntary or involuntary (Partlow, 2007; Tran 2017), it adversely affects student performance (Wills, 2016; Partlow, 2007; Jacob et al., 2015) and a principal's effectiveness is linked to student achievement (Lutrick & Szabo, 2012; Jacob et al., 2015; Payne & Wolfson, 2000). In a quantitative study, Wills (2016) compared principals' years of service to student achievement scores to determine if change in leadership impedes student learning. Data analysis showed principals leaving had a significant negative effect on student achievement, specifically in math scores (Wills, 2016).

One of the main reasons for turnover was burnout (Freidman, 2002). Burnout has been described as high levels of work stress (Tikkanen et al., 2017), unmediated stress due to lack of buffers and support systems (Friedman, 2002), frustrations related to role overload (Whitaker, 1996), and unsuccessful coping (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012). Cooper and Marshall (1978) concluded that internal and external managerial stress, career development, and organizational structure and climate caused burnout. Wax and Hales (1984) identified several additional factors including: unmet expectations, weak relationships, a lack of motivation, and not having a sense of fulfillment. In an investigation of elementary and secondary principals, Friedman (1995) noted other contributors like *exhaustion*, *aloofness*, and *deprecatio*n (p. 646), which meant principals felt tired, disinterested, and unvalued. Likewise, Whitaker (1996) found burnout was the result of lack of support systems, leadership skills, professional growth opportunities, and appreciation. These factors contributed to excessive exhaustion.

Other researchers investigated if burnout could be predicted. Different from his 1995 study that focused on elementary and secondary principals, Freidman (2002) studied secondary principals only and reported that depersonalization, exhaustion, and lack of a sense of accomplishment (p. 241) preceded burnout. Federici and Skaalvik (2012) researched elementary and secondary participants to determine the relationship between burnout and principal self-efficacy and found low self-efficacy led to diminished job satisfaction and the desire to quit.

More recently, other researchers continued to study how burnout affects turnover. Maxwell and Riley (2017) examined burnout of principals of all levels through a longitudinal study. The purpose of their research was to determine how burnout, job satisfaction, and wellbeing related to work demands. They explored the differences between two "emotional factors:" "surface-acting," the emotions manufactured for the role, and "deep acting," the true feelings about a situation (p. 486). Although a weak correlation between emotional factors and a principal's wellbeing was reported, a strong correlation existed between emotional factors related to work demands, job satisfaction, and burnout (Maxwell & Riley, 2017). Such findings aided the development of interventions to reduce burnout.

In summary, these researchers found links between burnout and turnover. Further, the factors of burnout were personal (e.g., lack of leadership skills, a sense of being appreciated) and professional (e.g., lack of support systems, organizational structure). Therefore, some require systemic changes and others require changes in interpersonal interactions to address issues of burnout.

To date, the focus of the research has been on the issues that lead to burnout and/or turnover, but not why principals stay. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study is to address this

gap by interviewing veteran secondary principals to better understand their perceptions of IL and whether efficacy shaped their decisions to stay.

Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy

Bandura's (1977, 1982, 1989, 2009) concept of self-efficacy maintains a person's performance is based on their confidence level. Performance accomplishments, vicarious experiences, social/verbal persuasions, and physiological states are sources of information used for a person to gain a feeling of confidence which affect motivation (Bandura, 1977). Based on this information regarding this study, principals are more likely to be effective as instructional leaders and remain in their roles if they have a sense of self-efficacy or confidence in their skills.

Bandura's (1977) *performance accomplishment* says a person gains or loses confidence based on personal mastery experiences. For example, Jana, a principal, found that teacher collaboration improved because of a program she instituted. As a result, she is more likely to continue using the program because of her success and has gained confidence in her ability to lead her teachers. On the contrary, another principal, Paul, pursued a different approach that yielded negative results in teacher collaboration. In this case, Paul became frustrated and lost confidence in his ability to lead because his actions did not lead to improvements.

Vicarious experiences refer to how a person's expectations of themselves increase after observing another person's success (Bandura, 1977). The person persuades themself that through intense and persistent efforts they can also perform the task based on another's success. Continuing the scenario, Paul observes Jana's facilitation of teacher collaboration for the next month. As a result of witnessing Jana's success, Paul implements a similar program with greater confidence in his ability to improve teacher collaboration.

If Paul and Jana discuss her programmatic approach, he may also feel more confident in leading his teachers. This encounter supports Bandura's (1977) *verbal/social persuasions*, where a person gains confidence in their ability to succeed based on verbal influences from others. Although this source of information is less influential than performance accomplishments and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1977), it can still serve to increase someone's confidence in their ability.

Finally, Bandura's (1977) *physiological state* asserts that a person's level of confidence is based on emotions surrounding stressful or taxing situations. The more a person becomes frustrated or anxious, the likelihood their performance will be debilitated (Bandura, 1977). In other words, Paul's efforts may be fraught with emotion because of the importance of the task. This stress may negatively affect his actions.

In conclusion, Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory provides a framework to better understand whether confidence levels impact veteran secondary principals' decisions to stay in their roles. With limited cases exploring principals' self-efficacy regarding IL (Skaalvik, 2020), this study will fill a gap in research. Additionally, it will provide insight into what school districts can possibly do to retain more principals.

Summary

Research indicates that retaining principals has been an issue overtime. Reforms have been implemented to improve retention and support principals in executing IL (*NCLB*, 2001; *ESSA*, 2015; *PREP*, 2019). However, the ambiguity of the term IL has created challenges for principals to be effective in their role (Costello, 2015). As a result, principals feel unprepared for their role (Keith, 2011; Rizvi, 2008) and, in some cases, leave due to burnout (Freidman, 2002), lack of PD (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Freidman, 2002), among other reasons. Nevertheless,

researchers say that some principals perceive PD (Jacob et al., 2015; Ng & Szeto, 2016), coaching and mentoring (James-Ward, 2013; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014), and PLCs (Brown & Tobis, 2013; Honig & Rainey, 2014) as support strategies that lead to their retention. With this understanding, a principal's confidence, or self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Federici & Skaalvik, 2012) in their ability to effectively execute IL, ultimately, affects their decision to leave or remain in their role. Therefore, this study seeks to fill a gap in research to determine whether veteran secondary principals perceive their self-efficacy hinders or enhances their decision to remain in their roles as instructional leaders.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This chapter provides an overview of the methodological approach used in the research. It includes the research questions, setting, participants, research design, methods for analysis, approaches to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations associated with the study.

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions of veteran secondary principals and what they believe shapes and contributes to their retention as instructional leaders. A qualitative approach was most appropriate because this methodology is designed to gather meanings and understandings of other people's views (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Specifically, this design is for "study[ing] things in their natural setting, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 3). The following research questions guided this study:

1. How do veteran secondary principals perceive self-efficacy contributed to or hindered their role (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state) as instructional leaders?
2. What role did self-efficacy play in veteran secondary principals' experiences as instructional leaders?
3. What did veteran secondary principals perceive contributed to their lengthy tenure as instructional leaders?

Setting

This research took place in two Texas suburban school districts (See Table 2). The first school district was referred to as Triangle Independent School District (TISD). TISD serves about 39,400 students in 43 schools, which includes 22 elementary schools, seven middle

schools, six high schools, and three campuses that are combined middle and high schools. Student demographics consist of 65% Hispanic, 18% African American, 11% White, and 6% Other, with 77% of students being economically disadvantaged. TISD has an overall B rating on a scale of A-F for state level academic performance (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

The second district for the study used the pseudonym Rectangle Independent School District (RISD). RISD is comprised of 46 schools of which 23 are elementary, six intermediate, seven middle, and eight high schools. With a student population of approximately 35,700, demographically 33% are White, 30% African American, 26% Hispanics, and 5% Other, with 43% classified as economically disadvantaged. RISD has an A rating in student achievement (Texas Education Agency, 2019).

Table 2

Number of District Principals by Grade Levels

District Name	Elementary	Middle	High	Combined
TISD	22	7	8	3*
RISD	29**	7	9	n/a

*TISD has 3 additional principals who serve combined middle and high school campuses.
**RISD has 6 Intermediate campuses (5th-6th grades) in which principals are categorized as elementary for the sake of this study.

These districts were selected because they have been successful in the state-level A-F academic assessments even though they have large populations typically viewed as at-risk of low performance. Second, these were convenient locations because I know many district employees. I have worked in one of the districts and have former colleagues in the other. These connections were beneficial in recruiting participants. Next, conducting the study in two school districts increased the potential participant pool, so I was able to recruit enough principals to participate

in the study. It also helped determine if and what commonalities exist within and between school districts to better note possible strategies that may be effective in other districts. Last, recruiting from two districts allowed the focus to be on secondary principals, because retention rates are lower at this level than in elementary settings (Fuller & Young, 2009). These steps increased the potential for rich, thick descriptions of their experiences. Therefore, the study addressed a critical issue in K12 education.

Research Design

In this qualitative study, there were four sources of data: (a) online-zoom interviews with veteran secondary principals, (b) a background questionnaire from the principal participants, and (c) an online zoom interview with a district administrator from each selected district, and analytic memos. The goal was to have 10 principals participate in the study. This number was selected because Creswell (1998) says it is an appropriate number of participants to define a phenomenon. In addition, the interviews with district-level supervisors were intended to provide supplemental information about what district supports are in place to help principals develop their IL skills and contribute to a fuller portrait of district resources.

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) and ISDs approvals, recruitment of participants began. Email addresses were obtained from district websites of secondary principals of TISD and RISD. Between both districts, a recruitment email (Appendix A) was sent to 18 principals explaining the purpose of the study and asking them to respond if they met two criteria: (a) serve as middle or high school principal and (b) have five or more years as a principal. My initial email secured four principals, so I re-sent the recruitment email in hopes of securing more participants. With no response, I used snowball sampling (Yin, 2016) where willing participants recommended other principals who met the criteria. From this strategy, two

more principals agreed to participate. In a third attempt of contacting them by email, both principals responded. One principal stated that it was a unique year for them because of the pandemic and time was a limited resource. After I shared the time required to participate, the principal never replied again. The other principal noted that they would be glad to help. Thus, the findings are based on the perceptions of six principals, all from the same district except for one. (See Table 3 for principal background information). All principals completed and returned the emailed, informed consent form (Appendix C) and the demographic questionnaire (Appendix G). The questionnaire helped ensure that the participants met the primary criteria for inclusion while providing some basic background information and other contextual data such as their number of years as principal, previous roles prior to being a principal, and professional development training attended since being a principal. All selected principals for the study were contacted by email to secure a date and time for the interview. Participants were given pseudonyms to establish confidentiality throughout the study.

Table 3

Principal Demographic Information

Name	Campus Level	Total Principal Experience	Years at Current School	Race	Gender	District
Zane Morehouse	High School	20	11	White	Male	RISD
Madeline Langston	High School	12.5	8	Black	Female	RISD
Daphney Carruthers	High School	7	7	Black	Female	RISD
Chase Dempsey	Middle School	6	6	Black	Male	TISD
Axe Buchanan*	Middle School	4	2	Black	Male	RISD
Blake Easley	Middle School	12.5	.5	Black	Male	RISD

*Does not meet 5-year criteria but was recommended based on professional experiences by eligible participant.

While I initiated recruitment of the principals, I further identified district-level personnel from TISD and RISD to gather insights on district efforts to support and retain principals. The purpose was to get an understanding of systems they have in place to develop their principals as instructional leaders and strategies they have for retention. Email addresses were obtained from district websites. A recruitment email (Appendix B) explaining the study was sent to district personnel who directly supervise principals. The individuals who responded were sent an informed consent document (Appendix C) to sign agreeing to voluntary participation. Initially, one principal supervisor from TISD agreed to participate in the study. However, due to miscommunication, the interview did not take place at the scheduled time. I attempted to reschedule but the supervisor did not respond to the email requests. In relation to RISD, two supervisors showed interest initially in participating in the study. However, only one responded to the request. Stephanie Foster, a pseudonym, is an area superintendent of seven years (former principal of 14 years) and the sole supervisor who completed all requirements to be a part of the study.

The semi-structured interviews with all the participants took place between December 2020 and January 2021 via online Zoom meetings, averaging about 30-50 minutes. The same set of questions were asked of each principal (Appendix D), and I probed as necessary to address any points that were unclear. For example, I had participants answer questions using acronyms, so I probed to get their understanding of the acronym. Likewise, a semi-structured interview with RISD's district personnel took place addressing questions (Appendix E) unique to her position (See Table 4 for district supports offered and actions taken for retention).

The final data source were analytic memos. These reflection notes (Appendix F) were written after each interview to track my initial thoughts of what went well, what needed improving, and possible follow-up questions for the interviews that followed. This approach was helpful in cross referencing notes and identifying similar responses between principals at the surface level. Furthermore, the reflection notes helped me capture follow-up questions in future interviews, which solicited more detailed responses.

Data Analysis

All interviews were recorded and immediately sent to a secure online-third party company (www.rev.com) for transcription. Upon receiving the transcript from the company within 24 hours, I reviewed them for accuracy. Then, I emailed the transcripts back to participants to provide them the opportunity to review and correct, as needed. Participants were given one week to ensure they were communicating what they intended. This was important and necessary because several participants made changes to their responses when they realized their responses did not convey what they hoped to communicate. For instance, one participant made grammatical changes, while two other principals focused on making their responses clearer. The essential meaning that was conveyed during the interview was not changed by the participants.

Once participants returned their transcripts to me, I began coding. Coding is a form of deep reflection of analyzing and interpreting data meanings to look for recurring patterns (Miles et al., 2014). Specifically, I utilized Creswell's (2004) five-step coding process. To begin, I read the first transcript. I annotated codes line-by-line in the margins, while underlining and highlighting key words from the initial read and repeated this process for each transcript. Second, after I completed the initial read and annotating of all transcripts, I divided the text of each transcript into segments. I took the segments from the first transcript and compared them to

segments of the second transcript, repeating the process for all eight transcripts. Third, I labeled segments with codes for each transcript, respectively. By labeling, I was able to identify similarities and differences which helped in recognizing patterns across participants. This iterative process is also referred to as the constant comparative method (Creswell, 2013). This means, I returned to previous transcripts to compare segments after identifying a new code to make sure I captured it within each transcript. Fourth, I reduced the redundancy of codes. This was helpful because it was evident that many of the principals were semantically saying the same thing using different terminology.

Last, I still used the constant comparative method as I moved from open coding to axial coding, where I linked common ideas to larger themes (Sandana, 2009) across transcripts to create broader categories about why veteran principals remained in their roles. This process took place with several reads of transcripts. After developing the themes, I coded the transcripts one more time applying Bandura's self-efficacy framework and the four sources of information (Bandura, 1977) to note the role self-efficacy played, if any, in their experiences. I also employed Creswell's (2004) five-step coding process to code the transcript of district personnel.

Trustworthiness

Creswell and Miller (2000) note nine ways to establish validity in a qualitative study. For this study, I used four strategies to ensure trustworthiness. First, I employed researcher reflexivity. This strategy allowed me to be transparent about my own experiences and biases related to the research topic. I understood that I have views on this topic based on my personal encounters with principals in relation to their IL effectiveness (see chapter 1). However, my goal was to seek to understand the principals' viewpoints and not express my own. The strategies I list below helped minimize any potential effect of my own biases on the findings.

Second, peer debriefing was also used to validate the study. This included using another doctoral student with experience in qualitative studies as a peer reviewer to challenge data coding, person biases, and assumptions. This person "can provide written feedback to researchers or simply serve as a sounding board for ideas" (Creswell & Miller, 2000, p. 129). The peer reviewed my coding of themes to ensure that my biases and experiences did not influence the creditability of the findings. We discussed coding schemes and at any point of disparity we discussed the content until we reached a mutually agreed upon code/theme. This person and I communicated weekly through emails and Zoom meetings to discuss the coding process in a timely way.

Third, I used member checking to establish credibility. As I mentioned earlier, each participant received the transcript of their interview to approve, clarify, or amend responses, as necessary. Participants were given one week to respond to my request for feedback on their transcript. All participants responded with updates or confirmation to move forward with coding. Additionally, I shared preliminary themes with the participants, in which they were given one week to view and note any issues they may have with the findings. Four of the participants responded noting they viewed the themes. None had issues with what was shared.

Last, I used thick, rich descriptions of my setting, participants, and themes. The details provided more contextual meaning to the study. It further allowed readers to feel or relate to principals' experiences described in the study, because they will hear the voices of the participants.

Limitations

In seeking to understand why veteran secondary principals remain in their roles, this study has limitations. First, this study only reflected the viewpoints of the six principals who

participated in the study from a small suburban region in Texas and does not reflect viewpoints of all principals serving in the selected school districts, other Texas school districts, or other states or districts. Further, one of them was not a veteran principal as defined by the study having only been in the role four years. Still, that variability provided a broader understanding of the issues of principals and if time at a school drastically changed their experiences. Moreover, although Creswell (1998) recommended 10 participants for saturation, the participants essentially shared similar perceptions of their experiences. Thus, there was saturation of the main themes that emerged from the data.

Second, this study only focused on middle and high school veteran principals. As a result, the perspectives were limited to why they remained in their roles. Other secondary principals and principals at other levels may have very different experiences.

Third, these principals may have been reticent to share their true feelings about their role for fear that any negative views may lead to adverse ramifications for them. Further, this reticence may have been exacerbated because of my own role as an administrator and the involvement of a district administrator as an interview subject. Nevertheless, I worked to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of my participants, so they felt comfortable sharing their experiences.

Last, data collection took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, which may have impacted the principals' responses and experiences. One of the principals who initially showed interest in participating decided against it because they did not have time. This may have been a direct result of the pandemic. It may also have affected other potential participants. That said, the principals who did participate in this study did not convey that the pandemic hindered their

ability to lead their campuses. Perhaps their longevity as veteran principals were significant to their efficacy to problem solve during this crisis.

Summary

This chapter explained the methodology that was utilized to better understand the perceptions of veteran secondary principals' self-efficacy and what they perceive shapes or contributes to their decision to remain in their role as an IL. It included the research questions, setting, participants, research design, methods to analyze data, approaches to ensure trustworthiness, and limitations associated with the study.

Chapter 4

Presentation of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore perceptions of secondary veteran principals from two Texas suburban school districts on reasons they remain Instructional Leaders (IL). Using Bandura's self-efficacy theoretical framework, this research focused on better understanding whether a principal's effectiveness in their role is contingent upon the level of confidence they have in themselves and their skill sets, thus impacting their decision to stay. Bandura (1977) said through the four sources of information: *master experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion,* and *physiological state* that a person can gain or lose confidence in their ability to execute a task. Through the exploration of the principals' instructional leadership experiences and the impact self-efficacy had on their decision to remain principals, four themes emerged: (a) steps toward preparation, (b) aspects of instructional leadership, (c) reasons for becoming and remaining instructional leaders, and (d) sources of motivation.

Steps Toward Preparation

The participants reflected over how prepared they were to be principals in the early stages of their careers and things that contributed to their long-term effectiveness. Zane, an RISD principal with 11 years at his current campus, shared, "now, you're never fully prepared because it's not what you think it is." He continued, "it looks like one job, and then once you get in the seat, it's very different than it looks." Like Zane, Chase, a six-year veteran principal, recognized the disparity, too, as he remarked, "I knew what I thought the position was" but "I would say I wasn't really prepared until I actually took the seat." In fact, many of the principals felt the actual role was very different from their initial expectations. Yet, mentorship, professional

development, and professional learning communities (PLCs) and networking were things the principals said impacted their longevity.

Mentorship

Mentorship is when a “seasoned leader helps a protégé place theory and practice in the context of experience” (p. 2) and is essential to principal development (Gimbel & Kefor, 2018). All but one of the participants discussed learning from their former principals and superintendents. This was the case for Blake, an RISD veteran principal of 12 years (0.5 years at current school), who shared, “I worked under a veteran principal, who had been a principal for like 30 years, and I learned a lot under her.” He stated succinctly that he benefitted from working with someone who had considerable professional experience.

Some of the principals reflected on the specific things they learned from a single mentor. For instance, Zane had a former principal who discussed key topics like “hiring and budgeting and creating a master schedule.” This information helped Zane build skill sets that were beneficial to the onset of his career. He noted her intentions:

> I worked for an experienced principal, and it was her goal, to develop her successor. So, she included me on a lot of things that weren't necessarily my job, because she was trying to prepare me to take over for her…. I think she did a good job in preparing me.

Likewise, Madeline, an eight-year RISD veteran, expressed how her mentor was, “just so full of wisdom…He called it Principal 101.” Principal 101 was a name given around an impromptu amount of time allotted for mentoring. Madeline continued:

> He would call us in, his APs [assistant principals], and say, "Don't ever do this," or "I made this mistake. Do it like this." Or "Don't forget, I did this the right way. This is the right way to do it.’ So, I think that mentoring helped.

From these examples, these participants felt better prepared for the instructional leadership role because of their experiences. Zane appreciated his mentor making it a “priority” to teach him things beyond “discipline and bus duty,” which set him up for success. Likewise, Madeline’s confidence in her ability to execute the principal role increased from listening to her principal’s advice of what to do and what not to do. As a result, she felt better equipped assuming the role.

Additionally, some participants shared the benefits of having multiple mentors. Daphney, a seven-year veteran principal, felt advice from numerous people was very “effective” in her development. Likewise, Blake described how several “mentors” helped him get “ready to become an administrator.” Under their guidance, Blake gained skills related to supervising “lunch duty,” building a “master schedule” and executing standardized “testing.” His mentors were an asset to his preparation for the principal role.

Similarly, Axe, who had been a principal for four years with two years at his current school, shared how having numerous individuals helped build his efficacy as a leader as he voiced:

> I have several mentors. They play different roles… I have one mentor; we talk about instruction. And that's just the thing we talk about. I have one mentor, we talk about emerging research, and just some of the theories that are out there. I have one mentor; we talk about leadership. We talk about career and charting a path career-wise along the way. So, having that mentorship and others investing in you as well as you investing in them…has played a huge part. I couldn't have done it without any of them.

Axe felt his effectiveness as a principal was sustainable because he was able to gain instructional leadership and other practical skills from different perspectives. Based on his need, he knew who to contact for guidance.

Ultimately, whether the principals had one mentor or many, it was apparent that they perceived that their efficacy was impacted mostly by observing their mentors. Through these vicarious experiences, the principals expressed how witnessing others execute the principal role was significant to their growth, preparation, and success as ILs. Chase, for instance, said he "watched previous principals…and what they did" to better understand the role. Likewise, Daphney voiced that her self-reliance as a leader grew by "watching people." She added, "I'm very observant." These participants learned from leaders who they believed were strong.

Blake admitted that he was able to take the lessons from watching a strong leader who had a different management style than he did. He explained, "when you work under somebody, you see some things that you could do. I could never do her style of leadership, because she's very type A, but I did watch." He expressed that although he learned a lot, he was keen enough to tease out what practices would work for him. Thus, he only applied the skills that were most effective to his leadership approach as principal. However, not all lessons came from the ideal role model. Madeline and Daphney acknowledged that sometimes they learned by observing "someone who wasn't a great leader" and saw "what not to do" (Madeline).

Most of the participants felt mentorship in some manner contributed to their success as principals. However, Sciarappa and Mason (2014) note that typically mentors are part of a formal program to build and strengthen principal instructional leadership and capacity; yet none of the participants mentioned being a part of a formal mentoring program administered by the district. Nonetheless, some participants spoke about professional encounters they had with district administration that proved valuable in their growth as an IL. For example, Axe said, "I had an excellent area sup. [superintendent], highly seasoned, mature lady…And she really helped me with the [district] way to do things." Likewise, Madeline mentioned how she

benefited from the supervision of an Area Superintendent, stating: “He's [the area superintendent] been doing these meetings with us…where he sits and just talks through situations with us or listens to us or asks our thoughts on our leadership style. He calls it a ‘grow’ meeting.” Madeline acknowledged these sessions were very helpful in her growth. Zane also thought such guidance was valuable when he said, “I have a supervisor who supervises all the high school principals, so we meet regularly. I think that's a good support.” Despite having no formal district system of mentoring for principals, their encounters with district administration were helpful because the principals were able to benefit from sound advice given by their superiors. In fact, RISD’s area superintendent, Stephanie, valued these encounters as well, admitting, “I take the success of my principals personally. If my principals are not successful, then I feel like I own part of that because I was their supervisor, their coach, their mentor.” Her words reveal a symbiotic relationship with her principals where she links their success or failure to her own.

Although these exchanges were helpful to the veteran principals, several still felt a more formal program would be helpful. For instance, Daphney explained:

> I would think it'd be important for districts to provide an onboarding process for principals and assistant principals. Because a lot of times you just get thrown in there…I think you need to have mentors for principals to help them in the onboarding process, especially if it's their first year.

She felt principals were more likely to be successful as ILs if they had mentor support to learn district expectations in a more formal manner from the outset. Similarly, Madeline also wished she had this type of mentorship:

> I wish I had the ability to have a conversation with my supervisor once a month just on how to grow and not feel like it was punitive, like he's documenting me or taking down information to get me in trouble. Just someone who's genuinely interested in helping me grow as a leader.

Chase, a six-year veteran principal, and the only principal who did not experience mentorship in preparation for the role, agreed with the plea for a district-sponsored formal orientation of some sort. He stated, “I would say some type of program or coaching or mentorship prior to someone taking the seat would probably benefit.” He added:

> I think there should be like a principal, like internship for a year. To where that principal sits alongside with a seasoned principal and sits in meetings, conversations, phone calls. They are working together side by side so that principal intern can see what the job actually entails.

As principal, Chase faced challenges related to “interpreting law,” obtaining “community support,” dealing with faculty that “quit” their jobs, among “a multitude of things.” In this case, mentoring in some form early in his tenure as principal “would have helped,” but he “didn’t have that.” So, he was left to address a range of difficult situations without the benefit of a mentor. Nevertheless, most of the participants found mentorship helpful in preparing them for principalship and sustaining them as instructional leaders.

Professional Development

Professional Development (PD) refers to ongoing learning opportunities for individuals, like principals, to grow competence in their craft and is most beneficial when it is collaborative (Jensen & Moller, 2013), job-embedded (Houle, 2006), and differentiated for their specific circumstances (Cieminski, 2018). The principals in this study felt that PD, as defined, was

instrumental to their growth and sustainability as ILs. The participants voiced that attending "conferences and superintendent sessions" (Madeline) about "leadership" and "being an instructional leader" (Chase) contributed to their success as principals. From these encounters, they were able to gain skills to better lead their campuses in areas like analyzing data and coaching teachers. More specifically, the principals highlighted the PD needed prior to assuming the role, the most impactful PDs they experienced along their journeys, the importance of individualizing PD, and the initiative they took to develop themselves professionally.

First, the participants felt there were certain PDs that they needed prior to assuming the role as principal. Axe wished he had PD in "human resources, documentation, and training for dealing with difficult employees." Daphney felt she needed training on how to have "crucial conversations" and "handle conflict," especially "when there are conflicts with teachers." Zane expressed he needed:

> More training on handling money. One thing that you get told a lot when you become a principal is how to get yourself fired quickly. One of them is mishandling money. Well, most administrators were former teachers, so we were trained to be a social studies teacher or an English teacher or a math teacher. We weren't trained how to do a budget, and we get some training when we get our master's degree. You get your master's degree, and then you get a job as an assistant principal, and you're assistant principal for several years, and you don't ever see or hear anything about the budget again…. Once you become a principal, then it's like, okay, create a budget, manage your money. I think it would be good to have more training on how to handle money, what you can and can't do with money.

The participants named many topics, such as working with others and handing the budget, that would have been helpful to know prior to assuming the principal role.

Next, the principals talked passionately about the PDs that were memorable and most impactful in building their leadership capacity. Some PDs were helpful because the principal and teachers could attend the same PD and work together to improve student achievement. For example, one of the "most meaningful" PD for Zane was AVID (Advancement Via Individual Determination). The goal of AVID is to support non-traditional students, who on average make B to C grades on their report cards to better prepare them for college. The trainings are unique because they provide strategies to principals, teachers, counselors, and others on how to strengthen students' writing, inquiry, collaboration, organizational, and reading skills from the individual's specific position. Zane felt AVID training was "helpful in giving me some tools" because he was able to use the information and strategies from these trainings to better collaborate and guide teachers on instructional practices to implement into their classroom activities. His efforts resulted in an increase in student performance.

Some trainings were useful in teaching principals how to vet resources. For instance, curriculum training was another major PD the principals felt supported their growth and instructional leadership capacity. Stephanie, the RISD's area superintendent, stated they had "curriculum calibration appointments" with principals regularly. The idea behind curriculum training, audits, and calibration was that it showed the principals how to assess materials and determine if teachers align instruction and assignments to appropriate grade-level curriculum and rigor regarding state standards. Zane found this training specifically helped him learn how to evaluate curriculum as he shared, "we have a structure in which we calibrate our curriculum, and I think that that helps me as an instructional leader because I have a framework." Madeline also

expressed, "...those curriculum trainings with the English and math people are probably the most beneficial." Daphney spoke to the impact of these trainings as she discovered, "that's when my eyes were opened to [what] an instructional leader is." Similarly, Axe stated that the various curriculum trainings "really changed my life and the way I did things in terms of being a principal." The sentiments surrounding their remarks regarding curriculum complemented previous research that claimed some principals have left their roles specifically due of lack of PD in using curriculum effectively (Ng & Szeto, 2016; Superville, 2014). The participants agreed that these trainings were particularly helpful to them as instructional leaders because they had a long-reaching impact on their efficacy as principals.

Additionally, some trainings offered ways for the principals to reflect on their leadership practices. For example, the principals discussed how the Flip Flippen Leadership Blueprint training impacted their effectiveness. Flip Flippen is a framework that provides leaders with a detailed outline in helping them determine what behaviors they and others see and do not see in them as leaders. The principals took a profile test to determine strengths in team building and communicating effectively. They then identified constraints that would prevent them from leading most effectively and created an action plan that would mitigate those obstacles. The experience resulted in the participants understanding how their behaviors impacted their leadership practices and determined if adjustments were necessary to better perform as principals. Daphney expressed how the Flip Flippen training was significant to her leadership journey as she voiced, "I mean that really has ignited me, and [I] just changed some things that I'm going to be tweaking as a leader." Zane had similar feelings as he learned that he was viewed as "more of a nurturing person" with a strong sense of "self-confidence." Several of the participants thought this training contributed to their effectiveness as ILs.

Despite these positive comments, in general, the principals felt the trainings were uneven. Blake concluded that district PD “for me, it's hit and miss.” Others commented that there was an issue about the general approach to many topics. Although some PD topics were appropriate for all ILs, like learning about “student service protocols” and “compliance trainings,” by and large, the participants thought PD should be more individualized. They acknowledged that their schools were different as it pertained to student demographics and economic disadvantaged status. Thus, tailoring PD to their circumstances would afford them opportunities to better respond to the specific needs of their campuses. For example, Chase shared how PD should target campus needs because principals’ needs differ. He expressed:

> We can go to the PD all day long and learn all these different things, and these strategies about how somebody else has done something, but we won't really know how that works on our own campuses because everybody’s campus is different. And yes, it gives you an insight. It gives you an idea of how to approach things, but it's still, every campus is different because whatever works for you may not work for me.

Likewise, Daphney felt the topics needed to be handled in different ways for new and veteran principals, too. She felt it was “wasting my time… I was looking for a little bit more in-depth.” She projected that districts should “individualize” the content “because there may be some people, they're at a certain level, so you come in there operating in this everybody at the same level, you miss people like me.” Daphney felt PD would be more beneficial if tiered from introductory training for new principals to in-depth training for longer serving leaders like her. Districts that do not provide differentiated PD could have principals leave a session with information that does not serve their instructional needs to lead their campuses (Houle, 2006; Jacob et al., 2015; Stewart & Matthews, 2015). This is important to note because Cieminski

(2018) found principal retention rates were increased by PD that specifically addressed campus needs so principals could refine their own instructional leadership skills.

Last, because there were few formal, tailored efforts to assist the principals' capacity development, the participants reported they needed to be proactive to find appropriate trainings. Zane, Blake, and Madeline all shared that when their district did not provide a particular training to strengthen their skill sets, they took the initiative to grow themselves as leaders. As Blake explained, "it's the principal's job to go out and find your own staff development." Similarly, Zane shared that when he continued his education through a "superintendent certification program" that he gained "more training on budget," which was "helpful" to him as a principal. Likewise, Chase spoke about how "getting the doctorate in educational leadership" helped him "form…ideas and perspective about how to approach certain situations." In the same way, Madeline took the initiative to grow herself as she described her experience as a first-year principal. In learning her role, she said she went "to every training I could go to." She continued, "I learned for myself so that I could support my teachers better." Overall, the principals became equipped by finding the trainings they needed to serve their schools.

According to Fink and Resnick (2001), principals need PD to execute elements of instructional leadership effectively. Likewise, Jacob et al. (2015) found that a principal's efficacy and retention is higher when trainings build leadership capacity. Based on the principals' experiences with key PD from their districts like curriculum training and Flip Flippen, it was evident that PD was vital to their effectiveness as ILs. They not only gained efficacy in mastering certain skills, but confidence in their leadership skills was built by listening and watching others. Even in times when the districts did not meet PD needs, the principals saw the benefit in developing themselves as they took the initiative to seek out their own training.

Professional Learning Communities and Networking

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are formal support groups with the purpose of strengthening collaborative processes typically with teachers (Brown & Tobis, 2013; Dufour, 2015). There was evidence that PLCs proved helpful to teachers, so they applied this same concept to principals' sustainability and found it also improved principals' IL development (Cranston, 2009; Honig & Rainey, 2014) and retention (Brown & Tobis, 2013). Chase, a middle school principal, voiced that a PLC was, "the catalyst of being an instructional leader." With neither district having structured, formalized PLCs, the principals' experiences varied.

Some participants created their own PLCs. Axe, a middle school principal for four years, mentioned, "I just took it upon myself… "to partner" with other "principals." He contacted principals at "five different elementary schools that fed into [his] school." Having no elementary experience, Axe said he wanted to "see what they were doing in elementary" and "how they were preparing the students before they got to me." He explained that the principals "met quarterly" to discuss "practices" taking place within the entire "feeder pattern." The group talked about "strategies, initiatives, trainings, and things that we were rolling out." From these meetings, Axe made efforts to "align" activities at the middle school to make for a smoother transition for the students. He considered the experience "a true blessing" to "professionally...work [with]those other five principals." He believed the PLC concept was significant to his leadership because he was able to apply things, he learned from collaborating with these principals at feeder campuses.

Like Axe, Madeline, a high school principal for over 12 years, also shared how she created her own PLC due to lack of structure in the district. She reflected on the specific areas where the PLC helped her improved her school's success:

> …we share our ideas on attendance, on math instruction [which] has been our focus in our conversations, seeing how kids grow from fifth grade, sixth grade, all the way up to 12th grade in math is something we've been working on.

Madeline felt the PLC provided an opportunity to discuss the progress of students before they got to her campus. Thus, these conversations allowed her to better prepare interventions or extensions necessary to address her students' needs when they arrived at her campus. Both Axe and Madeline took time to initiate PLC gatherings because they felt the meetings strengthened their instructional leadership for their campuses.

Not all participants had the benefit of engaging in a PLC. Zane, for one, had not "really experienced that [PLC] formally." Even though he found "a lot of value in collaborating" with his peers, he admitted that he "would enjoy having dedicated time to get together for a PLC." He wanted to have an official, organized PLC that included ongoing joint efforts to strategize to improve student engagement and instructional practices. Likewise, Daphney, a high school principal for seven years, also had not experienced a formal PLC even though she did talk to colleagues. She admitted, "we don't do the in-depth talk…because PLC you're looking at data, you're looking at plans." Daphney added, "I really think that districts now are starting to see" how necessary PLCs are to facilitate principals' growth and development as leaders. Therefore, she had hoped they would begin to offer PLCs in the future.

Although PLCs refer to formal conversations with peers, Ng and Szeto (2016) found that less formal networking opportunities were important for principals to gather and learn from one another to better lead their schools, too. Cieminski (2018) noted that such *collegial relationships* build support systems for principals to have a sense of belonging as instructional leaders. Some of the participants relied on these less formal conversations. For instance, Zane noted, "we [other

principals in the district] have gotten together on our own to collaborate over the years." Yet, without the formal structure, he confided that "sometimes people are more willing to get together than others." In other words, the group's commitment was not as strong as it might be in an official PLC. That said, some participants met with other principals to fill in learning gaps. For example, Blake said, "I got a group of guys that I actually started…we meet about once or twice a year." He continued, "if I don't know something, I don't want them [the district] to know that I don't know…If they [the district] asked me to go to an elementary school tomorrow, I wouldn't know what in the world I was doing. But I guarantee you, I can call on about five or six guys." For Blake and Zane, their peer network provided valuable support, as needed.

Other participants also found value in these less structured networking groups. For instance, Madeline met with individuals in neighboring districts and found "keeping lines of communication open" helpful to her experience. She expressed:

> I talk to other principals all across the district and all across the… area all the time asking questions…That has strengthened my leadership skills…. So, I continue to ask my friends, ask peers, and then ask central admin as well. What are principals doing in your district? How is your district handling this?

From communicating with principals and central administration in various locations, Madeline was able to build her efficacy as a principal.

Other participants voiced other benefits. For instance, Axe felt these connections were important to the advancement of his career He explained:

> Because in education, it is who you know. It is. I mean you can get some jobs sometimes, depending on the situation, based on your skill. But it's going to be who you know. If they don't know you, or somebody doesn't know you, who can speak for you, may not be

> the person that hires, but if somebody can't echo your name and say, 'I know [what] this person can do. I've seen them or I know them,' it goes a long way.

For Axe, one benefit of networking was that these contacts could potentially assist him when he sought new positions in the future. Other participants voiced the same perspective.

In summary, none of the participants had experienced a formal district-organized PLC with principals. For the few participants who initiated their own PLC structure and were successful, it was evident that it helped them build their instructional leadership skills (Dufour, 2015). The remaining principals, in this case, found that networking with other colleagues helped them build their efficacy as well.

Aspects of Instructional Leadership

Instructional Leadership has become the main responsibility of school principals in student achievement (Mitani, 2019). However, there is considerable ambiguity in literature about what it entails, which has made it difficult for principals to effectively execute the role (Keith, 2011; Rezvi, 2008). The participants in this study offered general descriptions of the term. Zane (11-year veteran) said an instructional leader needs, "to be involved in academics and instruction." Blake (12-year veteran at previous school) reported, "you're the principal teacher on that campus," and emphasized the necessity to simultaneously execute "management" and "instruction." Likewise, Axe (two years at current school) noted that an instructional leader needed to find balance between "leadership" and "instruction." The other principals shared their understandings of the term, in which their descriptions supported studies that claim the term is too broad and needs to be clearly defined to support principals' effectiveness (Kraft & Gilmour, 2016; Welton et al., 2013). Overall, the participants linked instructional leadership with four

themes that were relevant to their role: instructional accountability, data analysis, building and maintaining relationships, and associated strengths and challenges of leading.

Instructional Accountability

The principals in the study agreed that instructional accountability was central to their job expectations. Although there was still a component of balancing the managerial side of leadership, every participant, in one way or another, insinuated that instruction was the priority. As Blake stated succinctly, “the instructional piece is first.” He added “without the instructional piece, then it's hard for anything else to fall in line.” In this case, his priorities were clear. Daphney (seven-year veteran) echoed this view:

> Yes, you're principal but the instruction starts with you, not with the teachers in the classroom. They are the ones that will implement and be able to get it out to the students, but it still has to start with the head in terms of the mission and vision, and how.

Daphney felt her role was making sure her teachers understood what their purpose was surrounding student learning, identifying goals related to progress and achievement, and creating actions steps they would take instructionally to attain their goals. Madeline (eight-year veteran) added she was “continuously talking, talking, talking instruction” with her teachers. Blake also advocated that as a principal, “you have to walk the walk, and talk the talk as far as instruction goes.” The participants felt that continual conversations with teachers about instruction were a major focus of their jobs.

Additionally, some participants talked about the impact of using instruction effectively. For example, Axe explained how he learned how to use instruction as a teacher through various trainings. The knowledge he gained from those PD sessions improved his leadership effectiveness as a principal:

> Once I really began to understand what it [instruction] meant to have a vertically aligned, or horizontally aligned, or viable curriculum…. just cognitive rigor, cognitive requirements, content, context, differentiation. Once I really got deep and began to learn what that really looked like, it [instruction] was like a spark for me.

As Axe learned how to use instruction appropriately, he felt more confident in leading his campus. He ensured teachers worked with one another to connect curriculum from teacher to teacher in the same grade levels. Likewise, he guided teachers to streamline curriculum with other teachers who taught grades below and above one another. This was true for Zane as well, who discussed how curriculum audits assisted him in learning how to better align instruction to teacher resources based on grade-level needs and associated rigor with state assessments. He expressed, "I can look at materials and instruction and see if they're aligned to the course TEKS [Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills] and SEs [Student Expectations] or not. And I know what to do about them [resources and instruction] if they're not aligned." Zane felt more competent in leading his teachers because of his ability to assess and correct instructional alignment issues. This focus on instruction supports Honig and Rainey's (2014) notion that a strong "instructional focus" (p. 15) strengthens principals' leadership skills and effectiveness.

Data Analysis

The participants in this study also perceived data analysis as a key factor to their success as ILs. Each of them discussed the importance of student achievement and how assessments paint a picture of progress or regression. Chase (six-year veteran) reported, "It's all about data. It's all about testing," referencing annual state standardized tests.

Some principals used student data to improve results to maintain their reputation. For example, Madeline, said, "the number one criteria is always the scores at the end of the year."

However, her viewpoint on data was twofold. First, she felt like everyone worked together to be successful as she expressed, “I always tell teachers that I'm always on your side, I'm always on the kids' side.” Madeline “want[ed] people to do their best.” Yet, Madeline noted, “there are only two people's names on those scores at the end of the year. That's the superintendent and the principal.” With her name on the reports, she stated, “I'm never going to do anything that's attached to my name that's going to cause a foul result.” From this statement, if data showed low student performance, it would be a negative reflection on her, and she did not want that for herself. Because principals carry the accountability burden, it was important to them to ensure student achievement. Madeline, for example, was intentional about making sure her actions did not create, “a foul result” or hinderance to student performance on tests.

Participants also discussed the pressure they felt from district officials to increase student performance. According to area superintendent Stephanie, “data screams the truth.” With this understanding, Axe expressed the stress he felt to improve student achievement data. He shared his discontent with the way his district expected him to use data, “it's exponential about the things that are thrown at us, the initiatives, the different data points that the district is always looking to see [if we] are …being successful.” Axe felt like he was constantly expected to reach district expectations regarding an increase in student achievement, but without proper guidance. He said, “it's just trying to keep up in a sense to a game that you don't have the rules to.” By this, Axe meant that the district’s lack of communication often made him feel like he had to figure things out on his own. The stresses were the same for Chase, who was a principal in another district, when he voiced, “it's all about improving student outcomes.” He explained how, “if you're not on track to doing that, then there's a whole bunch of plans and protocols and procedures and meetings and coaching meetings.” These statements from Chase and Axe

reflected the overwhelming ramifications that landed on them when students did not perform according to district expectations.

Another key aspect to the principal's experiences was how they used multiple sources of data to drive their leadership practices. Some participants discussed how they used student assessments to improve student performance. For example, Zane said, "we've made adjustments to our school based on our student data." For example, once he got results from a "state test" and recognized that "kids are struggling in a particular area," which led them to implement changes to the curriculum to improve instruction "to meet the needs of our kids." Daphney also discussed how she used "assessments" to identify "best practices…about strategies and engagement of students and how they [students] are responding" to increase achievement. Assessments afforded the principals the opportunity to understand student strengths and weaknesses directly and act upon the information.

Besides assessments, some principals used other data sources to help students progress. Blake admitted to "looking at everything" to better understand issues on his campus. For example, by looking at other forms of data he noticed "how many kids we have in school suspension" and "how many kids we got that are failing classes." Blake understood that when kids were not in class it impacted their achievement. Therefore, he used these data to implement practices that would keep students in class and assist them in learning. This participant's use of multiple information sources provided a broader perspective on what may be impacting student learning. Blake used the information from many categories "to make changes as change is necessary" and made sure teachers were able to determine and implement the appropriate interventions necessary to improve scores overall.

Additionally, a few principals discussed how they used teacher statistics to improve student achievement. Zane, for instance, observed teachers in classrooms to see "what they're [teachers] doing." Afterwards, he provided teachers with feedback and resources "to help them [teachers] be successful." He believed, "if they're [teachers] successful," then "our school's going to be successful." By supporting his teachers, Zane concluded, "the data has shown it [intervention to meet student needs] to be a great success." Likewise, Daphney observed teachers to draw instructional conclusions. She said, "I'm watching basically by data…and making sure that I am providing them [teachers] with the resources." Daphney specifically looked for "different kinds of pieces of data" like "visible and observable, measurable things that, from teachers, will indicate where they are, or if they need additional support, or additional coaching." The information she gathered gave her a comprehensive view of campus performance, which guided her actions. Both principals using various data sources, in this case, grew teacher efficacy and improved student achievement.

Overall, analyzing and using data was significant to the principals' effectiveness. While some participants used state assessments to increase student performance, others used different sources of information to improve instructional practices of teachers. In all cases, the principals understood the importance of meeting district expectations regarding student data and worked to implement practices that would positively impact student learning.

Building and Maintaining Relationships

Reitzug et al. (2008) explained that an increase in learning and improvement of instruction stemmed from the principal's ability to build relationships also known as *relational IL*. Building relationships was essential to the principals' success. For some participants,

connecting with others-built efficacy. This appeared to the case for Chase, as he claimed how strengthening relationships with his staff positively impacted faculty retention. He said:

> I don't have a high turnover rate. When I first started, I did. I used to have a 20, 25 teachers a year [leave], when I first started and now maybe eight a year… I just have a great staff too, and we just work well together.

Chase's confidence increased because of his ability to improve the relationships with his staff. The benefit of those relationships caused teachers to remain at the school.

Other principals tied relationship building to creating a positive campus climate. Blake shared, "you got to come in and just build culture and relationships. That's the most important thing." He added "all the rest of the stuff will come later." With this, Blake believed that as principal, one of his primary duties was to build open and trusting connections with his staff. He saw these efforts as being critical to the ultimate success of the campus and the foundation of being an effective instructional leader.

The principals additionally shared that not only building these connections mattered, but rather maintaining the rapport was just as significant. Some participants voiced how they worked to sustain relationships with supervisors. For instance, Axe talked about how maintaining relationships with various stakeholders helped build trust. He said the "opportunities to work closely together" with others helped "build a strong working relationship and trust." In one case, Axe described the relationship as, "him trusting me" and "me trusting him." He believed the mutual trust "really set me up for success" as a principal.

Among the stakeholders, some principals discussed the importance of preserving relationships with students. Axe and Daphney highlighted how vital it was to stay connected to students. Axe expressed that "the relationship piece with students and working with kids, and the

love and the passion behind kids… was why I started teaching." Axe carried that same passion for students as he transitioned from teacher to principal. As principal, he shared, "I spend my time…connecting with kids during the parts of the day in which they see me." For him, being involved with students provided opportunity to relate and lead them better. Likewise, Daphney shared how nurturing the relationships with students was a learning experience for her. She said, "I've learned that a lot of those kids that we call potential drop-outs are really diamonds in the rough, and they can shine given the right support, and individual plans." By her staying connected to the students, she was able to positively impact them by providing the resources the students needed to be successful.

For these participants, building relationships was a priority. Maintaining the partnership was just as vital. Whether with superiors or students, the principals viewed these connections as pertinent to their effectiveness.

Associated Strengths and Challenges of Leading

The principals noted a range of things they credited to their effectiveness as instructional leaders. For example, Zane shared how he did a good job "hiring," because he said, "I work with great people." It was his belief that, "you have to be able to hire well if you're going to be successful." Likewise, Madeline felt she was effective at providing teachers "professional development and training," which resulted in creating an "environment for teacher success" and "student success." She acknowledged that "teachers appreciate" her method of leading because, "in the end, that translates to student success." Still, Axe, also identified ways he was an "effective" IL. He said:

> To me, one of the tenets that would show me that is not only the growth in student achievement, how well my kids do, but I look at the growth in the capacity of those that I

touch and those that I work with. Teachers, assistant principals, instructional coaches. A lot of them that I work with, they've gone on to become assistant principals, principals, work in central office. So, I use that as another way to measure my successes.

From this example, Axe prided himself in not only improving student learning, but also in helping others reach their goals. Overall, the principals were able to name things they did well that contributed to their success as ILs.

Next to identifying their strengths, the principals noted personal and/or situational issues that made their jobs more difficult such as time management, conducting teacher evaluations, and communicating effectively. Time management was the most common challenge mentioned among the principals because they viewed it as most relevant to their sustainability and instructional leadership. For instance, Chase explained, “because of the amount of responsibility that we do have, and being pulled in so many different directions, there were sometimes where the amount of time I want to spend on being an instructional leader doesn't actually happen.” He found the time it took to address other duties prevented him from focusing on instruction as much as he wished.

Like Chase, Madeline described the time constraints in her schedule as she shared how she was, “just trying to be all things to all people.” Although she had been a principal at the middle school level previously, she said, “running a high school building is like a small Texas town. You're like the mayor. You're like, there's a pothole on 1st Street, and a water main break. You're supposed to be running a city, but all this stuff is going on.” Madeline felt overwhelmed by the demands of leading a high school. She claimed, “I can't do everything I want to do…I'm checking off the list of, have I done everything I want to do for kids, for teachers? So those are

challenges. Just not enough time." Madeline found juggling the many tasks was one of her greatest challenges.

Axe confronted the same issues but offered strategies he employed to address the many demands on his time. He said he found balance by being "very intentional about" scheduling days "to stay in my office." While there, he reported that he worked on things like, "mapping out instruction, responding to emails, completing task projects or whatever the district wants me to do." In times when scheduled to be out of his office, he focused on, "connecting with kids" and "being in PLCs." The only thing that might disrupt his plan was if there was a "parent concern" or something similar that he had to handle immediately. Otherwise, Axe had a very structured schedule, so he could manage his many duties. The principals' experiences mirrored Kraft and Gilmour's (2016) findings that principals struggle to balance time maintaining school operations and working with teachers.

Some of the participants identified other challenges as well. Teacher evaluations tended to be difficult for principals. For example, Daphney, a high school principal, lead a school operated more on a self-paced schedule for students to recover credit. As such, students in a single classroom performed at vastly different levels academically, which did not allow a teacher to teach one lesson to all students in a class at one time. Daphney reported, "because of the way [the teaching is] individualized, it's a lot of independent work, [this makes evaluating the teaching] a little bit more challenging." For her, finding alternative ways to evaluate teachers under the district's appraisal system was a challenge.

Communication was also an issue mentioned by some of the participants. Sometimes the communication was within the school and sometimes outside of it. For example, Blake felt the "biggest challenge" he faced was "always" the way he would be perceived by his campus. He

explained that he “felt anytime he saw “something wrong” and “want[ed] to fix it,” he had to be careful in his response. He said, “you got to know that whatever you say or whatever you do is going to reverberate throughout the entire building, and so you don't want people to think that you're authoritarian, or that it's my way or else.” These concerns affected how he responded to issues on his campus.

However, not all communication issues were within the school. Axe voiced concern about external communication. He found district-level “communication …is not very clear. It's ambiguous. It's once again, trying to find the rules to the game. And nobody gave you the rules. It's a challenge. It's a challenge.” He thought the district consistently issued unclear and confusing statements, which became a recurring obstacle he had to work to overcome.

Overall, the principals were able to determine their own strengths within their leadership practices. They were also able to identify components of their job that were challenging. The balance of capitalizing on their strengths and finding practical solutions to their challenges afforded them opportunities to be effective in their roles.

Reasons for Becoming and Remaining Instructional Leaders

Despite of all the challenges, these veteran principals choose to remain in their roles. In this section, the principals discuss why they became principals and why they stayed in the role.

Why They Became Principals

Many of the participants became principals primarily to fulfill their purpose in life, which Reitzug et al. (2008) referenced as *prophetic IL*. This approach speaks to IL being linked to a person’s “calling” (p. 706) or purpose, where principals use their set of beliefs, morals, and convictions to develop their approach to leadership. For instance, Axe (two years at current campus) shared that his journey from teacher to principal “was really a God thing…everything

just aligned for me." Likewise, Daphney (seven-year veteran) expressed, "God just favored me and that's how I basically ended up in leadership." Zane (11-year veteran) was another principal who felt he was called as he expressed, "God spoke to me… and told me that He did not want me to be a coach anymore." He admitted, however, that, at that time, he did not know that not being a coach meant being a principal. Zane took a risk and resigned from coaching to seek a teaching position. However, he was encouraged by his principal to apply for administration, which he did, and got the position. In sum, the principals felt called by God.

While some principals felt called by a higher power, others became principals based on their perceptions of other individuals in leadership roles. These participants were inspired because they witnessed poor leadership. For instance, Chase (six-year veteran) explained how he "just felt like leaders should be able to motivate people and encourage them, rather than bringing them down and making them feel like that they were doing a job incorrectly all the time," which was his own experience too often. As a result, Chase felt he could be a positive influence on others, which lead him into the principalship. Likewise, Blake (12-year veteran at previous school) said he became a principal because, "I've seen so many people do it wrong." Too often, he saw people "get the job politically, and when they get the job, they really don't know what the blank they're doing." He witnessed these political appointees make many "boneheaded decision[s]" when he was an assistant principal. From these experiences, Blake concluded, "you know what? I think I can do a little better than what they're doing." Even though Blake had "no desire to be a principal" initially, he was drawn to the role to better serve students. Seeing other principals leading in "wrong" (Blake) ways, convinced him and several other participants to become principals. Thus, the two main motivations for taking on the role was for spiritual reasons or to provide stronger leadership than they witnessed.

Why They Stayed Principals

While the participants offered similar reasons for why they became principals, they voiced many reasons why they remained in their roles. These motives included family, empowering others, job satisfaction, and fulfillment of purpose.

Family

Family was a significant reason why some principals stayed in their roles. Some participants stayed because it would negatively affect their families if they left the school. For instance, Blake, who lived outside the district, stayed because his district administration allowed his children to attend district schools. He continued, "my oldest…he's going to be a senior next year. My daughter's going to be on her last year at the elementary school." Considering all who would be affected by change, Blake said, "I've stayed, really, because of family." For Blake, leaving his principal role possibly meant that his children would have to move schools and he was not willing to take such risk.

Other principals stayed because the dynamics of their family changed. Madeline (eight-year veteran) expressed how she remained to bring stability to her family. She shared:

> So, I've been here eight years, number one, because of family. I'm a divorced mom with two boys, and my boys are in a part in their lives, like they're 17 and 21 now, so they were in high school, middle school transitioning to high school [when I came to the school]. I felt like I needed to stay put. I didn't move or move them…. I chose to be a good mom.

From these examples, it was evident that family considerations were significant. Safeguarding their children was most important.

Empowering Others to Grow

Another aspect to the principals remaining was empowering teachers and students to grow. All the participates felt inspired to help others develop. For Daphney, "when teachers wanted to become an administrator," she wanted to be there to "help them to maximize their ability" by assisting them to reach their goals. Similarly, Axe explained how he felt it was his duty to empower other professionals as well:

> I want to be able to help them get to where they want to be…. And so, I need to help as many people as I can in due time… And I just like helping people…No matter how busy I am, if another colleague calls me, "How can I help you? What's going on?"

Madeline expressed how important it was to her to help teachers and students reach their potentials:

> Everything I want to do is because I want to help people. I want to help students excel. I want to help teachers grow… My whole thought process is let me get in a position where I can help. If I see that there's a problem, if there's something wrong, well, then I need to be in a position to help.

Madeline felt as the principal, she was able to help the teachers and students in her school reach their potentials. She felt responsible for their success, which motivated her to stay in her role. By helping others succeed, the principals felt that they were fulfilling their purposes as principals.

Job Satisfaction

Federici and Skaalvik (2012) noted that principals left their roles when they were not satisfied with their jobs. Conversely, the current study found many of the participants said they stayed in their roles because their experiences were rewarding. Axe shared how his retention was mostly connected to his destiny:

> I love the work. I truly love what I do. I think I would do okay or do well doing other things, but to me I know that this is my gift…and I need to share it. This is what I feel like I'm designed to do and the mark that I'm supposed to leave here in this world.

From this example, Axe felt like he was in the right position to influence as many people as he could from his assignment as principal, which he took very seriously. Madeline also illustrated how delighted she was remaining a principal at her school:

> I'm comfortable in my role. I love my school…This is probably the best job in America…I get to see kids be successful. I've hired back people who've graduated from here…. So, I always say it's the best job, I'm going to hate to leave it when I have to leave it, because it just a wonderful job.

For Madeline, doing a job she loves and reaping the benefits of her leadership, like employing previous students, were rewarding to her. Although she knew at some point her career journey would lead her elsewhere, she felt the principalship was most appropriate for her at this moment in her life. These sentiments confirm how important feeling fulfillment from the work was to the participants' longevity. Stephanie, their area superintendent, also recognized the importance of personal satisfaction stating, "principals either love it or not, and the ones that don't love it...leave." Enjoying what they did was paramount to their effectiveness.

In addition to liking their jobs, it is significant to note that the participants admitted they stayed because they did not want to go to central office at that point in their careers. Some remained because they liked working with students. For example, Zane, who has served 20 years as principal with 11 years at his current school, explained the uncertainty he felt in deciding if he should stay or leave. He said he ultimately stayed:

> Because I like it. I don't want another job. I know there are principals who get out of the profession, but there are also principals who move on to central office. I don't want to move on to central office…I figured out that I probably would not enjoy my job as much if I was in a building where there were not students…. Earlier in my career, I wondered what am I supposed to do next? Used to stress over, okay, this one person retired or resigned or got a promotion. Am I supposed to apply for their job? I hated that stress over wondering am I supposed to do that or not. I guess somewhere along the line, I realized I would be the happiest if I appreciated what I have. And as long as I enjoy it, why bother going somewhere else where I may not like it?

For Zane, being promoted to central office was less appealing than interacting with students. Once he realized he was fulfilled being an IL, the sense of urgency to leave dissipated and he felt more assured of his decision to stay.

Although they would make more money leaving for a district position, some participants conveyed they chose happiness over monetary gain. Daphney explained:

> I guess it has to do with my age and experience, I don't want to spend my time in a place that I'm unhappy with, and it's something that I'm there just because of the money. I want to operate in my passion, because I think you do a better job when you are in the place that you're supposed to be in… Everybody wants to make more money. But at the end of the day, I don't want to make more money… and have a meltdown or something because of the stress level. I'm just past that.

Daphney acknowledged that making more money can be the driving force for principals to leave. However, she was aware of the challenges that came with working at the central office, including

the accompanying stress, and decided she preferred her current role. For her, and the other participants, contentment superseded financial gain.

Fulfillment of Purpose

The most common reason voiced by the participants about why they remained instructional leaders was job completion. For some principals, completing the job meant staying to achieve the school goals. Madeline stated it succinctly, “I want to finish a task.” She added that “there are forces outside of the school that push principals up and out… ‘What are you going to do next? Where are you going to move to?’” Madeline admitted, “I could have taken a job somewhere else in another district.” However, her focus was to finish her assignment. Similarly, Chase felt obligated “to get out of being close to being an IR [Improvement Required] campus,” in which he said, “we accomplished that.” Chase also “won a grant for $1.4 million” and “changed the campus into a school of choice.” Therefore, he wanted to ensure certain goals were met prior to leaving. Daphney also felt compelled to stay for similar reasons stating, “I never wanted to leave a place until I felt like every stone had been unturned, and I had completed my assignment.” As she continued to expound on her “why,” she conveyed that she wanted to walk away knowing, “I had touched the kids I was supposed to touch, touched the teachers I was supposed to touch, touched the custodians.” For Daphney, she did not want to feel like she did not fulfill her purpose because she “exited out too early.” Her goal was to finish what she thought was her assignment.

Other participants stayed to bring stability to teachers. Madeline explained, “I don't want to walk into a building and turn everything upside down, and ‘we're going to be great,’ and then I walk out. That's so demoralizing for teachers.” From this response, she was adamant about taking care of the well-being of her staff. Apparently, the campus had experienced several

principal turnovers in a short amount of time, so when she arrived, “the first thing they [the teachers] asked was, are you staying? Are you going to stay?” Based on the school’s principal attrition rate, she said, “they didn't expect me to stay eight years.” Finishing the task meant staying to take care of her teachers.

Significantly, it is important to note that two participants left their principal’s role for another principal position. However, they left their schools to make lateral moves because they felt they had completed their roles at their previous schools. Blake, who was a principal for 12 years at his first school, left to avoid stagnation. He explained why he transitioned from one middle school to another. He stated, “I'm okay with being a middle school guy. I just want out of where I'm at. I feel like I'm not growing… Basically, I asked to move on.” He explained, “I can't do anything else [at that campus] …it's an A-rated school. It's nationally ranked…and I feel like there's nothing else to do... I can do that job in my sleep.” After being at his new school for five months, he reflected, “there's things to actually do. It's been a great experience so far.” Blake welcomed the challenge of a new campus. Therefore, he intentionally advocated to move to another school leadership position.

Axe, who had been at his previous school for 4 years, decided to leave to seek a new challenge. He felt he finished his job at his school. This was evident when he said he, “went there [previous school], was able to make some changes. Built connections with the staff. Improved the culture. And got the academics back on track, and the community relations. And we did well.” As a result, Axe left to pursue a new assignment. He asserted, “I've reached that time in which I need a new challenge. Professionally…I'm looking for another challenge.” He provided rationale for his transition saying, “I had no …ambition to leave very quickly, because I really wanted to make sure it [his school] was good and healthy and strong before I ever were to step

away." Since Axe felt the job was done, he looked for the next challenge "to go where I could be and implement the most change for kids." Finishing his assignment prior to transitioning was key to his leadership practices as principal.

In conclusion, Reitzug et al. (2008) say principals who feel "called" (p. 706) are likely to leave their position when they fulfill their purpose at that campus. This was true for the participants in this study. They explained how family, empowering others, job satisfaction, and fulfilling their purpose were key elements to them staying. Being "called" (p. 706) to lead appeared to be linked to their effectiveness as veteran principals.

Sources of Motivation

In the context of this study, self-confidence appeared to be linked to the principals' decision to remain instructional leaders (IL). The participants reported how belief in their own abilities helped them be successful principals. Their confidence stemmed from self-awareness, intrinsic motivation, and district trust and support.

Self-Awareness

The participants voiced that their confidence stemmed from self-awareness. Some gained awareness by taking inventory tests. For example, Zane (11-year veteran) took a leadership summary test to determine behaviors he saw in himself and what others perceived of him. Low-rated behaviors indicated the principal was weak in that area, while high scores suggested strong skills. Zane's results revealed he had "strong" behaviors for nurturing others but scored low for having an "urgency for change" and "holding people more accountable." Zane felt the low scores were because he had "been at the same campus for a long time." He felt the school functioned well, so there was no need for "urgent" changes. He explained the lack of accountability could be that over time and the meeting of key goals he had become lax in some practices. Although he

saw no reason to adjust practices to address the "urgency for change" measure, he determined he could amend his practices to hold faculty more accountable, as necessary. Overall, he felt the results from the inventory test provided valuable insights into his performance as a principal, which he could use to improve.

Like Zane, Daphney (seven-year veteran) also mentioned how she took inventory tests periodically to learn more about herself as a leader. She took these "different assessments," so she was "able to identify gaps…the missing pieces, or the pieces that's not so strong." She felt the tests provided valuable information to her, explaining "when you're aware of yourself, I think that you are able …to be more effective and to build sustainable leadership wherever you are." For example, she explained how she used the results to improve her leadership skills:

> I learned there are some things about me with my personality, and the way I handle things, that are just natural. But then there are certain situations [behaviors] which they call adaptive, where… [my practices] could change, or be tweaked, in order for me to operate in. And so, I learned that about myself, about making sure I'm always true to myself…I just think the main thing is self-awareness.

From this instance, Daphney captured how being self-aware of her practices afforded her opportunity to be a better leader. The inventory tests allowed her to gain insights on their skill sets.

On the other hand, some principals used their innate introspection skills to gain self-awareness. For instance, Blake (12-year veteran at previous school) explained how he constantly reflected on his own behavior without using an external method. He shared, "no one can tell you if you're doing a good job or a bad job, other than you." Blake's innate sense of his abilities taught him about his practices as a principal. He said, "I know when I'm slacking, and I know

when I'm on my game...to me, that's the most important thing." Blake's natural introspection kept him aware of his performance as an instructional leader.

Overall, the participants felt being self-aware of their skills and practices was important to being a strong IL. They were able to determine things they did well and continue those practices. Likewise, they were able to identify certain areas of weakness they needed to address to be more effective.

Intrinsic Motivation

Aside from self-awareness, some participants said their efficacy resulted from being intrinsically motivated. This meant, the principals had the inner drive to do their best in their positions. Some participants were motivated by holding themselves accountable. For instance, Chase (six-year veteran) said, "I don't need outside encouragement. So, a lot of things I do is based on me motivating myself, or just working hard to take care of those things that I know I need to do." For him, doing what he felt he "need[ed]" to do to reach goals impacted his confidence. He continued, "in my head it's like a checklist of things I want to accomplish, and if I accomplish those things off my list, then I'm good. I feel good about myself, but that's just me as a motivator, motivating myself." Chase's internal motivation helped him monitor is efficacy.

Other principals based their motivation on self-belief. Madeline (eight-year veteran) admitted that confidence comes from inner faith and having, "belief in oneself [and] seeing yourself or visualizing yourself as a successful person. You have to believe in yourself." In cases when Madeline doubted herself, she relied on self-talk to address the issue. She said, "even when you don't believe in yourself, you go home, you think about it, you pray about it, you cry about it, you stomp around about it. Then you come back." For Madeline, the internal belief that she

was "doing the right things" in the best interest of the staff and students motivated her as principal.

Still, some participants were motivated through inspiration. Axe (two years at current school) explained how the result of his father working hard inspired him to desire more:

> My dad was a big push for me, and he was a big part of that instillment when it came to the intrinsic motivation of just wanting more just out of life… I'm intrinsically motivated to want to make a difference. And that's what really keeps me going. And that's what keeps me here to want to make a difference.

From these examples, the principals expressed that motivation was an underlying reason they were so confident in themselves as ILs. Introspection, self-belief, and inspiration were key to their confidence.

District Trust and Support

The participants also felt their confidence was strengthened due to district trust and support. Some principals felt trust was established because they were able to lead their campuses independent of constant supervision. For instance, Zane expressed how he felt more self-assured as a leader because the district gave him "autonomy" to lead his campus. He said he had "supervisors who allow me to do my job without micromanaging me…I've learned what works, and I've learned what doesn't work. My supervisors trust me." This trust provided space for "trial and error" in Zane's leadership. He said, "I've tried a lot of things that didn't work." When strategies or practices were not effective, he "tried not to do those again if they didn't work" and continued "doing the things that do seem to work." The fact that the district gave him time to figure out what worked for his campus increased his belief in his abilities as principal. Madeline expressed similar attitudes. She said:

> That's what I love about [her school district]. They trust that the principal is doing the right job. They check in with us to make sure we're on the right track, but they're not here in the building telling me how to run my building. They trust me.

Madeline appreciated not being closely monitored. Being able to determine and make decisions on how her school would operate was an indication to her that the district respected her practices. Overall, gaining the district's trust made the principals feel more comfortable in their roles.

Other participants credited district supports for reinforcing their leadership skills and practices. The area superintendent, Stephanie, expressed the same belief stating that you got to "have the proper supports in place" for principals to be successful. The participants agreed that some of the district-level systems and structures assisted them in executing their role more effectively. For example, Blake shared how the human resources office (HR) was a great resource for him as he explained, "if I got a teacher that's not doing what they're supposed to do. Really, I need HR support to help me when that teacher files a grievance or gets mad." Similarly, Axe shared how the "human resources" department was an asset to him as well, especially "if I have a question about policy or how to support this teacher." For these participants HR helped, which was vital to their leadership when the principals had to handle difficult situations with their teachers.

Even though several participants felt the support of their districts, others noted how their districts could better sustain them, specifically, as veteran principals. For instance, some participants thought that their district could be more hands-on in helping them become better leaders. Daphney expressed:

> I'm always looking for people that will help me grow…people that are authentic and will honestly give me some feedback, because…I'll miss a blind spot…even some more

> professional development in terms of leadership, and in terms of instruction as well. So just probably a deeper level of training.

Madeline felt similarly saying, "I could get lost really easy and get stuck in a rut doing the same things over and over again, because they work. [I need] someone [from the district] to help me grow." Madeline added that she wanted her supervisors "to continuously push me, ask me questions, introduce new ideas to me." She expressed the "need" to have "their continued eyes on me and just support of me." Madeline did not want to become complacent and wanted more oversight from the district.

Madeline was not alone. A few other participants wanted more direct support than they received from the district. Yet, with limited time, superintendents must pick and choose the principals that get more attention. Stephanie, the area superintendent, explained what goes into her selection process, stating:

> In any typical year…I'm going to spend more time with that first-year principal than I am with my superstar principal. I'm going to spend more time with the principal that might have a few years under his/her belt, but they're not quite as proficient as the superstar that has mastered the gig years ago.

Stephanie shared that she concentrated on new principals and those that may be struggling, because it is more clear-cut that they needed help. However, the participants revealed contrasting views regarding district support. For some, the lack of oversight showed trust while others wanted more direct guidance from the central office. These principals wanted more district-sponsored opportunities to improve their skills as an IL even though they were viewed as effective veterans.

Additionally, participants offered other ways their districts could support them. Zane mentioned how he wanted to feel better appreciated by his district because of his expertise. He said, “I feel like at some point in your career, you also want to feel like they [the district leadership] value you. I have a lot of experience.” Chase had similar sentiments. He commented how he could add impact beyond his campus if the district gave him “projects” and put him “on district committees…giving me something that will entice me a little bit more…make me feel like I'm contributing to the district as a whole.” These veteran principals had confidence in their practices and desired to share their skillsets beyond their campuses.

Last, a few of the principals (i.e., Blake, Axe, and Zane) suggested other ways the district could take advantage of their experience by mentoring others. Blake stated this sentiment plainly, “I wish the district would call upon me more to actually give back to the other principals.” These principals had a deep eagerness to “mentor” to other principals (Zane). While the more experienced participants wanted to be tasked with helping newer principals, Chase (a veteran principal of six years), who has less tenure than some of the other participants, talked about wanting training in how to be a mentor to his peers saying, “I'd like to have some coaching sessions from my area superintendent about how to help me, help other principals…I would like to start understanding how that works.” He, too, eventually wanted to mentor novice principals. Therefore, both newer and more senior principals in the study wanted the district to prepare them and then select them to mentor colleagues.

The principals agreed that the motivation they had in themselves made a difference in being effective instructional leaders. Being self-aware of their practices and intrinsically motivated played major roles in their success. Likewise, district trust and support also helped

build their efficacy. Collectively, however, the veteran principals mainly longed for opportunities to grow more as professionals, feel valued, and be mentors to new principals.

Summary

In this chapter, I explored the experiences of veteran secondary principals from two Texas suburban school districts and the reasons they remained instructional leaders. Although their journeys spoke to different experiences, overall, the principals expressed similar views about what made them prepared and effective and the relevance behind their instructional practices. Furthermore, fulfilling their purpose on their campuses was why they stayed in their role and feelings of self-efficacy were tied to their success. These findings assist in filling a gap in research related to understanding reasons secondary veteran principals remain instructional leaders.

Chapter 5

Summary, Implications, and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore veteran secondary principals' perceptions of reasons they remain instructional leaders in two Texas School districts. It further sought to better understand whether self-confidence contributed to or hindered their effectiveness as principals, thus influencing their decision to stay. This research was framed around Bandura's (1977) conceptual framework of self-efficacy with interpretations of how the four sources of information played a role in these principals gaining or losing confidence. This chapter outlines the summary of findings, practical and theoretical implications, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy can be gained or lost based on a person's belief about their abilities associated with four sources of information: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal and social persuasions, and physiological states. From the perceived confidence, a person is either motivated or discouraged to attempt a task. The following is a review of the findings by each research question, providing a comprehensive explanation of whether self-efficacy, in some notion, influenced the principals desire to stay in their roles. It is important to note that the number of years as principal may or may not have made a difference in their experience.

Research Question 1: How do veteran secondary principals perceive self-efficacy contributed to or hindered their role (i.e., mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological state) as instructional leaders?

Overall, the principals viewed self-efficacy as an influence on them remaining instructional leaders. Their experiences confirmed Bandura's (2012) thoughts on how a person's confidence in themselves affects their cognitive, motivational, affective, and decisional processes to complete a task. Although the principals' experiences varied among the four sources of information, it was evident that all the sources, implicitly or explicitly, contributed to them staying in their roles. The subsections below capture the essence of the principals' experiences by each of Bandura's (1977) sources of information.

Mastery Experiences. Bandura (1977) noted mastery experiences as being the strongest indicator of assessing self-efficacy, which entails a person gaining or losing confidence based on their ability to master a new challenge. The principals' confidence as instructional leaders increased when their actions led to successful outcomes. For instance, Zane and Madeline shared how their leadership skills improved because of "trial and error." The participants expressed confidence in their ability to know what worked for them to be effective. They continued the practices that worked well and stopped the actions that did not. Their responses support Bandura's (1997) claim that if a person experiences success, they are likely to repeat the behavior. Such achievement increases efficacy. Likewise, repeated failures lower confidence. Their self-confidence was strong enough not to compromised by the occasional ineffective practice. Several spoke about having trust in themselves as leaders, which comes from mastery. For example, Madeline expressed how, "belief in oneself [and] seeing yourself or visualizing yourself as a successful person" helped her be effective. She said, "you have to believe in yourself." For her, as well as other participants, strong self-belief was key to the confidence they had in their actions.

Vicarious Experiences. This source of information proved to be the most common indicator of self-efficacy among the principals. Bandura (1977) explained that a vicarious experience is when a person's expectations of themself increases because of observing another person's successful action. All the participants connected a major part of their effectiveness to watching and observing others execute the principal role. The ability to see how principals made decisions, recovered from mistakes, and primarily balanced the role, gave the participants a sense of certitude in their own capabilities. Most of the principals' vicarious experiences occurred through mentorships. Zane, Madeline, Daphne, Axe, and Blake illustrated how their experiences with their mentors made them better self-assured as principals. This finding confirms what preceding literature maintained about the benefits of mentoring (Gimbel & Kefor, 2108; Malone, 2001; Sciarappa & Mason, 2014). The participants convinced themselves that if they "intensify and persist in their efforts" (Bandura, 1977, p. 197), that they can also perform the task of principalship based on their mentors' success.

The vicarious source of Bandura's self-efficacy (1977) also surfaced in the principals' ability to utilize professional development (PD) to improve their leadership skills. Researchers argued that principals need training to execute elements of IL effectively (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Freidman, 2002). Such was true for this study. Several of the participants sought out trainings or other resources to gain the skills needed to address curriculum alignment, budget formulation, etc. They found certain PDs helped them do their job. For example, Axe expressed how curriculum trainings "really changed my life and the way I did things in terms of being a principal." Watching others demonstrate how to use curriculum effectively, helped him better support and guide his teachers. On another note, it is important to acknowledge that some principals felt PD should be individualized because their campuses were different, much like

Stewart and Matthews (2015), who voiced that PD should be targeted to campus needs. However, even in these cases, the principals' ability to consistently take district PD and adjust it to work for their campuses reinforced their competence in executing the role.

In all, the principals felt they learned to be more confident leaders by exposure to others through mentorship, networking, and PD. However, there was an interesting twist that emerged from some of the participants. Madeline, Blake, and Chase gained expertise by watching others do the job unsuccessfully. Blake succinctly said, "I've seen so many people do it wrong." Apparently, their experiences with ineffective leaders taught them what not to do as principals.

Verbal and Social Persuasion. According to Bandura (1977), verbal and social persuasion refers to when a person gains confidence based on verbal influences from others. Some principals, like Madeline and Axe, overtly disclosed how formal conversations with mentors and peers made them more effective instructional leaders. Specifically, Madeline explained how her mentor told her, "Don't ever do this," or "I made this mistake. Do it like this." From those conversations, Madeline was influenced on definite practices to execute or avoid.

The larger influence of verbal and social persuasion among the principals were mostly embedded in PLC and networking experiences. Most of the principals expressed how connecting with their peers to discuss practical strategies increased their efficacy. Formally, PLCs allowed some of the principals to experience meeting with principals in their feeder patterns to discuss data and students' progress from vertical and longitudinal perspectives. These meetings were something the principals voiced as being key to their instructional development. In cases where PLCs were not initiated by the principals, because there was no district structure or guidance of such framework, the participants spoke of informally collaborating with colleagues through networks. As Blake said he met with "a group of guys" biannually, Madeline voiced how she

networked with “other principals all across the district and all across the DFW area all the time asking questions” which “strengthened my leadership skills.” These findings are synonymous to what Ng and Szeto (2016) found regarding peer networking opportunities improving principals’ practices to lead their schools. Malone (2001) further affirmed that networks of peers provide support and guidance, much of how the participants discussed their interactions with their counterparts.

Physiological States. The last source of information from Bandura’s (1977) framework is physiological states, which is when a person’s level of confidence is based on their ability to control their emotions surrounding stressful or taxing situations. There was no explicit evidence that the participants were so overwhelmed by their jobs that stress management was a significant element. However, they did express challenges. Time management was the most common aspect of difficulty among the principals. From Chase, “being pulled in so many different directions,” to Madeline metaphorically fixing, “a pothole on 1st Street, and a water main break,” it can be inferred that such experiences triggered certain emotions that the principals managed well enough to find effective solutions. Unlike the principals who research says left their roles due to burnout from work-related stress (Federici & Skaalvik, 2012; Freidman, 2002), the veteran participants in this study appeared to have found a sense of balance between their emotions and problem solving. Bandura said that performance is better when emotions are controlled during stressful times. In this context, the principals’ efficacy was apparent because of their ability to regulate their emotions in taxing times, thus better performing as instructional leaders.

Research Question 2: What role did self-efficacy play in veteran secondary principals’ experiences as instructional leaders?

The findings in this research suggest that self-efficacy played an instrumental role in the principals' experiences as instructional leaders. All the participants recognized the importance of having and displaying skill-related confidence to instructional leadership. Self-awareness was a major component the principals felt was necessary in building efficacy. Inventory tests that informed the participants of their strengths and weaknesses as an instructional leader, provided opportunities for them to make authentic changes in their practices to be more effective. Additionally, intrinsic motivation was a strong determinant of the principals being successful. For example, Axe expressed, "I'm intrinsically motivated to want to make a difference. And that's what really keeps me going." Like Axe, many of the principals voiced how the inner drive and belief in their own abilities motivated and influenced them to be better leaders. Last, the participants admitted that having access to district supports further strengthened their assurance as instructional leaders. With the latter, it is important to note that although veteran principals said additional supports could be extended to grow them beyond their roles and structure mentorships between veteran and new principals, the lack of such supports did not hinder their effectiveness as instructional leaders.

Research Question 3: What did veteran secondary principals perceive contributed to their lengthy tenure as instructional leaders?

The principals perceived mentoring, collegial relationships, and professional development (PD) as contributors to their lengthy tenure. Mentoring was a key resource for the principals to learn tangible instructional leadership skills and concepts. Almost all principals expressed how the significance of those partnerships aided their growth and development as leaders. Chase, the only principal who did not experience mentorship, even voiced how such experienced would have helped his journey. Collegial relationships also tended to be a bridge to

the principals staying in their roles, because the constant interaction with their peers was noted as being essential to their effectiveness. Last, PD proved to be a component of support to sustain the principal's growth. Curriculum training appeared to be most critical to the principals' efficacy in executing the instructional leadership role. These findings align with Cieminski's (2018) results about what supports influence principal retention.

Another contributing element to these principals staying in their roles was an essence of them fulfilling their "calling" (Reitzug et al., 2008, p. 706), which was also evident in the very limited research on principal retention (Ledesma, 2013). Many of the principals in the current study felt they remained instructional leaders at their schools because some higher power guided them to their campuses. They were compelled to complete their goals on the campus before considering leaving.

Although this study supports literature in ways to retain principals, it further discloses additional contributors to principal longevity which adds to the body of research. Like other studies (Fink & Resnick, 2001; Freidman, 2002; Ng & Szeto, 2016; Superville, 2014), Cieminski (2018) expressed the necessity for districts to provide PD for principals that is individualized. Similarly, the veteran principals in this study felt the same way. However, the principals noted the significance of finding their own PD when district PD did not support their needs. Therefore, self-development was a main source of sustainability regarding instructional leadership growth for the participants in this study.

Implications of Practice

This study provided insight from two Texas suburban school districts regarding veteran principals' perceptions of why they remain instructional leaders. Using Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory as a guide, the main sources of information that influenced their retention were

vicarious and mastery experiences with an undertone of physiological state experiences. These findings suggest practical steps districts could take to influence and strengthen retention. First, districts should develop mentoring programs for their principals. The participants in this study voiced how vital mentorship was to their success as instructional leaders and wished there were a district-directed mentoring program to assist them in the early stages of their career. They further revealed that as veteran principals they had a desire to mentor new principals. However, neither district had a structured system in place. In creating a more systematic approach to support new and veteran principals, mentoring would provide new principals opportunities to learn their roles from nonevaluative encounters. It further would extend a sense of district appreciation to veteran principals. Zane, a 20-year veteran, expressed such gestures may help veteran principals feel valued to make district-level contributions and possibly stay in their roles longer.

Second, all districts should incorporate ways for principals to assess their instructional leadership skills to detect strengths and weaknesses to improve practices if they are not doing so already. The principals in this study took an inventory test initiated by the district and felt that self-awareness was huge to their progression as leaders. For Daphney, assessing her skills was a way to "identify gaps" in her leadership methods. The ability to use the information from inventory tests would allow principals to gauge, sustain, or adjust leadership practices as necessary, which the veteran principals expressed as being significant to their success. The results could also provide district with specific skills principals need to strengthen through PD.

Third, districts should consider individualizing PD as much as possible. Research shared the benefits of individualized PD (Cieminski, 2018) and the principals in this study said that it is needed. Although, time and cost would be major factors to consider, the benefits may outweigh replacing a principal who leaves due to incompetence or burn-out to sustain the role. There are

times when PD is necessary as a district unit, as the principals in this study mentioned, like receiving HR and compliance protocols. However, when considering new versus veteran principals, some participants viewed PD as a waste of time when it was not tailored to their specific needs. It is common practice in the field of education for teachers to differentiate learning for students and campus administrators to distinguish guidance for teachers to strengthen development. In this case, districts individualizing growth for principals is just as appropriate and critical to their effectiveness as instructional leaders.

Fourth, the veteran principals in this study reported the importance of collaborating with their peers. Networking and PLCs helped the principals connect with colleagues for advice, but both partnerships were driven by the individual principals. The participants who participated in them felt the interactions with others strengthened their instructional skills. For the ones who did not experience PLCs, they said it was needed. From Zane expressing a wish to formally meet in PLCs to Chase declaring them as being a catalyst to instructional leadership, most participants yearned for more formal collaboration with their counterparts. As a result, districts should develop structured PLCs for principals to regularly meet with colleagues to analyze data and problem solve. This may reduce principal attrition and improve student achievement.

Additionally, findings suggest that districts should consider implementing ways to grow principals beyond their roles. Most of the veteran principals felt their districts did not micro-manage them, which communicated a bond of trust that they were effective in their positions. However, some principals desired additional support to build them beyond instructional leadership effectiveness. Such conclusion evolved from: Daphney's desires to receive authentic feedback to find her "blind spots" to Madeline's longing to not be "left alone" and "stagnate" because her systems work. The conflicting responses suggest that district support for veteran

principals may need to be individualized like the PD and/or let the principals elect to participate or not without any negative ramifications.

Last, many of the principals in this study felt unprepared when they initially took on the role. As Daphney shared, “I don't think there was ever a clear training of what leadership truly is…what we need to learn how to do, is to have the skillset to be able to know what's needed.” One option to help them get a better grounding in leadership would be for pre-service programs for principals to offer Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to address and resolve issues they are likely to encounter. For example, some of the participants noted they specifically wanted more training in budgeting and allocating funds, handling difficult employees, and building a master schedule. Perhaps, PLCs could help them gain competence in these areas prior to assuming the principal role. Furthermore, PLCs could offer ongoing support for principals to routinely collaborate with like-minded colleagues to build and strengthen skills and efficacy.

Implications of Theory

Utilizing Bandura’s (1997) self-efficacy theory was a practical approach in better understanding whether a veteran principal’s confidence in their abilities, in any capacity, influenced them to remain instructional leaders. The four sources of information afforded an opportunity for the participants’ experiences to be categorized. *Mastery experiences* gauged whether the principals were able to acquire instructional tasks based on their own successful efforts. *Vicarious experiences* provided insight to the significance of principals watching or observing other successful (or unsuccessful) principals. *Verbal and Social Persuasions* exposed how the principals were empowered through peer supports. Last, *physiological states* served to covertly measure the principals’ confidence based on how they managed emotions during stressful times. Future researchers may determine this theoretical lens beneficial in understanding

similar topics, and expanding limited literature related to understanding principal efficacy and retention.

Recommendations for Future Research

This qualitative study explored veteran secondary principals' perceptions of why they remain instructional leaders and whether self-efficacy, in some way, influenced their decisions to stay. The findings are only specific to the participants from two Texas school districts and should not be generalized to represent any context beyond these principals' experiences. To broaden the scarce literature surrounding principal retention, recommendations for future research are below.

First, this research focused specifically on veteran secondary principals because research says that principal retention rates are lower at middle and high school levels than elementary settings. Additional research could explore retention from principals of all levels, focusing on those who have been at their school over five years. This approach could provide global understandings of why veteran principals in general remain instructional leaders.

Second, this study focused on veteran principals from two school districts. This research could qualitatively or quantitively be expanded or replicated into single-case studies that focus on veteran principals at every level (i.e., elementary, middle, and high schools). This would help districts gather comprehensive insights based on a specific campus environment to better understand what contributes to or hinders principals remaining instructional leaders. Findings could influence district practices to support novice principals and further sustain veterans.

Next, this study focused on two relatively small Texas suburban school districts with six participants. Future research could focus on why principals stay in larger school districts. This approach could yield more participants to validate or contradict the findings in this study. Furthermore, it would provide richer contexts to interpret retention from inner city or rural

experiences and other relevant variables (e.g., demographics, socio-economic status, predominantly minority or nonminority populations), which this study did not explore.

Further, because of the small number of willing participants, I included the experience of one person, Axe, who had served only four years and had recently moved to another campus. His perceptions were largely like those of the other participants, but in one critical area he offered different views. He talked about the value of networking as helping if and when he chose to get another position. While the other principals were fulfilled staying on their campuses for much longer periods of time and rejected those who hoped to persuade them to change assignments, his response may suggest that he sees the principalship as a steppingstone to the district. It is unclear in this study if this is an innate quality of Axe or a non-veteran. Future research, that explores principals at all levels will help to better explain this difference between the veteran principals and those who change positions more frequently.

Fifth, this study was explored through the lens of Bandura's self-efficacy theory and the four sources of information that helped tease out ways principals gain or lose confidence in their abilities to execute instructional leadership. Future research could examine retention through other theoretical lenses, such as Northouse's (2013) skills-approach or trait-approach theories to understand why principals stay. Such explorations could aid in explaining retention from different ideological frameworks in what contributes to or hinders principals remaining in their roles.

Last, this research explored retention using qualitative methodology to capture veteran principals' perspectives. Future researchers could explore principal retention from a quantitative design to examine different variables (e.g., PD, principal collaboration, job satisfaction, external motivational factors, self-efficacy, support systems) to determine what contributes to principal

retention. Such findings could inform national and state-level policy makers on things to include in educational reforms to better attract and retain principals. Also, this method can aid in finding more reliable instruments to measure principal efficacy, since they are currently unavailable (Skaalvik, 2020).

Conclusion

With the role of the principal changing from a managerial stance to instructional leadership, accountability for student achievement has become the driving force for principal effectiveness. Over time, education reforms have been implemented to change the trajectory of principal preparedness and efficacy. Yet, turnover persists. Principals have left their roles for multiple reasons and with the anticipated demand for qualified candidates stemming from population growth, it is more apparent for districts to focus on principal retention. Previous research has focused on why principals leave, with little research exploring what makes principals remain instructional leaders. Thus, this study filled a gap in research, as it explored the perceptions of veteran secondary principals from two Texas suburban school districts and implications that may influence retention.

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory with the four sources of information helped frame this studying in determining whether the principals' confidence in their abilities impacted their decisions to stay instructional leaders. The findings propose that vicarious and mastery experiences were most influential in the principals gaining efficacy. Likewise, verbal and social persuasions, along with physiological states were also implicitly prevalent to impacting confidence in their experiences. Although there was variance among the principals on how they gained, or loss confidence related to their circumstances, self-belief, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivators proved to be powerful catalysts to the participants' self-efficacy. Such confidence in

their abilities impacted their effectiveness as instructional leaders, thus influencing retention. Perhaps, most important, their continued success as principals leads to student success as well.

References

Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review, 84*(2), 191-215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191

Bandura, A. (1982). Self-efficacy mechanism in human agency. *American Psychologist, 37*(2), 122-147.

Bandura, A. (1989). Regulation of cognitive processes through perceived self-efficacy. *Developmental Psychology, 25*(5), 729-735.

Bandura, A. (2012). On the function properties of perceived self-efficacy revisited. *Journal of Management, 38*(1), 9-44. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0149206311410606

Bartanen, B., Grissom, J., & Rogers, L., (2019). The impacts of principal turnover. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 41*(3), 350-374.

Boone, M., Colina, M., & Nelson, S. (2008). Lifeworld or systemsworld: What guides novice principals? *Journal of Educational Administration. 46*(6)*,* 690-701.

Brown, K., & Schainker, S. (2008). Doing all the right things: Teacher retention issues. *Journal of Cases in Educational Leadership, 11*(1), 10-17.

Brown, B., & Tobis, S. (2013). Principal coaching for collaboration. *Leadership, 43*(1), 8-10,37.

Cieminski, A. B. (2018). Practices that support leadership succession and principal retention. *ICPEL Education Leadership Review, 19*(1), 21-41. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1200804.pdf

Collins, Kaine Introduce Bipartisan Bill to Address Nationwide Teacher and Principal Shortages (2019). Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC.

Cooper, C., & Marshall, J. (1978). *Understanding executive stress*. London: The McMillan Press LTD.

Costello, D. (2015). Challenges and supports of instructional leadership in schools. *Antisasis, 5*(1), 3-6.

Cowie, M., & Crawford, M. (2007). Principal preparation: Still an act of faith? *School Leadership and Management, 27*(2), 129-146. doi:10.1080/13632430701237198

Cranston, J. (2009). Holding the reins of the professional learning community: Eight themes from research on principals' perceptions of professional learning communities. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy,* 90, 1-22. https://cjc-rcc.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/42771

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions.* Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2004). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research.* (2nd ed.). Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39*(4), 124-130.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

Davis, B., & Anderson, E. (2020). Visualizing differential principal turnover. *Journal of Educational Administration, 59*(2), 177-198. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-03-2020-0054.

DeBevoise, W. (1984). Synthesis of research on the principal as instructional leader. *Educational Leadership, 41*(5), 14-20.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research*. Sage Publications.

Dwyer, D. C. (1984). The search for instructional leadership: Routines and subtleties in the principal's role. *Educational Leadership, 41*(5), 32-37.

Dufour, R. (2015). Professional learning communities: A bandwagon, an idea worth considering, or our best hope for high levels of learning? *Middle School Journal, 39*(1), 4-8. https://doi.org/10.1080/00940771.2007.11461607

Dufour, R., & Reeves, D. (2015). Professional learning communities still work (if done right). *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-professional-learning-communities-still-work-if-done-right/2015/10

Ediger, M. (2014). The changing role of the school principal. *College Student Journal*, *48*(2), 265-267.

Every Student Succeed Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 129 STAT 1802. (2015-2016). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

Every Student Succeed Act-Texas Education Agency (2017). Revised state template from consolidated state plan. https://www2.ed.gov/admins/lead/account/stateplan17/txconsolidatedstateplanfinal2.pdf

Farley-Ripple, E., Solano, P., & McDuffie, M. (2012). Conceptual and methodological issues in research on school administrator career behavior. *Educational Researcher, 41*(6), 220-229.

Federici, R., & Skaalvik, E. (2012). Principal self-efficacy: relations with burnout, job satisfaction and motivation to quit. *Social Psychological Education, 15*, 295-320.

Fink, E., & Resnick, L. B. (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *The Phi Delta Kappan, 82*(8), 598-606. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.uta.edu/stable/20439981

Friedman, I. (1995). Measuring school principal-experienced burnout. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 55*(4), 641-651.

Friedman, I. (2002) Burnout in school principals: role related antecedents. *Social Psychology of Education, 5*, 229-251.

Fuller, E. (2012). Examining principal turnover. *National Education Policy Center*. http://www.shankerinstitute.org/blog/examining-principal-turnover

Fuller, E. & Young, M. (2009). Tenure and retention of newly hired principals in Texas. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Michelle_Young4/publication/228660740_Tenure_and_Retention_of_Newly_Hired_Principals_in_Texas/links/0deec5217bb17277af000000.pdf

Gates, S., Rangel, J., Santibanez, L., Guarina, C., Ghosh-Dastidar, B., & Brown, A. (2006). Mobility and turnover among school principals. *Economics of Education Review, 25*, 289-302.

Gimbel, P., & Kefor, K. (2018). Perceptions of principal mentoring initiative. *NASSP Bulletin, 102*(1), 22-37. doi:10.1177/0192636518754405

Habegger, S. (2008). The principal's role in successful schools: Creating a positive school culture. *Principal, 88*(1), 42-46.

Honig, M., & Rainey, L. (2014). Central office leadership in principal professional learning communities: The practice beneath the policy. *Teacher College Record, 116*(040304), 1-

48.
https://education.uw.edu/sites/default/files/250/2014%20HONIG%20RAINEY%20Central%20office%20leadership%20in%20principal%20professional%20learning%20communities.pdf

Houle, J. (2006). PD for urban principals in underperforming schools. *Education and Urban Society, 38*(2), 142-159.

Jackson, K., & Marriott, C. (2012). The interaction of principal and teacher instructional influences as a measure of leadership as an organizational quality. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 48*(2), 230-258.

Jacob, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Miller, R., & Goddard, Y., (2015). Exploring the causal impact of the McRel Balanced Leadership Program on leadership, principal efficacy, instructional climate, educator turnover, and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 37*(3), 314-332.

James-Ward, C. (2013). The coaching experience of four novice principals. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 2*(1), 21-33. doi:10.1108/20466851311323069

Jensen, R., & Moller, J. (2013). School data as mediators in professional development. *Journal of Education Change, 14*(1), 95-112.

Kaine Introduces Bill To Address Nationwide Teacher And Principal Shortages (2018). Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC.

Keith, D. (2011). Principal desirability for PD. *Academy of Educational Leadership Journal, 15*(2), 95-128.

Kraft, M., & Gilmour, A. (2016). Can principals promote teacher development as evaluation? A case study of principal's views and experiences. *Education Administration Quarterly, 52*(5), 711-753.

Ledesma, J. (2013). Narratives of longevity: Why Adventist principals stay beyond 10 years in one school. *The Journal of Applied Christian Leadership, 7*(1), 36-53.

Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019). Understanding and addressing principal turnover: a review of research. *Reston, VA: National Association of Secondary School Principals*. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/nassp-understanding-addressing-principal-turnover-review-research-report

Lutrick, E. & Szabo, S. (2012). Instructional leaders' beliefs about effective professional development. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *78*(3), 6-12.

Malone, R. (2001). Principal mentoring. *National Association of Elementary School Principals, 17*(2), 2-5. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED453591.pdf

Marzano, R. J., Walters, T., & McNulty, B.A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Maslach, C. (2003). Job burnout: New directions in research and intervention. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 12*(5), 189-192. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8721.01258

Maxwell, A., & Riley, P. (2017). Emotional demands, emotional labour, and occupational outcomes in school principals: Modelling the relationships. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 45*(3), 484-502.

McAuliffe, T. R., Kaine, T. (2018). Congressional documents and publications; Washington. Federal Information & News Dispatch, LLC.

Miles, M., Huberman, A., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage Publications.

Mitani, H. (2019). Principal turnover under no child left behind accountability pressure. *Teachers College Record*, *121*(2), 1-44.

Moolenaar, N., & Sleegers, P. (2015). The networked principal: Examining principals' social relationships and transformational leadership in schools and district networks. *Journal of Educational Administration, 53*(1), 8-39.

Murtedjo, & Suharningsih (2018). The role of principal in optimizing school climate in primary schools. *Journal of Physics, 953*, 1-7. doi:10.1088/1742-6596/953/1/012179

National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2017, March). *Position statement: Principal shortage*. https://www.nassp.org/policy-advocacy-center/nassp-position-statements/principal-shortage/

Ng, S., & Szeto, S. (2016). Preparing school leaders: The PD needs of newly appointed principals. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 44*(4), 540-557.

Nidus, G., & Sadder, M. (2011). The principal as formative coach. *Educational Leadership 69*(2), 30-35.

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, P.L. 107-110, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2002).

Northouse, P.G. (2013). Skills approach. In P. Quinlin & L. Shaw (Eds.), *Leadership: theory and practice.* (pp. 43-74). Sage Publications.

Norton, M. (2002). Let's keep our quality school principals on the job. *The High School Journal, 86*(2), 50-56.

Partlow, M. (2007). Contextual factors related to elementary principal turnover. *Planning and Changing, 38*(1/2), 60-76.

Payne, D., & Wolfson, T. (2000). Teacher PD-The principal's critical role

NASSP Bulletin, *84*(618)*,*13-21.

Peterson, K. (2002). The PD of principals: Innovations and opportunities. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*(2), 213-232.

Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals Act of 2019, S. 752, 116th Cong. (2019).

Reames, E. H., Kochan, F. K., & Zhu, L. (2014). Factors influencing principals' decisions: A southern US perspective. *Educational Management Administration Leadership, 41*(1), 40-60. https://doi.org/10.1177/1741143213499254

Reitzug, U. C., West, D. L., & Roma, A. (2008). Conceptualizing instructional leadership: The voices of principals. *Education and Urban Society, 40*(6), 694-714. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124508319583

Rizvi, M. (2008). The role of school principals in enhancing teacher professionalism. *Educational Management Administration Leadership, 36*(1), 85-100.

Sciarappa, K., & Mason, C. (2014). National principal mentoring: does it achieve its purpose? *International of Mentoring and Coaching in Education, 3*(1), 51-71.

Shaked, H., & Schechter, C. (2016). Holistic school leadership: Systems thinking as an instructional leadership enabler. *NASSP Bulletin, 100*(4), 177-202.

Shulstad, R. (2009). Perspectives on leadership and management. *Air and Space Power Journal, 23*(2), 11-18.

Skaalvik, C. (2020). School principal self-efficacy for instructional leadership: Relations with engagement, emotional exhaustion, and motivation to quit. *Social Psychology of Education, 23*(2), 479-498. doi:10.1007/s11218-020-09544-4

Stewart, C., & Matthews, J. (2015). The lone ranger in rural education: The small rural school principal and PD. *The Rural Educator, 36*(3), 49-60.

Strickland-Cohen, K., McIntosh, K., Horner, R. (2014). Effective practices in the face of principal turnover. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 46*(3), 19-25.

Superville, D. R. (2014). Study finds principal mobility takes toll on budgets, learning; churn: the high cost of principal turnover. *Education Week, 34*(12), 5.

Superville, D. R. (2019). Principal turnover is a problem. new data could help districts combat it. *Education Week, 39*(18). https://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2019/12/19/principal-turnover-is-a-problem-new-data.html

Texas Administrative Code (2018). State board for educator certification, principal certificate. http://texreg.sos.state.tx.us/public/readtac$ext.TacPage?sl=T&app=9&p_dir=P&p_rloc=142866&p_tloc=&p_ploc=1&pg=12&p_tac=&ti=19&pt=7&ch=241&rl=15

Texas Education Agency. (2019). *Texas academic performance report: 2018-2019*. https://rptsvr1.tea.texas.gov/perfreport/tapr/2019/srch.html?srch=D

Tikkanen, L., Pyhalto, P., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2017). Interrelations between principals' risk of burnout profiles and proactive self-regulation strategies. *Social Psychological Education, 20*, 259-274.

Tran, H. (2017). The impact of pay satisfaction and school achievement on high school principals' turnover intentions. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 45*(4), 621-638.

United States Department of Education (2016), Title II of Every Student Succeed Act, (2016). https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essatitleiipartaguidance.pdf

Versland, T., & Erickson, J. (2017). Leading by example: A case study of the influence of principal self-efficacy on collective efficacy. *Cogent Education, 4*(1), 1286765. doi:10.1080/2331186X.2017.1286765

Wallace Foundation. (2013). *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning.* The Wallace Foundation, https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf

Wax, A. S., & Hales, L. W. (1984). *The development of an instrument for measuring burnout in public school administrators*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, LA. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED321376

Weller, D. (1982). Principals, meet Maslow: A prescription for teacher retention. *NASSP Bulletin*, 66(456), 32-36.

Welton, A., Diem, S., & Holme, J. (2015). Color conscious, cultural blindness: suburban school districts and demographic change. *Education and Urban Society. 47*(6), 695-722.

Whitaker, K. (1996). Exploring causes of principal burnout. *Journal of Educational Administration, 34*(1), 60-71.

Wills, G. (2016). Principal leadership changes and their consequences for school performance in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development, 51*, 108-124.

Yang, Y. (2014). Principals' transformational leadership in school improvement. International Journal of Educational Management, 28(3), 279-288.

Yarborough, J. P. (2018). The role of coaching in leadership development. *New Directions for Student Leadership, 2018*(158), 49-61. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1002/yd.20287

Yin, R. K. (2016). *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish.* The Gilford Press.

Youngs, P., & King, B. (2002). Principal leadership for PD to build school capacity. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 38*(5), 643-670.

Appendices

Appendix A

Principal Recruitment Letter

Dear Principal,

My name is Coletha Johnson, and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Texas in Arlington in K-16 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, under the advisement of Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky. I am conducting a qualitative study to gain insight on the perceptions veteran secondary principals have regarding instructional leadership and retention. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of veteran secondary principals with five or more years of experience in the role. Specifically, the findings will help provide information on what contributes to their success as instructional leaders and why they decide to stay.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please respond to this email and I will provide the next steps. If you would like additional information about this study, please contact Coletha Johnson at coletha.johnson@mavs.uta.edu or 316-204-4162. Agreement to be contacted or a request for more information does not obligate you to participate in the study.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Coletha Johnson

The University of Texas at Arlington

Appendix B

District Personnel Recruitment Letter

Dear District Personnel,

My name is Coletha Johnson, and I am currently a doctoral student at the University of Texas in Arlington in K-16 Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, under the advisement of Dr. Barbara Tobolowsky. I am conducting a qualitative study to gain insight on the perceptions veteran secondary principals have related to instructional leadership and retention. The purpose of the study is to explore the experiences of veteran secondary principals with five or more years of experience in the role. I am contacting you because it would be valuable to understand what supports the district offers to support principals.

If you are interested in participating in this research, please respond to this email and I will provide the next steps. If you would like additional information about this study, please contact Coletha Johnson at coletha.johnson@mavs.uta.edu or 316-204-4162. Agreement to be contacted or a request for more information does not obligate you to participate in the study.

Thank you again for considering this research opportunity.

Sincerely,

Coletha Johnson

The University of Texas at Arlington

Appendix C

Principal Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Coletha Johnson, and I am requesting your participation in a UT Arlington research study titled, "Principal Retention: The Perception of Secondary Veteran Principals Who Remain in Their Roles as Instructional Leaders." The purpose of this study is to better understand why Secondary Veteran Principals remain in their roles. As a participant, I will ask you to complete one 45–60-minute semi-structured interview. Additionally, you will be asked to complete a 10-minute Demographic Questionnaire to provide background information about you as a principal. To participate in this research study, you must have been a secondary principal for at least five years.

Possible benefits of participating in this study would be your ability to provide insight into the experiences of instructional leaders, which may help with principal retention. Also, your participation will contribute to the limited amount of research that exist regarding principal retention at the secondary level. There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or direct benefits associated with your participation. Furthermore, as a voluntary participant, please understand that you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Information obtained for this study will be confidential and I am committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a participant. Although I may publish or present the findings, you will remain anonymous throughout this entire process. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me at Coletha.Johnson@mavs.uta.edu or 316-204-4162. For additional questions or concerns, contact the UTA Research Office at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

By marking your interest below and returning the demographic questionnaire, you are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate in this study. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

_____ Yes, I want to participate in this study.

_____ No, I do not want to participate in this study.

______________________________	______________________________	_______________
Printed Name	Signature	Date

Regards,

Coletha Johnson

The University of Texas at Arlington

Appendix D

District Personnel Letter of Consent

Dear Participant,

My name is Coletha Johnson, and I am requesting your participation in a UT Arlington research study titled, "Principal Retention: The Perception of Secondary Veteran Principals Who Remain in Their Roles as Instructional Leaders." The purpose of this study is to better understand why Secondary Veteran Principals remain in their roles. As a participant, I will ask you to complete one 45–60-minute semi-structured interview. To participate in this research study, you must directly supervise principals.

Possible benefits of participating in this study would be your ability to provide insight into the experiences of instructional leaders, which may help with principal retention. Also, your participation will contribute to the limited amount of research that exist regarding principal retention at the secondary level. There are no foreseeable risks, discomforts, or direct benefits associated with your participation. Furthermore, as a voluntary participant, please understand that you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.

Information obtained for this study will be confidential and I am committed to protecting your rights and privacy as a participant. Although I may publish or present the findings, you will remain anonymous throughout this entire process. If you have questions about the study, you can contact me at Coletha.Johnson@mavs.uta.edu or 316-204-4162. For additional questions or concerns, contact the UTA Research Office at 817-272-3723 or regulatoryservices@uta.edu.

By marking your interest below and returning this document, you are indicating your voluntary agreement to participate in this study. Thank you for your consideration of this request.

_____ Yes, I want to participate in this study.

_____ No, I do not want to participate in this study.

____________________________	____________________________	______________
Printed Name	Signature	Date

Regards,

Coletha Johnson

The University of Texas at Arlington

Appendix E

Principal Interview Protocol

1. Tell me about yourself and how you arrived at the role as principal? What other positions did you hold in K-12? When did you decide you wanted to be a principal? What did you expect it to be like?

2. Since you became a principal, how has the role changed over the years?

3. What does it mean to you to be an instructional leader?

4. How do you feel about your effectiveness as an instructional leader? How do you determine effectiveness?

5. What do you feel are your strengths and challenges as an instructional leader?

6. What helped prepare you for your role as principal? Can you give me some examples? How did it help you?

7. Did PD help prepare you to be a principal? If yes or no, why?

8. Did coaching or mentoring help prepare you to be a principal? If yes or no, why?

9. If you have experienced a PLC for principals, how has it helped or hindered your instructional leadership skills as a principal?

10. Knowing what you know now, what resources or PD would you have desired prior to assuming the principal role? Why?

11. Are there any district supports in place to support you in being an Instructional Leader? If so, what supports are available? What was your experience like with them?

12. Why do you think you have remained in this role for as long as you have?

13. What do you think contributed to you staying?

14. As a veteran principal, what supports would be most helpful to you now? Why?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me regarding your role as an instructional leader?

Appendix F

District Personnel Interview Protocol

1. What role do you play in supporting principals as instructional leaders?

2. What district supports are in place to retain principals?

3. How do you determine if a principal is an effective instructional leader? What specific measures do you use?

4. What strategies are used to improve a principal's performance as an instructional leader?

5. What do you think contributes to principals remaining in their role as instructional leaders?

6. How do you meet the instructional leadership needs for novice principals versus veteran principals with over 5 years of experience? Please give some examples.

7. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about the district's role in supporting principal's success?

Appendix G

Reflection Note Template

Date of Interview: ____________________________

Name of Interviewee: ____________________________

Name of School District: ____________________________

Question	Reflective Notes

Appendix H

Demographic Questionnaire

Please complete the following information

1. First and Last Name (Pseudonym Preference) ___________________________________
2. Age ________
3. Gender _____________
4. Race _____________
5. Current Campus Level: _______ Middle School ________ High School (check)
6. Number of years as a principal __________
7. Number of years at your current school ___________
8. Name all roles in education you fulfilled prior to principalship.

   ____

   ____

   ____

9. Name any Professional Development/Trainings you have attended that contributes to your success as a principal.

   ____

   ____

   ____

Appendix I

IRB Approval Letter

UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS ARLINGTON | OFFICE OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION REGULATORY SERVICES

12/3/2020

IRB Approval of Minimal Risk (MR) Protocol

PI: Coletha Johnson
Faculty Advisor: Barbara Tobolowsky
Department: Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
IRB Protocol #: 2021-0140
Study Title: *Principal Retention: The Perceptions of Secondary Veteran Principals Who Remain in their Roles as Instructional Leaders*

Effective Approval: 12/3/2020
In-person interactions with human subjects must comply with UTA's list of permitted research activities and the related requirements under COVID-19 limitations: https://resources.uta.edu/research/coronavirus/index.php.

The IRB has approved the above referenced submission in accordance with applicable regulations and/or UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures.

Principal Investigator and Faculty Advisor Responsibilities

All personnel conducting human subject research must comply with UTA's IRB Standard Operating Procedures and RA-PO4, Statement of Principles and Policies Regarding Human Subjects in Research. Important items for PIs and Faculty Advisors are as follows:

- **Notify Regulatory Services of proposed, new, or changing funding source**
- Fulfill research oversight responsibilities, IV.F and IV.G.
- Obtain approval prior to initiating changes in research or personnel, IX.B.
- Report Serious Adverse Events (SAEs) and Unanticipated Problems (UPs), IX.C.
- Fulfill Continuing Review requirements, if applicable, IX.A.
- Protect human subject data (XV.) and maintain records (XXI.C.).
- Maintain HSP (3 years), GCP (3 years), and RCR (4 years) training as applicable.

REGULATORY SERVICES | The University of Texas at Arlington, Center for Innovation
202 E. Border Street, Suite 300, Arlington, Texas 76010, Box #19188
(Phone) 817-272-3723 (Email) regulatoryservices@uta.edu (Web) www.uta.edu/rs

Biographical Information

Coletha Johnson is currently a K-12 Educator. She was previously a middle and high school administrator, middle school counselor, and a middle school math teacher. She is passionate about impacting the field of education by strengthening teacher efficacy and creating opportunities for all students to learn at optimal levels. Her Bachelor of Arts degree is from Wichita State University in Elementary Education. Her Master of Education degree is from Dallas Baptist University in School Counseling. Her Doctorate degree is from the University of Texas at Arlington in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies. She plans to become an educational consultant to influence principal efficacy through professional development and mentorship.