School Principal Support: A Qualitative Study of Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Schools

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School Principal Support: A Qualitative Study of Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Schools

Abstract
This study sought to understand, through their lived experiences, teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and what influence, if any, it had on the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools. Teacher consistency and proficiency contribute to an increase in student achievement; however, 50% of educators in the United States leave the profession within their first five years of employment. The literature lacks specificity with regard to teachers’ perception of support from their school principal. This study explored the following research questions: (a) How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support? (b) How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment? and (c) How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal? This qualitative study included 143 Grade K-12 teacher participants who completed the Teacher Perception Questionnaire. Participants described a supportive principal as one that leads by example, promotes collaboration, cultivates leadership in others, demonstrates compassion, demonstrates commitment to school, has an all-hands-on-deck attitude, and builds on teachers’ strengths. Teachers in the urban schools described a low teacher-principal exchange while participants from suburban and rural schools described a high rate of exchange. This study recommends administering the TPQ to charter, parochial, private schools, and/or other non-traditional schools. Further, this study proposes the need to redefine the qualifications for mentorships and proposes a review of the effect and implementation of federal, state, and district policies that inadvertently cause teacher and school principal turnover.
School Principal Support: A Qualitative Study of Teachers’ Lived Experiences in Urban, Suburban, and Rural Schools

By

Larry C. Schmiegel

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

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Dedication

This educational journey would not have been possible without the support of my two sons, Giovanni A. Schmiegel and Gianni C. Schmiegel, whom I love more than life. Being away from you on class weekends, along with the many late nights, completing coursework and conducting research, reminded me how much I love you both. I thank God every day for blessing me as your father. You both made many sacrifices throughout this dissertation journey, and I am forever grateful.

To my mother, Jo Ann Schmiegel, who has always believed in me and encouraged me to keep reaching for the stars – the sky is the limit. I’m not sure you understood when you taught me how to read how much I would enjoy learning.

To Charles J. Paquette, my friend and encourager, who watched over my boys when I couldn’t be there myself, and more importantly, for being the living definition of a true friend. Without your support, encouragement, and many sacrifices, this accomplishment would not be possible.

To my sister, Melissa A. Doris, and my sister, Jennifer L. Schmiegel, and brothers, Eugene H. Schmiegel and Robert A. Schmiegel-Remigio, who have always been there for me and encouraged me to pursue my dreams and to never give up. To my grandmother, Mary Pendock, and my beloved sister, Marlene Susan Schmiegel, I dedicate my dissertation to your memories. Your presence lives through me each and every day. I’m sure you are looking down from heaven now, smiling with me upon the accomplishment of such a goal.
I extend thanks to my Chairperson, Dr. Theresa Pulos, for taking this journey with me. Your guidance and friendship throughout this process, while reminding me to “trust the process” was truly appreciated. To my committee member, Dr. C. Michael Robinson, for believing in me and encouraging me to believe in myself. I will never forget that day in my family room as you held my newborn son in your arms. You reassured me by saying, “You can do this!” At that point in my life after almost losing my son to SIDS, I wasn’t confident the timing was right. Your compassion inspired me to join the doctoral journey, and I am glad that I did. I only hope to inspire others as much as you inspired me.

I express thanks to my superintendent, Dr. Dean Goewey, who was a true ambassador of the program. A special thank you to my faculty and staff at Leighton Elementary School for your understanding and encouragement when, at times, the road seemed too steep to face. It is amazing what one can accomplish with the support of people like you. I appreciate all that you do every day to provide the best opportunities for our students.

Lastly, I would like to thank my cohort group, the Shining Lights. Thank you Derrick, Katharine, and Chap for being the best doctoral group one could have asked for. Your support and inspiration is truly appreciated. May the friendship we created live on forever.
Biographical Sketch

Larry C. Schmiegel is the principal of Frederick Leighton Elementary School in the Oswego City School District. Prior to his current position, he spent much of his career in one of New York State’s Big Five School Districts—the Syracuse City School District. There he worked with students and families in poverty. He considers his most important role to be a champion for all children.

Mr. Schmiegel attended Columbia College of Missouri from 2001 to 2005, graduated with three Bachelor of Arts degrees in 2005, and graduated with a Master of Business Administration degree in 2006. He expanded his post-graduate studies at LeMoyne College in Syracuse, New York where he earned a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership in 2007.

Mr. Schmiegel’s passion for improving educational outcomes for all children inspired his dissertation topic. He understands that in order to improve educational outcomes for all students, we must decrease the rate in which teachers leave their school or the profession altogether. He can be quoted as saying, “Education is not cheap, but providing our students with consistency is. Students in poverty need to know that their teachers care about them as individuals, so their mind is free to learn without worry or fear.”

Mr. Schmiegel came to St. John Fisher College in the fall of 2013 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. program in Executive Leadership. He pursued his research by examining teachers’ perceptions of school principal support and its influence on their
level of commitment to their school under the direction of Dr. Theresa L. Pulos and Dr. C. Michael Robinson and received the Ed.D. degree in 2015.
Abstract

This study sought to understand, through their lived experiences, teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and what influence, if any, it had on the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools. Teacher consistency and proficiency contribute to an increase in student achievement; however, 50% of educators in the United States leave the profession within their first five years of employment. The literature lacks specificity with regard to teachers’ perception of support from their school principal. This study explored the following research questions: (a) How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support? (b) How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment? and (c) How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal? This qualitative study included 143 Grade K-12 teacher participants who completed the Teacher Perception Questionnaire. Participants described a supportive principal as one that leads by example, promotes collaboration, cultivates leadership in others, demonstrates compassion, demonstrates commitment to school, has an all-hands-on-deck attitude, and builds on teachers’ strengths. Teachers in the urban schools described a low teacher-principal exchange while participants from suburban and rural schools described a high rate of exchange.

This study recommends administering the TPQ to charter, parochial, private schools, and/or other non-traditional schools. Further, this study proposes the need to
redefine the qualifications for mentorships and proposes a review of the effect and implementation of federal, state, and district policies that inadvertently cause teacher and school principal turnover.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

Highly qualified and dedicated teachers are essential for improved student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998). Teacher proficiency and consistency contribute to an increase in student achievement. Like many professions, it takes a person time in the classroom to move from novice to master. However, 50% of educators leave the profession within their first 5 years. This turnover rate in urban districts, also referred to as “high-needs and high-poverty” districts, happens at a significantly higher rate compared to their “low needs” counterparts (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). This study explores teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and how it influences teachers’ commitment to their organization.

In 2009, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) (New York State Education Department, 2010) began a national conversation that served to reform public education while stimulating our economy. The ARRA included a $4.3 billion grant called Race to the Top (RTTT) (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2010), which allowed districts, nationwide, with an opportunity to apply for grant funds through the United States Department of Education (Conley & Dupor, 2013). The U.S. Department of Education intended to reward and encourage states to enhance education initiatives within four core education-reform areas: (a) adopting rigorous performance standards and standardized assessments to ensure that students are college and career
ready; (b) building data systems that help improve instructional practice and outcome for students; (c) recruiting, retaining, and developing teachers; and (d) transforming low-achieving schools (Conley & Dupor, 2013). The constraints of the funding included an obligation by the districts to exhaust the RTTT funds within 2 years of distribution and to sustain the initiatives, which were put into place, once the funds were exhausted.

The purpose of the ARRA (New York State Education Department, 2010) and RTTT (NYSED, 2010) was to recruit, retain, and develop teachers and to transform low-achieving schools (Conley & Dupor, 2013). Despite these initiatives, teacher attrition in the U.S. has increased by 40% over the past two decades. Conley and Dupor’s study referenced that the most common level of experience in 1987 was 15 years. It was reported in 2009 that most teachers were in the midst of their first year of teaching; however, in 2011, due to the economic downturn, there was a reduction in beginning teachers, therefore, increasing the median level of experience to five years (Haynes, 2014; Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014).

The annual cost of teacher attrition in the United States is approximately $2.2 billion. Ingersoll et al. (2014) estimated the annual cost of teacher attrition in New York State at $56,850,584 to $127,742,817. The study reviewed data from the 2008-2009 School and Staffing Survey, which indicated 13,024 teachers from New York State left the profession during that time period. In addition to the most obvious negative financial impact teacher attrition has on districts, it also results in a loss of instructional knowledge, which has a negative impact on those teachers who choose to remain teaching (Haynes, 2014).
Teacher attrition also negatively impacts the lower-achieving, high-poverty schools where continuity and stability is needed when searching for new teachers (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). Podgursky (2003) suggested that teachers are more likely to leave the profession early on—before they become tenured. In New York State, after teachers are appointed to a position, state law requires that they serve a three-year probationary period. Supervisors observe them and evaluate their classroom management, lesson planning, presentation skills, and use of data to help new teachers plan their instruction. At the end of three years of acceptable service, teachers may be recommended to receive tenure, which means they are entitled to due process rights under Section 3020a. This law specifically addresses discipline and penalties of school employees. This is commonly called “acquiring tenure,” but it is effectively the completion of their probationary period.

Given that tenure helps to retain teachers, Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Korstjens, and Volman (2014) sought to gain insight into ways to enhance teacher retention in urban environments. The authors looked specifically into induction programs for new teachers and how those programs influenced teachers’ intentions to remain teaching. Other researchers have proposed that preparation programs could aid teachers in creating long-term commitments to education (Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005). The same studies define organizational commitment as employees’ relationships with their organization that influence their decisions to either remain or leave the organizations (Meyer & Allen, 1991). More importantly, it is believed that teachers who are committed to their organizations are less likely to leave the profession or move to another school (Johnson et al., 2005; Meyer & Allen, 1991; Price & Collett, 2012; Selamat, Nordin, & Adnan, 2013;
Zhao et al., 2012). As did Tickle, Chang, and Kim (2010), this study examined the effect of leadership support and workplace commitment on teachers’ intentions to remain in the profession.

The highest rate of attrition for both special and general educators is during their first three years of teaching. Boe, Sunderland, and Cook (2008) quantified trends in three components of special and general education turnover and investigated excessive teacher turnover as the predominant source of teacher shortage. The data suggests that more teachers are transferring from special education to regular education as a result of feeling isolated and overloaded with paperwork when compared to their regular education counterparts (Boe & Gillford, 1992; Curran & Abrahams, 2000).

Teacher retention was compared to other fields, such as nursing, social work, and accounting. LeMaistre and Pare (2009) used Ingersoll’s (2001) research to guide their study that compared teachers, school, and organizational characteristics to similar professions with regard to retention. Despite similarities among these other professions, Ingersoll (2001) found that teacher turnover was higher than nurse turnover because beginning teachers receive far less support than nurses in their field (LeMaistre & Pare, 2009).

About 13% of the American workforce of 3.4 million public school teachers either move (227,016) or leave (230,122) the profession each year (Bakeman, 2014). Classified as stayers are those teachers that remain teaching at the same school. Movers are those who transfer to another school within the same district, and leavers are classified as those who leave teaching to pursue another career, raise children, or retire (National Center for Education Statistics) (Snyder & Dillow, 2012).
Of course, turnover is not always a negative for a school system because it can save a district money in salaries by hiring newer teachers at a significantly lower rate. Research also suggest that teacher turnover has the potential to replace stagnant workers with “new blood” to the organization, which is needed for innovation (Ingersoll, 2002, 2003, Mobley, 1982; Price, 1977). However, Ingersoll (2003) suggested that high rates of turnover is not free for organizations because they incur training and recruitment costs and face difficulty with productivity. Ingersoll stated that school managers are essential in mitigating high levels of teacher turnover, which contributes to better school performance.

This leads to an analysis of the variety of reasons teachers leave the profession. The literature reports specific factors that influence teachers’ decisions to leave their positions, which results in attrition. These factors include job satisfaction, personality traits, organizational commitment, parent and student involvement, teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs, the lack of mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, the disconnect between college preparation programs and the actual job itself, and a teacher’s perception of administrative support (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). These factors all have the possibility of increasing teacher attrition or turnover.

Researchers have proposed that administrative support is important to leavers and stayers, which supports why teachers leave the profession when they perceive a lack of administrative support. These studies confirm that support from the school principal is a proactive factor against teacher turnover (Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2005; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009); however, the research lacks specificity with regard to school principal behaviors that serve to reduce teacher attrition.
This study investigates the factors that influence teachers’ decisions to leave the teaching profession. Research has confirmed, beyond all other single measures, that well-qualified and committed teachers are the strongest predictor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998). Therefore, by expanding on previous research, this study looks specifically into teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support, both personally and professionally, as well as it strives to gain a better understanding of how teachers view the commitment of the broader organization that employs them. It is proposed that a better understanding of the relationship between teacher perception of school principal support and the commitment of their workplace can inform the practice of education and reduce the rate in which teachers move to another school or leave the profession.

**Problem Statement**

Teacher proficiency and consistency contribute to an increase in student achievement. It is shown in research that well-prepared and invested teachers are the strongest foreteller of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998).

Half of educators leave the profession within their first five years of employment (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). As a result, retention of highly qualified teachers is significant for all educational stakeholders because teachers are leaving before they reach the mastery level (Carroll, 2005).

The literature proposes reasons, such as administrative support, self-efficacy, collegial support, and job satisfaction that influence a teacher’s decision to remain
teaching or leave the profession. It further distinguishes between stayers, movers, and leavers (NCES, 2011).

Even with extensive research relating to teacher attrition, the perception of administrative support, specifically relating to the support of the school principal, teacher attrition lacks research; therefore, a gap in the literature has been created regarding teacher retention. This study explores the relationship between a school’s principal and the school’s teachers as it relates to the teachers’ perceptions of school principal support both professionally and personally, as well as school principal behaviors that influence the teachers’ organizational commitment, in order to address the rate in which teachers leave the profession and, ultimately, negatively impact student achievement.

**Theoretical Rationale**

Teachers choose to leave their profession due to a variety of influencing factors, however, the one factor least studied is their perception of school principal support. Insight into how teachers perceive the support of their principal, in their earlier years, may reduce the rate at which they leave the profession. The work of leader-member exchange theory (LMX), also known as the vertical dyad linkage (VDL) theory, provides a theoretical framework for this research. LMX theory was first described by Dansereau et al. (1975), then Graen and Cashman (1975), and finally, Graen (1976).

LMX theory conceptualizes leadership as a process that is based on the interactions between leaders and their followers, and it is focuses on the vertical linkages leaders form with each of their followers. Vertical linkages are best explained by the relationship between a leader and his or her followers. Each of the linkages represents
employees within the organization. For the purpose of this study, the vertical linkage represents the relationship between the school principal and each teacher.

LMX theory includes three stages that are known as role taking, role making, and routinization. In the first stage, members join a group, and the leader assesses their abilities and talents. In the second phase, the leader subconsciously sorts members into the in-group or out-group. In the third phase, a pattern of social exchanges takes place. The in-group members work hard to remain in the in-group while the out-group members begin to dislike and distrust their leader, which inadvertently reduces their workplace commitment. LMX theory proposes that members’ roles are based on expanded or negotiated role responsibilities. It further suggests that the leader, for the purpose of this study, the school principal, places those teachers who work beyond their contractual obligations, as members within his or her in-group. These teachers go above and beyond to fulfil extra roles and responsibilities within the school. They work hard to maintain their status in the in-group and are more willing to work beyond their job description. These members have a high level of trust, respect, and rapport with their leader. In addition, the theory suggests that some members are placed by their supervisor in out-groups based on their leader’s perception of the out-group members’ lack of workplace commitment and competence. Because the teachers’ roles are based on a formal employment contract, this creates many obstacles for the leader and the organization’s ability to meet performance goals (Northouse, 2013). Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) suggested the importance of leaders building trust and respect with all subordinates. High-quality leader-membership exchanges advance the goals of the leader, subordinates, and the organization. Scholars have concluded that high-quality leader-member
exchange produces less turnover, more positive evaluations, and a higher frequency of promotions. Additionally, it creates greater organizational commitment, more desirable work assignments, better job attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, greater participation, and faster career progress (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden, Wayne, & Stilwell, 1993).

With regard to reducing turnover and increasing commitment, the proposed impact of LMX theory is the rationale for using it within this study. LMX theory has been tested in both business and the military, and it was recommended that it be expanded to include education and other industries. More importantly, LMX theory was used to gain a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support and commitment to their success.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to research factors that influence teachers’ decisions that lead to attrition in their school systems. These factors influence teachers’ decisions to remain teaching in their same school (stayers), transfer to another school within the same district (movers), or leave teaching (leavers). Specifically, the research investigated teachers’ perception of their school principals’ support that impacts the teachers’ view of organizational commitment to them, and leads to their decision to either stay in their current position, move to another school, or leave the teaching profession. Researchers have found that when teachers feel supported by their administrator, they are more committed to the organization and are less likely to move to another school.

The data collected from the research has the potential to add to the existing body of knowledge with a deeper understanding of teachers’ perceptions of school principals...
support and specific school principal behaviors that influence the teachers’ level of workplace commitment. The data can be used to establish a framework of best practices for school principals to reduce teacher attrition.

**Research Questions**

The study addresses three research questions:

1. How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support?
2. How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment?
3. How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal?

**Potential Significance of the Study**

In an era of increased state and federal school accountability, many districts are striving to transform low-performing schools. Teacher consistency contributes to an increase in student achievement. Research has confirmed that well-qualified and committed teachers are the strongest predictor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998). However, despite this confirmation, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) and Ronfeldt et al. (2013) noted that 50% of educators leave the profession within their first five years.

LMX theory, as it relates to education, Scandura and Graen (1984) suggested that school principals’ relationships with their teachers has the potential to reduce teacher turnover. If teachers feel supported by their school principal, they are more likely to remain teaching in their current school rather than leave their school and transfer to
another school within the district, or leave the profession (NCES, 2011). Studies have documented the impact that school principal support has regarding teacher attrition and retention (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

LMX theory can measure the relationship between school principals and teachers. This study has the potential to contribute to the leadership literature by specifically focusing on school principal leadership and by relating information on the comparison between the school principal-teacher relationships and teacher decisions leading to attrition.

This study adds to the body of knowledge as it relates to school principal support and how it influences teachers’ decisions to remain teaching at their current schools, move to another school within the same district, or leave the teaching profession.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions represent common definitions found in the literature. For the purpose of this study, these terms are used to analyze the factors that influence a teacher’s decision to remain teaching, leave teaching, or move to another school. These terms also refer to a teacher’s organizational commitment to a specific school.

*Stayers* – teachers who continue teaching at the same school (NCES, 2011).

*Leavers* – teachers who leave teaching to pursue a different profession (NCES, 2011).

*Movers* – teachers who continue to teach but switch to a different school with a different school principal and organization (NCES, 2011).

*Organizational Commitment* – An individual’s desire to remain working for their current school principal (Meyer & Allen, 1991).
Chapter Summary

This chapter presents the research problem as it relates to the impact teachers have on student achievement and the adverse effect a lack of perceived school principal support and workplace commitment can have with regard to a high rate of turnover. This research study specifically investigates the reasons why teachers leave the profession and what impact leadership had on their decision. Although several factors relating to teacher attrition were identified within the literature, a clearer understanding of teachers’ perceptions of school principal support and organizational commitment is lacking and is the basis for this study. If school principals have a clearer understanding of teachers’ perceptions of personal support and professional support, they may be able to help the new and more vulnerable teachers remain in the profession. LMX theory, as a result of its success in reducing employee attrition in other professions, has the possibility of reducing the rate in which teachers move to another school or leave the profession. The purpose of the research is to add to the body of knowledge in order to reduce teacher attrition. The answers to the three research questions addressed in this chapter describe personal support and professional school principal support, organizational commitment, and insight into how teachers describe their relationships with their school principals.

Chapter 2 provides an introduction of the chapter and the purpose of this study. Next, a review of the literature takes place to build context for this study. Further, a summary of the chapter is provided. Chapter 3 provides an explanation of the qualitative methodology used within the study. Additionally, it includes the research context, a description of the data collection tool used, and provides a summary. Chapter 4 provides demographic information pertinent to this study, a review of the research questions, data
analysis, and findings. A summary of the results is provided. Lastly, Chapter 5 reexamines the research problem, identifies the implications of the findings, and reviews the study’s limitations. Additionally, Chapter 5 provides recommendations for future research, recommendations for practice, and recommendations for policy. A conclusion of all five chapters is provided.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

There are direct connections between teacher turnover and student achievement. Despite this, many teachers choose to leave their current school, move to another school within the same district, or leave the teaching profession. Chapter 2 examines the existing literature as it relates to those factors that influence teacher turnover, school principal support, and commitment.

Chapter 2 is organized around the factors that influence a teacher’s decision to leave his or her current school, move to another school, or to leaving teaching. These factors include job satisfaction, personality traits, organizational commitment, parental and student involvement, teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, the lack of mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, the disconnect between college preparation programs and the actual job itself, and teachers’ perception of administrative support (NCES, 2011).

Review of the Literature

The topic of the impact of teacher turnover on education has been widely studied. There are many variables to examine to determine why teachers stay or leave the profession. For instance, their perception of school principals’ personal support and professional support and their impact on the teachers’ level of commitment is among those variables considered to explain a teacher’s intention.
Leadership influence on stayers. School principals play an integral role in creating an environment where teachers feel both personally and professionally supported; therefore, are more committed to remain teaching at their same school. This section reports on the empirical studies that support this notion.

Grissom (2011) studied the correlation between working circumstances and job fulfilment and attrition. The researcher examined the role of school principals in retaining teachers in less desirable schools where staffing challenges existed.

The study used national data from the 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 School and Staffing Survey (SASS). The researcher used regression analysis to alleviate potential bias from absent variables and employed an extensive set of variables and a school district fixed-effects approach to make comparisons among school principals and teachers within similar school contexts. The results indicate that 3.47, on a four-point scale, indicated relatively high job satisfaction. Grissom’s (2011) study concluded that despite high level of job satisfaction, 13% left the profession compared to Ingersoll’s (2001) study, which confirmed a 12% turnover rate. According to the Ingersoll study, school principals were much better at defining an ideal school that they wanted, but they were less capable of acknowledging teachers or staff for a job well done.

Turnover rates are a result of many factors. One such factor is job fulfillment. Teachers who demonstrate high levels of fulfillment are less apt to leave. With a positive environment, the level of turnover remains steady compared to other studies, and in schools where the principal is less capable of acknowledging staff for a job well done, the turnover rates are consistent with other negative factors that influence a teacher’s decision to leave. This indicates that there will be a certain number of teachers who leave
regardless of the factors included here, and therefore, this issue is worthy of inclusion in this study (Grissom, 2011).

Tickle et al. (2010) examined the effect of leadership support on whether or not teachers had a high-level of workplace commitment and intended to remain in the profession. The authors defined leadership support as a school’s ability to coach teachers with issues such as behavior management, instructional delivery, curriculum, and amending to the schools’ already existing climate (Borman & Dowling, 2008).

The participants were 34,810 full-time Grade K-12 teachers with less than three years of experience using the SASS conducted by the NCES from 2003-2004. The national sample was collected using a stratified probability based on school type and grade. Teacher intent was measured using an ordered-response scale level. Responses for the length of time they expected to remain in teaching ranged from “leave as soon as I can” to “stay as long as I can.” An endogenous variable in the study related to teacher job satisfaction. The question posed was: “To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?—I am generally satisfied being a teacher at this school.” The researchers referred to the school principal component analysis in the SASS that “the principal lets staff members know what is expected of them” to “in this school, staff are recognized for a job well done.” A Likert scale was used. The second independent variable used in the study asked the teachers’ whether or not they began teaching before 1999-2000. The third independent variable included student behavior. “Do you agree or disagree with the statement?—What level of discipline interferes with your teaching?” Again, a Likert scale was used. Last, the researchers looked at a fourth variable that
considered teachers’ satisfaction with salary. Participants were asked whether or not they were content with their teaching pay (Snyder & Dillow, 2012).

Findings confirm that school principal support is a combination of both an educators’ job satisfaction and intention to remain teaching. Data indicate that significant predictors of teacher retention include teacher experience, job satisfaction, and administrative support. The researchers found that behavior management was a predictor of the level of support teachers felt they received from their principal, teachers’ job satisfaction, and teachers’ intent to remain teaching, which supports previous studies. The researchers’ found that teachers perceive their salary as a means of support from the administration (Tickle et al., 2010).

Administrator support of teachers is an important factor in a teacher’s job satisfaction. Where teachers have that support, satisfaction rates are higher. These teachers express the intent to stay. As Tickle et al. (2010) and Grissom (2011) concluded, teachers stay when they are in a supportive work environment. Without it, some teachers decide to leave. Therefore, the data gathered from the Tickle and Grissom studies was used in this research as it directly looks at administrative support and its correlation to teacher turnover.

Influence of student relationships on teacher turnover. Notwithstanding administrator support of teachers, the influence of interpersonal relationships and a teacher’s decision to stay, to leave, or to move have also been studied. The ways in which teachers perceive their interactions with students affects the decision-making process for some teachers.
Veldman, van Tartwijk, Brekelmans, and Wubbels (2013) sought to study teacher-student relationships and teacher job gratification of four veteran educators who reported high job gratification. The researchers’ conducted four case studies. In each case study, the researchers’ investigated the career of a teacher who maintained a high level of job satisfaction throughout his or her career. They utilized the Job Satisfaction Index and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey. The researchers selected those teachers who reported high satisfaction with their job and had a low burnout rate.

The results included a narrative biographical method and reported on the data gathered on the insights of teacher-student association. One of the teachers self-reported that her job satisfaction was a 5 out of 5, which had been as low as 2 at her previous school. She reported that her low satisfaction was the result of being placed in a leadership capacity at her previous school and having a difficult time motivating her colleagues. With regard to students, the teacher reported that her relationships with students rated a 4.5 out of a 5. The teacher reported that this had improved over the years through her own experience with raising her child at the same developmental age as the students she taught. All teachers saw an increase in student-teacher relations ratings after their first few years. Some teachers indicated a dip in their relations with students due to a change in teaching assignment and/or mid-life crisis (Veldman et al., 2013).

Teacher-student relations have a direct impact on job satisfaction. In the Veldman et al. (2013) study, teachers who experienced low burnout were selected. These teachers expressed their job satisfaction with regard to student interaction and how the skills to form positive relationships evolve over time. Personal life issues, such as mid-life crisis or child rearing, also played a role in the quality of student-teacher
relationships. Outside influences might also affect a teacher’s decision to stay, to move, or to leave teaching. Still, other job-specific issues inform a teacher’s decision. The Veldman et al. study (2013) is included because it looked at both sides of the issue and provided data that was worth analyzing to help understand the issue of teacher turnover.

**Teacher commitment.** In addition to leadership influence and student relationship influence on teacher turnover, a teacher’s commitment was studied to determine if certain traits were common among the teachers who chose to leave. Shah (2012) studied teachers’ organizational commitment in Islamabad, Pakistan. The researcher attempted to confirm whether teacher collegiality and teacher organizational commitment were different among different schools.

The researcher’s study was quantitative, non-experimental, and cross sectional. Data were collected via a survey that allowed for predictions in a large sample where limited resources were available (Shah, 2012). Teachers of 17 secondary public schools were surveyed.

The results revealed that when teachers felt there was a high level of collegiality within their school, more opportunities existed for sharing ideas and knowledge. Regarding commitment, teachers had high continuous commitment in both schools. Organizational commitment was defined as the school demonstrating the importance that teacher collegiality had on workplace commitment.

Shah (2012) reported that nurturing or firming up teacher collegiality did not increase student performance because it did not mean the teachers were or would participate in a deep dialog of how to advance instruction. The Shah (2012) research was enlightening as it revealed that teacher collegiality and camaraderie play significant roles
in teachers staying where they are. Where teachers feel the support of co-workers, they tended to be happier in their jobs and thus movement is limited. Therefore, the study sought to understand teacher’s perceptions of their co-workers’ level of commitment to the school and how it influences their decisions to remain at their current school, to move to another school, or to leave the teaching profession. Future research on the success of students in buildings with high professional collegiality was recommended.

Selamat et al. (2013) sought to identify the factors that enhance teachers’ organizational commitment in environments where transformational leadership was established. The authors defined organizational commitment as employees’ relationships with their organization that influenced their decision to either remain or leave the organization (Meyer & Allen, 1991). The authors defined transformational leadership as facilitating teacher commitment and capacities to meet organizational goals.

The participants were full-time secondary teachers in Klang, Selangor, Malaysia. These researchers modified the original instrument created by Meyer, Allen, and Smith (1993), which measured organizational commitment. The survey consisted of 16 items using a 7-point Likert scale. School principal transformational leadership was measured by using a modified version of the Nature of School Leadership Survey by Leithwood (1997). This measured eight dimensions of school principal leadership ranging from vision to strengthening school culture to building collaborative structures. The survey used a 7-point Likert scale.

The findings demonstrated high levels of commitment of the teachers to their schools, 44.6% showed moderate organization commitment, and 1.6% showed low levels of commitment. The findings depicted the employee’s positive emotional commitment to
the organization higher than their fear of loss and sense of obligation to stay. The study proved a strong linear relationship with transformational leadership and organizational commitment. Last, the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation reported that holding high-performance expectations and modeling behavior also showed a strong linear relationship with organizational commitment. The authors reported their findings that transformational leadership has a positively significant impact on teachers’ organizational commitment; therefore, creating a sense of shared vision is essential for school principals.

A supportive, engaged leader is essential in the creation of a positive school climate and culture. The Selamat et al. (2013) research looked at the affect a strong, supportive principal has on the rate of teacher turnover, and therefore this study has a direct influence on the research.

Price and Collett (2012) used data from the 2004 SASS to test whether the process could decrease turnover, described in Lawler’s affect theory of social exchange, by enhancing teacher commitment. The methods used within the research tested the four hypotheses and measured the significance of the affect theory to elementary teachers. The researchers constructed a scale index measure. Their measure of interdependence captured the sense of the collective influence over the school in which they worked. Another scale was used to measure teachers’ interactions with one another. Possible responses ranged from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” Dependent variables included professional investment commitment to the decision to not leave their employ. A classroom control (exogenous) measure was used to measure teacher control over their classroom. These control variables included sex, ethnicity, and experience, Title 1 status, proportion of marginal teachers, and amount of faculty.
The results suggested that interdependence only moderately affects teacher commitment. Additionally, teachers’ interactions with others is positively correlated to their level of independence with their school setting. Price and Collett (2012) reported that when there was an increase in interdependence within the school, interactions among teachers’ increased by 0.09%, which in turn increased their enthusiasm. Last, the researchers confirmed their findings that suggest teachers’ positive emotion and sense of belonging can significantly reduce their intention to leave an organization.

The measure of the different levels of commitment a teacher holds for the workplace is an important factor in turnover. Price and Collett (2012) looked at several facets of social engagement and their effect on teachers’ decisions to stay in their current assignment or to leave the organization. There were other factors, such as relationships among staff and the reliance of colleague support, to foster a desire to stay.

Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) sought to determine whether work engagement, burnout, OCB (organizational commitment behaviors), and/or work disaffection are forecasters of turnover intents. Establishments face substantial challenges in the managing of capacity and human capital. Du Plooy and Roodt suggested that organizations do a poor job tracking voluntary employee turnover.

A secondary data analysis was done by Du Plooy and Roodt (2004) in a quantitative investigation practice on cross-sectional survey data collected from a large South African information and technologies segment. The organization was N = 23,134. The researchers used a census approach to ensure the enumeration of the organization and they had a response rate of 11% (2,429). Utrecht Work Engagement Scale was used to measure work engagement. Maslach’s Burnout Inventory was used, and an alienation
scale was used to measure workplace alienation. Roodt (2004b) developed the Turnover Intentions Questionnaire to measure employees’ intent to either stay or leave their job.

The results of the Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) study confirmed the correlation between variables, such as work engagement, teachers’ feeling of being burned out, and work isolation, of turnover intentions. Specifically, work engagement and organizational commitment behaviors were negatively related to intentions of leaving their positions, while burnout and work alienation were significantly but positively related to intending not to leave the teaching profession. Other third-variable relationships indicated statistical significance. Lastly, the researchers’ used an analysis of variance which confirmed that the multiple regressions were highly significant.

Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) confirmed relationships between all predictor variables with the exclusion of work isolation. The researchers recommended a longitudinal study be conducted to determine additional variables that might influence their study. The researchers acknowledged a limitation in that its cross-sectional field survey hindered its causal relationships. Another limitation of their study was its self-reporting measures, which have a greater probability of errors.

The data studied in the Du Plooy and Roodt (2010) research, while it opened the door for further research, also indicates that workplace engagement and the presence of organizational commitment behaviors directly feed a teacher’s decision to stay or leave. While there were other factors, including burnout and job satisfaction included, the predominant factor was leader support. Therefore, the information studied in this sample was significant to the research in that it incorporated both inductive and deductive
questions, which specifically addressed workplace commitment and teachers’ perceptions of school principal support.

**Job satisfaction and burnout.** Among the many reasons teachers choose to remain teaching at their current school, to move to another school within the same district or to leave the teaching profession is job satisfaction and burnout. This section reviews empirical studies that help the reader gain better insight into these factors which influence a teacher’s decision.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009) sought to explore relations between burnout and teachers’ job satisfaction. A second purpose was whether or not teachers’ perceptions of contextual variables predicted teacher burnout and job satisfaction. The researchers’ also sought to determine if gender, size of school, and the number of years in the teaching profession contributed to teacher burnout or job satisfaction.

There were 563 participant teachers from elementary schools and middle schools. Teacher burnout was measured using a modified Norwegian version of the 22-item Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey (Maslach, Jackson, & Leiter, 1996). Participants were asked to rank statements, such as how their work made them feel and their feelings toward some students and whether or not they felt their position as a teacher helped them accomplish something in life (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). The Likert scale included 7 points. Job satisfaction was measured using a 5-point Likert scale. Another question referenced teachers’ intent to leave their job. Additionally, four dimensions of teachers’ perceptions of school context were measured: leadership support, time burden, relations to parents, and independence.
The correlations among the four supposed variables dappled from close to zero to moderate correlations. The robust correlation was among leadership support and autonomy. The three extents of teacher burnout remained positively but weakly interrelated. Gender associated weakly through all study variables. Moreover, job satisfaction was negatively associated to time pressure and positively correlated to managerial support, relations with parents, and autonomy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009).

The researchers studied teacher burnout and teacher job gratification. The analyses included gender, number of years in teaching profession, and magnitude of school. Years of experience was weakly but negatively related to teacher job satisfaction. The data did not prove to be significant with regard to age of teacher and job satisfaction.

Burnout and job satisfaction studies have concluded that leadership support and autonomy are two of the most noted factors in a teacher’s mobility decision. This study is relevant because it corroborates the belief that having a strong, supportive leader is key to retaining teachers. Teachers are less likely to move or to leave when they feel supported as indicated in this study. This study supports the claim by Burke et al. (2013), Kersaint et al. (2005), and Schwab and Iwanicki (1982) that acknowledged the impact school principal support has on teacher retention. However, the study took these studies further by allowing the participants to share their perception of school principal support as well as to rank those factors that influence their decision to remain teaching at the same school, move to another school, or leave teaching. The study looked to see whether district type or years teaching in a current assignment influences a teacher’s decision.

Pas, Bradshaw, and Hershfeldt (2011) studied 600 Maryland primary public school teachers from the fall of 2007 and the spring of 2008 and 2009 regarding teacher
and school-level effects on the advance of both teacher efficacy and burnout. Participants were asked to complete a five-item survey on teacher efficacy (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) that addressed working with students with behavior problems. The researchers felt that this facet of teacher efficacy was important in optimizing performance and reducing attrition. In addition, teachers were asked to complete an emotional exhaustion questionnaire (Maslach et al., 1986). Demographic characteristics such as gender, race, highest level of education, and number of years taught and were reported via an individual reporting measure. In addition, respondents were asked questions regarding their level of preparation and experience. Last, participants completed an organizational health inventory (Hoy & Feldman, 1987) as an indicator of school context.

The findings show that efficacy and burnout were statistically significant and had increased over time. It was reported that neither of the demographic characteristics (i.e., race and gender) were significantly related to teacher burnout or efficacy. Regarding teacher preparedness and burnout, the researchers confirmed that it was significant. Higher preparedness resulted in higher self-efficacy and lower burnout. The researchers also confirmed their hypothesis that increased parental and student involvement resulted in less teacher burnout. Lastly, the researchers confirmed that school-level variables, such as enrollment, mobility, and suspension rates, were not associated with burnout or efficacy (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2011).

Teacher preparation and attrition are directly related as shown in the Hoy & Woolfolk (1993) study. The level of leadership support was indicated, and it affected teacher satisfaction. High levels of leadership support yields low burnout. These, along with parent and student engagement, played significantly higher roles in a decision by a
teacher to make a professional change than any other factor. Highly prepared and engaged teachers have less burnout and less dissatisfaction. They are able to secure the interest of parents and students, and they are successful. The study looked at other variables, such as district type and teaching experience, and evaluated how they influence teachers’ decisions. Hoy and Woolfolk’s study supports the need to further analyze the factors that influence a teacher’s decision to remain teaching at the same school, move to another school, or to leave teaching.

Burke et al. (2013) sought to quantify the relative importance of remuneration, workload, support, administration, and parents on teacher attrition using best-worst scaling (BWS). Finn and Louviere (1992) designed the BWS to quantify the importance of one factor comparative to other issues.

Burke et al. (2013) used a mixed-method approach in order to determine the 31 aspects that teachers take into consideration when deciding whether or not to remain in teaching. A data reduction technique was used to identify/code coherent themes from all respondents. BWS was then used as a quantitative method in order for participants to rank 31 factors.

Respondents uses a 5-point Likert scale to measure the rate to which they were emotionally prepared to teach. The authors reported that 10% of participants felt they were prepared for teaching, while 7% reported not at all prepared. Of the participants, 50% felt that their life outside of work was disrupted when they entered teaching, and 16% reported no disruption at all. Teachers indicated 86% had a purpose for teaching and 5% reported having little or no sense of purpose. The BWS confirmed student involvement is 7.82 times more important to new teachers, when compared to
socialization with regard to their decision to leave or remain teaching. The authors demonstrated how the ratio for one factor was meaningful to another. In doing so, the authors took student involvement (7.82) and divided it by school culture (3.03) to determine that student participation in class was more important than school culture (2.58) to the teachers (Burke et al., 2013).

Burke et al. (2013) acknowledged that use of the BWS helped them identify key factors that influence a teacher’s decision to remain or to leave teaching. The researchers suggested that beginning teachers needed support for engaging students, assistance meeting the professional challenges of teaching, collegiality, collaboration, and support from leadership.

The Burke et al. (2013) research indicates that newer teachers need active student engagement success more than anything else to remain teaching. Where guidance and assistance are provided, they tended to stay. As new teachers enter the field, they quickly determine, usually within the first three years, whether or not they’re prepared for and committed to teaching. Leadership support and guidance from experienced colleagues help to keep newer teachers in the classroom. Therefore, the Burke et al. study is relevant and serves as the foundation for this study as it allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of leadership support and its impact on teacher turnover.

**Teacher efficacy and outside influence on teacher burnout.** Among those factors that cause a teacher to remain teaching at their same school, move to another school within the same district or to leave the profession is teacher efficacy, both individual and collective, as well as other outside influences. This section reviews empirical studies that address these factors.
Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2010) sought to explore the associations among teachers’ perceptions of school context, self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, burnout, job satisfaction, and beliefs. The participants in Skaalvik and Skaalik’s study were teachers from 113 elementary and middle schools (Grades 1-10) in Norway. Approximately 20-25 schools represented from one large city. A stratified random procedure was used to select one smaller town and two rural areas to participate in the study. Measurement instruments used within the study included the Norwegian Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale, Collective Teacher Efficacy Scale, and Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educators Survey. Other Likert measures were utilized to measure teacher job satisfaction and perceived school context. Data were analyzed by means of confirmatory factor analysis and structural equation modeling.

The results indicate that teacher self-efficacy was associated with both emotional exhaustion and lack of belonging. The two extents of teacher exhaustion were absolutely, but weakly, associated. All school context variables were significantly correlated to one or more endogenous variables. The strongest variables were teachers’ relations with parents. School principals’ support was strongly associated to teacher efficacy. A teacher’s sense of autonomy was positively associated with varying time pressures that come with teaching. Lastly, these researchers confirmed that teachers’ collective efficacy was the result of the leadership of the school principal.

Skaalvik and Skaalvik’s (2010) sought to understand the effects that a teacher’s self-efficacy and the collegiality among staff have on turnover. Self-efficacy, collegiality among staff at school, and burnout are factors that affect turnover. Skaalvik and Skaalvik
reported that the levels of teacher exhaustion and a sense of belonging directly impacted turnover. Collective self-efficacy was dependent upon leadership of the school principal.

Trust is another factor considered among teachers and turnover. A teacher’s professional trust in a colleague or a school principal is related to the decision to stay or leave. Van Maele and Houtte (2012) explored the role of teachers and faculty trust in creating job satisfaction. The authors used teacher experience as a moderator of the trust-satisfaction relationship.

The participant teachers were from 80 schools in the Dutch-speaking region of Belgium. The researchers’ purpose was to explore teachers’ perceptions of other school members’ trustworthiness as a predictor of job satisfaction. Teacher trust was measured using a 29-item scale developed by Hoy and Tschannen-Moran (1999). Items were scored absolutely disagree to definitely agree. Trust in students was measured using a 10-item scale, trust in parents was measured using a 5-point scale, trust in colleagues was measured using a 7-item scale, and trust in the school principal was measured using a 7-item scale. Teacher job satisfaction was measured using the Job Descriptive Index (Smith et al., 1969). Responses ranged from definitely agree to highest level of job satisfaction. Teaching experience was measured by the length of time the teachers had been teaching at their current school, which correlated to the teachers’ ages. Last, the teachers’ sense of self-efficacy was measured using the short Teachers’ Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). The 12-item measure ranged from not to a great deal.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) found that teacher job satisfaction correlated negatively to the number of years of experience and positively to their sense of efficacy.
The model demonstrated a 2.72% variance in teacher job satisfaction at the building level. The researchers acknowledged that building-level variables did not directly correlate to job satisfaction; however, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy indicated a significant correlation between content area and job satisfaction with an equally strong association with self-efficacy. The researchers found that the more teachers perceived their students’ parents to be trustworthy, the higher their job satisfaction, with the same being true of the trust of students, their colleagues, and the building principal. Last, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy confirmed the importance of maintaining trusting relationships with all stakeholders in order to improve teacher job satisfaction.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) suggested that teachers who trust other school members (i.e., parents, students, colleagues, and principal) feel more satisfied with their jobs and are less likely to leave their school or the profession. Trust among teachers and school leaders and all stakeholders is important in the level of satisfaction teachers feel with their job. Where trusting relationships are formed among the stakeholder groups, and job satisfaction is high, teachers stay.

Tschannen-Moran and Hoy’s (2001) research recognized trust among and between the staff and the leader as highly important. Where there is less trust, higher turnover rates exist. Not surprisingly, the converse is also true. Therefore, this research includes the work by Van Maele and Houtte (2012) as it directly addresses a factor that influences teacher mobility decisions.

**Collegiality and others’ assistance.** Mawhinney (2008) sought to explore educators’ need to assemble and be heard and for their experiences to be confirmed. The act of validation is a coping mechanism where teachers receive social support from each
other. Mawhinney used an ethnography method. Data were collected via observations in the teachers’ lounge and other congregational spaces with teachers, teaching assistants, and parent volunteers. Observations were performed during the lunches of the students in Grades K through 2, 4, 7, and 8. Field notes were completed directly after these observations. Mawhinney utilized a stratified sample based on the following categories: race, gender, age, teaching experience, and number of years at school.

Through this ethnography, Mawhinney (2008) reported that teachers needed to feel heard and validated, which happened in the congregational spaces in which she observed. Mawhinney stated that allowing a space for this validation allowed teachers with an opportunity to release some frustration about their students and/or job. She later clarified validation as being the academic progress of students, students’ behaviors, and the job itself.

The reliability of a study depends on the reliability and reproduction of the findings (Shadish, Cook, & Campbell, 2002). Mawhinney (2008) acknowledged her experience as an urban educator as bias. Thus issues of reliability and validity came into play with the study. Nevertheless, there is a need for more research to be conducted regarding congregational spaces, especially in the United States. Understanding causal associations can guide teachers, school principals, parents, and schoolchildren in a dialogue about the pressures facing teachers and the loss of teacher talent (Mawhinney, 2008).

As with other professions, the ability for teachers to gather and share experiences is important. The venting process among people who share common experiences allows teachers to move forward and feel like they are not alone. This information is helpful to
the research as it provides guidance on retention opportunities, particularly keeping the pressures at a level of tolerance so that teachers will remain teaching.

Martinussen, Adolfsen, Lauritzen, and Richardsen (2012) sought first to evaluate the effect of an intervention that was aimed at improving interprofessional collaboration and service quality, and secondly, to examine if collaboration could predict burnout, engagement, and service quality among human service professionals who work with children and adolescents. The participants (480) were recruited from six different small municipalities in Northern Norway (93), and a comparison group were recruited from four smaller municipalities (58), and questionnaires were distributed. The researchers predicted burnout and engagement by specific factors such as job demands and resources. Last, the study results were evaluated using a quasi-experimental, post-test study design with non-equivalent groups (Shadish et al., 2002).

The results indicate that there were no significant differences between the groups in demographic variables apart from working part time. The model district participants who reported they knew about the project rated collaboration higher when compared to those participants that did not know about the project. Additionally, there were no significant differences between the two groups in terms of service quality. However, there was a significant difference between the groups in terms of collaboration. Collaboration was negatively correlated to exhaustion, unrelated to engagement, and positively correlated to service quality. Last, after controlling for demographic, 41% of the variance was due to exhaustion, and 6% variance was attributable to engagement. Job resources explained 5% of the variance in exhaustion and 14% of the variance in engagement.
Shadish et al. (2002) acknowledged that some non-participation may have been from those respondents who felt overloaded at work and were more likely to face burnout, and as a result, they become part of the turnover. Despite this, the researchers believed that their research study had contributed to a deeper understanding of collaboration and its relation to worker well-being and self-evaluation of work quality.

Service quality and collaboration in the work environment provide insight into teacher turnover. In this study, it was determined that service quality and collaboration were more significant to the participants in this study. Therefore, the data gathered is informative to the research as it provides understanding about two factors that might contribute to a teacher’s decision to stay, to move to another assignment, or to leave the profession entirely.

Ware and Kitsantas (2007) sought to determine if collective efficacy beliefs predict commitment to the teacher profession. They used the public data set from the Principal Questionnaire and Teacher Questionnaire from 1999-2000. They surveyed 26,257 teachers and 6,711 school principals using two efficacy scales: a collective efficacy scale and a teacher professional commitment scale.

Ware and Kitsantas (2007) used exploratory factor analysis to develop the two teacher self-efficacy scales that formed the independent variables. The independent variables included: efficacy to recruit administrative direction, collective efficacy with regards to teachers’ autonomy over classroom management, and being involved in building-level decision making. Teacher commitment was the dependent variable. The results of the study concluded that correlation was significant.
Ware and Kitsantas’ (2007) study is included because it used a large national database that confirmed the earlier work by Bandura (1986, 1997, 2000). Teacher commitment results in low teacher turnover. The study provided evidence that is necessary when building a school culture. Ware and Kitsantas further suggested that the self-efficacy should be reflected in leadership programs. Ingersoll (2001) suggested that administrators improve the support to their staff by soliciting input in decision making so that it might reduce attrition rates of teachers. Therefore, the study sought to understand teachers’ perceptions of school principal support and the impact that it has on their decisions to remain teaching at the same school, move to another school, or to leave the teaching profession.

**Climate and workplace conditions.** Another factor related to teacher turnover is the school climate. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) sought to investigate components of school climate and assess their effect on burnout, lacking a sense of belonging to the organization, and the feeling failure. This study examined the effect of school climate on burnout and turnover of Ohio teachers. The data confirmed that no specific group is more apt to suffer burnout. The role burnout and turnover play in schools is not a significant factor in attrition. What is important to note is that the teachers who felt a sense of belonging and low burnout reported higher satisfaction and accomplishment. The turnover rate increased where the climate was negatively impacted by student-teacher relations and the school administration. Therefore, working in a positive environment supports the assertion that turnover will be lower when teachers feel supported and included in building decisions where possible.
Kukla-Acevedo (2009) sought to extend prior research in order to determine factors that caused teachers to remain or to leave their current school. The study focused on workplace conditions. The authors suggested that school principals have the authority to control and modify principal support, behavioral climate, and classroom independence.

The data for Kukla-Acevedo’s (2009) study came from the 1999-2000 SAAS and Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS) (Snyder & Dillow, 2012). The outcome measured were teachers’ mobility decisions between 1999-2000 and 2000-2001. Teachers were categorized as leavers, movers, and stayers. The total sample size included 3,505 participants. The three independent variables included: classroom autonomy, administrative support, and behavioral climate. Demographic data on the teachers’ such as age, race and gender were also included in all models.

Of the 3,505 teacher participants sampled, 5% were identified as leavers, 8% were identified as movers, and 87% were identified as stayers. The results indicate that change differed considerably based on teacher and school characteristics. New teachers were 1.5 times more likely to be leavers and 2 times more likely to be movers. Teachers younger than 30 years old were 3 times more likely to be leavers, and 4 times more likely to be movers. Although men and women exited the profession at similar rates, men were more likely to remain in their same school at a much higher rate than woman (6.10/8.39). The multivariate analysis revealed that the level of school principal support to the staff was the only significant relationship related to teacher turnover.

Kukla-Acevedo’s (2009) study built on prior research by evaluating teachers’ perceptions of workplace conditions. Kukla-Acevedo analyzed the three workplace conditions on teacher mobility and noted that first-year teachers were more likely to leave
teaching due to poor workplace conditions. Kukla-Acevedo also noted that classroom autonomy was not a predictor of teachers leaving, despite previous research that suggested teachers prefer to have autonomy over their classroom (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). This study also confirmed that support from the principal was a proactive factor against teacher turnover among the full sample of teachers.

Kukla-Acevedo’s (2009) study revealed that the interaction with the school principal was the most significant factor in newer teachers’ decisions to stay, move, or quit. Furthermore, newer teachers left primarily for reasons of workplace conditions as opposed to classroom environment or issues related directly to teaching. The study gains a deeper understanding of how teachers in various districts describe school principal support; therefore, reducing the rate in which teachers leave their current school, move to another school within the same district, or leave teaching.

Yesil Dagli (2012) sought to determine the causal relationship between teacher attrition and teacher features, perceived workplace climate and working conditions, and student characteristics of the school for public school kindergarten teachers. Selected teacher variables included gender, race, age, educational level, years of experience, and certification. The data were derived from the SASS and TFS. Using a stratified probability sample design, the 2003-2004 SASS sampling procedure included sampling all primary and secondary schools in the United States. The results indicate that, on average, the study sample of teachers had high job satisfaction and low burnout. Administrative support, colleague support, and classroom autonomy were ranked as the major reasons for high job satisfaction. Based on the correlation coefficient, job satisfaction negatively, but highly, correlated to a teacher’s decision to leave teaching.
Better school climate and quality of students were correlated with job satisfaction and decreased burnout. The data confirmed that teachers with advanced degrees were more likely to move to another school. The probability of moving to another school or leaving the profession was significantly increased in schools with higher rates of free and reduced-lunch participation.

The Yesli Dagli (2012) study aimed at contributing to the literature that models the effect of teacher characteristic, perceived school climate and working conditions, and teacher characteristics on teachers’ mobility decisions. The findings in the study show that approximately two-thirds of the variance in turnover was accounted for by teachers’ personal characteristics and perceived workplace conditions, which resulted in them either leaving the profession, relocating to another school, or continuing at their current school.

Yesli Dagli (2012) demonstrated that a teacher’s personal characteristics, along with current working conditions, definitely play a significant role in the decision making process for a teacher to stay, to transfer to a perceived more favorable environment, or to leave the profession. More importantly, the Yesli Dagli research is significant because it addressed specific reasons that influence a teacher’s mobility decision. It is therefore useful to the study and the body of knowledge to possibly propose ways to keep teachers in their current assignments and lessen turnover to ultimately benefit the students.

**Stayers’ and leavers’ intentions.** Some teachers who leave decide to later return to the profession. Kersaint et al. (2005) examined factors that promote or hinder a teacher’s return to teaching and those that remained in teaching. A teacher survey estimated that there is a turnover of nearly 3,500,000 teachers each year (Ingersoll, 2001).
The study targeted teachers who left (leavers) two large Florida school districts during a 2-year period (2002-2003 and 2003-2004). Answers to the questions paired the responses to the importance it had with regard to decision making. Participants were representative of school grades and socio-economic status. Teachers’ age and years of teaching were considered.

The results of the Kersaint et al. (2005) study conclude that time and family was of high importance to leavers and low importance to stayers in that leavers chose to leave due to child-rearing or child-bearing. This indicates that leavers may leave the profession to spend more time with their families. Administrative support was of importance to leavers and stayers, which may support why teachers leave the profession when they perceive there is a lack of administrative support. This was particularly true for females. Another aspect measured financial benefits, which suggested that it was of minimal importance to leavers and of low importance to stayers. The Kersaint et al. reported that the joy of teaching rated of low importance for both stayers and leavers.

In order to reduce teacher attrition, school principals should employ intervention strategies that engage staff in the decision-making process (Kersaint et al., 2005). The study conducted by Kersaint et al. addressed six factors that influenced teacher retention: balanced time with family with increased responsibilities, support received from their school principal, financial benefits, and amount of required paperwork. The study also verified that leavers rated lack of administrative support as the key reason for their leaving.

The Kersaint et al. (2005) study is relevant to the topic of teacher attrition. Several factors related to staying or leaving were examined. The data collected revealed
that administrative support, particularly for female teachers, was of high importance in the teacher’s decision making process of whether to leave or to stay. For leavers only, family commitments or the desire to start a new family, were also of high importance and factored into their exit. However, neither money nor the joy of teaching played a significant role in the decision-making process to stay or to leave. Having a supportive leader, who is engaged with their members in the organization, was key to keeping staff in place. Kersaint et al. sought to understand the teachers’ perceptions of school principal support as it relates to their decision to remain teaching at their current school, move to another school, or leave teaching.

**Supporting new teachers.** Many new teachers decide early in their career to leave the profession. There are many reasons why new teachers choose to leave.

Høigaard, Giske, and Sundsli (2012) sought to inquire into the impact of potential predictor variables on job satisfaction (i.e., the degree to which they like their job), burnout, and the subsequent intention to quit in recently qualified teachers. Høigaard et al. had three hypotheses: teachers’ efficacy and work engagement are negatively related to job burnout, teacher efficacy and work engagement are positively related to job satisfaction, and teachers’ efficacy and work engagement are negatively related to intention to quit.

Students who graduated from one teaching preparatory university from 2004-2008 were invited to participate in study. A total of 750 questionnaires were mailed with a response rate of 25.6%. The participants’ ages ranged from 25 to 57 years old with the mean teaching experience at 3.3 years. A Personal Teacher Efficacy Scale (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993) was used to measure their level of conviction. To measure work
engagement, the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006) was used. Teacher burnout was measured using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Kristensen, Borritz, Villadsen, & Christensen, 2005). Job satisfaction was measured using a five-point Likert scale.

The Høigaard et al. (2012) results show that personal teacher efficacy (PTE) and all work-engagement subscales were significantly and negatively correlated with the intention to quit and to work burnout. Moreover, a significant positive correlation was detected from PTE and work-engagement subscales on job satisfaction (32%). Furthermore, for work burnout, a significant negative effect emerged from energy and dedication. For the dependent variable intention to quit a significant negative effect emerged from vigor and dedication.

The aims of the Høigaard et al. (2012) study were to investigate the impact that teachers’ self-efficacy and work engagement had on job satisfaction, job burnout, and the intention to quit. Teachers’ efficacy and work engagement is negatively related to job burnout, positively related to related to job satisfaction, and negatively associated to the intention to quit. The Høigaard et al. (2012) showed the impact of self-efficacy and workplace engagement and a new teacher’s intention to quit. It is less likely to occur when active engagement in the workplace and a qualified, well-prepared new teacher enters into the profession. While both have little to do with burnout, they do relate to job satisfaction and teacher turnover.

Gaikhorst et al. (2014) sought to gain insight into ways to enhance teacher retention at the primary levels in urban environments. The authors looked specifically
into induction programs for new teachers and how they influenced teachers’ intention to remain teaching.

The participants engaged in in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews, with 11 volunteered school principals and eight beginning teachers. Gaikhorst et al. (2014) defined a beginning teacher as a teacher with less than 6 years’ experience. The qualitative descriptive study was conducted in primary schools in the Netherlands. The researchers sought to gain a diverse perspective from those that perceived negative or positive support. Interviewees were asked to rate and define the level of support they receive using a 10-point Likert scale. Gaikhorst et al. operationalized the “support structure” by asking beginning teachers what structural activities were provided to them.

In the Gaikhorst et al. (2014) study, one participant, who reported her experience with a positive support structure, said that new teachers are exempt from additional tasks, which provides them with more time in their classroom to perfect their craft. However, another respondent said she was given extra tasks and that she appreciated being seen as a “full” teacher. Teachers who reported a positive support culture indicated that they had regular visits from administration with immediate feedback. One of the respondents shared that her principal covered her class while she observed another classroom. Additional support from curriculum coordinators/directors was also reported for beginning teachers. Teachers that reported a negative school support culture said they felt isolated. One respondent questioned why she was in teaching. Another respondent shared that expectations were not clear—nothing was in writing for new teachers. She went on to report that an agreement was made to sit down weekly for coaching with her leader that proved unsuccessful. A culture of support, which was rated highly among
new teachers, was reported to have open lines of communication with concern for success, while someone who reported it negatively said that although lines were open, it was evident that veteran staff were talking among themselves about the novice teacher doing it incorrectly rather than offering support.

Gaikhorst et al. (2014) suggested that there were no remarkable differences between the school support structure and culture for those who rated these structures positively or negatively. The researchers found that although both may include a mentor structure, those who rated their support structure negatively had little time to participate with their mentor. Contrarily, those teachers that rated their support structure positively were trained in the mentor-relationship process and had time built into their schedule to ensure it happened. In addition, Gaikhorst et al. found that teachers who rated their support structure and culture favorably noted clear expectations from their supervisors.

The Gaikhorst et al. (2014) study shows that providing a strong school support culture to new teachers results in less turnover. Frequent visits from the administrators, who provided immediate feedback and support, along with providing time to work with a veteran teacher, was also helpful and worthwhile. In these schools, it was a priority, and time was scheduled to allow for these interactions. Any negative findings in the study came from new teachers who had little time to work with a mentor and who felt disengaged. Gaikhorst et al. sought to examine whether or not teachers perceive mentoring as a factor that would influence their decision to remain in teaching, move to another school, or to leave the teaching profession. The researchers sought to understand what, if any, influence their district type or years of experience influence their decisions.
Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) conducted a large-scale survey in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium. The study surveyed 13 universities that had teacher-preparation programs. The total sample size included 154 teachers with teaching experience and 81 teachers without teaching experience. The researchers sought to investigate the motives for teacher attrition of newly qualified teachers who never started a teaching career and those who dropped out after a short period. Struyven and Vanthournout wanted to answer two research questions: Does teacher attrition vary according to personal variables such as having actual experience with teaching or not, gender, or type of teaching qualification? What motives do certified teachers have for their exit attrition?

The results of Struyven and Vanthournout’s (2014) study suggest that the predominant reason teachers left teaching was a lack of prospects. Five factors, job satisfaction, school management and support, workload, future prospects, and relations with parents, explained 53% of the variance in motive to leave teaching. The effect of teaching experience was significant for most of the reasons for the teachers with experience teaching. These teachers put a lot of thought into their decision to leave or stay. Results from the study suggest that male teachers (25%) tended to leave their teaching profession more rapidly than their female colleagues (13%). However, the data shows that there was no significant difference based on gender of those who never started teaching and those who did.

Struyven and Vanthournout (2014) suggested that teacher preparation programs needed to provide in-depth teaching practices, which would help teacher candidates distinguish what they think the profession ought to be and what it actually was. Once
these candidates sought a teaching position, it was important that they receive support from their administrator. Doing so reduced the level of turnover for the young and energetic teachers (Ingersoll, 2001).

Struyven and Vanhournout (2014) asserted that the level of preparation is correlated to the longevity of a teacher’s career. Administrative support is critical for new staff. While preparation programs are important for obvious reasons, the practical application of what the new teachers learned is where the rubber meets the road. Without the support of a leader, many new teachers do not commit to teaching for very long. The study of Struyven and Vanhournout confirms the work of Burke et al. (2013), Kersaint et al. (2005), and Schwab and Iwanicki (1982). Last, the Struyven and Vanhournout (2014) study examined teachers’ perceptions of school principal support as it relates to their level of commitment to the organization.

LeMaistre and Pare (2009) identified that teachers who leave teaching preparatory programs lack coping strategies that would sustain them over time. The authors reflected on their research to suggest ways to improve the transition process for new teachers entering the field of education. The researchers focused on students one year before graduation, during practicum, and those with experience teaching. LeMaistre and Pare compared teaching to physiotherapy, occupational therapy, and social work. The study took place in Quebec, Canada and consisted of 32 dyads. The 32 interviews were conducted by both LeMaistre and Pare (2009) who were knowledgeable in education and other fields represented in the study.

The findings reveal that beginning teachers received far less support than did the other representative fields. LeMaistre and Pare (2009) pointed out that other professions
gave less workloads and a mentor to help them transition. To the contrary, beginning teachers were given less or no support and were assigned classes that veteran staff did not want to teach. A participant responded in her interview that a new teacher is extremely isolated. She went on to suggest that seeking help from veteran teachers is a means of losing credibility with them. The researchers sought to understand why 50%, as reported by Ingersoll (2001), decided to remain in teaching. What they found were induction and or mentoring programs for beginning teachers. Teachers felt supported. However, LeMaistre and Pare also mentioned that expectations of first-year teachers differ from reality. Problem solving was noted in the interviews. A participant noted that modifications are needed all the time and that decisions needed to be made every minute. How do they survive? A participant said it is important to maintain a balance between your personal life and teaching. Another respondent reported that understanding the fact that not every lesson will be perfect is essential to survival. Another participant said it is important to seek help from other school personnel and then being okay with your decision. Lastly, a respondent reported that she came to the determination that she would not be the world’s greatest teacher—and that’s okay. She reported that this helped her understand that she would evolve as a teacher over time.

LeMaistre and Pare (2009) indicated that a mentoring program for beginning teachers is essential because their experienced counterparts can explain the reality of “good enough.” The authors mentioned that teaching student teachers at the university level to recognize and be satisfied with their progress, while still encouraging them to improve, lacked in most programs.
Impact of school demographics. Guarino, Brown, and Wyse (2011) studied the impact of school demographics and performance incentives’ influence on teacher’s mobility decisions. The authors defined personal characteristics by the phase of the teachers’ careers and human capital investments. Guarino et al. (2011) suggested that teachers with degrees from prestigious colleges and who had National Board certification were more likely to leave their less desirable-school based on a self-perceived poor school demographics.

Guarino et al. (2011) used data from all public school teachers in North Carolina from 1995-2006, which included 103,800 participants. The data contained employment information, education information, certification information as well as demographic information. The researchers used a regression analysis to focus on the five types of transitions a teacher makes: (a) remain at same school, (b) remain teaching in the state but relocate to another school in the district, (c) remain teaching in the state but relocate to another district, (d) take an administrative job or other non-teaching position in education, or (e) leave the education system.

Guarino et al. (2011) found that over the 10-year period, the teacher workforce grew 27%. Furthermore, the number of teachers earning National Board certifications and those graduating from prestigious undergraduate colleges grew substantially. The authors mentioned the most common transition for a teacher was within their same district (76.5 to 77.9%) compared to those that left the field of education (9.2 to 12.4%). Guarino et al. concluded that 45% of teachers left their predominantly non-white schools over the 10-year study with 40% relocating to a predominantly non-white school; therefore, filling at-risk schools with new teachers. Interestingly, Guarino et al. (2011)
pointed out that privileged schools were more likely to see teachers leave the profession while at-risk schools were more likely to see beginning teachers move to another district. Mid-career teachers (seven plus years) in at-risk schools were reported, by choice, to move to another school within the same district.

Guarino et al. (2011) acknowledged that some movement decisions were not observable within their study; however, their analysis of the teacher population in North Carolina suggested consistency with regard to labor market theory. Teachers’ longevity and human capital investment influenced their decision to leave the profession. School demographics also played a role with at-risk schools failing to attract teachers from prestigious colleges or who possessed an advanced degree, or losing them at a much higher rate than schools that were not at-risk.

It is important to know what impact, if any, a teacher’s level of education and certification can affect the decision to change workplaces or professions. In addition, this study examined school demographics and how they affect a teacher’s decision to make a change. Be it leaving an at-risk school or the field of education, or change their choice of assignment and building, this study provides data that is helpful to understanding a large group of teachers and their motives. The Guarino et al. (2011) study revealed that teachers from more prestigious institutions of higher learning either did not seek to work in lower-performing schools or that they left early on in their experience at at-risk schools. It is important to know this because recruitment and retention of highly-qualified teachers for these schools is crucial to the success of the children. Therefore, the Guarino et al. study asked teachers to report whether or not they work in a rural,
suburban, or urban district. The study looked for correlations between types of school
district and teachers’ perceptions of school principal support and workplace commitment.

Tamir (2009) researched the challenges of retaining teachers in hard-to-staff
schools. The author looked specifically into three context-specific programs: urban
Catholic, urban public, and urban Jewish day schools. Tamir conducted semi-structured
interviews with 30 participants. The participants were representative of the three
programs. The interviewer asked participants to expand on why, specifically, they joined
their respective program; what were they hoping to achieve personally and
professionally; and where they saw themselves in the future. The subjects were first- or
second-year teachers in the same school. A follow-up interview was held with all
program supervisors. Tamir (2009) felt it was important to gain the perception of the
teachers’ programs and the teachers. The researcher coded their responses under two
categories: aspirations for teaching and projected length of stay.

The findings of the Tamir (2009) study were that eight teachers intended to
remain in teaching, while 11 reported they would expect to hold a leadership position.
The teachers articulated a long-term commitment to teaching, with nine reporting they
would remain teaching for more than 5 years. Tamir looked at teacher aspiration as to
whether teachers were committed to remain teaching even if they were not prepared to
teach in a specific community or population. The researcher determined that nearly one
out of every three teachers would consider relocating to the suburbs to teach, with 12
indicating no intention to teach in another context. Tamir, through interviews, asked the
program directors how long they expected their teachers to remain teaching. Their
responses ranged from 5-10 years with a hope that the teachers would leave the Catholic
program and continue to advocate for Catholic education even in a different sector. All
directors indicated that they wished their teachers would take on leadership roles. Lastly,
after the 2-year study, 100% of all context-specific teachers remained teaching in their
schools, compared to the national average of 76%. In 5 years, 25% of the context-
specific teachers left their classroom compared to 50% nationally. Tamir (2009)
accounted for those context-specific teachers that went into leadership positions, which
included equate to a 90% retention rate.

Hard-to-staff schools might attract teachers in the beginning of their career as they
seek a first job. The teachers interviewed in Tamir’s 2009 study revealed that the
teachers would most likely stay; some for as many as 5 years. Others indicated they
would like to eventually hold leadership positions. Their level of preparedness for the
specific school types examined in the study—particularly urban Catholic, public, and
Jewish day schools—is also of significance. Some felt they weren’t prepared for these
environments, and they would seek to move to a suburban district/school. For the
purposes of this study, it is relevant to know that again, the higher need schools and urban
environments are challenging to new teachers. Much support and collegiality among
staff is needed to retain staff. There is just cause to further understand the connection
between teacher preparation and retention.

With 50% of teachers leaving the field of education within the first 3 years, it is
essential to know why this is happening. LeMaistre and Pare’s (2009) study looked at
new teachers and mentoring opportunities in schools as a means to support new teachers.
They also examined other professions and the induction programming in those fields. It
was concluded that new teachers, compared to other first-timers in other fields, receive
far less support. New teacher responses to the study survey varied depending on the level of support they received in their first teaching job. Where mentoring and induction programs were present, teachers felt more supported and reported that they would most likely continue teaching. Those new teachers who were otherwise isolated and left to their own devices were less prepared and less likely to seek help because of the stigma of asking for help resulting in lost credibility among other staff. Those who felt isolated either stayed isolated or moved on to another profession.

**Comparison to other professions’ turnover rates.** Other professions also have high turnover rates. Harris and Adams (2004) sought to compare teacher retention with other fields that are arguably comparable, mainly nurses, social workers, and accountants. These researchers used Ingersoll’s (2001) research to guide their study as his research compared teachers’ characteristics, school characteristics, and organizational characteristics to similar professions with regards to retention. Ingersoll’s (2001) research confirmed annual teacher turnover rate between 13.2% and 15.0%. What Ingersoll (2001) found was that teacher turnover was higher than nurses.

Harris and Adams (2004) included data from 1992-2001 from the Census Bureau, which was collected over a 10-year period, with hopes of gaining a large enough sample size. This data included age, race, marital status, education level, and address. This pool consisted of 18,700 teachers. The methodology included an analysis of the Current Population Survey and was based on a comparison of other work groups: nurses, social workers, and accountants. Harris and Adams felt that these professions required similar levels of education, involved some form of caretaking, and therefore attracted similar workers.
Turnover among teachers (7.73%) is slightly higher than that of nurses (6.09%), but it is lower when compared to social workers (14.94%) and accountants (8.01%). Harris and Adams (2004) suggested that nurses and teachers have a lower rate of turnover when compared to social workers or accountants because they are more likely to be married, according to the Census Bureau, which makes it easier for one spouse to leave work. They further suggested that retention of teachers is much higher in public schools compared to private schools primarily because of pension benefits for public school teachers.

Harris and Adams (2004) concluded that there is a higher rate of turnover for our youngest teachers and oldest teachers. They claimed that pension participation increases the probability of a teacher leaving the profession at younger and older ages. This contradicted their previous claim that pension-to-salary decreases the probability that a younger teacher will leave the profession. Despite these findings, the overall turnover rate of teachers is very similar to other professions.

To better understand the exodus from teaching in large numbers, other professions were studied to see what their turnover rates were. Accountants, social workers, and nurses were surveyed. Harris and Adams’s (2004) demonstrated, when comparing teaching to other fields where similar levels of and education and similar personal characteristics are observed, the turnover rate among the occupations studied, including teaching, were similar. For some, the pension possibilities for public school teachers might cause teachers to stay longer. The promise of the pension at the end of one’s career is a motivator to be sure. However, the caretaker personality traits demonstrated by all of the occupations that were studied also created opportunities for leaving one’s
profession. One example for leaving a profession was to start a family. Because many of
the people who enter into the fields studied in this research are married, it is
understandable for one to leave these professions to pursue family interests. According
to Harris and Adams’s (2004) study, teachers, overall, receive the least amount of
support, early on, in their careers. That lack of support might contribute to a new
teacher’s decision to leave the field. Harris and Adams’s study is included in this
research to evaluate and analyze the secondary factors that affect teachers’ decisions to
stay, to move to a different assignment, or to leave the profession.

Zhao et al. (2012) studied the quality of work life, job embeddedness, and
effective commitment on turnover intentions of nurses in China. Such high turnovers
waste resources and increase management costs for hospitals. According to the scholars,
the quality of work life, job embeddedness, and effective commitment made a revolution
in their study of turnover, which is why we find it useful in teacher turnover.

Zhao et al. (2012) used a cross-sectional survey and structural equation modeling,
which were applied to data collected from the self-report questionnaires. The surveys
were distributed to 1,000 nurses employed in Heilongjiang Province, Northeast China.
Their response rate was 73.3% with 733 nurses returning their questionnaire. The
measurement tools for quality of life at work, job embeddedness, effective commitment,
and turnover intention utilized a five-point Likert scale.

Zhao et al. (2012) confirmed their hypothesis as a positive relation to quality of
work life, with job embeddedness, and affective commitment. The research confirms the
researchers’ hypothesized negative relation with quality of work with turnover intentions
thus high-perceived quality work-life enhanced their job embeddedness and effective
commitment to the hospital, therefore, reducing turnover intentions. In this study of nurses, it was discovered that a positive work life directly affected commitment to the organization. Where positive work environments existed, staff tended to stay. To the contrary, where negative work relations were prevalent, turnover rates were much higher. This study helps to inform the research on what the effect a good working environment has on a teacher’s mobility decision.

**Predominant source of teacher shortage.** Boe et al. (2008) sought to quantify trends in three components of special- and general-education turnover and to investigate excessive teacher turnover as the predominant source of teacher shortage (Boe & Gillford, 1992; Curran & Abrahams, 2000). Data sources included teacher self-reports to three versions of the NCES SASSs from 1990-1991, 1993-1994, and 1999-2000. The three SASSs were cross-sectional surveys. The TFS included various information from the previous school year prior to the turnover. The researchers sought to examine the turnover of regular-education and special-education teachers.

The results the Boe et al. (2008) study confirmed that the annual attrition of teachers increased significantly from 5% in 1991-1992 school year to 8% in 2000-2001 school year. The highest rate of attrition for both special educators and general educators was during their first 3 years of teaching. Overall, special and general educators do not differ significantly in their reasons for leaving teaching. Some reasons included: retirement, seek new educational occupations, homemaking, or child rearing. The same is true for transfers, which were more likely within the first 3 years and slowly declined with additional teaching experience. The data suggests that more teachers transfer from special education to regular education than those switching from regular education to
special education. The Boe et al. indicated that 60% of all public teachers from the school years of 1991-1992 to 2000-2001 either left teaching, moved to another school, or remained teaching at their original school.

The Boe et al. (2008) study is relevant to the topic of teacher turnover because it is important to know if a specific group of teachers is more likely to leave teaching, to leave their current school or district, or to retire, etc. The researchers concluded that no particular area of specialization was more apt to make a change. But the data support that it is typically within the first 3 years of teaching when teachers decide to make teaching their career or to move on. Therefore, this study asked teachers to anonymously report their length of time teaching at a particular school. This study looked for correlations between years of teaching and a teacher’s decision to remain teaching at his or her current school, move to another school, or leave the teaching profession.

**Summary**

The research supports a compelling reason to learn more about the relationship between teachers and their school principals and how their relationships influence teachers’ decisions to remain teaching at the same school, move to another school within or outside the district, or leave the profession. Ingersoll and Smith (2003) and Ronfeldt et al. (2013) suggested that 50% of educators leave the profession within their first 5 years.

Many studies have introduced factors that influence teachers’ decisions to either remain teaching, move to another school, or leave teaching. These factors ranged from school principal support, student behavior, low socio-economic status and school context, parental involvement, autonomy, workload, salary, and collegiality. It is essential that
leaders and policy makers understand the perceived value these factors play in reducing teacher attrition. The majority of the literature speaks to other related factors that influence teachers’ decisions to remain teaching, move to another school, or leave the profession. However, it is essential to deepen our understanding of the dyadic relationships between teachers and their leaders, using LMX theory in order to mitigate the negative impact teacher turnover has on our nation’s schools.

Chapter 3 provides an introduction of Chapters 1 through 3. Additionally, it identifies the research questions and research context for this study. Next, the chapter describes the instrument used for data collection and the data analysis procedures. Further, a summary of the chapter is provided.
Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

A challenge for schools is to provide students with consistency in teaching so they can be adequately prepared for college and career. Teacher consistency contributes to an increase in student achievement. Research has confirmed, beyond all other single measures, that well-qualified and committed teachers are the strongest predictor of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Inv gargarson, 1998). Despite the consistency needed to improve student achievement, some teachers are leaving the profession. Therefore, in order to reduce teacher attrition, administrators must determine what support is required to maintain effective teachers.

This study administered an online teachers’ perception questionnaire to volunteer teacher participants using Facebook. A convenience sample was used in a small city in Upstate New York. All participants were voluntary and solicited from Kindergarten through the 12th grade. The qualitative questionnaire measured the teachers’ perception of school principal support and its impact on their own level of organizational commitment, and principal-teacher relationships.

Research confirms that teachers are the strongest predictor of student achievement (Johnson et al., 2005); however, Ingersoll and Smith (2003) and Ronfeldt et al. (2013) suggested that 50% of educators leave the profession within their first 5 years. As a result, teacher retention is a significant issue for all educational stakeholders (Carroll, 2005). Factors, such as administrative support, self-efficacy, collegial support, and job
satisfaction, influence a teacher’s decision to remain in teaching. Snyder and Dillow (2012) who reported on the National Center for Education Statistics referred to those teachers who remain teaching at the same school as *stayers*. The *movers* are teachers who transfer to another school within the same district, and the *leavers* are teachers who leave teaching to pursue another career, raise children, or retire. In order to assess why teachers decide to stay, move, or leave the profession, this study explored the impact of the teacher and school principal relationship on teachers’ decisions to leave their profession, which results in attrition of the teaching workforce.

The leader-member exchange theory is well respected in business and the military, and it has been used to reduce turnover (Scandura & Graen, 1984). Despite no prior research in education, there is potential for Scandura and Graen’s research to inform elementary school principals as to the relationship factors that influence teacher attrition. Understanding the dyadic relationships between teachers and their leaders using the leader-member exchange theory can mitigate the negative impact that teacher turnover has on our nation’s schools. Therefore, the study expands the LMX theory to the field of education in order to examine the direct comparative analysis between leader-member exchange and teacher turnover created by teachers’ decisions to leave the profession. The study addresses three research questions:

1. How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support?

2. How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment?
3. How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal?

Research Context

The research questionnaire was posted online via Facebook to increase the participation of all grade levels of teachers to gain a better understanding of how teachers perceive school principal personal support and professional support and commitment in urban, rural and suburban school districts. The study, in addition to Facebook, utilized a convenience sample, which took place in a small city in Upstate New York. In both cases, participants were asked to share the questionnaire link with their colleagues or friends via Facebook. This snowball approach increased overall participation while representing teacher perceptions of school principals’ personal and professional support and commitment from urban, rural, and suburban districts and across all grade levels. This approach significantly added to the research by not limiting participants to a particular region or district type. Participants varied in years of experience, grade level taught, and types of school districts they were teaching within. Information was anonymously identified in the questionnaire. All participant responses were self-reported.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

This study included a qualitative questionnaire, designed by the researcher, using Qualtrics Survey Software (2015) to measure teachers’ teaching experiences in relation to their perception of school principals’ personal and professional support, school principal’s behaviors, which influence their level of commitment, and principal-teacher relationships or exchanges. The 21-question questionnaire included four slider questions,
three multiple-choice questions, eight open-ended response questions, one ranking question, and five 5-point Likert questions.

Demographic questions included the state the teacher is currently teaching in, type of district currently teaching in, grade level currently teaching, the length of overall teaching experience of each teacher, the type of school district, grade level taught, the length of their teaching experience, years teaching at their current school, and years teaching in the same grade-level assignment. These questions helped the researcher determine if there is a significant comparative analysis between the length of teaching and the teachers’ responses to the questionnaire. To avoid any misinterpretation during implementation, the study included a clarification in the notes section regarding what qualifies as a teaching experience.

The study tested the constructs by administering the questionnaire in the field to elementary teachers who were not be included in the study sample. The data gathered from the field test was used to make necessary revisions with regard to language and procedures to the final questionnaire. Fowler (2014) suggested that a pretest should be done to test the data collection protocols and instrument work under realistic conditions. The questionnaire was piloted to elementary teachers within one school. This pilot was based on their exclusion from the research sample. The pilot group participants tested the language and procedures of the instrument with regard to the participants’ ability to answer the research questions. As a result of the piloted study, it was determined that the instrument language and procedures were clear. The piloted questionnaire answered the research questions.
To measure teachers’ perception of school principal support, six questions were included in the qualitative questionnaire, which asked teachers to describe a lived experience when they felt supported both, personally and professionally, by their school principal. These questions addressed the professional aspects of the participants’ jobs as well as those personal aspects that impact their role as a teacher. In addition, the participants were asked to respond to an open-ended response question indicating whether or not they had left a teaching position. This was especially helpful for the researcher to see whether or not teachers left a teaching assignment and for what reasons.

Last, participants were asked to respond to open-ended questions relating to the support that is necessary to help new teachers with less than 5 years of teaching. The study sought to explore school principal support. The study conducted an in-depth data analysis from the participant responses in order to inform the research questions (Patton, 1987). To measure a teacher’s perception of organizational commitment, the study asked participants to rank factors that influence their final decision to remain teaching at their current school.

The second question within this section asked teachers to explain how their school principal’s behavior helped them feel committed to their school. This open-ended question was focused on identifying specific principal behaviors that help a teacher feel more committed to his or her school.

The third question within this section asked participants to describe a time when their school principal’s behaviors made them less committed to their school. This question was focused on understanding specific school principal behaviors that negatively influence the participants’ level of commitment to their school.
The LMX 7 questionnaire software, developed by Scandura and Graen (1984), measures the quality of leader-member relationships or exchanges. Through the lens of leadership making, Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) suggested the importance of leaders building trust and respect with all subordinates. Scholars concluded in their research that high-quality relationships produced less turnover (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1993). Back-Kyoo Joo (2010) recommended that the LMX software be expanded to include additional industries. The LMX software questions address a teacher’s perception of how satisfied the school principal is with what he or she performs; how well the school principal understands the teacher’s job needs; whether the principal recognizes the teacher’s potential; what his or her confidence level is in the principal; as well as a characterization of the working relationship between the teacher and his or her principal. The word “leader” was removed from all five questions and replaced with “school principal” in order to avoid confusion for the participants. The reduction of the number of questions simply addressed the pretest concerns of length. The second question, which addressed needs and concerns, was modified to simply include needs because the pretest participants felt there was no significant difference between the two. Question number 1 was a double-barreled question, and it was modified to address the needs clarified during pretesting (Rossi, Lispey, & Freeman, 2004).

After developing the qualitative questionnaire to measure teachers’ teaching experience in relation to their perception of school principal personal support and professional support, organizational commitment, and principal-teacher relationship, the questionnaire was pretested in the field to ensure that the instrument and procedures worked efficiently under realistic conditions (Fowler, 2014). The feedback gathered
from these pretests were used to modify the study instrument. The revisions allowed for a clear instrument that the participants could understand and were able to respond to questions that addressed the research questions (Fowler, 2014).

**Data Analysis**

The study utilized a descriptive approach in that it strived to gain the uniqueness of teachers’ perceptions of school principal personal support and professional support and their level of workplace commitment based on participants’ lived experiences. The study sought to have participants describe their experience.

First, the study reviewed all participants’ responses to the Teacher Perception Questionnaire and all of the collected data was recorded. Next, statements and phrases pertaining to the phenomenon being studied were removed from each open-ended response question within the online questionnaire. Meanings were framed from the significant statements, and they were organized into themes—these themes progressed into theme bands, and ultimately into theme groups. The analysis of the participants’ lived experiences took place until no new information was absorbed. A color-coded system was used to highlight specific themes and categories to perform a preliminary analysis. Then, a comprehensive description of the teachers’ lived experiences and the phenomena was framed. The researcher synthesized individual participant’s responses to determine meaning.

The study incorporated inductive and deductive analysis approaches. The inductive analysis involved a close examination of participant responses to open-ended questions, which strived to tell a story involving teacher perception and experiences, while the deductive analysis limited participant responses in order to rank factors that
influenced their decision to remain at their current school, move to another school, or to leave the teaching profession.

The deductive analysis attempted to answer specific questions that limited a respondent’s answers based on factors identified in the literature that influence teacher attrition. The study used both the inductive and deductive qualitative analysis approaches in order to conduct a comparative analysis between teaching experiences and perceptions of school principal personal support and professional support, organizational commitment, and principal-teacher relationships, to determine the significance of each factor on teachers’ decisions to leave their school of employ. These qualitative analysis approaches are often combined (Patton, 1987).

Last, the study utilized peer checking. This included all data collection materials being given to a peer reviewer in order to verify that the researcher coded all participant responses accurately. The study analyzed the data through a process of reflecting, examining, discovering, judging its relevance and meaning, and ultimately developing themes that accurately depicted the lived experience of all teacher participants. Additionally, the research was authentic in that it reported each teacher participant’s experiences in such a way that it maintained respect for the context of the data and presented all teacher participants’ perspectives equally. The study suspended judgement and the researcher’s own preconceived notions in order to allow for a thoughtful, non-leading, interpretation of participant responses to inform the phenomenon through a process called bracketing (Creswell, 2009). This was critically important as the researcher has served as a teacher and principal in an Upstate New York urban district, a school principal in a small suburban district in Upstate New York, and a vice principal in
a small rural district in Arizona. Additionally, the researcher created analytic memos in order to purge ideas and thoughts from the participant responses. This process included documenting main ideas and patterns brought up by the teacher participants. This process was repeated until all online questionnaires had been coded.

**Summary**

This chapter summarized the methods used and discussed the rationale for increasing participants by utilizing Facebook, which provided a broader perspective of teachers’ perception of school principals’ support from those teaching in suburban, rural, and urban districts, not only teachers from one, small city in Upstate New York. Additionally, the researcher described the qualitative instrument tool that was used in the data collection and the data analysis procedures that were utilized to ensure accurate reporting of the qualitative data collected from the participants.

Chapter 4 communicates the findings including participant demographics in this study. The data analysis and findings are reported by research question, theme, and by sub-theme. Further, the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.
Chapter 4: Results

This research study specifically investigated teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and how it impacted teachers’ commitment to their schools. After approval from the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board to conduct this research (Appendix A), teachers were solicited via Facebook (Appendix B). A teacher perception questionnaire (TPQ) was administered anonymously, online, and it was the only instrument used for data collection. The qualitative questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, which allowed participants the opportunity to share their lived experiences as it related to their perception of school principals’ personal support and professional support and their influence on the teachers’ level of commitment to remaining employed at their schools. Doing so, for some, caused them to relive emotional experiences that were very much a part their person. The qualitative questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

The study utilized a descriptive approach to capture the uniqueness of teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and teachers’ level of workplace commitment based on the participants’ lived experiences. The researcher used specific qualitative protocols to analyze the data through a process of reflecting, examining, discovering, judging its relevance and meaning, and ultimately developing themes that accurately depicted the lived experience of all teacher participants (Table 4.1). The researcher maintained analytic memos in order to bracket ideas and thoughts from participant responses. This process included documenting main ideas and
patterns brought up by the teacher participants. As shown in Table 4.1, the researcher utilized peer checking throughout the data analysis process to ensure accurate interpretation of the data.

Table 4.1

Qualitative Data Analysis Process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step Number</th>
<th>Analytic Process</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bracketed researcher’s own bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Identified a priori codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Organized the data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Transcribed participant response to open-ended questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Added additional codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Chunked participant responses by codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Peer check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Broke participant responses apart by meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Peer check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Put participant responses together to identify themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Peer checked the themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Broke apart themes to identify possible sub-themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Peer check</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Constructed outline for argument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Created the explanation of the findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Demographics

This study included 143 volunteer participants. The participants were Grade K-12 school teachers who taught in urban school districts \((n = 72)\), suburban school districts \((n = 21)\), and rural school districts \((n = 50)\). The participants provided their informed consent by agreeing that they understood the study, confirmed they were at least 18 years of age or older, and agreed to participate in the study (Appendix D). If the participants
did not agree to the terms of consent, they were excluded from the study and thanked for their interest in the TPQ. In addition to the above criteria, the participants had to self-identify that they were indeed a Grade K-12 teacher.

A sample of 143 teachers out of a possible 163 met the criteria to participate in the TPQ. The participants were provided with as much time as they needed to complete the online teacher perception questionnaire. The online questionnaire consisted of six demographic questions, eight open-ended questions, five multiple-choice questions, and one rank-order question. Each online questionnaire was recorded using Qualtrics (2015) online survey software. The time window to take the online questionnaire was 2 weeks from beginning to end. On average, the participants took 40 minutes to complete the online questionnaire; however, some took significantly longer.

![Figure 4.1. Participants by School District Type.](image)

Question 1 asked the participants to self-report their school district type. The result was: 72% urban, 50% rural, and 21% suburban. This is shown in Figure 4.1.
Question 3 asked the participants to self-report their overall years of teaching. Those who reported working in an urban school district averaged 17 years teaching experience, the suburban school teachers averaged 19 years teaching, and those teaching in a rural district had roughly 16 years’ experience teaching. Question 4 asked the participants to self-report the number of years in their current district. Urban teachers report an average of 14 years, suburban teachers reported an average of 16 years, and rural teachers reported an average of 12 years.

**Figure 4.2. A Comparison of Years’ Experience (District, School, Grade).**

Question 5 asked the participants to self-report how many years they had been teaching in their current school. The average for urban school teachers was 7 years, 14 years for those teaching in a suburban school, and an average of 10 years for those teaching in a rural school setting. Question 6, the last demographic question, asked participants to self-report the number of years they had been teaching at the same grade level. The urban teachers reported teaching the same grade level for an average of 6.9
years, suburban teachers at 10.8 years, and rural teachers at 9.5 years. This is shown in Figure 4.2.

Although several factors relating to teacher attrition were identified within the literature, a clearer understanding of teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal and professional support and their influence on the teachers’ level of commitment to their school is lacking and is the basis for this study. The answers to the three research questions addressed in this chapter describe the participants’ perceptions of personal and professional school principals’ support, organizational commitment, and insight into how teachers describe their working relationship with their school principals.

Research Questions

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the online questionnaire. The chapter is structured in order of the three research questions that guided the study.

The study addresses three research questions:

1. How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support?

2. How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment?

3. How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal?

Quotes are taken directly from the participants’ responses to the online teacher perception questionnaire. The teacher participants reported their own experiences of school principals’ personal support and professional support and their impact on the teachers’ level of commitment to their school.
Data Analysis and Findings

**Research question 1.** How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support? There were four themes and 15 sub-themes that emerged from the participant responses to the online teacher perception questionnaire that describe their perception of how their principals supported them both personally and professionally. These themes and sub-themes are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Research Question 1 – Themes and Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leads by Example</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engagement with the school</td>
<td>U11, U27, U22, U1, R15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional presence</td>
<td>U34, R13, U27, U40, R32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School advocacy</td>
<td>R32, U39, R31, R3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Builds on teachers’ strengths</td>
<td>U34, R31, R30, U32, U46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitates learning opportunities</td>
<td>R15, R35, R2, U43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentoring partnerships</td>
<td>R27, R35, R31, S6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotes a Collaborative Culture</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborative planning</td>
<td>U2, U43, U5, U30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowers teachers with shared decision making</td>
<td>R17, U30, R15, U16, R9, R35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective communication and listening</td>
<td>U34, R14, U4, U41, U42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student management support</td>
<td>R30, U28, S1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultivates Leadership in Others</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages professional learning</td>
<td>U8, R35, R15, U32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction autonomy</td>
<td>U29, U30, U12, U24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Values knowledge and expertise</td>
<td>U30, R5, R25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates Compassion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledges personal obligations</td>
<td>U7, R6, R12, R2, U32, U17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expresses interest in teachers as individuals</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
**Leads by example.** The participants who took the online teacher perception questionnaire overwhelmingly discussed the importance of their school principal leading by example. The participants communicated that their school principal leads by example by their engagement with the school, maintaining an instructional presence in all classrooms, his or her willingness to be an advocate for the school, building on teachers’ strengths, and by providing and supporting facilitated learning opportunities as well as providing mentoring partnerships.

**Engagement with the school.** The results from the teacher perception questionnaire triggered both positive and negative emotions relating to principal commitment. Participant U11 shared the following:

> One of my early principals told us that parents weren’t hiding their good children at home but were sending us the very best children they had and thus we had to be the very best teachers we could be. His passion and dedication were contagious and inspiring.

Participant R15 said, “Actions speak louder than words.” Participant U27 stated that, “Seeing a principal attending the school functions that she encouraged the staff to go to is commitment.” Another’s words were, “Leadership by example always has a big impact for me.” Participant U34 offered, “I felt that my school principal believed in me, the students and the school.” Conversely, Participant U22 stated, “When there is a high level of turnover, it sends a message—this work is not that important, they aren’t staying—why should I?” Participant U22 went on to say, “I believe that the students and families
should expect a high level of commitment and that means staff that knows them, and they deserve more than a revolving door of teachers and principals.” Participant U1 stated, “The principal that hired me was extremely supportive but was then moved to help another school in trouble. He then left the district.” These participants’ responses were common among those working in urban districts, which reported a higher rate of teacher turnover.

*Instructional presence.* A majority of the participants suggested that a principal’s instructional presence in their classroom and those of their colleagues was important. Participant U34 shared,

I felt supported by my principal when my work and effort was acknowledged in a very positive, personal way. When this principal worked in my building, he stopped by my room to say hi and often wrote short personal notes to let me know that he noticed something great that my class had done. I felt that he believed in me, the students, and the school.

Participant R32 stated, “Provide useful feedback, both positive and negative, after classroom observations.” Many of the participants acknowledged the importance of getting timely feedback after a school principal’s classroom visit. This study researched ways in which school principals could provide instructional support to novice teachers. Participant U40 said,

I think that professional support is most valuable to a new teacher. Having a principal take a vested interest by not only meeting with a novice but visiting the teacher’s classroom and following up with coaching on the observations allows for a better relationship.
Participant R13 talked about an issue that others reported as being problematic which was, “I did not feel supported by the principal who only showed up in the classroom once a year to complete an evaluation.” Participant U27 stated, “A principal needs to make himself/herself visible by visiting the classroom periodically.”

School advocacy. Another sub-theme that emerged in this study consisted of the teacher participants’ perceptions that their building principals should be an advocate for their school and, therefore, be willing to confront district office mandates that are not, in teachers’ opinions, best for students. Participant R32 shared an example of how his/her principal supported his/her despite differing views from the district administration.

We were implementing a new 9th grade academy. This involved teaming and working with other 9th grade teachers. Our principal was very supportive, she provided a lot of encouragement, professional development, and support when others in the district had complaints about the program.

Participant R3 clarified the argument by stating, “Whenever he backs us up against higher level administration.” The participants also acknowledged potential roadblocks to a principals’ willingness to advocate for their schools. Participant R31 shared the following experience,

Years ago, when we had a new principal, she was directed by our Superintendent, rather than by her own method of directing staff. Therefore, she was not at will to direct her own building. Consequently, she made decisions that left many feeling that they weren’t being supported.

Participant U39 stated something that echoed throughout this study which was, “She sat silent while leadership shot it down without cause.”
Builds on teachers’ strengths. The teacher participants reported the desire for their school principals to recognize them for the variety of things they do every day. Participant U32 stated, “Remind the teacher that EVERY teacher, even one with more experience, faces challenges and doesn’t know all the answers. Be forgiving of mistakes; we learn from them.” Participant U32 shared his/her desire for “school principals to never forget what it was like to be in the trenches—the classroom.” Some of the participants reported feeling like their school principal forgot what it was like to be in the classroom or lacked classroom experience altogether.

Positive reinforcement was reported to boost morale. The participants reported that positive reinforcement made them feel more committed and motivated to continue to do their best. Participant R31 stated, “Our principal often tells us we are the best staff he has worked with. He tells us what a great job we are doing and how we do our jobs with the students’ best interests in mind.” Participant U34 provided an example,

He stopped by my room to say ‘Hi’ and often wrote short personal notes to let me know that he noticed something great that my class had done. I felt that he believed in me, the students and the school.

Participant U46 stated that school principals ought to “be a good host, welcome them, let them know that you want them to succeed!”

Promotes professional development. The participants across all school types overwhelmingly described the importance of professional development (PD) and its potential impact on teaching and learning. Participant U43 offered, “The one position in which I felt truly supported professionally was embedded with routine professional development on a monthly basis.” Others reported that the professional development
should be targeted to meet the individual needs of the teacher. Some of the participants reported being able to recommend PD to their principal. Participant R35 stated, “For several years, my principal supported me when I asked to go to a full-day professional development opportunity in the spring. It felt good to switch roles and be a student for a day.”

Participant R15 succinctly explained how others’ ideas were addressed as opposed to the teachers’:

Instead of supporting us and our needs, professional development has been geared towards supporting our principal’s initiative. For the last several years, professional development has been heavily geared toward implementing modules, data driven instruction, and meeting new APPR requirements with a total disregard to the loop holes that existed in the curriculum that teachers have pointed out.

Participant R15 went on to say, “Before this time, our school principal would rely on our professional development committee, which the principal is a member of, to conduct surveys to gather information from the staff to determine their needs and plan professional development.”

The participants described how their school principal had begun incorporating professional development with their faculty meetings. Consequently, some participants, on occasion, felt that professional development was rushed due to time constraints. Participant R2 said, “This routine behavior makes me feel like administration does not truly support the need for professional development.”
Provides mentoring opportunities for new teachers. The participants overwhelmingly described their perception of mentoring as a means of feeling professionally supported by their school principals. This was echoed in both the professionally supported section of the TPQ as well as the section that solicited their input as to what support new teachers most likely needed to be successful. Participant R31 stated,

Mentoring has to be fostering participation and growth by examination of the levels of learning, not a perpetuation of an administrator’s agenda. A quality mentor pairs up new teachers with excellent teachers, regardless of content area, so that they collect examples of good teaching practices.

Participant S6 added,

New teachers need a mentor, but not just someone who is assigned because they are the same grade level or wanted to be a mentor. They need someone who clicks personality-wise and knows the ins and outs of the school’s culture . . . someone who will teach about chain of command and procedures for getting things done.

Participant R35 challenged the notion of who is the perfect candidate to receive a mentor by stating,

New teachers should always be paired with a trusted and successful veteran teacher to help with daily questions and planning . . . . This should not be limited to teachers who have less than three years experience, but should also be open to those who are in a new district or building since every position has things to learn. This year, I helped a teacher (not set up by my school principal) who had many
years on the job but was new to our school. She needed help with paperwork, computer programs, etc.

As pointed out by Participant R35, it was also discovered that a formal or informal mentoring could also be beneficial for a veteran teacher who is new to the school.

**Promotes a collaborative culture.** The study participants suggested their desire for their school principals to create a collaborative culture where all members of the school community feel involved—at the table. Ingersoll (2001) suggested that administrators improve the support to their staff by soliciting input in decision making so that it might reduce attrition rates of teachers. A collaborative culture was identified as a theme throughout all of the participants’ responses to TPQ, regardless of the school or district type. There were four over-arching sub-themes that emerged relating to promoting a collaborative culture. These included allowing time for planning, involving teachers in decision making when appropriate, effectively communicating and listening to all staff, and supporting teachers with student management.

**Collaborative planning.** The teacher participants collectively described the need for team or collaborative planning time that would be built into their work day. This question solicited both negative and positive experiences of when it worked well and, for some, when it did not work so well. Participant U43 stated, “The one position in which I felt truly supported professionally was embedded with . . . common planning time with my co-teacher plus collaborative team meeting planning time . . . .” Participant U5 said that his/her school principal provided substitute teachers to allow for team planning. Participant U30 stated, “Principals supported our program by allowing teaming through joint planning times.”
Most of the participants agreed that planning time was important. Participant U2 shared, “Often times, our planning time was taken away or used to go over data. I understand the importance of data, but there’s also the importance of planning and we have not been given significant time to focus on planning.”

The participants agreed that the school principal sets the tone for the building and what is valued. The teacher participants felt that planning is an important part of their day. Participant U5 described a supportive school principal as one who allows teams of teachers to plan. For those who reported their principal provided time for collaborative or team planning and substitute teacher coverage, they described their school principal as being professionally supportive.

**Empowers teachers with shared decision making.** The participants wanted to feel like they are a part of the decision making within their work context. The participants desired to be invited to the conversation, which they described as a positive working relationship with their school principal. The participants overwhelmingly reported negative experiences regarding being involved with any level of decision making. Some of the participants reported not being involved at all.

Participant R15 shared that school principals do not professionally support their teachers, commenting: “Whenever the principal disregards collective decision making or just goes through the motions of it.” This was echoed among other participants who felt like school principals were inviting them to the table but not allowing them to participate in the conversation. Participant U16 added that a school principal is supportive when he or she allows teachers, “to have a say in making decisions for our school.” To clarify this sentiment, Participant U30 shared: “When your ideas aren’t of any value to the principal
or the principal has such a strong mind set on a topic that there is no forward in other ways.” Participant U35 stated, “Also having worked on school leadership teams, teachers feel unsupported when the decision making is top-down.” However, as participant R9 stated, “We needed that top-down support to make a difficult decision and directly deal with the problem.”

*Effective communication and listening.* From the TPQ responses, the data revealed 44 participants desired to have a school principal who communicates and listens effectively. The participants in this study described the ways in which their school principal communicates with them.

Participant R14 shared, “I believe that communication is a must”! Communicating effectively can alleviate issues that have the potential to tamper with the building culture. For example, Participant U25 shared a personal experience he/she encountered.

I did not feel supported when I was changed from working in an inclusion classroom to a dual language classroom without the principal talking to me about it first. This was a huge change and I did not agree with the dual language philosophy. This was echoed by others in the study who reported being reassigned grade levels or classrooms without being consulted. Participant U4 said, “A specific principal behavior that would help is direct, consistent communication.”

The study participants overwhelmingly described the need for effective communication. Participant U41 summed it up by saying, “I will always work hard for any principal with open communication who I know will support me.”
Student management support. According to the study participants, teaching often feels isolating. The participants overwhelming suggested that their school principals professionally supported them via support with student management. This level of support varied among those with less experience when compared to those with more experience. Participant R30 stated,

I work with students with significant behavioral needs. I can remember my first year in the middle school and my principal worked diligently with me to come up with appropriate consequences for each student. Every situation was different and there was no definite answer.

Participant S1, who reported working with students with autism, concurred by stating, “My principal supported me during student behavioral incidents.”

Participant U28 said,

Classroom management is the most important thing a principal needs to make sure the teacher has and if they are struggling, the principal needs to help them with that by having someone mentor them and teach them techniques to keep their classroom under control.

Cultivates leadership in others. A theme that emerged from the responses, which was shared by most participants across all district and school types, was the need for teachers to have their school principals recognize their leadership capacity. The sub-themes that surfaced as a result of school principals recognizing the leadership capacity in their teachers included encouraging teachers’ professional growth, allowing flexibility in programming and curriculum, and valuing teachers’ knowledge and expertise.
Encourages teachers’ professional growth. The participants praised their school principals who they felt professionally supported them by recognizing their leadership potential relating to the participants’ professional growth. Participant R35 shared, “For several years, my principal supported me when I asked to go to a full-day professional development opportunity in the spring. If felt good to switch roles and be a student for a day.” This was a common theme among the participants.

Encouraging professional growth is even more valuable, as Participant R35 suggested, if the teachers can decide on the professional development they wish to attend with the backing of their school principal. Participant U8 added, “My principal told me she saw leadership qualities in me. She selected me to attend a workshop and turnkey it to staff. I felt valued and appreciated.”

Participant R15 addressed the notion of how school principals can support their teachers’ professional growth:

There’s a fine line between developing someone’s potential allowing them to become who they are and micromanaging them into the person YOU want them to be. Every principal should know when to back off and allow the teacher to be who they are. Micromanagement is the quickest way to put a cap on anyone’s true potential. The sky should always be the limit.

Participant R15 suggested, “Don’t be afraid to say that you see leadership qualities in your teachers but be careful imposing your own personal beliefs on their potential.” Lastly, Participant U32 shared, “Remind the teacher that EVERY teacher, even those with more experience, faces challenges and doesn’t know all the answers. Be forgiving of mistakes—we learn from them.”
Instructional autonomy. According to the study participants, one area that school principals professionally acknowledge their leadership capacity within their staff is by the flexibility they give teachers when making programming and curriculum decisions that they know are best for their students. Participant U24 shared, “I was extended the courtesy of being trusted on my judgement to make programming decisions in future years.”

Participant U29 provided the following example of when he/she felt professionally supported by his/her school principal as a result of being allowed flexibility in programming and curriculum.

I felt very supported by my principal when my teammate and I met with him to propose a new approach to teaching reading. He listened carefully to our points then asked us to clarify how it would benefit our students. He then scheduled a time for us to meet with the district ELA department head to get her permission.

A majority of the study participants described the desire of their school principal to provide teachers with the opportunity to make program and curriculum recommendations as long as they supported their claim that such change was more beneficial to their students. Participant U12 stated “My school principal allowed me and other teachers to explore new programming options for students with unique needs that could provide better learning opportunities.” Participant U30 acknowledged that it was becoming overwhelmingly more difficult to allow for flexibility with the new regulations and a decrease in student achievement scores.
*Values knowledge and expertise.* The participants overwhelmingly suggested they felt professionally supported by their school principals when they valued them for their knowledge and expertise rather than discounting them. Participant R25 shared,

The principal accepted my idea to create a new space to teach photography and computer graphics. He treated me like I am an expert in my field, and took my word for why things would work or not work. The principal demonstrates trust while fostering innovation.

Participant R5 echoed the same sentiment by saying,

When I was a department chairperson, I felt completely supported in my decisions by my school principal. He saw me as a valid resource in my department and felt I knew what was best for the children in this district.

Similar to allowing for flexibility in programming and curriculum, Participant U30 shared, “Much earlier in my career when we could teach the curriculum and content is a way we knew the students learned best.”

*Demonstrates compassion.* The participants acknowledged the need for their school principals to know them on a personal level. Most associated it as an influential component to their level of commitment to their school. This theme was present in all school and district types, regardless of years in the profession or grade-level taught, and it triggered both positive and negative responses as some teachers discussed life-changing events that would live in their hearts and minds forever. The sub-themes that emerged regarding compassion directly related to the teacher participants’ perception of their school principals respecting and understanding their personal obligations and the principals’ interest in them as individuals outside of the classroom walls.
Acknowledges personal obligations. Many of the participants reported having experienced times in their career when they felt personally supported as their principal respected the idea that things come up that would remove them from their teaching duties. Participant U17 offered:

There was a time when I received a call from my child’s school. The principal allowed me to leave to handle the situation. I brought my child back to work with me. The principal spoke to my child about his behavior. It does takes a village to raise a child.

For this participant and many others, the school principal understood family obligations and offered support. Participant R6 echoed, “During a personal crisis with my youngest child, the principal didn’t question if I had to leave, just found coverage.”

The participants described their principals as being personally supportive if they sought substitute coverage for them. Participant U7 provided more insight into what some staff view as personally supportive. “She grants all requests for time off to deal with any family, medical, or financial issue that arises.” Participant R12 shared, “Upon the death of my father both of my principals came to see me at calling hours that were an hour away from work. That shows caring and compassion.” Participant R12 felt personally supported when dealing with the sudden death of a family member.

Conversely, the participants also reported occasions when their school principal lacked an understanding of their family obligations, thereby, causing tension in the workplace that resulted in some teachers leaving their school. Participant U32 shared the following:
The day my dad died, I tried to let my principal know he was seriously ill and I needed a sub right away to get to the hospital. He did not send anyone, so an hour later I tried to get his attention (He was teaching a lesson in another classroom) - still no sub. When it was time for lunch, I went to the office to say sub or not, I was leaving. They told me my husband just called. My dad was gone. I was too late! I have never been able to forgive him for his lack of response.

*Expresses interest in teachers as individuals.* The participants described situations that demonstrated their desire for their school principal to know them as individuals and professionals. Participant U6 shared,

> For me, what is most valuable is knowing that he cares about my personal and professional needs, and can recognize how hard I work and how successful I am, in spite of the few instances when I have not followed every procedure or done my best work.

Participant U23 added, “Teaching should be just that – all hands on deck. The principal guided and had our backs at all times. I always new where I stood and I worked my hardest for this certain principal.”

Participant R13 shared an example, “The principal helped me when my car had a flat tire in the parking lot. He had some sort of spray that inflated my tire enough for me to drive home. (I did not have AAA.).”

Participant R22 shared a personal experience with his/her school principal. “My previous principal chose not to call me, visit me, or even send a card while I was in the hospital having surgery and then radiation to combat cancer.” To the contrary, Participant S9 shared that, “I had cancer - she was empathetic and helped arrange a sub
quickly. She also set up a schedule for meals to be delivered to our home once a week.”

Participant U21 concluded, “The best principal I have worked with made everyone feel appreciated and important by making personal, sincere connections.”

Participant R15 described the importance of authentic compassion:

My principal has inquired about my personal life, but only to appear as if to care. There has been many times in which my principal’s actions have sent a loud and clear message that our job should take precedent over home life. Actions speak louder than words. My principal’s actions show that she does not care.

It was important to the participants that school principals were cautious of their verbal and non-verbal communication that might come across, as Participant R15 described it, “. . . only to pretend to care.” The participants overwhelmingly described the desire for their school principals to be compassionate and to care about them as individuals who have lives outside of school that may occasionally take them away from school.

Research question 1 focused on the participants’ lived experiences of school principals personal support and professional support. The participants described supportive school principals as those who lead by example, promote a collaborative school culture, recognize the leadership capacity in others, and one who demonstrates compassion for his or her teachers. Research question 2 explores the participants’ perceptions of school principals’ behaviors that influence the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools.

**Demonstrates commitment to school.** The questionnaire asked the participants to describe how their school principals had and had not influenced their level of
commitment to their school. One of the themes that emerged in the study, in all district and school types and across all grade levels, was the notion that school principals should demonstrate commitment to their school. The teachers overwhelmingly suggested that visibility and retention are two ways in which a school principal demonstrates different levels of commitment to his or her school.

**Research question 2.** How do teachers describe the influence of school principals’ behaviors on the teachers’ own level of commitment? There were three themes and six sub-themes that emerged from the participant responses to the online teacher perception questionnaire that described the principals’ behaviors that influenced the teachers’ level of commitment to their school. These themes and sub-themes are listed in Table 4.3.

**Table 4.3**

*Research Question 2 – Themes and Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates Commitment to School</td>
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<tr>
<td>School principal visibility</td>
<td>R13, U23, S5, R11, U21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retention of school principal</td>
<td>R20, U22, U13</td>
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<tr>
<td>All-Hands-On-Deck Attitude</td>
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<tr>
<td>School principal modeling their expectations</td>
<td>U23, R29, U23, U17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forges school principal-teacher relationships</td>
<td>U14, R10, R23, U3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builds on Teachers’ Strengths</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Prompt positive feedback</td>
<td>R31, R32, R2, U5, U15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgement</td>
<td>U45, R31, R4, R36, U46</td>
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School principal visibility. The participants described school principal visibility as being visible in the halls, classrooms, at meetings, and at after-school events. The participants agreed that one good way to demonstrate commitment to the school was for the principals to be present. In fact, some of the participants asserted that when the principal demonstrates commitment by being present for such events, they, too, become more committed to their school. Participant U23 described, “My administrator attends all after-school activities and by doing so, she models the level of commitment that she would like to see.” Participant R13 shared an example of school principal visibility that happened at his/her school:

The principal found out that we needed a new kind of playground fill but realized that we did not have the money in the budget. He garnered so much parent support that we were able to complete the project using free local resources. But best of all, he was the first one to arrive, shovel in hand, and the last to leave on the day that the new fill was delivered and spread [it] throughout the playground.

Although Participant R13’s example was on a larger scale, the participants reported other examples of how their principals garnered support or rallied the troops for a common purpose; therefore, they maintained a presence in the school and community. Nonetheless, Participant S5 agreed with modeling commitment by an active presence and added: “Having our principal be committed to our school and seeing his enthusiasm made us all want to be just as committed.” Participant U21 described school principal visibility by stating, “He also had enthusiasm for the students and the school’s future.”

According to study the participants, in order to decrease teacher turnover, school
principals should first increase their level of commitment by modeling the commitment they wish to see in others.

**Retention of school principal.** The participants did not address commitment to their school without mentioning the disproportionate amount of principals leaving their schools. Participant R20 shared, “There have been 8 principals over my career at the same school building. None of them made an effort to get to know me on a personal level.” Participant U22 summarized what was reported by other participants:

> When there is a high level of turnover, it sends a message - this work is not that important, they aren’t staying - why should I? I believe that the students and families should expect a high level of commitment and that means staff that knows them, and they deserve more than a revolving door of teachers and principals. I understand that people leave to do important work that will help improve education, overall, but schools need committed people to stay the course.

Participant U22 shared a belief commonly reported by urban school participants that school principals are not staying longer than three years. Participant U13 added, “My principal resigned after the second year of a three-year commitment.”

**All-hands-on-deck attitude.** Another theme that was identified relating to how teachers perceive their school principal as positively or negatively, influencing their level of commitment to their school, related to the principal modeling behaviors. When analyzing what participants described as modeling, two sub-themes emerged that include a school principal who models their expectations, and the principals’ willingness to work alongside those they supervise.
**Principal modeling their expectations.** The participants suggested that they felt more committed to their school when they observed the principal adhering to the same expectations that they, themselves, impose on their staff. Participant R29 shared, “I feel committed to the school when I see my building principal in the halls every morning enforcing the same rules that we are required to enforce. Continuity is nice.” Participant U23 echoed this sentiment by saying, “The principal was so supportive. Because she was, all teachers helped out in anyway they could! Teaching should be just that—all hands on deck.” Lastly, Participant U17 shared, “The principal should be firm, yet fair . . hopefully willing to help and guide the new teacher through the good and the bad.”

**Forges school principal-teacher partnerships.** The teacher participants reported being more committed to their school when their school principals were in partnership with them. Participant U14 described working alongside as, “Her willingness to work alongside us to accomplish a shared goal, to role up her sleeves and get right in there to get the work done, as opposed to remaining aloof.” Participant U3 stated, “Teachers need a principal who has been in the trenches that really understands education and what it entails to be a teacher.”

To add to the idea of working alongside, some participants described the desire to have their school principal visit their classroom. Participant U23 stated, “All administrators in the building paid many unofficial visits to the classrooms, all of which felt nonthreatening. It gave them an excellent idea of what was going on in each and every classroom.”

Participant R10 summed up the idea of school principals working alongside the staff they supervise. In doing so he/she said, “When you can tell that your administrator
loves what they do. When they are fully vested and committed to the school, you want to be the same. It’s the whole together-everyone-achieves-more TEAM!”

**Builds on teachers’ strengths.** Another important theme that emerged from the participant responses related to how their school principal influences their level of commitment to their school related to the need for their school principal to build on teachers’ strengths. The data from the questionnaire was further examined around commitment. The participants’ responses were categorized into two sub-themes that include: prompt positive feedback and acknowledgement. Although the participants’ responses varied based on their individual experience, all teachers, regardless of their school or district type, described the desire to be recognized by their school principal for the good they do each day.

**Prompt positive feedback.** Providing prompt positive feedback was a contributing factor with regard to the participants’ decision to remain teaching at their same school. The teachers in this study reported receiving feedback from their school principal in order to gain better understanding. Participant U5 said, “Visiting the classroom often. Encouraging positive comments about what was observed.” For this participant, his/her principal’s actions were a source of encouragement. Participant U32 explained, “Sometimes the post-observation meeting was too brief to discuss the lesson and offer feedback. I feel this is an important part of developing and improving my teaching and it was often lacking.” Feedback from the school principal was important to 53 participants. Participant U15 described a supportive school principal as one who provides “explicit feedback that will help a teacher improve his or her practice.”

Participant R31 shared:
Our principal often tells us we are the best staff he has worked with. He tells us what a great job we are doing and how we do our jobs with the students’ best interests in mind. I really believe this positive reinforcement not only boosts morale, but makes teachers feel more committed and motivated to continue to do our best.

The participants believed that the school principal cared for them and, in return, they cared for the school principal. Another participant, R2, described his/her experience of the school principal publicly supporting an event they had organized but added that the importance and value of the school principal was in sharing positive feedback that the principal had received from those in attendance at the event.

During my long-term subbing position, I worked with my mentor and grade-level teacher to help bring a local Holocaust survivor to speak to our students as part of our unit on Elie Wiesel’s Memoir Night. We received support from our principal who not only thanked us, himself, but also made sure to share with us the positive feedback that was generated by students and other staff.

The participants acknowledged that it was easy for their school principal to get bogged down with the day-to-day running of a school; however, they described the importance of their school principal providing them with positive feedback that had the potential of raising their level of commitment to the school.

*Acknowledgement.* Another important sub-theme that arose after analyzing the participant responses, as they related to their perception of their school principal recognizing the goodness in them, was acknowledging that they exist. Unfortunately, some teachers reported passing their principal in the hallway and being ignored.
Participant R4 shared, “. . . when he is sarcastic and rude and doesn’t even say “Hello” or “Good morning.” Participant R36 added, “When you are ignored in the halls.” This sends a message to principals that their interactions, no matter how brief, have a significant impact on how teachers feel about teaching in their schools.

Fortunately, there were also positive experiences of the participants. Participant U45 said, “For me, it was belief in my abilities, recognition in the unique needs and talents of my students, and a sense of understanding of the difficulties of my job.” This participant reported that the school principal made frequent visits to the classroom to acknowledge the good things both he/she and his/her students were doing.

Overwhelmingly, the participants reported the need for their school principal to acknowledge their existence within the school. Participant R31 stated, “I really believe this positive reinforcement not only boosts morale, but makes teachers feel more committed and motivated to continue to do our best.”

In closing, Participant U46 sent the following message to school principals about the importance of acknowledgement, “Personal attention: know their name, talk to them about professional and personal matters. Be a good host, welcome them, let them know that you want them to succeed; give them time.”

Question 2 focused on school principal behaviors that the participants described as influencing teachers’ level of commitment to their school. These behaviors include supportive school principals who demonstrate commitment to school by being visible in the school and their own level of retention, modeling their own expectations and forging school principal-teacher partnerships, and building on teachers’ strengths by providing positive feedback and acknowledging their teachers.
Research question 3. How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal? There were two themes that emerged from the participant responses to the questionnaire that describe teachers’ lived experiences of their professional working relationship with their school principal.

**High principal-teacher exchanges.** The participants were asked to rank five multiple-choice questions using a 5-point Likert scale to describe their working relationship with their school principal. These questions were a sample from an LMX questionnaire. The data revealed that teachers in both rural and suburban districts ranked their principal-teacher exchanges at a significantly higher rate than those who identified as teaching in urban schools (Table 4.4). In particular, when asked how their school principal understood their job needs, they averaged between a fair amount and quite a bit.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Number</th>
<th>Urban</th>
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16 (Moderate) 18 (High) 20 (Very High)

Low principal-teacher exchanges. Contrary to suburban and rural districts where the teacher participants reported high and very high ranges of principal-teacher exchange,
the average teacher participant in urban districts reported a significantly lower rate of principal-teacher exchange, placing them in the moderate range; therefore, indicating less quality interactions between them and their school principals. Due to the 5-point Likert scale, the participants were not able to elaborate on the reasons for such a low rating of exchange. However, when asked how well their principal understood their job problems and needs, the urban participants, on average, reported that their school principals understood a little about their job needs. This was lower than the participants in the suburban and rural school districts who reported between a fair amount and quite a bit.

The leader member exchange theory provided insight into the dyadic relationships with managers and their subordinates. Some participants in this study reported having an effective school principal-teacher relationship. For these participants, the LMX theory suggests that they work beyond their contractual limits to meet the goals of their leader, report a positive work environment, and are less likely to leave their school. Other study participants reported having a less desirable working relationship with their school principal. For these participants, the LMX theory suggests that they are more likely to work to the rule and not go above and beyond. In addition, they are more likely to leave their school or the profession altogether. In all, the LMX theory provides great insight into the study participants’ desire for effective school principal-teacher relationships.

**Summary of Results**

The study included a qualitative analysis of 143 Grade K-12 teachers from urban, rural, and suburban school districts. The results of the research identified the teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support relating to the teachers’ level of commitment to their school. It also looked into how the teachers
perceived their working relationship with their school principals. This was communicated through seven major themes: (a) leads by example, (b) promotes a collaborative culture, (c) cultivates leadership in others, (d) demonstrates compassion, (e) demonstrates commitment to school, (f) hand an all-hands-on-deck attitude, and (g) builds on teachers’ strengths.

This study walked through the teacher participants’ perceptions of their school principals personal and professional support and how it impacted their level of commitment to their school. The teachers who reported having a higher rate of principal-teacher exchange indicated that they were more likely to remain teaching at the same school. For the purposes of this study, the teachers that reported a lower rate of exchange were employed by urban school districts, and those schools were more likely to face a higher rate of teacher turnover through the teachers moving to a different school or leaving teaching altogether.

Chapter 5 contains a discussion of the results including the implications of the findings and limitations of this study. Recommendations for future research, practice, and policy are proposed. The discussion is connected to the themes identified in Chapter 4, and the study is summarized.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study sought to understand teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal support and professional support and their influence on the teachers’ commitment to their school. Understanding teachers’ perceptions of school principal support has the potential of lessening the rate in which teachers leave their school (Burke et al., 2013; Kersaint et al., 2005; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the research findings. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion of the implications of the findings of this study; an identification of the research limitations; recommendations for future research, practice, and policy; and it concludes with a summation the five chapters.

Problem Statement

Teacher proficiency and consistency contribute to an increase in student achievement. It is known that well-prepared and invested teachers are the strongest foreteller of student achievement (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998). Despite this fact, 50% of educators leave the profession within their first 5 years of employment (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). As a result, retention of highly qualified teachers is important for all educational stakeholders. Teachers who remain in their employ reach the mastery level and are valuable to the school and to the teachers that they will mentor. Unfortunately, teachers are leaving the schools or the profession before they reach the mastery level (Carroll, 2005).
The literature proposes reasons that influence a teacher’s decision to remain teaching or leave the profession. They include administrative support, self-efficacy, collegial support, and job satisfaction (NCES, 2011). Even with extensive research relating to teacher attrition, the perception of administrative support, specifically relating to the support of the school principal, lacks research. Based on the problem statement, the purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support through the teachers’ lived experiences.

The study included 143 Grade K-12 teachers who participated in an online qualitative questionnaire. The questionnaire asked the participants to answer open-ended questions relating to ways in which they did or did not feel professionally and personally supported by their school principal as well as ways in which their school principals’ behavior influenced the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools. Lastly, questions from the LMX 7 were included in order to measure the participants’ working relationship with their school principals.

The following research questions were addressed in order to gain a better understanding of teachers’ lived experiences relating to school principal support:

1. How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support?
2. How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment?
3. How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal?
Implications of Findings

The implications of the study indicate a strong need to change interpersonal practice in the field. Principals need to clearly understand the importance of their relationships with their teachers. Further, school principal support has a direct impact on teacher retention (Burke et al., 2013; Kersaint et al., 2005; Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982). Additionally, the significance of this study comes at a unique time in education when school principals are striving to recruit, retain, and develop teachers and transform low-achieving schools (Conley & Dupor, 2013). This study is valuable because it provides a deeper understanding of select teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal and professional support. Lastly, relationships are at the heart of affecting teachers’ commitment to their school.

Previous studies identify the following factors: Race to the Top (NYSED, 2010), student and parent involvement or engagement, salary and benefits, as influencing teachers’ decisions to leave their school. Although these factors were explored by the study participants, this study revealed the teachers’ desire for an effective relationship with their school principal was the most important factor related to their decision to stay at their current school, move to another school, or leave the profession.

Implications for practice. The ability to form effective relationships with teachers is the most important thing that school principals can do to prevent teachers from leaving. It is essential to provide principals with the skills they need to form these relationships. The implications include trust, communication, collaboration, and compassion.
**Trust.** Trust is the foundation of effective relationships (Renn & Levine, 1991). In order for school principals to lead their schools through No Child Left Behind (No Child Left Behind [NCLB], 2002), RTTT (NYSED, 2010), Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) (New York State, 2012), CCSS (Rothman, 2011), and other mandates, they must establish trusting environments. The teachers in this study clearly articulated the desire for trusting school principal-teacher relationships. The teachers that reported a better working relationship with their school principals were more likely to be fully committed and fully engaged (Graen, 1976).

Graen and Uhl-Bien (1991) suggested the importance of leaders building trust and respect with all subordinates. This study found the importance of trust being top down, bottom up, and side by side. This included from the superintendent to the principals and from the principal to his or her teachers. Further, high-quality leader-member exchanges advance the goals of the leader, subordinates, and the organization. Scholars have concluded that high-quality leader-member exchange produces less turnover. Additionally, the exchange creates greater organizational commitment, more desirable work assignments, better work attitudes, more attention and support from the leader, and greater participation (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995; Liden et al., 1993). Lastly, Grayson and Alvarez (2008) suggested that a positive environment supports the assertion that turnover will be lower when teachers feel supported.

To this end, school principals should trust that their teachers are doing their part to deliver. School principals should believe that what their teachers are saying is the truth to the best of their knowledge. This study revealed the importance of principals providing their teachers with honest feedback on the quality of the teachers’ instruction.
and provide them, if necessary, with a mentor who will help them refine their practice. LeMaistre and Pare (2009) agreed with Gaikhorst et al. (2014) by suggesting that where mentoring and induction programs were present, teachers felt more supported and reported that they would most likely continue teaching. The results of this study reflect the importance of school principals trusting their teachers. One participant said it best, “Micromanagement is the quickest way to put a cap on anyone’s true potential. The sky should always be the limit.”

Trusting relationships allow teachers to move from going through the motions to feeling good about their job and the impact they have on their students; therefore, they are less likely to leave their school. When trust exists, teachers are more willing to challenge their own abilities without the fear of being ridiculed for making a mistake. These teachers are more committed to their school and are more willing to work beyond contractual obligations (Dansereau et al., 1975; Graen 1976; Graen & Cashman, 1975). Trusting relationships are extremely complex, meaning different things for different people, and they can be emotionally provocative.

As evidenced by this study, trust is something that takes time to be build, and it can be impaired in an instant. Trust is something that is based on experiences. As revealed in this study, there are negative experiences when school principals lack trust or make decisions that demonstrate a lack of trust of their teachers. For others, they suggest ways in which their school principal trusted them in making decisions and by giving them a voice. Grayson and Alvarez (2008) and Ingersoll (2001) acknowledged the impact of engaging teachers in shared decision making regarding their commitment.
Communication. Trust relationships depend on effective communication and listening. Truly effective leaders have built two-way patterns of communication. These kinds of leaders establish a series of formal and informal channels allowing communication to flow freely in either direction (Batsis, 1987). Two-way communication includes the leader providing his or her teachers with actionable feedback. As evidence in this study, teachers desire their school principal to provide them with honest and timely feedback on their instructional performance. Gaikhorst et al. (2014) affirmed these findings by stating that regular visits from administration with immediate feedback from them results in a positive support culture.

A school principal who creates an environment that solicits input from all stakeholders is more likely to identify potential issues before they become problematic. It was evident in this study, when teachers or school principals operate in silos, they function with assumptions rather than a concrete understanding of what is expected. Dukess (2001) asserted that school principals should have strong interpersonal skills, be good listeners, and effectively communicate and speak the truth. According to Halawa (2005), better school climates exist in schools where the school principal communicates effectively.

According to Witherspoon (1997), leadership exists only through effective communication, and the main function of such effective communication is to further develop shared meanings in order to seek and use information. This study revealed the importance of school principals communicating and listening effectively. It was evident through the participants’ responses in this study that a lack of perceived support was the direct result of a lack of effective communication and listening. This study is in
alignment with Gregson (1991, Orpen (1997), and Varona’s (1996) studies that indicated communication satisfaction has also been shown to influence an employee’s level of job satisfaction, commitment, and work motivation. Consequently, communication dissatisfaction may cause stress, absenteeism, low feedback, burnout, and a higher turnover rate for employees (Ahmad, 2006).

A number of authors indicated that communication is central to efficacious leadership (Awamleh & Gardner, 1999; Den Hartog & Verburg, 1997; Frese, Beimel, & Schoenborn, 2003; Kirkpatrick & Locke, 1996; Riggio, Riggio, Salinas, & Cole, 2003; Spangler & House, 1991; Towler, 2003). This study explored the implication of effective, successful school leaders having a realistic view of effective communication and its direct and indirect effects on the school and its staff. Additionally, school principals ought to understand the complexity of communication (Clampitt, 2005).

The teachers in this study presumed that school principals should contribute to the collaborative atmosphere by informing them in a timely manner; resolving conflicts; engaging teachers in shared decision making when appropriate; and supporting, protecting, and respecting all of their teachers. Lastly, in order to make this happen, school principals should learn how to master the skills of effective communication, listening, and leadership (Terek, Nikolić, Gligorović, Glušac, & Tasić, 2015).

**Collaboration.** Collaboration is an essential component of effective school principal-teacher relationships. Teachers perform a critical role in society as they work diligently to prepare students for college and career. Yet all too often teachers, are not treated as equals by their principals because they lack the status and power when compared to other professions. The teachers in this study spoke often about being
isolated from their colleagues and other supporters. For these teachers, the bell rings, their door closes, and they teach independently for most of the school day.

The findings in this study show the necessity of supportive leadership, how important it is for teachers to share their intellectual property, and the benefit of school principals creating supportive conditions for teacher collaboration. Historically, teachers worked predominantly in isolation, while new studies indicate that productive working relationships with colleagues have the potential to positively influence the performance of students (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). For the teacher respondents in this study, leadership behaviors that support a collaborative school climate include mentoring partnerships, collaborative planning, empowering teachers with shared decision making when appropriate, providing student management support, and effectively communicating and listening.

A well-structured, effective model of instructional collaboration fills the void left by traditional professional development and provides teachers with the professional learning that has a profound impact on their instructional practice. As evidenced in this current study, collaboration involves orderly, rigorous interactions in which team members are engaged and the activities that facilitate teacher learning, such as opportunities to observe, debate, and share teaching practices for the benefit of both teacher and student, are evident. When there is a high level of trust in a collaborative group, teachers are more willing to be vulnerable and show their weaknesses without the fear that their colleagues will assume something negative. These effective collaborative groups allow for true professional growth as teachers stretch their thinking based on their new learnings from colleagues.
Further, collaboration is essential in bringing teachers together to form trusting, professional relationships for the sake of building and also for sustaining an effective learning community in the school (Williams, 2010). School principals communicate expectations for collaboration by setting goals, providing protocols, and sending the message that all teachers need to bring their best each day to the job, to avoid others from pointing fingers and assuming ill intent. Leadership is, therefore, a critical component in effective collaboration for the whole team.

**Compassion.** A critical component of effective school principal-teacher relationships is the ability of the school principal to demonstrate compassion. This is contrary to the popular belief that leaders should manage by their head instead of their heart. Traditionally, school principals were celebrated by being strong, tough, hard-nosed, and data driven. However, effective school principals, among many characteristics, have conviction, confidence, and courage to cultivate compassion with all members of the organization.

A compassionate school principal acknowledges their teachers and demonstrates a great deal of interest in them as individuals. LeMaistre and Pare (2009) confirmed the importance in maintaining a balance between a teacher’s personal life and teaching. For some teachers, they find it difficult to separate the personal and professional aspects of the job. Overall, teachers find it valuable to know that their school principal cares about them personally and professionally.

Kersaint et al. (2005) studied the factors that influence teacher retention: balanced time with family with increased responsibilities and support they received from their school principal. This study found that a lack of perceived administrative support
was the key reason for the teachers’ desire to leave their job. The teachers overwhelmingly suggested the need to know that their school principals understood that they have families outside of the schoolhouse, and that they occasionally might need to be away from their jobs.

Subsequently, the teachers desired their school principals to check in with them on the status of a surgery, cancer treatment, adoption of a child, loss of a loved one, birth of a child, etc. The teachers prodigiously appreciated the personal support that their school principals provided to them during such personal experiences and by welcoming them back into their school. These open arms were done without making the teachers feel as though they had abandoned their job, their school, or more importantly, their students. School principals who are authentic and compassionate let their teachers know that they care about them as individuals. Further, a compassionate school principal allows teachers to reach their full potential, which is a critical component of compassionate leadership.

The most important factor to creating a positive school environment is the school principal factor. The Selamat et al. (2013) research concluded that a supportive, engaged leader is essential in the creation of a positive school climate and culture. Woolfolk (1993) added to this notion by concluding that leadership support affects teacher satisfaction. This study revealed the significance of the school principal forming effective relationships with teachers as the most important factor to prevent teachers from leaving. This section discussed the implications of forming these relationships. These implications include trust, communication, collaboration, and compassion.
Limitations

This study was limited to those participants teaching Grades K-12 in an urban, suburban, or rural school district. Consequently, the study did not include charter, parochial, alternative schools, private schools, or other non-traditional schools. The study was limited to teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support through the teachers’ lived experiences.

Another limitation in this study is that the teacher participants self-reported demographic information. Since the study was conducted anonymously online, it was not possible to verify the demographic data reported by the participants. In addition, this study did not include gender, age, and ethnicity demographic information from teacher participants. Moreover, accuracy of recall is a limitation, as some teachers might not have been able to accurately recall their support or a lack thereof from their school principal because some experiences occurred more than one year prior to their participation in this study.

The study was limited also in that it was administered anonymously online. The format was unable to determine whether or not all participants fully understood the questions. Additionally, the researcher was not able to ask clarifying questions or to probe deeper into participant responses. The impact of administering the questionnaire online may have limited participation among those who lacked a Facebook account; therefore, they did not receive the questionnaire. The perceptions of those not included in the study might have been different than those who participated.

The final limitation is the impact the researcher’s participation had on the results. While I do not have any direct authority in my position over the participants, and while I
was very conscious of my position throughout the data analysis process and through a process of bracketing, the fact that I am a school principal could have influenced my interpretation of the data. Although my profession might have impacted the results of the study, it cannot be said for sure how much of an impact it had.

**Recommendations**

*Recommendations for future research.* This study was limited to those participants teaching Grades K-12 in an urban, suburban, or rural school district who possessed a Facebook account. More research is needed to include charter, parochial, alternative schools, private schools, or other non-traditional schools. It may be helpful to understand how teachers from other school types describe school principal support and what influence, if any, it has on their level of commitment to their school. The online Teacher Perception Questionnaire limited the researcher’s ability to check for understanding or to probe deeper. It may prove beneficial for future studies to duplicate this study in the form of a focus group or structured face-to-face interview with the participants.

This study measured teachers’ perceptions of their school principals’ support that the participants indicated as a reason for remaining at their current school, moving to another school, or leaving the profession altogether. Therefore, it is recommended that future research consider a possible connection between principal-teacher exchange and teacher commitment, and its impact on student achievement.

This study explored teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support. It was apparent through the participants’ retelling of specific lived experiences that their school principals’ perceptions of the support they provided to teachers were not aligned. This
research exposed the possible perceptual differences of support between school principals and teachers. The results of this study supports the need for future research to understand this disconnect. Therefore, it is recommended that future qualitative research include a focus group with school principals to gain their perspective of the support they perceive teachers need from them compared to the support they feel they are able to provide in the school context. Furthermore, an in-depth analysis of school principal responses during the focus group should be compared to teachers’ perceptions of school principal support in order to identify a possible disconnect. The recommended study should be administered in urban, suburban, and rural district school types.

Lastly, a school principal’s level of commitment to his or her school has an influence on his or her teachers’ own level of commitment to remain teaching at the principal’s school. Moreover, it is warranted that future research deeply explore the influence principal turnover has regarding teacher attrition decisions and commitment to his or her school.

**Recommendations for practices.** This study highlights the effective leadership practices that teachers perceive as supportive attributes of supportive school principals. These recommendations for practice contribute substantially to improvements in both teacher effectiveness and the ability for school principals to retain highly effective teachers in their school. Additionally, each recommendation identifies possible challenges.

This study provides enough data to suggest the importance of school principals maintaining frequent classroom visits while providing immediate feedback. It is recommended that this time be in addition to the two required APPRs. The two formal
observations within the school year are not frequent enough for a school principal to improve instruction and teaching in his or her buildings. Additionally, a lack of frequent classroom visits makes it impossible for a school principal to identify possible concerns that should be addressed. In some situations, this lack of a presence in a classroom may be the difference between documenting a teacher’s poor performance to assist in his or her removal and having to grant his or her tenure because of a lack of documentation.

Possible challenges for school principals conducting frequent classroom visits include student disciplinary issues, meetings, and parent visits; however, this time should be considered sacred. The school principal will need to decide how he or she will manage these classroom visits (new teachers and underperforming teachers) to validate high performers and to support struggling teachers. The school principal is the best person to align school and district support to assist struggling teachers and to set expectations for improvement. Lastly, it is understood that issues come up from time to time that may be reason for the school principal to deviate from his or her schedule; however, being transparent and communicating these deviations with the teachers will alleviate their misperception that their school principal is not supportive.

Some of the teachers felt unrecognized and unappreciated by their school principals. For some participants, they proposed that their school principal unconsciously failed to recognize them. Herzberg (1987) distinguished between motivation and demotivation. School principals who consciously recognize their teachers on a regular and consistent basis are more likely to motivate teachers and who report a high rate of principal-teacher exchange, and they are less likely to leave their school. More importantly, recognition must happen at all levels of the organization—from the
superintendent to the principals, from the principals to their teachers, and from the
teachers to their students. If school principals fail to recognize when their teachers
perform outstandingly, the teachers understandably feel unappreciated. School principals
can solicit input from their teachers for the teachers’ preference for recognition. Some
suggestions include leaving a note in a teacher’s mailbox, recognizing him or her in front
of his or her peers at a faculty meeting, or sending a brief email thanking him or her for
their efforts. School principals can also encourage staff to recognize one another and the
students. Once recognition becomes routine and a part of the school’s culture, all
members of the school community will feel appreciated for the value they add to the
school.

As stated previously, teachers need time for collaboration. Collaboration is a
research-based professional dialogue that strives to develop and achieve common goals
that are focused on continuous improvement of student achievement, professional
performance, and school performance goals. Thus, it is a practice recommendation of
this study to incorporate collaboration time for teachers. In doing so, school principals
will be more capable of removing teacher isolation, which inhibits a school’s ability to
grow. Some challenges include uncommon planning times for special education teachers
who teach more than one grade level, a lack of funding that would support substitute
teachers being hired, a perceived lack of understanding of common planning, and a
master schedule that limits collaborative planning opportunities. Districts utilize varying
models for collaboration. These range from having a late-start or early-release day
designated for collaboration, a collaboration period built into the teachers’ schedules, the
use of monthly faculty meeting time, release time, and quarterly vertical collaboration on
superintendent development days. Regardless of the model used, school principals are critical in setting the tone for collaboration in their schools. It may be helpful for districts to allow school principals time to discuss ways in which their master schedule can support collaboration. These planning meetings maximize opportunities for teams of teachers to review student achievement data, discuss instructional practice strengths and challenges, and ensure curriculum alignment among the grade levels.

The participants desired that their school principals support their student-management decisions when they go to meet with a student and his or her parents. However, if the teacher’s student-management decision violates school district policy or laws that govern the discipline of students, school principals are not able to support a teacher. Regardless, school principals should communicate these mandates relating to progressive discipline with teachers who are unfamiliar with them. Additionally, this information is indispensable for school principals as they decide what behavior-management incidents are specific to an individual teacher or are systemic and require further professional development. The school principal can easily identify issues with classroom management during frequent classroom observations. In the event support is required, the school principal can align the struggling teacher with a colleague or district behavior coach. Teachers will report a more favorable working environment when they feel supported by their school principal with student management.

The teacher participants desired their school principals demonstrate an interest in them, as individuals, whose lives extend beyond the schoolhouse. School principals should seek to understand family obligations that may temporarily remove their teachers from their job from time to time. Examples include the birth of a child, adoption, death
of a family member, and/or surgery. School principals who demonstrate compassion by acknowledging their teachers on a personal level and recognize that they may need time away from their teaching responsibilities to address personal situations, are more likely to retain those teachers. For example, a principal can help and demonstrate compassion by covering a class so a teacher can assess a personal emergency, by sending an email or phoning to let the teacher know support is available, or by offering words of encouragement.

This study exposed the painful reality that not all school principals are perceived as compassionate when their teachers demonstrate personal struggles. After a review of two school leadership programs in Upstate New York, it was apparent that these leadership programs include coursework relating to the fiscal aspects of school administration as well as legal and policy aspects; however, these same programs that promise to build compassionate leaders fail to incorporate courses of study that focus on compassionate leadership with an emphasis on building human capacity. Therefore, school principals are currently operating on prior experiences that may not have included formal opportunities to practice compassionate leadership, which is often learned on the job. Moreover, school principals bring their own experiences to the table, and they manage these types of situations the best way they know how. Therefore, it is a practice recommendation that school principal leadership programs incorporate opportunities for inspiring administrators to learn effective, compassionate leadership practices. In doing so, school principals will have the skills necessary to effectively manage their human capital. Further, teachers will work harder for a principal who they know cares about them as individuals.
Another practice recommendation refers to the school principals’ ability to model their own expectations. The teachers wanted to know that they were not out in the trenches alone and that their school principal models what is expected of them. Two examples included the school principal asking students to remove their hats, and another example was when the school principals attended the same after-school function they expected their staff to attend. Some challenges for school principals are their ability to balance their multiple responsibilities. However, letting teachers know that the school principal is unable to attend due to other obligations will address the possible misperception that their school principal lacks commitment. Another example from one of the participants involved a school principal who arrived late for a meeting when it was expected that the staff should arrive on time. Teachers may not know their school principal was stopped in the hall by a parent or received an urgent phone call from central office, so what is often described as an unsupportive school principal could very well be the lack of communication, which resulted in a perceived lack of support.

Lastly, the teachers desired their school principals provide them with targeted professional development. Too often, teachers report receiving the same PD as their counterparts; therefore, not allowing those coming in with a lower level of knowledge to access the professional development in order to improve their instructional practice. Additionally, for some teachers, their school principals’ lack of attendance in PDs was considered a lack of support. For some of the teachers, they had seen initiatives come and go. The teachers wanted their school principals to communicate the principals’ expectations for their PD and to give the teachers accountability. A recommendation from some participants included utilizing a PD committee to determine PD topics and
maintain a PD plan for the school. Regardless of the strategy, the teachers demonstrated a strong preference for school principals to organize PDs that are relevant, differentiated, and address the teachers’ individual learning gaps. The challenge for organizing an in-depth PD is a lack of time. To address the lack of time, some school districts are moving from the traditional form of PD to include job-embedded PDs. For these schools and districts, they allow time for side-by-side coaching directly in the teachers’ classrooms or observations in effective teachers’ classrooms. These sessions are followed up to ensure that learned strategies are being implemented consistently and routinely. For other districts, they are transforming their once-monthly faculty meetings into professional development meetings. These districts are encouraged to ensure that these time-constrained PD opportunities are intellectually engaging and cause teachers to leave feeling like they received something tangible that will enhance their professional practice. Most importantly, school principals who model the level of differentiated PD that is expected are more likely to improve instructional practice and outcome for students by continuously developing teachers and transforming low-achieving schools (Conley & Dupor, 2013).

The subsequent section offers policy recommendations that were discovered within this research and are to be considered by the field.

**Recommendations for policy.** Research is warranted to determine the effectiveness of federal, state, and school district policies that support or hinder school principals’ ability to support teachers. For instance, in New York State, Education Law 3020b was enacted to support the expedited removal of ineffective teachers and school principals. The essence of this study reveals the importance of building effective
partnerships among teachers and their school principals. As evidenced in the findings, it takes teachers time to build trust to the extent where they feel comfortable enough to expose their deficiencies and to make measurable growth.

Research demonstrates that the most important factor for improving student achievement is effective teachers in all classrooms (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Invargarson, 1998). With frequent classroom observations and coaching opportunities, school principals can identify struggling teachers and help them to improve. For those that, with support are unable or unwilling to improve, the law supports their removal. The impact these ineffective teachers have on classrooms are too great to ignore. Lastly, school principals must attract and retain effective teachers and respect and encourage their own leadership growth.

The data reveals that mentoring for new teachers should be revisited. Currently, the New York State Education Department (2010) maintains mentoring standards for the field. These standards specifically define mentoring as a sophisticated and systemic effort to initiate, shape, and sustain new teachers. The Burke et al. (2013) research confirms that novice teachers need active leadership support and guidance from experienced colleagues in order to remain in the classroom. However, the findings of this study reveal the power of sustaining mentor partnerships for teachers needing additional support to strengthen their teaching practice. Further, mentoring helps teachers navigate the new building, helps them with completing paperwork, learning new programs, or in understanding specific procedures unique to that building.

More specifically, mentoring relationships include a sharing of curriculum knowledge, grade-level knowledge, building procedural knowledge, and opportunities to
visit effective teaching. Mentoring time should be allocated on a frequent basis, and it should include classroom visits from the school principal. More importantly, policy makers and school districts must expand the notion of providing mentoring opportunities for new teachers to include those veteran teachers who may benefit from mentoring. It is important to select mentors based on the skills they bring to the table and their ability to create effective partnerships with the teacher receiving the mentoring.

Lastly, it is critically important that policy makers and districts look into the overwhelmingly significant turnover of school principals. Although this study did not focus on the factors that cause school principals to leave their school, district, or profession, it was evident from the findings of this study that it is a significant issue. The teachers wanted to work with school principals who demonstrate the same level of commitment they expect of their teachers. When there is frequent turnover of the school principal, for whatever reason, teachers question their own commitment to the school. This study revealed the essence and power of effective school principal-teacher relationships. These relationships take time to build trust. A revolving door of school principals negatively impacts school cultures. Policy makers and districts should analyze those factors relating to school principal turnover in order to address teachers’ own commitment to their school. If school principals and teachers are the most significant factors to increasing student achievement, then principal and teacher turnover must be stabilized. More importantly, policy makers must look at the overall effectiveness of principal turnover as it relates to teacher effectiveness and student achievement.
Conclusion

This study specifically explored teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ support and the influence it has on their level of commitment. Many studies presented factors that influence teachers’ decisions to either remain teaching, move to another school, or leave teaching. These factors ranged from school principal support, student behavior, low socio-economic status, and school context, to parental involvement, autonomy, workload, salary, and collegiality (NCES, n.d.). However, it was evident that a gap in the literature existed around teachers’ perceptions of school principal support, which was the basis for this study. It is believed, as a result of this study, that if school principals had a clearer understanding of teachers’ perceptions of personal and professional support, they might be able to build stronger partnerships with their teachers and help the new and more vulnerable teachers remain in the profession.

The literature demonstrated a compelling reason to learn more about the relationship between teachers and their school principals. Understanding the dyadic relationship between teachers and their school principals, using the LMX theory, to mitigate the negative impact teacher turnover has on our nation’s schools is essential. The LMX theory, as a result of its success in reducing employee attrition in other professions, was the theoretical framework for this study.

This study included Grades K-12 teachers (n = 143) who volunteered to participate in the 21-item qualitative Teacher Perception Questionnaire. The online questionnaire was distributed anonymously via Facebook. This allowed the researcher to gain a broader perspective of teachers’ perceptions of school principal support from those teaching in suburban, rural, and urban districts. The teachers were asked to self-report
their school type, grade level, overall years teaching, years teaching at the same district, years teaching at the same school, and years teaching the same grade level.

Principal-teacher exchange was measured using a modified version of the LMX 7 questionnaire. Revisions to this instrument directly addressed concerns highlighted during the field testing (i.e., language). Prior to analyzing the participant data, the researcher bracketed his own bias. Data collection was done by first transcribing the participants’ lived experience answers to the open-ended questions that expressed both negative and positive explanations of how they perceived school principals’ professional support and personal support. After which, codes were added and participant responses were chunked by codes. These codes were analyzed to determine meaning and frequency of the responses. Further, the researcher utilized peer checking to ensure accurate analysis of all of the data and to ensure protocols were adhered to.

This study centered around the following research questions: (a) How do teachers describe school principal personal support and professional support? (b) How do teachers describe the influence of school principal behaviors on their own level of commitment? and (c) How do teachers describe their professional working relationship with their school principal?

The results of the research identified teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal and professional support as they relate to the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools. It also looked into how the teachers perceived their working relationship with their school principals. This was communicated through seven major themes: (a) leads by example, (b) promotes a collaborative culture, (c) cultivates leadership in others,
(d) demonstrates compassion, (e) demonstrates commitment to school, (f) has an all-hands-on-deck attitude, and (g) builds on teachers’ strengths.

The participants overwhelmingly described their desire for their school principal to lead by example. Examples included their engagement with the school and community; instructional presence; advocates for the school, particularly with the central office when decisions are not in the best interest of the students; build on teachers’ strengths, no matter how big or small; forges school principal-teacher partnerships; maintains an instructional presence in classrooms with timely consistent feedback; and facilitates learning opportunities.

Another theme identified in this study was the idea of the school principal promoting a collaborative school culture where teachers feel professionally supported. School principals foster this notion by allowing time for team planning, empowering teachers with shared decision making when appropriate, effectively communicating and listening to all members of the organization, and give student-management support. When everyone is invited to the table and encouraged to participate, they are more likely to report a higher rate of exchange between them and their school principals.

Another common thread was the desire to have school principals recognize that every member of the organization has leadership potential, and it should be unleashed. Teachers in this study stated that they require encouragement to grow professionally, and they need autonomy to make curriculum and program decisions that are, in their opinion, in the best interest of students, and they wanted to be valued for their professional knowledge and expertise. The teachers wanted a school principal that builds on their strengths without putting a cap on their potential.
Another theme identified in this research was the desire for the school principal to demonstrate compassion. The teachers voiced the need for their school principal to respect the fact they have family obligations that may take them from their job from time to time; however, this does not mean that they do not respect their professional responsibilities; it just means, as one participant described it—they have a life outside of school. The teachers also showed preference for working with a school principal who demonstrated an interest in them both in and out of the schoolhouse. In all, the teachers who described their principals as compassionate reported a more favorable relationship with their school principal.

A school principal’s level of commitment to his or her school has a direct impact on the teachers’ level of commitment. The teachers found that influential school principals were the ones that demonstrated a high level of commitment by attending after-school activities and by not leaving the school their positions. As one teacher put it, “Seeing a principal committed makes us all want to be committed.” The teachers acknowledged their principals for demonstrating the commitment they expect from others. For some, commitment brought up negative emotions, such as abandonment, when a principal left his or her position. A significantly higher rate of principal turnover was reported in urban districts.

Another theme found in the research was the desire for school principals to pull up their sleeves and work alongside their teachers in the trenches. This idea of principals pulling up their sleeves, with an all hands on deck attitude, brought up mixed emotions for some as they experienced the polar opposite. For those participants, they often expressed their perception of a principal forgetting what it was like to be in the classroom
or that some lacked classroom experience altogether. The teachers overwhelmingly suggested they prefer a school principal who models their own expectations.

The teachers voiced a need for their school principals to recognize the good in them by building on their strengths. The notion of recognizing the good in teachers seems simple and seems to lack complexity, however, many of the teacher participants shared negative experiences regarding not being recognized by their school principal for the great things they do to help students each and every day. For some, they recalled experiences where a principal stopped by their classroom to leave them a positive note. For others, it was saying a simple “Hello” when they encountered them in the hallway. One teacher summed it up by saying that their principal told them they were the best staff he has ever worked with. For him or her and many others, they felt motivated to continue doing their very best.

One teacher participant stated, “When you can tell that your administrator loves what they do. When they are fully vested and committed to the school, you want to be the same. It’s the whole together-everyone-achieves-more TEAM!”

This study walked through teachers’ perceptions of school principals’ personal and professional support and how they impacted the teachers’ level of commitment to their schools. The teachers who reported having a higher rate of principal-teacher exchange expressed a higher rate of commitment to their schools. Teachers who reported a lower rate of exchange, for the purposes of this study, urban school districts, expressed less commitment to their schools.

The study was limited to those Grades K-12 teacher participants in urban, suburban, and rural school districts. Consequently, the study did not include charter,
parochial, alternative schools, private schools, or other non-traditional schools. Another limitation of the current study included the inability to verify demographic information that the participants self-reported. Additionally, a limitation of the current study was the inability for the researcher to probe deeper into participant responses or to confirm that participants truly understood questions being posed anonomously online. Lastly, this study was limited to those with a Facebook account.

Recommendations for future research include administering the questionnaire, in print, to school types not included in this initial research. Additional research should consider the perceptual differences among school principals and teachers when confronting the idea of school principal support. It may also prove beneficial to study the impact principal turnover has on teachers own level of commitment.

Practice recommendations in this study include: frequent classroom visits by the school principal with constructive feedback—acknowledge effective teachers; support struggling teachers who are coachable; document and remove those who are uncoachable; make a conscious effort to recognize the good deeds of teachers; provide teachers with collaboration time, while outlining expectations and accountability for improved student performance and teacher practice; provide consistent student-management support with techniques for struggling teachers; show a compassionate interest in teachers as individuals; model shared expectations; and provide teachers with a schedule of targeted PDs with opportunities to provide input.

Policy recommendations include: look into the current policies that limit a school principal from supporting the professional growth of staff while not forgetting the reality that ineffective teachers cannot go unrecognized and should be removed; expand the
current policy for mentoring new teachers to include any teacher who demonstrates a need for a mentor; and address policies that negatively impact the frequent turnover of school principals.

The significance of this study addresses school principals, districts, and policy makers who strive to recruit, retain, and develop teachers and transform low-achieving schools (Conley & Dupor, 2013). The teacher participants in this study described seven major themes. These themes all exemplified a supportive school principal and included: a school principal who leads by example, promotes a collaborative culture, cultivates leadership in others, demonstrates compassion, demonstrates commitment to the school, has an all-hands-on-deck attitude, and builds on teachers’ strengths.
References


Appendix A

IRB Approval Letter

June 22, 2015

File No: 3458-052115-13

Larry Schmiegel
St. John Fisher College

Dear Mr. Schmiegel:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, “School Principal Support: A Qualitative Study of Teachers Lived Experiences in Urban, Suburban and Rural Schools.”

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at irb@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen Lynd-Balta, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

ELB:jdr
Appendix B

Letter of Introduction

Dear K-12 Teacher Participant:

I am a doctoral student at St. John Fisher College (SJFC) in Rochester, New York. As part of my doctoral research, I am conducting a study to determine your perception of school principal personal support and professional support as it relates to your decision to remain teaching at the same school, move to another school within the same district or to leave the profession altogether. I want to hear what you think - your ideas and opinions count!

In this study, you will be asked to complete an online questionnaire. The questionnaire will be open for a three-week period. The online questionnaire contains 21 questions and should take approximately 45 minutes to complete. There are no risks to you from completing the questionnaire.

All questionnaire responses will be anonymous; no one will be able to identify you when the results are recorded/reported. The researcher will not know or have access to your names. Your name will never be linked to your questionnaire responses. Your participation in this study is totally voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without negative consequences. If you wish to withdraw at any time during the study, simply stop participating by failing to submit the online questionnaire.

Please feel free to contact me, Larry C. Schmiegel at (315) 516-4663, if you would like to discuss anything about this study. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this research proposal. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun at (585) 385-8012. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

Thank you for your willingness to help with this research! Your ideas are valuable and will help principals understand how you perceive their role with regard to personal and professional support and workplace commitment and how it influences your intention to remain teaching at your current school, move to another school or to leave the profession altogether.

I truly appreciate your willingness to participate in this study.

Respectfully,

Larry C. Schmiegel  
Doctoral Student and Researcher  
St. John Fisher College  
Doctorate in Executive Leadership
Appendix C

Teacher Perception Questionnaire (TPQ)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM – QUESTIONNAIRE
St. John Fisher College

Title of study: Teacher Attrition Decisions: A Qualitative Study of Teacher Commitment and Perception of Principal Support

Name of researcher: Larry C. Schmiegel, Ed D Candidate, SJFC

Faculty Supervisor: Teresa Pulso, Ed. D

Purpose of study: To determine your perception of school principal personal and professional support and your relationship with your school principal as it relates to your decision to remain teaching at your current school, move to another school or to leave the teaching profession altogether.

Place of study: Online via Social Media

Length of participation: The questionnaire will be open for a three-week period. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risks and benefits: There are no risks to you from completing this questionnaire.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: All your responses will be anonymous so the researcher will not know who you are.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:
1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

Please feel free to contact Larry C. Schmiegel at [Email] if you have any questions about the study. If you experience emotional or physical distress due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at [Phone] or the Health & Wellness Center at 585-385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathburn [Contact Information]. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

☐ Click here to indicate that you have read and understood the study described above and have access to a copy of this form.

☐ Click here to indicate that you are 18 years of age or older.

☐ Click here to indicate that you agree to participate in the study as outlined above.

Teaching Experience

What grade level do you currently teach?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kindergarten</th>
<th>1</th>
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How many years have you been teaching? *Include all districts, but do not include itinerant substitute teaching or student teaching. If this is your first year teaching, please indicate one (1) year.*

*Note: Click the slider and place it on the number/year(s) that represent your answer for this question.*
How many years have you been teaching in your current school district? *(You can include year-long substitute teaching experience if it was in the same assignment.)*

*Note: Click the slider and place it on the number/year(s) that represent your answer for this question.*

How many years have you been teaching at your current school?

*Note: Click the slider and place it on the number/year(s) that represent your answer for this question.*

How many years have you been teaching in the same grade level/assignment?

*Note: Click the slider and place it on the number/year(s) that represent your answer for this question.*

Have you ever left a teaching position? If so, please explain. If no, please explain what has influenced your decision to remain teaching at the same school. Please use 1-3 sentences.
Describe a time when you felt professionally supported by your school principal.

*Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your anecdote. This question is focused on understanding the perceived support you receive from your school principal with regard to the professional aspects of your job (e.g., professional development, team planning, collaboration, resources).*

Describe a time when you did not feel professionally supported by your school principal.

*Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your anecdote. This question is focused on understanding the lack of perceived support you receive from your school principal with regard to the professional aspects of your job (e.g., professional development, team planning, collaboration, resources).*

Describe a time when you felt personally supported by your school principal.

*Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your anecdote. This question is focused on understanding the support your school principal provides with regard to the personal needs that happen outside work that often impact your role as a teacher (e.g., birth of a child, divorce, death in family, financial, medical).*

Describe a time when you did not feel personally supported by your school principal.

*Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your anecdote. This question is focused on understanding the lack of perceived support your school principal provides with regard to the personal needs that happen outside work that often impact your role as a teacher (e.g., birth of a child, divorce, death in family, financial, medical).*
What support from the school principal is most valuable to a new teacher? Please explain.

Note: A new teacher, for the purpose of this research is a teacher with less than 3 years experience. Please use 1-3 sentences to describe your answer.

Organizational Commitment

Please rank the factors that influence your decision to remain teaching at your current school (1 being most important and 8 being least important).

Note: Click your mouse on each factor and slide them to the rank you choose.

- Collegiality
- Salary/Benefits
- Shared Decision Making
- Support from School Principal
- Student Involvement
- Parent Involvement
- Grade Level Assignment
- School Culture

Describe an experience when a school principal helped you feel more committed to the school.

Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your response. This question is focused on understanding what specific principal behaviors helped you feel more committed to the school.
Describe a time when a school principal made you feel less committed to the school.

*Note: Please use 1-3 sentences to provide your response. This question is focused on understanding what specific school principal behaviors negatively influenced your level of commitment to the school.*

---

**School Principal-Teacher Relationship**

The following questions ask you to describe your relationship with your school principal. For each of the items, click on the response that best indicates the degree to which you think the item is true for you by selecting one of the responses that appear below the item.

Do you know how satisfied your school principal is with what you do?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Fairly often</th>
<th>Very often</th>
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</table>

How well does your school principal understand your job needs?

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<thead>
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<th>Not a bit</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>A fair amount</th>
<th>Quite a bit</th>
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<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How well does your school principal recognize your potential?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not At All</th>
<th>A little</th>
<th>Moderately</th>
<th>Mostly</th>
<th>Fully</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I have enough confidence in my school principal that I would defend and justify his or her decision if he or she were not present to do so.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

How would you characterize your working relationship with your school principal?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Extremely ineffective</th>
<th>Worse than average</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Better than average</th>
<th>Extremely effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
<td>○</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.
Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Title of study: School Principal Support: A Qualitative Study of Teachers Lived Experiences in Urban, Suburban and Rural Schools

Name of researcher: Larry C. Schmiegel, Ed.D Candidate, SJFC

Faculty Supervisor: Theresa Pulos, Ed. D

Purpose of study: To determine your perception of school principal personal support and professional support and your relationship with your school principal as it relates to your decision to remain teaching at your current school, move to another school or to leave the teaching profession altogether.

Place of study: Online via Facebook

Length of participation: The questionnaire will be open for a three-week period. It will take approximately 45 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

Risks and benefits: There are no risks to you from completing this questionnaire.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: All your responses will be anonymous so the researcher will not know who you are.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
4. Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that might be advantageous to you.
5. Be informed of the results of the study.

Please feel free to contact Larry C. Schmiegel at (315) 516-4663 if you have any questions about the study. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of Academic Affairs at 585-385-8034 or the Health & Wellness Center at 585-385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun. She will direct your call to a member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

☐ Click here to indicate that you have read and understood the study described above and have access to a copy of this form.

☐ Click here to indicate that you are 18 years of age or older.

☐ Click here to indicate that you agree to participate in the study as outlined above.