12-2021

Employee Engagement: Exploring Principal Dispositions in Turnaround Schools

Leah Kedley
St. John Fisher College, lak01184@sjfc.edu

Employee Engagement: Exploring Principal Dispositions in Turnaround Schools

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to gain more knowledge about leadership dispositions of school principals who could give insight into helping failing schools succeed. High-poverty, low-performing (HPLP) environments with chronically underperforming schools are identified as schools needing a "turnaround." By learning more about the experiences of teachers and administrative leaders working with school principals in low-performing schools, a better understanding emerged of the leadership dispositions that can engage employees in a successful school turnaround. Three themes emerged based on the experiences from six teachers and four supervisors of school principals regarding the principals' leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. The three themes include: (a) cultivating a culture of trust, (b) developing a shared vision, and (c) reflective leadership. The findings support the need for leadership dispositions in school principals to assist in the engagement of the school community toward school improvement. This research recommends developing a blueprint for current and aspiring school principals, HR departments, and school districts with HPLP environments and schools that are in need of a turnaround by outlining the identified dispositions for effectively improving a failing school in a turnaround setting.

Document Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Education (EdD)

Department
Executive Leadership

First Supervisor
Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, Ed.D.

Subject Categories
Education

Employee Engagement: Exploring Principal Dispositions in Turnaround Schools

By

Leah A. Kedley

Submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

EdD in Executive Leadership

Supervised by

Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, EdD

Committee Member

Terrance McCarthy, EdD

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

St. John Fisher College

December 2021

Dedication

I am incredibly blessed for the opportunity for self-development in the EdD program. Thank you to Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson, my dissertation chair, for providing much-needed guidance as I navigated this process. To Dr. Terrance McCarthy, thank you for your continued encouragement to "Trust the Process." I would also like to thank each EdD faculty member for their support, guidance, and feedback throughout this process.

To the members of Cohort 7 and 7.5, thank you for being a part of my educational journey. You provided many moments to learn and laugh together. Diane, Danielle, and Karen, I will cherish all of our scholarly sessions during our lunch breaks and after class. Thank you to my table mates as we completed each group project and had some fun in the process. To my fellow principals, Sue and Katrina, thank you for all the support you showed me as I learned to balance this new chapter in my life. Thank you to Nikia for being my ultimate cheerleader and wonderful friend.

To my dearest friends, Nene, Yversha, Esther, Vicki, and Jen, I am so grateful for your friendship and belief in me as I ventured through this process. Your constant check-ins and "you've got this" moments were so valuable. Finally, and most importantly, I am forever indebted to my family. Mom and Dad, your unwavering support and encouragement were just what I needed. I cannot begin to express my gratitude for all you have shown me and given me. To Terry and Kerrie Anna, thanks for calling it like it is and bringing me moments of joy in stressful times. I love you all.

Biographical Sketch

Leah Kedley is currently the principal at Jefferson Road Elementary School, in Pittsford, NY. Ms. Kedley attended SUNY Geneseo from 2001 to 2005 and graduated with a Bachelor of Science and Art degrees in 2005. She attended St. John Fisher College from 2007 to 2009 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 2009. She came to St. John Fisher College in the fall of 2019 and began doctoral studies in the EdD Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Kedley pursued her research in employee engagement by exploring principal dispositions in turnaround schools under the direction of Dr. Shannon Cleverley-Thompson and Dr. Terrance McCarthy and received the EdD degree in 2021.

Abstract

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological study was to gain more knowledge about leadership dispositions of school principals who could give insight into helping failing schools succeed. High-poverty, low-performing (HPLP) environments with chronically underperforming schools are identified as schools needing a "turnaround." By learning more about the experiences of teachers and administrative leaders working with school principals in low-performing schools, a better understanding emerged of the leadership dispositions that can engage employees in a successful school turnaround.

Three themes emerged based on the experiences from six teachers and four supervisors of school principals regarding the principals' leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. The three themes include: (a) cultivating a culture of trust, (b) developing a shared vision, and (c) reflective leadership. The findings support the need for leadership dispositions in school principals to assist in the engagement of the school community toward school improvement. This research recommends developing a blueprint for current and aspiring school principals, HR departments, and school districts with HPLP environments and schools that are in need of a turnaround by outlining the identified dispositions for effectively improving a failing school in a turnaround setting.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

School reform efforts have been in place for decades. Elected officials have often initiated educational reform efforts at the national, state, and local district levels. These initiatives have often involved creating funding mechanisms to improve elementary and secondary education quality through grants for textbooks, library resources, and enhanced funding for special education needs. Ultimately, utilizing these resources consistently becomes the responsibility of school leaders, superintendents, principals, and department heads (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], n.d.). However, most building leaders and school-related stakeholders are not skilled in the most effective ways to provide appropriate teaching, instructional supports, and interventions to improve the educational outcome of underperforming pupils who are often poor, minority students (Reyes & Garcia, 2014).

Government Policy and Initiatives

Public education was founded in the 19th century (Fife, 2013). In the 1840s, Mann advocated for common schools where every child could receive a basic education funded by local taxes (Fife, 2013). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act ([ESEA], United States, 1965) was the first federal legislation to designate federal funds to support only schools that were identified as schools needing assistance because of the low socioeconomic status of the student (USDOE, n.d.). In October 1979, President Jimmy Carter established the Department of Education to support public schools (Fife,

2013). At the time of this writing, over five decades after the Supreme Court ruling to desegregate schools, the result of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), the United States remains heavily segregated and isolated (Perry & Harshbarger, 2019). The urban school settings serve predominantly low-income families and disproportionately non-Caucasian children across the country (Fife, 2013).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1990) report indicated that students in urban school settings had significant challenges, such as poverty, limited lower English proficiency, and family instability, than students in rural and suburban districts. The NCES report highlighted schools that served the highest concentrations of low-income students (Fife, 2013; NCES, 1990). A focus on children's education was a civil rights issue and at the forefront of education policy (Fife, 2013).

The United States has recognized that many urban districts are failing and need assistance to improve (Brinson et al., 2008). The school improvement process in failing schools is not a new phenomenon. The United States has over 20 years of documented interventions to assist in this process at a national level (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017). No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2002) was a law that attempted to reform failing urban education. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) mandated that states identify and approve plans for turning around their lowest-performing schools, and these must be evidence-based solutions (Aladjem, 2016). Under ESSA (2015), Title I, Part A, funds are to provide children with the opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education to close the educational achievement gap. Title I funds are federal dollars to support schools with high percentages of low-income students (ESSA, 2015). While these Title I funds are allocated to support new school initiatives, the most effective

school leaders must rely on out-of-the-box thinking to utilize funds in a way that facilitates sizable school improvements (Hitt et al., 2018).

ESSA (2019), previously signed into law by President Barack Obama in 2015, was created to inform and emphasize equitable school success opportunities in the United States. ESSA (2019) expands efforts for providing school support and accountability measures that require improvement plans for the lowest-performing schools and subgroups within a failing school that fall below adequate performance standards. For example, if children with disabilities are underperforming in reading, additional plans to close the achievement gap are required (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2020).

The federal government policies, formerly NCLB (2002), and most recently, ESSA (2015), highlight the inequities associated with urban districts where there are many failing schools that are significantly impacted by poor neighborhoods with high minorities and low incomes. Under ESSA (2015), each state could decide how individual school districts chose to resolve low-performing schools, allowing for flexibility in the path toward improvement. Federal legislation sought to improve low-performing schools while providing financial resources (Reyes & Garcia, 2014).

The National Center for Evaluation and Regional Assistance report, *State Capacity to Support School Turnaround* (NCEE, 2015), found that more than 80% of the states made turnaround a high priority. In comparison, 50% of those states indicated significant challenges in turning around low-performing schools and achieving sustainable outcomes for improvement. The evaluation reports specified challenges that have hindered the turnaround process, such as significant gaps in expertise for supporting

school turnaround, which could include outside intermediaries and school administration structures (NCEE, 2015). The School Improvement Grants (SIG) program awarded by the USDOE suggested identifying turnaround competencies to support the selection process of educators with qualities that equip them to succeed in the turnaround environment (USDOE, n.d.).

NYS legislation tasked the approved intermediaries, identified as state education agencies, to support low-performing or priority schools to moves out of their failing status (NCEE, 2015; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). State education agencies are organizations that are primarily responsible for the state supervision of public elementary and secondary schools (USDOE, n.d.). Under federal legislation ESSA (2015), school districts choose how to resolve their low-performing schools instead of being schools that have a choice to hire local state education agencies to assist in their turnaround efforts. School districts depend upon local agencies to support the lowest-performing schools; however, these agencies may not know how to best support the schools (NCEE, 2015).

Turnaround Schools in NYS

NYSED (2019b) released new terminology in 2019 to identify schools that had not met state-level criteria and were not in good standing as a district within NYS. The new labels are "comprehensive support and improvement" (CSI) and "target support and improvement" (TSI) schools (NYSED, 2019b). CSI schools are in the bottom 5% of all schools in student performance. These are the turnaround schools, and they must adhere to the development and implementation of transformational plans (NYSED, 2019b). Evidence has shown that effecting change in a school can take at least a decade to accomplish (Heck & Chang, 2017). Within this time frame, a less-than-adequate

educational experience is delivered to hundreds of thousands of children (NYSED, 2019b; Public Impact, 2008, 2016). However, the turnaround process begins with 6 months to develop a plan and 2 years to achieve significant growth. Table 1.1 gives the definitions of the different categories of school classifications.

Table 1.1

Categories to Identify School Classification

Classification	Definition
Recognition schools	A school that is high performing or rapidly improving as determined by the Commissioner.
Schools in good standing	A school that is not a TSI, CSI, or Recognition school.
Targeted support and improvement schools	A school with low-performing subgroups of students (lowest performing in the state, consistently underperforming).
Comprehensive support and improvement schools	A school with low overall performance for all students group, a graduation rate below 67%, or a school with low-performing subgroups that have not improved.

Note. Adapted from "New York State's Final Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Plan," 2019c, by NYSED. http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/essa/nys-essa-plan-summary.pdf

School reform remains a focus for the USDOE and individual state governments, as evidenced by the past and present legislation and initiatives to support failing schools (Calkins et al., 2007). The literature supports that improvement is needed in low-performing schools (Calkins et al., 2007; ESSA, 2015; NYSED, 2019b; Public Impact, 2008, 2016; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). As school districts recognize failing schools and determine the need to become turnaround schools in their district, NYS education Rules and Regulations Part 100.19 (NYSED, 2020) have also identified the schools in need. CSI schools are measured by NYS's Diagnostic Tool for School and District Effectiveness (DTSDE) school review process (NYSED, 2019a).

Additional essential data pieces about HPLP and failing schools that assist in providing a deeper understanding of NYS schools' standings are that 53% of the student population is economically disadvantaged. Students enrolled in Grades 3–8 show proficiency levels of 35.8% in mathematics and 31.4% proficiency in English language arts, according to the NYSED 2015 Report Card. Lastly, NYS's graduation rate of 76.4% kept almost a quarter of the student population from graduating, illustrating a public education system needing change (NYSED, n.d.).

According to Education Law Section 211-f in NYS's Regulation Part 100.19 (NYSED, 2019b), there is step-by-step guidance for school districts to take over and restructure failing schools. This policy dictates the process, plan, and terminology relevant to failing schools and NYS's response to support improvement efforts. The taking over or restructuring process is part of a plan to pursue school improvement. This school improvement plan includes additional terms and labels, stakeholder involvement, and interventions. The roles and responsibilities of the school (the receiver), evaluation of the program, and time frame for improvement are indicated in the plan, along with the Commissioners' option to phase out and close struggling and persistently struggling schools (NYSED, 2015).

School Building Leadership

This study explored the role of effective leadership in developing and supporting student learning and achievement in underperforming K–12 urban public schools in NYS. School leadership is critical to ensuring urban schools' success (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). It has become more apparent that there is a need to identify the characteristics of leaders and what actions they take to achieve success in the neediest of schools (Public Impact,

2008, 2016). While school leaders' impact on student achievement is second to classroom instruction, the school principal's role is integral to promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger, 2003).

One of the roles of a building leader, synonymously known as the school principal in this study, is to lead the staff in the school improvement process. According to Kahn (1990), leaders must ensure employees find meaning in their work, feel safe while working, and are psychologically available to participate in the organization's improvement process. When and staff and teachers' feelings are validated, they are motivated to work and invest their time and energy into a school's success (Cucchiara et al., 2015). Aladjem (2016) stated that the school principal's role is to establish safe and secure schools. The lowest-performing schools often serve families with the highest needs, and they include diverse student populations that reflect English language learners (ELLs) and families with low socioeconomic status (Reyes & Garcia, 2014). Influential leaders need to embrace their community for support and connections to enhance all students' learning experiences (Reyes & Garcia, 2014).

A part of the process to support a school in the turnaround process includes partnerships. In addition to state agencies and community organization partnerships, schools often employ consulting agencies and personnel to improve their schools. Bussey et al. (2014) asserted how essential it is to engage the community in student achievement success. School leaders struggle to establish alternative partnerships, and the ownership of improving schools falls heavily on the building leaders (Brinson et al., 2008). With strong partnerships and the increased pressures for high performance, the demands on

building leaders to utilize all resources that support teachers in implementing new initiatives are required (USDOE, n.d.).

This study sought to better understand the leadership dispositions of school building principals who helped facilitate their failing schools' turnaround process. Additionally, this study explored the role of school principals in engaging their employees in the improvement process.

Problem Statement

Effective school leadership can significantly impact student learning and achievement in NYS's lowest-performing schools (Hallinger & Heck, 1996). NYSED (2019c) identified turnaround schools based on their student achievement levels. Turnaround schools must increase student academic achievement within 2 years after submitting their plan and demonstrate a transformational plan for continued improvement and sustainability (NYSED, 2019a).

Education promotes the significance and relevancy of this study to improve failing schools. NYSED's mission is to raise all people's knowledge, skill, and opportunity in NYS (NYSED, 2020). In Governor Andrew Cuomo's "The State of New York's Failing Schools Report" (NYS of Opportunity, 2015), over 250,000 students had been in a school considered failing for at least a decade. NYS identified 178 failing schools in 17 school districts across the state. These figures represent a significant population of students who did not have access to the high-quality public education they deserved. Furthermore, 93% of the students in these failing schools were students of color, and 82% qualified for free or reduced-fee lunches (NYS of Opportunity, 2015).

These data expose a public school system needing immediate change, impacting some of the neediest populations.

Most building leaders in the lowest-performing schools are tasked with spearheading an aggressive and strategic plan for improvement. Once a school has a turnaround designation, it has 6 months to submit a school intervention plan (NYS of Opportunity, 2015). One critical component to a school's success is teachers' engagement and how they see their role in the improvement process based on the measurable outcomes required by the state. Additionally, school districts and higher educational administration preparatory programs should assist in identifying leadership dispositions that support turnaround schools' expectations (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). With this data, turnaround schools can have a greater chance of success in preparing leaders to support turnaround schools, thus improving student performance.

Theoretical Rationale

The theory that framed this research is Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory, which was seen through the lens of personal engagement in the participants' work. While employee engagement has many engagement indicators, Kahn researched three areas to determine effective employee engagement. Kahn focused on the varying degrees of personal engagement and how people see themselves in their work— physically, cognitively, and emotionally. Kahn believed that there are ways in which employees' engagement impacts their work performance. The findings of Kahn's research contributed to a deeper understanding of why employees are either engaged or not engaged at work. According to Kahn (1990), employees performed based on their perceptions of how meaningful it was to participate in their work, how safe it was to do

so, and how available they were to do their work. While each component can be examined separately, the ability to intertwine each component illustrates the foundational influence of employee engagement in supporting employees in an organization.

Kahn (1990) explored whether individuals are engaged more because they have a sense of ownership at work and it feels meaningful to their lives and to the organization's success. Kahn studied safety and whether employees were in a work environment where they were comfortable taking risks and showing who they were personally in their work role without fear of consequence. Lastly, Kahn (1990) investigated whether employees were psychologically available to engage in their work. He studied whether employees were exhausted or insecure, anxious about their role and performance within the organization, or had too many obligations outside of work, resulting in disengagement.

While not founded on Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs, Kahn's (1990) theory connects to the five categories of motivation: physiology, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. In Maslow's theory, higher needs emerge as these base-level needs are satisfied. Satisfaction is met by learning new information and gaining a better understanding of the world around us. The basic requirements include air, water, feeling safe and secure, feeling loved, and having feelings of belonging, respect, self-esteem, and the desire to be the most that one can be (Lester, 1990). There is a foundational belief that one cannot build on anything without the basics in place (Maslow, 1943). Kahn's three psychological components, meaningfulness, safety, and availability, align with Maslow's (1943) base level needs of his theory. These connections assist in understanding why engagement is critical to a workplace, specifically how leaders can support and motivate their employees (Setiyani et al., 2019).

For purposes of this study, employee engagement theory, turnaround schools, and school principal dispositions are all intertwined. Research supports that the school principal should embrace specific ways to engage the staff in the improvement process required in a turnaround school (Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Kahn, 1990; Kowal & Hassel, 2005), and understanding those dispositions are crucial for future opportunities for success (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). A workplace environment has to be conducive to employees feeling that they have a purpose and meaning and work in a safe place to take the necessary risks and feel supported by their leader during challenging times (Kahn, 1990). The turnaround setting requires a transformation in a 2-year time frame (NYSED, 2019b). Therefore, Calkins et al. (2017) asserted the work of a turnaround school principal needs to be led by a leader who can rise to the challenge.

Employee engagement is explored in businesses and organizations and adapted to various leadership styles and transformational processes (Flint & Hearn, 2015). Kahn (1990) provided the foundational components for future research to operationalize and understand increased levels of employee engagement (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). Utilizing employee engagement theory offered a deeper understanding of the components that promote employee engagement or disengagement through leadership dispositions of a building principal. This study explored teachers' and supervisors' perspectives on school principals and whether they possessed certain dispositions that promoted employee engagement. The disposition findings, while not limited to Kahn's three components of meaningfulness, safety, and psychological availability, were also indicators of employee engagement in the improvement process (Kahn, 1990), ultimately providing a framework to illustrate the findings.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain more knowledge about leadership dispositions of school principals that could give insight into helping failing schools succeed. By learning more about the experiences of teachers and administrative leaders working with school principals in low-performing schools, a better understanding emerged of the leadership dispositions that can engage employees in a successful school turnaround. For the purpose of this study, there are multiple variations of the term "dispositions," including terms like competencies, skill sets, and characteristics. This study used Freeman's (2003) definition of dispositions.

Research Questions

This study's two research questions each offer a different perspective on the role of a school principal:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of school principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

Potential Significance of the Study

As indicated by the former NYS Governor's failing schools report (NYS of Opportunity, 2015) and ESEA (2020) regulations, our nation has substandard educational atmospheres for children, thus supporting this study and further research. Effective leadership is one component to address the challenges of failing schools. Effective

leadership in a turnaround setting requires the leader to possess a "distinct set of actions, behaviors, and dispositions" (Hitt et al., 2018, p. 77). This study examined the perspectives of teachers and administrative leaders to understand better the school principals' dispositions that engaged employees in turnaround schools.

By definition, a failing school is one that becomes a turnaround setting that is able to be transformed within a 2-year time frame and begins the path for continuous improvement. This research offers more information to the educational field with a leadership focus and a more explicitly focused lens on turnaround settings. The current educational climate suggests that modest changes will not be significant enough to assist in the dramatic change required to transform a turnaround school. A collaborative approach to motivate parents, community members, teachers, and fellow administrators to come together in this work collectively is necessary (Calkins et al., 2007).

The research results have future application opportunities for higher educational institutions with leadership programs. Additionally, human resource departments can utilize the potential findings in hiring practices for districts with failing schools or schools needing increased employee engagement and transformation (Kwon & Parks, 2019). Furthermore, there are countless opportunities for professional learning and improved methods for existing building leaders who need support to improve their schools. Lastly, as demands on educators and educational systems increase, it is imperative to identify the desired dispositions for building leaders to possess when facing the immediate challenges of a failing school, because children are impacted the most when they are not adequately prepared for their future (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015).

Connecting effective leadership to student achievement is an opportunity to provide a robust and enriching education to all students, especially students in impoverished communities (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). This connection would simplify the process of hiring and establishing the most effective leadership in the nation's most struggling schools (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). Gaining a clearer understanding of influential leaders' capabilities to motivate and implement change supports further inquiry with this study. The leaders in these school settings played a critical role in hindering or helping their schools to succeed. Identifying what leaders do to engage their employees in the improvement process will offer further insight into specific dispositions for building leaders to possess during challenging times.

Definitions of Terms

Dispositions – "a flexible range of tendencies that engage in a pattern of action that has its source in the interaction of beliefs or values, strategies, or ways of acting and intention" (Freeman, 2003, p. 7).

Turnaround schools – the lowest-performing, 5% of education institutions in the nation (Hitt & Meyer, 2018). Turnaround schools must significantly increase student academic achievement within 2 years and demonstrate a transformational plan for continued improvement and sustainability in NYS (NYSED, 2019b).

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined the significant changes in our P–12 public school systems, thus creating the need to understand the role of school principals in leading the transformational plan required for turnaround schools. The role of the school principal to engage the staff in a turnaround school process is an essential need, and it lacks

empirically supported data (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). Utilizing Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory, understanding employees' physical, cognitive, and emotional states can assist in determining the factors that significantly impact organizational success.

This study identified the perspective of two stakeholder groups regarding the dispositions and tendencies of school principals. The research questions aimed at determining the teachers and supervisors' views of the school principals regarding the leadership dispositions that promoted staff engagement.

Chapter 2 provides an in-depth perspective of the literature connected to this study, and it provides empirically supported data that provide evidence, thus promoting this study's need. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology and tools for this research. The researcher used descriptive phenomenology to conduct a focus group and one-to-one interviews with stakeholders connected to the school principal associated with a turnaround school. Chapter 4 provides the findings and analysis of the different themes that emerged from the research. Chapter 5 provides an overview of the findings and their implications to policy, education, and theory. Chapter 5 concludes with an understanding of the study's limitations and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

     This chapter provides an in-depth review of the literature to support the research problem and questions. The research problem addressed in this study highlights the state of affairs in low-performing schools, specifically turnaround schools; an overview of the role of a leader in this setting; and the leadership standards by which leaders are measured. The employee engagement theory helped frame this work as the research questions sought to gather information regarding what school principals did to engage their employees in the improvement process.

     This study aimed to understand what perspectives teachers and supervisors of school principals had regarding principals' leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. Low-performing student achievement levels in chronically underperforming schools are identified as schools needing a turnaround. In 2009, then U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan declared districts and education leaders must change the lives of millions of children by dramatically improving the nation's lowest-performing schools (Brinson et al., 2008). Turnaround schools must significantly increase student achievement within 2 years and demonstrate a transformational plan for continued improvement and sustainability (NYSED, 2019b). Turnaround schools have shown significant growth in NYS's mandated components by meeting specified areas of focus, chosen by each school from a list of options approved by the state, and showing an approved percentage of increase within the 2-year time

frame (NYSED, 2019b). This literature review covers employee engagement; factors influencing school transformation; and leadership dispositions, standards, and competencies.

Employee Engagement Theory

Kahn (1990) defined personal engagement as the "harnessing of organization members' selves to their work roles: in engagement, people employ and express themselves physically, cognitively and emotionally during role performances" (p. 694). Kahn's initial work was designed to generate a theoretical framework to understand the "self-in-role" process (Kahn, 1990, p. 692). When strong leadership integrates with employee engagement, the hopeful outcome is intended to improve, motivate, increase enthusiasm, and inspire within an organization (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). This section delves into a deeper understanding of the three components within Kahn's theory. He believed that individuals bring varying levels of themselves, physically, cognitively, and emotionally, into their work, impacting work performance (Kahn, 1990).

Employee engagement theory was developed by Kahn (1990), a psychologist interested in understanding the factors involved in people engagement. He believed that effective employee engagement would increase work performance and a company's bottom line. To support this claim, Kahn conducted a theoretical study in two different environments to gather his data. He believed that work engagement was about the way an employee felt. Using Glaser and Strauss's (1967) grounded theory framework and Kahn's (1990) research of people's attachment and detachment, Kahn asserted there are direct correlations between human behavior and motivation in the workplace.

Employee engagement has strong connections to motivation (Maslow, 1943). Motivation refers to what a person does, how hard a person works, and how long a person works (Kanfer, 1990). Motivation psychology explains why things happen by studying the biological, psychological, and environmental variables contributing to motivation. Employee engagement has three dimensions that determine work performance, depending on how the individuals bring themselves into their work, physically, cognitively, and emotionally (Kahn, 1990).

Kahn (1990) stated that employees experience engagement and disengagement at work. Personal engagement means that people immerse themselves at work through their expressions. This also means that people keep themselves personally separate in their work roles and are less connected to the work (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). Physical engagement refers to individuals' expended effort, both mentally and physically, in their jobs. Cognitive engagement refers to individuals having a clear understanding of their employers' vision and strategies and being active members contributing to the vision (Kahn, 1990). Lastly, emotional engagement refers to the relationships between the employees and their employers, with the intended outcome of the employees feeling trust and having a sense of belonging at work. Trust and belonging produce employee commitment and buy-in toward the values and mission of the organization (Kahn, 1990). The leader in all this work must manage the group dynamics and styles and ensure that employees feel safe and trusted (Wefald et al., 2011).

Kahn (1990) disagreed that the right fit in an organization would yield increased performances. He maintained that employees should feel safe, find meaningfulness, and have resources provided by the employer to support the employees' physical, cognitive,

and emotional needs. If employees felt this sense of safety and support across all three dimensions, they were secure in their roles, and the efforts expended were worth it and supported by the employer (Rothmann et al., 2017).

Kahn's (1990) methodology was to conduct two qualitative studies, one at a 6-week camp and another at an architecture firm. Kahn conducted interviews and observations to determine how people connect their self-definition/self-esteem with their work. Additionally, he applied descriptive statistics to his findings and rated the responses on a 9-point scale to determine whether the three psychological conditions were present in the 186 examples provided. As a result of this study, Kahn developed a needs satisfaction framework.

Meaningfulness

Kahn (1990), Kahn and Fellows (2013), and Xu and Thomas (2011) found that people engage more in meaningful work that is influenced by task characteristics, role characteristics, and work interactions. These factors mean that the employees were part of meaningful tasks to identify their purpose and value in their work and had reciprocal relationships with their employer (Kahn, 1990). When employees experienced decreased communication and interactions, this diminished their sense of meaning. If employers expend energy toward their employees and their employees' well-being, it will yield positive outcomes from the employees (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015).

Safety

Kahn (1990) and Xu and Thomas (2011) asserted that employees who felt safe could physically be present as themselves without fear of retaliation or negative consequences. Kahn's study found that areas of higher engagement equated to people

who felt psychologically safer, and they could personally engage in their work. Kahn shared four factors connected to employee safety: interpersonal relationships, group dynamics, management style, and organizational norms.

Interpersonal relationships meant the employees felt supported and trusted. They experienced flexibility and opportunities to try new things, and they could even fail without fear. The relationships were supportive. When employees felt disconnected, they did not feel safe. Group dynamics included each member playing their unacknowledged role within the organization, and if they felt safe, they were seen to bring themselves more into their assumed work roles (Kahn, 1990). Cucchiara et al. (2015) asserted that leaders should invest time and resources into creating stability, clarity, and an environment of respect and support.

The second factor of management style, group dynamics, provided a process that was supportive to the employees as they took risks to try and fail in their work (Kahn, 1990). This instilled feelings of safety within the employee group. Hitt and Meyers (2018) asserted that sustained improvement induced a sense of accomplishment and promoted motivation and commitment to change. Together, in an environment that promoted risk-taking, combined with an employer who provided support and continuous improvement equated to increased levels of employee engagement.

The ineffective or harmful managers are unpredictable, inconsistent, and unable to give up control (Hoffman et al., 2013). Organizational norms are the shared expectations about workers. If the norms are articulated clearly and understood, employees feel safe. If employers deviate from the norms, employees have increased levels of anxiety and frustration, especially from lower-level status-holding employees (Kahn, 1990). The

organization's atmosphere in Kahn's study was centered around the established norms. Employees needed to know that the authority figures were competent enough in their vision to lead the employees to follow and create paths and opportunities for them to do so safely (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Kahn, 1990).

Psychological Availability

Kahn (1990) determined that personal engagement equates to high levels of psychological availability. This means that an organization has emotional and psychological resources to engage employees at a particular moment. Despite everyday distractions from personal lives, employees were ready to shift and engage in the work tasks because their environment supported them in this way.

Kahn (1990) shared four different distractions that could decrease engagement: depletion of physical energy, lack of emotional energy, individual insecurity, and people's outside lives. These distractions occurred when employees were exhausted and less committed to the work. Employees could have low self-confidence and not see their purpose in the organization. A clearly articulated vision and values could help remedy the lack of confidence and commitment to the work (Kahn, 1990).

The following section illustrates the application of employee engagement in different organizations and industries. Kahn's (1990) theory provides a foundational understanding for organizations to engage their employees.

Application of Employee Engagement. As previously mentioned, employee engagement does not have just one definition. This section highlights employee engagement theory in conjunction with different models, frameworks, leadership styles, practices, and variables, such as flexible working hours. In addition, employee

engagement was used as a foundational theory in the literature review for future development toward organizational improvement and improved outcomes. In alignment with this study, specific attention is focused on employee engagement and how leadership dispositions influence employees to engage in a school improvement process.

In Kwon and Park's (2019) literature review, they examined 52 human resource development-related articles, in which a majority included exploration of the relationships and connections to employee engagement. The literature summary offers multiple perspectives on employee engagement and the contributing factors to individual and organizational performance (Kwon & Park, 2019). Findings in the literature reviews resulted in a descriptive outline of the job and personal resources that included job characteristics, leadership styles, learning and development needs, organizational climate and individual skill sets, and readiness for workplace stress (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015; Kwon & Parks, 2019). When the employers addressed these jobs and provided the resources to meet the employees' needs the outcomes in performance resulted in positive or negative engagement.

In conjunction with Kahn's (1990) psychological conditions of meaningfulness, safety, and psychological availability, Serrano and Reichard (2011) maintained four pathways that increase employee engagement. They found that they enhanced employees' engagement by designing meaningful and motivating work, providing a supportive network and coaching opportunities for growth, and enhancing personal resources while facilitating positive relationships and rewarding reasonable efforts.

Rana (2015) examined the relationship between high involvement work practices (HIWPs) and employee engagement. The HIWPs presented were power, giving

opportunities for shared decision making, information, providing relevant data connected to the organization, reward, recognizing employees through an established system and knowledge, and providing training and development programs. Rana concluded that increased engagement resulted in meeting the employees' needs through the four HIWPs and addressing the needs of the employees to engage as desired by the employer.

Two quantitative studies conducted by Xu and Thomas (2011) and Wefald et al. (2011) took a deeper look at the link between leaders and employee engagement. Both studies argued that high levels of employee engagement were a desirable outcome and a predictor of engagement. Factors such as support teams illustrated semi-partial and unique variances (Xu & Thomas, 2011). The Xu and Thomas (2011) study concluded with multiple ways that leadership behaviors are associated with employee engagement. They suggested that employee engagement was predictable through support teams, leadership integrity, and effective leader performance. In contrast, Wefald et al. (2011) indicated a strong relationship with leaders and their personality to engage—not their leadership skills. Engagement in the Wefald et al. (2011) study resulted in organizational opportunities, and the leader assisted in leveraging those opportunities.

In a case study by Flint and Hearn (2015), businesses that have successfully integrated employee engagement into their organizations' culture include Google, American Express, John Lewis, Hyatt, Southwest, and Virgin. These companies utilized a variety of practices to show their employees they matter by focusing on the employees' behaviors and understanding their emotional levels. These organizations provided development opportunities for continuous growth. They ensured everyone was seen and heard by listening and making the employees' concerns a priority and to inform of the

valued practices that shaped the work environments (Flint & Hearn, 2015). These companies prioritized their resources to focus on their employees, and, in turn, they were able to effectively engage them in their company initiatives to serve their customers.

It is vital to acknowledge worker burnout, especially when work stress is an indicator that negatively impacts employee engagement (Bakker et al., 2005; Rothmann et al., 2017). The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) is a 22-item questionnaire that measures detachment from a job, feelings of cynicism, and exhaustion (Maslach & Leitner, 2008). Understanding the data is critical for leadership in high-stakes work environments, such as turnaround settings, so leaders can combat occupational burnout, offer emotional resources to counter the negativity associated with burnout and disengagement, and support employees to maintain and increase engagement (Serrano & Reichard, 2011). Kahn's (1990) research supported employees who felt they belonged and had social relationships to manage the stressful work and engage further within the organization by following the leader (Breaugh, 2021; Kahn, 1990; Van den Broeck et al. 2008). Worker burnout suggests that the employer is not addressing the needs of the employees by prioritizing the employees' need to belong and be recognized for their contributions (Van den Broeck et al., 2008).

Employee engagement, as a concept, provided an opportunity for researchers to create collaborative opportunities for other frameworks and models to demonstrate the intentional role of the leader to influence the work environment and increase employee engagement (Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2015). Zhang et al. (2014) asserted that leaders might not have the necessary skill set to perform this work and create environments that yield improved engagement levels. This could be problematic for school principals in a

turnaround setting because the environment demands so much of their leaders, and they have to engage their staff in the improvement process.

Factors Influencing School Transformation

The existing educational reality of failing schools calls for strong leadership. The literature supports the notion that the school principals' roles are vital to the success of schools through their advocacy for professional development, building community, and supporting instruction (Garza et al., 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Meyers & Hitt, 2017).

Role of the Principal

There are several critical dispositions school principals need to possess to support schools. Villegas (2007) defined dispositions like the definition by Freeman (2003), stating, "dispositions are a tendency for individuals to act in a particular manner under particular circumstances" (p. 373). Public Impact (2008, 2016), a national entity focusing on dramatically improving education for all students, specifically low-income students, to fill leadership positions in turnaround schools by providing aspiring leaders with a list of competencies they should acquire to be successful in the turnaround process. Resources included a list of competencies of the turnaround leader, such as having prior success in challenging situations with limited resources and the ability to connect with communities in lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. Some of the recognized competencies from Public Impact included focusing on a few wins and using the momentum to communicate a positive vision; requiring all staff to change, using data-driven decision-making; and doing what works by focusing on successful tactics (Public Impact, 2008, 2016). These competencies require a school principal to create an environment where these actions can take root and can begin to transform the school.

Building leaders in public education cannot change their race, and they may have a different socioeconomic status than the students they serve. Research suggests that when school principals focus on dispositions that help them behave in a manner that is accepting and receptive of the differences in teachers and students, more beneficial relationships can be created that can lead to a more successful turnaround process (Villegas, 2007; Public Impact, 2008, 2016).

Leadership preparation for the turnaround process is an identified need in scholarly research (Public Impact, 2008, 2016). Brown (2015) and Weiner (2016) focused on school principal preparation programs and the readiness for leading low-performing schools upon completing the programs. In both studies, aspiring school principals were immersed in professional learning opportunities that highlighted the multiple challenges faced in a turnaround setting. As a result, these leaders had opportunities to build upon their leadership practices in preparation for future career opportunities.

At the time of this current study, there is a lack of research on the impact of building-level leadership, employee engagement, and the successful school turnaround process. However, there is literature that highlights obstacles in the turnaround process. One of the obstacles in successfully transforming a failing school is the time spent finding and supporting the leader and the leader's team of teachers (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Another possible obstacle, according to Hunzicker (2013) and Kowalski and Dolph (2015), is how the attitudes and feelings of building leaders can influence behavior and dictate actions toward others. For example, Cucchiara et al. (2015) stated that teachers need to feel success in the turnaround school process. Therefore, building

leaders must create opportunities to celebrate the wins with their teachers. While

engaging in continuous improvement, a leader becomes more proactive versus reactive to

new initiatives within the community and supports the district to improve the school

(Harris et al., 2006).

Turnaround Strategies

Turnaround schools provide a community and a school district with the

opportunity to reinvent themselves (NYSED, 2015). One of the avenues to do this is

through closing and restructuring the school by eliminating practices of the previous

school or by transforming it and then offering the chance to rebuild the school (Weiner,

2016). Turnaround settings require skills that are not part of the typical school principal

learning programs (Public Impact, 2008, 2016).

As aspiring school principals are selected to integrate practices from Public

Impact, they are provided with training to support learning how to build connections,

they learn about change and the elements of highly effective schools in low-

socioeconomic communities, and they learn ways to implement fast change that is driven

by data. School districts continue to gain more insight into what data are gathered during

the improvement process. District attempts and different branches of leadership have

used trial and error to collect data; however, this requires more time to see if these

initiatives produce successful outcomes (Calkins et al., 2007).

Through a Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation grant, Calkins et al. and Mass

Insight (2007) instituted the Turnaround Challenge to provide educational reform

strategies to the most consistently underperforming schools. It became a call to action,

and they used a comprehensive plan that changed working conditions, built capacity, and

gained support from all levels within a community to transform these schools. Calkins et al. (2007) outlined the Turnaround Challenge comprehensive plan to address the nation's lowest-performing schools with a model that demonstrates high-poverty, high-performing (HPHP) outcomes.

This plan is divided into five parts, 1) providing information on the challenge of school turnaround, 2) understanding the adverse conditions of high-performing and high-poverty schools, however, acknowledging that success can be achieved, 3) what success requires and how to change the odds of this school, 4) organization at the state level to support these schools and 5) lastly, a framework for underperforming schools. This grant has provided millions of dollars in funding toward school improvement efforts using a Readiness Triangle. (p. 9)

The HPHP Readiness Triangle (or "Model," Figure 2.1) is divided into three areas, "readiness to LEARN, readiness to TEACH, and readiness to ACT" (Calkins et al., 2007, p. 9). The triangle is split into nine subcategories with three focus areas for each side. In readiness to learn, the focus of a school is on safety, discipline and engagement, action against adversity, and close student-adult relationships (Calkins et al., 2007). Additional evidence supports the notion for leaders to create environments where employees have relationships, trust, and support from their employers (Shuck & Herd, 2012).

Figure 2.1

HPHP Readiness Model

HPHP READINESS MODEL

readiness to **LEARN**

readiness to **TEACH**

1 **Safety, Discipline & Engagement**
Students feel secure and inspired to learn

2 **Action against Adversity**
Schools directly address their students' poverty-driven deficits

3 **Close Student-Adult Relationships**
Students have positive and enduring mentor/teacher relationships

4 **Shared Responsibility for Achievement**
Staff feel deep accountability and a missionary zeal for student achievement

5 **Personalization of Instruction**
Individualized teaching based on diagnostic assessment and adjustable time on task

6 **Professional Teaching Culture**
Continuous improvement through collaboration and job-embedded learning

readiness to **ACT**

7 **Resource Authority**
School leaders can make mission-driven decisions regarding people, time, money & program

8 **Resource Ingenuity**
Leaders are adept at securing additional resources and leveraging partner relationships

9 **Agility in the Face of Turbulence**
Leaders, teachers, and systems are flexible and inventive in responding to constant unrest

Note. Used with permission from "The Turnaround Challenge: Why America's Best Opportunity to Dramatically Improve Student Achievement Lies In Our Worst-Performing Schools," by A. Calkins, W. Guenther, G. Belfiore, D. Lash, & Mass Insight Education, 2007. Copyright 2007 by Mass Insight Education. https://www.massinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/TheTurnaroundChallenge_MainReport.pdf

In the readiness to teach a portion of the triangle, there was a focus on shared responsibility for the staff to participate in the improvement process collaboratively.

School leaders utilized data and implemented accountability measures that led to student achievement (Calkins et al., 2007). The third side of the triangle included the readiness to act. Leaders focused their approach and made decisions while modeling flexibility and creativity to support the turnaround process (Calkins et al., 2007).

The Turnaround Challenge is a comprehensive plan that illustrates an alignment with Public Impact and the leadership dispositions of school principals. Both include developing young, aspiring leaders, using data to drive decisions, building trust with the employees, and working quickly to implement change (Calkins et., 2007; Public Impact, 2008, 2016). The Turnaround Challenge is a call to action and requires new responses to bring about the dramatic change necessary for schools to successfully qualify as turnaround schools. While there are success stories in turnaround schools, there continues to be a lack of empirically supported data for sustainability in these settings (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). Effective school change includes employing the right leaders to impact the desired change. The three Cs of a turnaround process are changing the conditions, building capacity, and clustering for support (Calkins et al., 2007).

The Wallace Foundation (2003) created the Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI). PPI was developed to support school leaders over 5 years in preparing, hiring, promoting, and evaluating school leaders across the United States. Gates et al. (2020), the researchers for PPI, conducted a study utilizing 175 structured interviews. The interviews tackled a series of questions that would ultimately inform how to best support building leaders of failing schools and provide a comprehensive, strategic plan for a turnaround school. In the report, which included districts with over 10,000 students, the findings stated:

District goals, strategic plans, or initiatives tied school leadership to school improvement. Less than half the respondents reported moderate or high satisfaction with their pool of principal candidates, and each respondent could identify someone responsible for supervising principals, using standards, evaluations, coaching, and professional development. (Gates et al., 2020, p. xiv)

As a result of the need to improve recruitment and hiring practices, Public Impact (2008, 2016) focused on supporting HPLP groups by gaining a clearer understanding of the needs in this learning environment. Understanding how crucial school leadership is in ensuring success in urban schools made it more apparent to specify the tendencies and dispositions of leaders to achieve success when met with adversity (Public Impact, 2008, 2016). With the creation of the PPI and access to resources and tools to increase leadership capacity within failing districts, Public Impact aimed to provide research-based strategies and training on leadership preparation for turnaround settings.

School Community

Another critical component to turning around a school is increasing student achievement and the success of a school in collaboration with families and the community (Finnigan, 2012; Pregot, 2015; Reyes & Garcia, 2014). Parents desire clear and consistent communication from the building leader (Pregot, 2015). Community, teachers, and parents want a nurturing learning environment (Pregot, 2015). Finnigan (2012) spoke to inclusive leadership and having shared governance with teachers and parents. Empowering teachers and parents to make decisions creates a relationship of support.

Reyes and Garcia (2014) studied a school that was transformed. The principal was successful because he could integrate into his school and community as a bilingual and Mexican leader who contributed to increased student achievement. The school was in a highly populated area of ELLs. The school principal connected with the community and involved the community along with the teachers and staff in the transformation process. Multiple factors, such as increased trust and building rapport with critical figures in the school community, assisted in this transformation. Additionally, his ability to collaborate with the outside community and meet families and students' needs greatly influenced a positive trajectory. This leader was credited for following traditional practices by focusing on data, relationships, and creative resource use; and parent involvement, a target focus on achievement, and cultural development (Reyes & Garcia, 2014).

Parent and community involvement are equally critical to the school improvement process. Government agencies tasked to provide the necessary support in school turnaround are not aware or prepared for what truly needs to happen to transform and support continuous improvement (Fife, 2013). Bussey et al. (2014) stated a growing recognition that engagement with communities is vital to student achievement and success. The pressures to increase school performance have placed a high demand for districts and individual schools to partner with experts, such as local educational agencies or a consortium of schools under the Investing in Innovation Fund (USDOE, n.d.), to increase the effectiveness of utilizing resources and supporting teachers and school leaders in implementing new initiatives (ESSA, 2015)

The research has provided different perspectives, data, and resources to increase a knowledge base regarding leadership dispositions of school building leaders and school

turnaround. There remains limited empirical support specifically on turnaround school settings and the leadership dispositions to support this change. While school reform continues to be an area of concern nationally, there are only pockets of success stories for sustained growth and improvement in chronically low-performing schools (Hitt et al., 2018).

Leadership Dispositions, Standards, and Competencies

Determining one definition for leadership is difficult (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). McCleskey (2014) asserted that the study of leadership spans over 100 years. Shuck and Herd (2012) maintained that transformational leaders are influential, inspirational, motivational, intellectually stimulating, and considerate of individuals when leading their employees. While this is current study focused on the dispositions of leaders in a turnaround setting, their role in these schools was to transform the buildings. The following section illustrates the different previously studied and analyzed dispositions regarding school leadership that were both effective and ineffective. This section also defines the role of a school building leader using national leadership standards.

Disposition Definition

Disposition is defined as "a flexible range of tendencies that engage in a pattern of action that has its source in the interaction of beliefs or values, strategies, or ways of acting and intention" (Freeman, 2003, p. 7). At the Second Annual Symposium on Educator Dispositions, "Where Dispositions Come From and What We Can Do With Them" was the topic led by Freeman, 2003. The term disposition has evolved dramatically in the past decade. Historically, research from over seven different theorists and practitioners was shared, ranging from years in the 1970s until the symposium in

2003. There has been confusion and multiple definitions of what disposition is and means. The term is interchangeable with temperament, attitude, and habit (Freeman, 2003). The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education ([NCATE], 2008) uses the following definition to outline professional dispositions.

> The values, commitments, and professional ethics influence behaviors toward students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation, development, and the educator's professional growth. Dispositions are guided by beliefs and attitudes related to values such as caring, fairness, honesty, responsibility, and social justice. (p. 89)

However, for this current study and alignment of the multiple variations of the term dispositions is inclusive to a focus on the school building leader. Dispositions have a behavioral component to help identify beneficial leadership tendencies (Hitt et al., 2018; Hunzicker, 2013; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Schulte & Kowal, 2005). Buss and Craik (1983) articulated that the frequency in which one displays acts from a dispositional category over a period of time becomes a fundamental form of the individual's personality data.

Dispositions of School Leaders

School leadership is crucial to ensuring success in urban schools, and there is a need to identify a leader's disposition and actions to achieve successful outcomes for students (Finnigan, 2012; Public Impact, 2008, 2016). While school leaders' effect on student achievement is second to classroom instruction, the school principal's role is integral to promoting a positive school learning climate (Hallinger & Heck, 1996).

School leaders' dispositions for turnaround schools differ from other school leaders (Meyers & Hitt, 2017). Examples of dispositions that are required of leaders in turnaround schools include aspects of trustworthiness, resiliency, persistence, morally centered, and genuine care to support others (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Brown, 2015; Cucchiara et al., 2015; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Hitt et al., 2018; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Welch & Hodge, 2017). One way to engage the teachers is for the leader to motivate them (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

This current study aimed to identify the different dispositions from the participants regarding their beliefs of school principals during the school improvement process and their ability to engage employees in this process. Trust is an overwhelmingly regarded trait in school building leadership and turning around a school (Shuck & Herd, 2012). The success or failure of a school's improvement is contingent upon the trust and relationship between the teachers and school leadership (Johnson et al., 2014). Two studies ranked trustworthiness as one of the most desirable dispositions of a leader (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Jarrett et al., 2010).

Some research studies provided examples of principals' abilities to transform school settings. School leaders could accomplish transformation by being culturally responsive to the school's needs, promoting trust, and providing opportunities to develop change with increased engagement from all stakeholders (Lochmiller & Chestnut, 2017; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Welch & Hodge, 2017). Anderson and Wasonga (2017) provided data illustrating dispositional values of a school principal that were found most helpful in supporting increased leadership knowledge when a principal is learning with a mentor. Further research and determining more specific dispositions of building leaders during

successful situations and connecting their leadership tendencies could illustrate what dispositions future leaders' need to achieve success (Hitt & Meyer, 2018).

An additional dispositional tendency included for leaders of turnaround schools is courage (Gaza et al., 2014). Leaders should be equipped with a drive for social justice, be genuine in caring, be ethically and morally centered, and they should demonstrate a high degree of resiliency and persistence (Garza et al., 2014). Hitt et al. (2018) asserted that employing school leaders capable of moving turnaround schools forward for sustainable results requires certain qualities referred to as competencies, synonymously known as dispositions.

Wasonga (2010) created a survey that measured the dispositional values and contexts toward the co-creation of leadership dispositions. The findings of the qualitative data and literature review were gathered to create a quantitative instrument to measure the dispositional values and presence of contexts that facilitate co-creating leadership in schools. The survey instrument could be used to assess dispositional values in schools. The identified dispositional values were trust, trustworthiness, humility, active listening, patience, collaboration, and cultural anthropology. Additionally, in illustrating leadership competency, there is an alignment when leadership dispositions and leaders' ability to carry out actions improve their schools (Hunzicker, 2013; Welch & Hodge, 2018).

Pregot's (2015) meta-analysis study compiled information from 102 school leaders, 146 parents, and 125 teachers to determine the participants' preferred dispositions. In the study, a survey was administered initially to principals who, in turn, randomly generated further participation by sending the information to five teachers and parents within their network. The participants could all contribute supplemental

administrative dispositional items not in the survey that needed to be added. The three groups surveyed indicated that the leader must be a strong communicator, use time efficiently, and be productive. Some differences included the parents' desire for an inspirational leader to motivate staff and model what they wished to see. The school leaders were the only group to value developing philosophical underpinnings (Pregot, 2015). The study concluded with the identification of 21 leadership responsibilities. The leadership standards guided those who were aspiring and in leadership roles at the time for expected behaviors that yielded acceptable results such as using time efficiently and being a strong communicator and productive (Pregot, 2015). The following section discloses more about the specific responsibilities of a school building principal.

Negative Dispositions Tendencies

Many of the leadership dispositions studied promoted positive relationships and yielded increased effectiveness within the school environments. Leaders who possess negative tendencies can negatively impact a school (Hoffman et al., 2013). Leary et al. (2013) studied dysfunctional leadership dispositions and the impact on employee engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout, using a self-reporting questionnaire assessing 11 dysfunctional dispositions and finding that two factors, intimidation and avoiding others, had a significant influence on employee engagement job satisfaction and burnout. Charm, manipulation, ingratiation, and building alliances were unrelated and insignificant toward dysfunctional leadership (Leary et al., 2013).

Additionally, Hoffman et al. (2013) researched the effect of narcissism and leadership. The study indicated that narcissistic personalities often crave the opportunity to lead for glory, and they even present as inspirational leaders. The study did not

correlate the negative behavior to a decrease in leadership effectiveness. Still, it did suggest that the organizational climate could enhance the effects of narcissistic behaviors in an unethical environment (Hoffman et al., 2013). As indicated in other research, relationships are critically important to the success of a leader, are desired by the school community, and are beneficial to creating a positive organizational environment (Schulte & Kowal, 2005).

Calkins et al. (2007), Hitt and Meyers (2018), and VanGronigen and Meyers (2019) asserted the need for further empirical research in leadership development and successful turnaround processes. One recommendation stressed the importance of improving hiring recruitment practices and employing different tools and strategies to assist in identifying desired and undesirable dispositions. Leary et al. (2013) found that dysfunctional dispositions may produce behaviors in leaders that influence employees' ability to function, potentially jeopardizing the organization's success. Additional examples included incorporating a personality type approach to determine more leadership strengths that focus on students and the belief that all children are capable of learning. Those components would become nonnegotiable when hiring candidates for struggling schools (Aly et al., 2019; Amrein-Beardsley, 2012; Doyle & Locke, 2014; Hitt et al., 2018; Public Impact, 2008, 2016; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

Educational Leadership Standards

Finnigan (2012) studied the policy implications and accountability policies that directly focused on principals' leadership. When a school is failing, the first step is often removing a principal because it would be too challenging to replace an entire faculty and recruit highly qualified teachers to support this change (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Hitt &

Meyers, 2018). The literature in the Finnigan (2012) study questioned the ability and preparedness of principals to manage and address the significant change in a turnaround setting. School districts that understand leadership standards as a framework or guideline for leaders to navigate the turnaround process may reduce the tendency to remove principals when a school fails (Finnigan, 2012).

Pregot (2015) analyzed preferred leadership dispositions using the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC, 2018) standards. ISLLC standards are the same as the NCATE (2008) standards, which focus on six standards for educational leadership programs. Preparatory programs across the nation utilize standards to determine what a leader should do (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Brown, 2015; Hunzicker, 2013). These standards include promoting success for all students by facilitation and development of a clear vision as well as applying best practices to student learning with professional learning opportunities for staff and managing the operations and resources while promoting a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment. The leader must collaborate with families and community members and create partnerships to address diverse needs while acting with integrity, fairness, and ethics (ISLLC, 2018; NCATE, 2008).

Many organizations, like Public Impact (2008, 2016), advocate that school leaders' dispositions for turnaround settings differ from influential leaders in a general school setting. The leadership standards do not have a focus on specific dispositions or skills relating to work in a turnaround setting. In 2008, the organization, Public Impact, stated that turnaround leaders need to act swiftly and decisively with little concern for broad collaboration and more significant interest in stabilizing the organization's failing

students. Harris et al. (2006) demonstrated that because of the differences in a more prosperous area, leaders do not face the same pressures and factors as their peers in low socioeconomic environments, which further highlights the need to provide proper support and training to leaders of lower socioeconomic communities. In the Harris et al. (2006) study, the school district was on a trajectory of improvement because of a new building and parks in the area and a targeted focus on curricular programs that provided additional funding to support school structures.

School Principal Leadership

The role of a school principal is significant to the success of a school (Hitt & Meyer, 2018). Failing schools are met with low expectations from the school community, have inadequate leadership, have a lack of decision-making for fundamental change, have a high percentage of staff turnover, and they have teachers who do not want to teach in high-poverty schools (Calkins et al., 2007). The challenge lies in the school's inability to address the low-performing issues, knowing these same issues often go well beyond the school environment (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Amrein-Beardsley (2012) focused primarily on highly effective teacher recruitment in high-needs schools. Eight factors were found as desired results when recruiting teachers: salary, community, school, teacher professionalism, student, student achievement, caring, and administration. The administration impacts many of these components. Additional findings in the study included the need for strong leadership and an administration that provided a vision, stressed professionalism, shared mutual respect among teachers and offered helpful feedback that would entice teachers to join the environment (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012). A caring principal was desired by both teachers

and students slightly—after the desire for a good paying salary for the teachers (Amrein-Beardsley, 2012). The study highlighted the finding of a principal with a vision to entice teachers to work with that leader. The following section further illustrates the need for a principal to have a clear vision that can be communicated to motivate employees.

Vision, Communication, and Motivation

Finnigan (2012) emphasized the importance of leadership when schools are high in need. A leader's ability to articulate a clear vision, align goals, and inspire teams promotes the necessary learning environment for change (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Finnigan, 2012; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015, Pregot, 2015). Employees' perceptions of the quality of a leader's work environment can cultivate and enhance employee engagement experiences and increase leadership effectiveness (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). A principal's responsibilities include many complex challenges that do not allow for a prescribed set of strategies for managing. Leaders play an important role in establishing a work environment where employees feel involved and supported. (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Jarrett et al., 2010; Serrano & Reichard, 2011).

The literature also supports shared learning opportunities. The need to acknowledge one's own beliefs and values to lead others to the best of their abilities creates a more robust institution (Brown, 2015). Jarrett et al. (2010) articulated the need to increase attention and knowledge regarding the relationship between teachers and leaders that co-construct leadership initiatives to transform organizations and improve student achievement. The school principal is responsible for motivating and inspiring increased performance by the teachers through a supportive work environment (Finnigan, 2012; Myers & Hitt, 2017; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

Cucchiara et al. (2015) also recognized the importance of trust and respect between teachers and leaders and asserted the correlation to teachers' perceptions of the working conditions and support of turnaround when all teachers feel supported, encouraged, and aligned with a shared vision. Johnson et al. (2014) emphasized the idea of teacher buy-in, which comes from forming relationships with teachers. While leadership needs to make some decisions and provide a clear vision, the vision should encompass opportunities for engagement and advancement while emphasizing student experiences and inviting partnerships with the broader community to enhance the school learning environment (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Communication from the building leader was a common theme in many studies. Teachers wanted to be heard, or the building's morale would be low (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). Components of leadership and turnaround schools are interconnected and rely on movement in various sectors to make the change process cohesive (Myers & Hitt, 2017; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

Teacher evaluation systems are directly connected to school culture and can significantly impact how teachers feel about their leaders' dispositions (Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). Leaders can use evaluation feedback to engage in collegial learning opportunities to support growth and change (Brown, 2015; Finnigan, 2012; Jarrett et al., 2010; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015). Some of the case studies, Finnigan (2012), Reyes and Garcia (2014), and Welch and Hodge (2017), provided examples of principals' ability to transform school settings and improve school cultures. School leaders were able to transform schools by being culturally responsive to the schools' needs, promoting trust,

and providing opportunities to improve change with increased engagement from all

stakeholders (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

Leadership Attitudes

The attitudes of a leader in alignment with effective leadership dispositions, like

fostering a collaborative, trusting environment, can influence the school improvement

process (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Shuck & Herd, 2012; Welch & Hodge, 2017). Many

researchers have highlighted the importance of possessing a positive attitude when

leading a building with such significant needs. Modeling expectations, fostering

continued growth by supporting professional learning opportunities, and celebrating the

small or quick wins is essential toward the process of improvement (Anderson &

Wasonga, 2017; Brown, 2015; Cucchiara et al., 2015; Hunzicker, 2013, Hitt & Meyers,

2018; Jarret et al., 2010; Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Welch & Hodge, 2017).

The demands on teachers, administrators, support staff, social-emotional supports,

and families are high in low-performing districts (Cucchiara et al., 2015). The added

pressure of increasing student performance and achieving specific, measurable

benchmarks have created a less-desirable work environment and an increased need for

leaders to shape their cultures and support employee engagement (Kahn, 1990).

Chapter Summary

There is evidence that improvement in schools is needed across the United States.

For example, using the NCES (2014) data on operating public schools in the United

States, VanGronigen and Meyers (2017) shared that roughly 2.5 million American

students are enrolled in priority schools at a given time in a year. The focus on

turnaround schools becomes a moral and social justice issue with such a high population

of students being impacted (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2017). Research suggests a building leader can influence school success and employee engagement in turnaround settings (Hitt et al., 2018; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Reyes & Garcia, 2014).

Government legislation and a common practice for failing schools is to hire highly qualified school leaders who possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to ensure all children learn (NCLB, 2002). Some research supports the importance of leaders successful engaging employees to better support the school turnaround process; by learning more about the dispositions of school leaders and their influence on employee engagement may help determine influential and effective leaders for turnaround schools (Public Impact, 2008, 2016; Schulte & Kowal, 2005).

Ensuring that schools are staffed with the right leader to guide everyone involved in the process is crucial. The schools that have found sustainable success attribute much of this to the school culture, learning environment, goals, and support—all of which are led by the building leader (Calkins et al., 2007).

Chapter 3 outlines the research methodology. This research used a qualitative descriptive phenomenological method. Aspects of the research design, context, information regarding participants, recruitment and selection criteria, and instruments used in the data collection provide a structure for the data analysis of this study.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

General Perspective

This study aimed to understand what perspectives teachers and supervisors of school building principals had regarding the principals' leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. Low-performing student achievement levels in chronically underperforming schools are identified as schools needing a turnaround. Effective school leadership can significantly impact student learning and achievement in NYS's lowest-performing schools. NYSED identifies turnaround schools based on their student achievement levels. Turnaround schools must significantly increase student academic achievement within 2 years and demonstrate a transformational plan for continued improvement and sustainability (NYSED, 2019b).

NYSED (2019a) has a mission statement to raise all people's knowledge, skill, and opportunity in NYS. In the 2015 NYS Governor's failing schools report, over 250,000 students had been in schools considered failing for at least a decade (NYS of Opportunity, 2015). The report and data represented a public school system needing immediate change, impacting some of the neediest populations. Leaders in the lowest-performing schools have been tasked with spearheading an aggressive and strategic plan for improvement. Once a school has a failing designation, the school leaders have 6 months to submit a school intervention plan and 2 years to implement the plan (NYSED 2015). School districts and educational administration preparation programs should access empirical data identifying leadership dispositions that support turnaround schools'

expectations (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). With these data, turnaround schools will have a greater chance of success, thus improving students' performance.

This study has two research questions. Each question offers a different perspective on the role of a building principal. Teachers and supervisors of school principals may share similar experiences from their lived interactions with turnaround school principals. Research Question 1 provides a view through the lens of teachers—those led by principals. Research Question 2 provides the perspective through the lens of school principals' supervisors—those leading the principals:

1. From the perspective of teachers in low-performing, high-poverty schools, what leadership dispositions of building principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of building principals in low-performing, high-poverty schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

These research questions connect to the research problem and focus on revealing more about building leaders in environments like turnaround schools. The opportunity to gain more knowledge about specific leadership dispositions may provide insight into what could help failing schools succeed.

Research Design

Qualitative research approaches aim to explore, describe, and analyze the meaning of the individual lived experiences (Patton, 2015). This study utilized a qualitative method with a descriptive phenomenological design. Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret,

46

phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Phenomenology describes the relationship between situations and the participants to identify the essence of the experience as expressed by the participants (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2012). The participants in this study answered questions with descriptions of the participants' lived experiences working with school principals in HPLP school settings (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2012). Using a descriptive phenomenological design, teachers and district-level principals' supervisors shared their experiences regarding building principals' leadership in the school improvement process. The data collected and analyzed in this study highlights critical dispositions for building leaders to possess, leading to effective change.

The researcher acknowledges her role as a building principal and a former administrator in a turnaround setting. A reflexive approach was used to recognize and limit researcher bias (Schwandt, 2007). The researcher collaborated with the research committee and engaged intentional dialogue to review the results and findings to minimize the researcher's bias. Descriptive phenomenology was the appropriate methodology for this study as it supports gathering data from participants in a systemic manner for collection and analysis (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2012).

Research Context

The participants for this study came from schools that qualified as HPLP schools, focusing on NYS-identified turnaround and failing schools. Therefore, the research setting included three school districts in upstate NYS with various schools that met the HPLP criteria for failing or turnaround status. These schools were on the receivership list and then removed as the result of significant growth according to the DTSDE process and

rubric (NYSED, 2019a). Giorgi and Giorgi (2012) suggested a purposive sampling to represent a specific population and identify knowledgeable individuals with experience of a phenomenon. There was intentionality to recruit participants from schools that had the turnaround distinction.

In 2015, NYS identified 77 schools that had been failing for at least 10 years and needed a turnaround (NYSED, 2015). As of 2018–2019, NYS identified 14 schools that showed demonstrable growth, and as of this research, they will continue their turnaround process (NYSED, 2019b). A school with a designation of struggling or failing is placed on notice by NYS. The state has a list of the required changes to be implemented that should increase school performance and status (NYSED, 2015).

Research Participants

For this study, the focus was on the participants' lived experiences with the phenomenon of working in a turnaround school or a continuously failing school, or supervising the school principal of a turnaround school without focus on a specific school or district.

Inclusion Criteria

The participants, at the time of this study, had worked with school principals or had supervised school principals who worked in schools that met both criteria for HPLP schools for at least 3 consecutive years. The teachers needed to have at least 5 years of public school experience and a minimum of 1 year in a school environment deemed HPLP. The chosen participants also had a role that provided student contact. This was helpful because achievement was a component toward showing demonstrable growth in the turnaround process. The supervisors of school principals had to have at least 3 years

in a district working with a school with a failing status distinction, ideally one that had been designated as a turnaround school. Additionally, while not required, the principals' supervisors would offer a unique lens of understanding of the principalship role if they, too, had previously worked as a principal in a similar setting.

Recruitment and Selection

The recruitment process relied on volunteers to willingly participate, providing the researcher with the specified demographics. All participants were recruited from personal connections and networking with colleagues to recruit others who met the study's criteria (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2012). The 2019–2020 receivership school list provided by the Office of Innovation and School Reform assisted in recruiting individuals who met the participation criteria and included turnaround schools (NYSED, 2021). The participants did not receive any incentives for their involvement in this study.

After seeking interest and determining if the potential participants would consider learning more about the study, they were sent a recruitment letter to determine their eligibility (Appendix A). Once their eligibility was determined, the participants agreed to participate in the study. The recruitment pool included 16 people. From the recruitment pool, 10 total participants were selected based on the eligibility requirements and their availability to join the focus group and interviews. There was one focus group consisting of six certified teachers. Ten teachers were recruited for the focus group, and six could join. This number of participants offered the researcher various perspectives without becoming too large a group to manage. Of the six supervisors who were asked to volunteer for one-to-one interviews, four were able to participate in the interviews.

The descriptive phenomenological research approach requires at least six participants to gain the necessary information (Englander, 2012). The 10 participants in this study included six certified teachers and four supervisors of school principals.

Table 3.1 illustrates the demographics and pseudonyms of the teacher focus group participants in this study. It also includes if the teachers were part of a school that was successfully turned around. The certified teachers included a teacher on assignment, ELL teachers, physical education teachers, and general and special education teachers across the K–12 spectrum. The selection process included certificated teachers beyond the general education setting, which provided a more diverse perspective in the pool of participants.

Table 3.1

Teacher Participant Focus Group Information

Participant Pseudonym	Current Teaching Role	Successful Turnaround Experience
Teacher 1	High School – TOA	Yes
Teacher 2	Elementary – ENL	Yes
Teacher 3	High School – PE	No
Teacher 4	Middle School – ENL	No
Teacher 5	High School – ELA	No
Teacher 6	Middle School – SPED	No

Note. TOA = Teacher on assignment; ENL = English as a new language; PE = Physical education; ELA = English language arts; SPED = Special education.

Englander (2012) and Marshall and Rossman (2016) suggested that a study sample size should be large enough to gain the necessary data to address the research questions accurately. Each participant was selected because their educational background

and teaching or supervisory positions at the time of this research offered a diverse group of experiences to the study. Table 3.2 illustrates the demographics and pseudonyms of the supervisor participants. It also includes if the supervisors had previous school principal experience and whether they had worked in a turnaround school setting.

Table 3.2

Supervisor Participant Information

Participant Pseudonym	Title	Previously a principal	Worked in a turnaround school
Supervisor 1	Chief of Schools	Yes	Yes
Supervisor 2	Superintendent	Yes	No
Supervisor 3	Superintendent	Yes	Yes
Supervisor 4	District Superintendent	Yes	Yes

The supervisors of the school principals included individuals with different titles employed in different districts. The participants in this study served as school chief, district superintendent, and superintendent. District size and structures for the building principals' supervision varied. All four supervisor participants had previously worked as a principal in HPLP school districts, and three supervisor participants were involved in a turnaround school as a principal.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

This qualitative study used a focus group protocol with certified teacher participants along with a semi-structured interview protocol for the supervisor participants.

Focus Group Protocol

Focus groups offer the opportunity to gather various feelings and opinions, with multiple perspectives, to provide new insights and ideas (Krueger & Casey, 2009). Appendix B includes the protocol used during the focus groups with the certified teachers. The questions for the teacher participants were developed by the researcher based on the literature review and employee engagement theory (Hitt et al., 2018; Kahn, 1990). Probing prompts were used when the conversations seemed to stall or required further elaboration and clarification. Kruegar and Casey (2009) acknowledged that focus groups are likely to yield the best information when the participants have commonalities and the researcher has limited time to collect data.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

The second protocol utilized in this study was the semi-structured interviews (Appendix C). These interviews offered flexibility for a set of prescribed questions while providing additional opportunities for the participants to elaborate (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The semi-structured interview protocol illustrates the flexibility afforded by a one-to-one experience. Based on the feedback provided during the focus group, additional questions were added to the interview process for the supervisors to respond to a similar set of questions. Kvale and Brinkman (2009) suggested using an interview protocol with open-ended questions to invite the participant to open up and disclose more information than in a group setting.

Pilot Testing

Creswell (2013) suggested refining interview questions through pilot testing. Before the study, the researcher conducted pilot interviews and focus groups that

included colleagues of the researcher and not participants in this study. The researcher used the protocols to practice the interview questions and used the field tests for adjustments and modifications. Through this process, the researcher became more familiar with the interview process and adjusted some of the interview questions when they became repetitive.

Procedures for Data Collection

Before St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix D), the researcher compiled interview and focus group protocols and developed an introductory invitation for the study to be emailed to prospective participants upon IRB approval. Recruitment letters and consent forms were also developed so participants were fully informed once the study could begin. The data collection process began after IRB approval was received. The following reflects a summary of the methodology procedures:

1. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to identify schools within NYS that met the context criteria for the study, turnaround, HPLP, and failing schools.

2. The researcher utilized purposive sampling to recruit teachers and supervisors of school principals in the identified schools and districts to meet the participant criteria.

3. The researcher contacted potential participants to get their permission to use them as participants in the research.

4. The researcher engaged the participants to review all protocols and confidentiality agreements and obtained signed consent documents.

5. The researcher conducted interviews and a focus group via the Zoom platform. The researcher used the audio recordings used in the interviews and the focus group session for transcription, through Descript, after each interview and the focus groups session was completed.

6. The researcher obtained transcripts of each interview and the focus group session using Descript.

Confidentiality is critical to ensuring a trusting relationship between the researcher and participants. The records of this study are kept confidential. Pseudonyms of teacher and supervisor participants were used to remove any of the participants' identifiers or the schools they worked in which they worked at the time of the study or previously. The nature of focus groups prevented the researcher from guaranteeing confidentiality. However, every precaution was taken to secure the data and adhere to confidentiality agreements noted in the consent form.

The data collection, because of the COVID-19 restrictions, changed the way the interviews were conducted. For this study, the focus group and interviews occurred online using Zoom. These sessions were recorded, and the participants knew this information in advance (Archibald et al., 2019). The cameras were disabled, and the pseudonyms "Participant 1" to "Participant 6" were used to protect the confidentiality of each participant in the focus group.

The process followed to collect data included the Zoom recordings. The video was disposed of after the interview, but the audio recording was saved and transcribed using the software Descript. The audio recordings are only saved and accessible on the researcher's computer hard drive. The researcher's computer is password-protected, and

the recordings are stored in a password-protected file, along with the consent forms and data documentation. The audio recordings were used for transcription checking, coding, and analysis.

Focus Groups

The certified teachers participated in a focus group that lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. The participants were provided with the date and time for the focus group session in advance, and they completed the consent to participate and the confidentiality agreement. The participants were provided with their coded username for login on Zoom in their introductory letter. As the participants logged in, their cameras were already disabled through the initial Zoom set up. The first question for the focus group was asking all participants to describe their current building structure, grade level or content subject area, and if their school was an HPLP school that had moved to the turnaround-school distinction. The participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and they were asked to inform the researcher if they wished to withdraw from the focus group and any time without penalty.

The focus group audio recording was uploaded into Descript to transcribe the recording. The transcription was not published online but, instead, it was saved back to the hard drive of the researcher's computer, and a hard copy of the transcript was printed for the coding process. Transcription occurred immediately following the focus group. The researcher utilized a note-taking journal for additional notes during the focus group session. Descript allowed for an accurate capture of the participant responses, and it allowed for transferability of the text into Chapter 4. Thorne (2020) shared that verbatim

quotes provide a rich and vigorous presentation of the observations and findings. The transcripts were used to begin the coding process.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The supervisor participants of school principals participated in one-to-one interviews that lasted between 30 to 60 minutes with an opportunity to answer open-ended questions. The participants' were provided with the dates and times of their interviews in advance, and they completed the consent to participate and the confidentiality agreement.

The researcher removed any identifiers in advance of the interviews and informed the participants of their pseudonyms in the transcripts so the recordings would not break confidentiality. The participants were reminded that participation was voluntary and they could withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.

The interview audio recordings were uploaded into Descript for transcription. The transcripts were not published online but, instead, they were saved back to the hard drive of the researcher's computer, and a hard copy of the transcripts were printed for the coding process. Transcription occurred within 24 hours of the interviews. The researcher used a journal to capture additional notes during the interviews to note any comments that required further clarification from the participants. The attention and focus of the one-to-one interviews allowed for a conversational rapport and provided opportunities for further probing and details regarding the participants' lived experiences. Each of the interviews were audio recorded and saved for continuous review and analysis. The transcripts provided hard copy documentation to further chunk and determine identifiers in the values coding approach.

Procedures for Data Analysis

After the focus group and interviews were completed, various steps occurred to code, analyze, sort, and generate themes from the data collected. Each participant identified was coded for confidentiality. The following reflects the procedures for the data analysis process:

1. The researcher engaged in the values coding process and the descriptive phenomenological approach to analyze the transcripts.

2. The researcher reviewed and conducted coding multiple times as needed.

3. The researcher conducted a data analysis.

4. The researcher formulated the findings for Chapter 4.

The first step in the data analysis procedure was printing the interview and focus group transcripts for initial coding. The second step in the initial coding process was using values and patterns coding. This approach constructed meaning and patterns from the participants' attitudes regarding the school principals' leadership dispositions during the school improvement process (Saldaña, 2016). Coding with a heuristic approach means that the transcripts provide an opportunity to discover and make meaning out of the lived experiences the participants provide (Saldaña, 2016). Coding is a cyclical process, and the transcripts were reviewed and analyzed multiple times by the researcher.

In addition to values and patterns coding, descriptive phenomenology has a four-step process to analyze the described lived experience properly. The Giorgi and Giorgi (2012) phenomenology process included:

1. The researcher assumed the participants' attitudes without their plan regarding what they believed and thought about turnaround schools and leadership dispositions.

2. The researcher differentiated segments of the descriptions relating to the research and topics of focus. This means that the researcher identified the different experiences and placed them into groups based on commonalities, such as multiple participants speaking about trust. The descriptive phenomenology approach aligned with values and pattern coding appropriately matching the identified dispositions into overarching themes. These became the themes that arose from the data revealed by the participants relating to the research questions.

3. The researcher maintained a neutral presence toward the participants' thoughts and feelings when they revealed how they felt about their shared lived experiences. This process led to the development of general knowledge and lessened the potential for bias from the researcher.

4. Finally, the researcher established an understanding of the content. Then the researcher structured the findings in a meaningful way that illustrated the more in-depth lived experiences.

Once the common themes, patterns, and outliers were determined, identifying relationships and commonalities between the supervisors of the school principals and the teachers could occur. The findings were documented and grouped into themes and subthemes to outline the leadership dispositions discovered in the shared lived experiences of the participants.

Summary

The descriptive phenomenological approach explored the participants' experiences working with their building principals in a turnaround setting. There is limited research examining the turnaround school setting experience and the building principals' ability to engage staff in the improvement process. The focus was to better understand teachers and supervisors of school principals' lived experiences. An examination of the results provided data that was coded and sorted into themes and subthemes connected to school principals' leadership dispositions. In Chapter 4, the results from this phenomenological study are described.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This qualitative study aimed to understand what perspectives teachers and supervisors of school principals had regarding principals' leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. This study utilized descriptive phenomenology. Thus, the perspectives captured during the interviews and focus group represented the participants' lived experiences, illustrated their beliefs, and reflected their experiences of working with school principals.

The findings in this study share the perspectives of six teachers and four supervisors of building principals in school improvement environments. The purpose of the study was to better understand the leadership dispositions that a building principal should have to effectively engage staff participation in the school improvement process. The research questions were as follows:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of school principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of building principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

The theory of employee engagement (Kahn, 1990) served as the theoretical underpinning of this study and provided a framework in which to describe the leadership

dispositions of building principals who influenced employee engagement in the school turnaround process. A descriptive data analysis process was used to determine the findings in this study that included multiple steps and resulted in three overall themes and five subthemes. The three themes were cultivating a culture of trust, developing a shared vision, and reflective leadership.

Theme 1: Cultivating a Culture of Trust

This section examines the theme of cultivating a culture of trust in failing schools through the lens of both the supervisors and teachers of building principals. The participants described the development of a school culture where there was trust and that allowed the employees to engage more in the school improvement process. Some of the topics that emerged in discussion with the participants included creating genuine relationships, listening to employees, being heard and seen by the principal, and navigating challenging times to promote continuous improvement. For example, Supervisor 2 described that the role of the leader was to cultivate culture through their intentional efforts to change the way the work environment feels for the employees. According to Kahn (1990), culture relates to meaningfulness where employees report feeling valued and invested in their work because they believe they can improve the school. Participants described trusting the principal because they had created genuine relationships, felt seen and heard, and were a part of the team process toward school improvement.

Cultivating a culture of trust as a theme illustrated what the teachers and supervisors shared about leadership and how this impacted the school atmosphere and improvement process. The need for trust was frequently stated among the teacher

participants to feel valued and supported by their principal. When trust was present, teachers were more inclined to engage and participate in the work. The teachers and supervisors shared the difficulties of trusting their leader and having their leader trust them. Teacher 5 shared, "it's kind of hard when your staff doesn't trust you to move forward because then it creates a certain awkwardness and dysfunctionality that's already adding into the dysfunctionality that's already happening in the school." The challenges that teachers face in an HPLP school result in dysfunction resulting from a lack of trust when the principals cannot rely on their teachers. Teacher 3 shared the desire for administrators to "trust the staff, that they are still going to continue working with these students." The teachers wanted recognition for doing this work because they cared and would continue to serve the students regardless of the dysfunction in and around the school building. Teacher 3 also shared:

> We need to know that administration will take care of any student issues that are going on so that we can continue teaching the other 80 to 90% of the students while another support staff is dealing with the individual student issues, whether they're good, bad, or ugly.

Supervisor 3 shared a response that supported the desire from teachers by indicating that:

> When it gets really hard, you become a servant leader. If you are needed to go co-teach or put the kids in the cafeteria and test them, so teachers can just deal with those they know need more support, you can take the masses with you.

Teacher 3 and Supervisor 3 agreed there was a need for principals to support the teachers, and the teachers, in turn, would help the students. Support was shown by sharing the work and offering a level of trust between both groups. An equally important component

of trust was the ability to form relationships. Principals cannot gain the trust of their employees or supervisors without forming relationships, as indicated by Teacher 5 when he shared about the inability to function when trust is lacking.

Each participant identified and emphasized the importance of forming relationships, a subtheme to cultivating a culture of trust. Forming relationships is a disposition principals should possess to assist employees' engagement in school improvement. When Teacher 2 shared about the investment of time and energy by the principal with her staff, she stated:

> Building relationships with students, also with staff and truly getting to know everyone, having conversations regularly, does a lot for morale in the building, and you feel like your principal genuinely cares about you, obviously, as a teacher but also as a person. Checking in, just little check-ins really go a long way. Administrators realize that, and it helps teachers feel seen and feel like there is someone looking out for them and supporting them. And that's a big deal.

Other participants shared that to develop relationships with teachers, principals must take the time to have conversations to exhibit a caring attitude toward their staff. The teacher participants provided additional responses when they were asked about the critical dispositions of their building principals that support the importance of building relationships. For example, Teacher 3 agreed that "you need to know what everyone on your staff is doing so that you can keep going in the same direction." Teacher 4 shared how creating relationships can lead to more employee engagement by saying, "you do need relationships because staff needs to trust you, and they come back, and they confide

in you. They will go above and beyond for you." Teacher 1 stated, "building principals need to ask teachers, 'What do you need?,' which shows they genuinely care."

Another example of a principal showing they cared and were a part of the school team was by Teacher 1. At the time of the focus group, she worked at a high school with children in their final attempt to acquire high school diplomas. Teacher 1 shared: "we had one principal in particular who, actually, on pajama day, wore pajamas, came in with their silk robe and really made the students feel important because they felt recognized." The teacher participants shared that forming relationships that helped with engagement included principals conducting little check-ins, making time to know their staff, asking teachers what they need, and participating in school events. When principals demonstrated these actions, the teacher participants reported feeling seen and recognized by building principals.

However, not all principals successfully build relationships with staff and students. A lack of relationships between teachers and principals does not allow for trust to be earned and therefore impedes future opportunities to grow a culture of trust and collaboration. Teacher 2 shared her lived experiences of her HPLP setting and the high level of student needs.

> A lot of times, the principal spends most of their time with a small group of students that have the most needs. These are students acting out the most or having the most difficulty staying in class and drawing the most energy and attention out of leadership, making building relationships with other students challenging because they're constantly putting out fires.

As a result, some teachers indicated that principals may have challenges developing relationships because they are preoccupied with the various student needs.

Teacher 3 described her desire for the building principal to show his trust in her ability to continue teaching while taking care of a student issue. In contrast, Teacher 2 shared that when the principal's time was occupied with these same student issues, she felt this attention took away from opportunities to form relationships. This created less opportunities for the teacher to be a part of the trusting culture the principal was cultivating in the building.

Another example of principals who do not form relationships and negatively impact the culture of the building was from Teacher 4. She was an English as a new language (ENL) teacher at a middle school and shared her perspective and experience that impacted her role, and she spoke to the treatment of the children she served.

> I teach in an area that building leadership does not know what the job is or isn't, and you tend to get overlooked quite a bit or only called on when they need you for something. It would be tremendous to have leadership that planned accordingly. For example, our special education students get scheduled first, gen ed second, and then my students last. So, they don't always get what they need. Let's just say there's not a lot of equity in what they get. So, you know, a leader who actually shows consideration, evidenced by their behavior, would be phenomenal.

Teacher 4 indicated her experiences of how the lack of equity and recognition of needs for the students she serves resulted in her reluctance to form a relationship with the principal.

The formation of relationships relies on making time to be present in the classrooms, talk to the teachers and staff, and learn more about who they are beyond the classroom. Similarly, Teacher 2, another ENL teacher at an elementary school, shared that "the administrator has never been in my room." Teacher 2 shared her belief in the value of knowing one's staff and taking the time to "check-in." Both Teacher 2 and Teacher 4 expressed dissatisfaction with their building leadership because there was little to no recognition and there was a lack of understanding regarding their role in the school. Teacher 6 further described her interaction with her principal and the impact of a data-driven focus instead of a personnel-oriented focus. The principals lacked the essential relationships with Teacher 2 and Teacher 4 to form a culture of trust in their buildings. Teacher 6 shared that her building principal was focused on "the numbers and to get the data to see what that needs to say" and stated:

> It was not about checking in with your staff to see if they were okay. And I think that is the greatest downfall of a principal. If you're not willing to hear out your staff or to have them work with you and make sure that your school building is running professionally and efficiently, then it's going to make it difficult for everyone that's involved, including the kids.

Teachers 2, 4, and 6 all experienced devaluing interactions with principals that led to challenges in forming relationships with their principals when they were not seen as valued professionals. Their principals focused on data or had a lack of understanding of the teachers' roles, such as Teachers 2 and 4 who were ENL teachers and were not understood or shown equal consideration in their school plans. The absence and impersonal relationships from the principals with the staff in their schools negatively

66

impacted the leader's ability to form relationships, and the lack relationship did not promote an engaging culture for these teachers. Teacher 4 described that she did not feel her students had an equal opportunity to learn like the other children.

Some supervisor participants expressed that building principals can demonstrate the importance of relationships by engaging the teachers in dialogues and providing them with opportunities to share and be heard. Both Supervisors 3 and 4 had years of experience as building principals who were successful leaders in overseeing turnaround schools. They offered the principals under their employ advice on cultivating a school culture of trust within their staff. Supervisor 3 shared that "asking questions creates molds to shape the environment in which people matter, and their concerns are heard." The questions illustrated the supervisors' value of relationships and ensuring that the teachers felt heard. Supervisor 4 asserted that creating this type of school culture was not easy and that the "most difficult part of a principalship is moving a system and the people in a way that they feel valued and seen."

Relationships in the HPLP environment require teachers to have a leader who cares and supports them. Supervisors show this support by being part of the team and allowing teachers to share their concerns and be heard. Supervisors 3 and 4 described the need to make people feel seen and heard, thus supporting the formation of relationships that develop a culture of trust. Teacher 1 shared that:

> Nobody goes into teaching for the money, so we're here because we care. At least, I know I am. I just believe that if a good leader is doing their job, they will build those relationships with staff and students, which will make a difference. When the leader was focused on relationships, it really made the students feel

important and recognized. I've worked for leaders who were more about higher-performing students, and you would wonder if they knew that low-performing students were there. They were overlooked.

The participants reported how principals could invest time in building relationships and getting to know their staff, students, and community. Teacher 5 shared this sentiment:

It's supposed to be a team, one cohesive unit, and you need to know that we just want our voices, concerns, and thoughts to be heard. You don't have to agree with them. But the fact that you took time to listen and come with a logical debate as to why this may or may not, it's all a lot of teachers are asking for. The issue is just being heard and getting our thoughts across.

Teacher 5's recalled situations where there was a plea from the teachers to be heard by the principal that illustrated the importance of relationships and trust with the staff and school community. As Teacher 5 and Supervisors 3 and 4 described the idea of being a team or cohesive unit promotes an opportunity to cultivate relationships and trust by listening and providing space to be heard by the principal. As demonstrated by Teacher 5's experience, when the principal created opportunities for listening and acknowledged the work of others, it helped build a culture of trust.

Supervisor 2 asserted that "you cannot be an introvert in this role. You must have the ability to have conversations with people you don't like and who have different opinions." He emphasized this point because many parts of the job are challenging and working with all the people in the school community is a critical factor in promoting school improvements. Additional examples of leadership dispositions that support the formation of relationships included: Supervisor 4 sharing, "we have to be able to be

vulnerable." He elaborated on "the need for a system that acknowledges failures and has more examples of people who are vulnerable instead of being fired or demoted, then people will never lean in and be vulnerable." This type of vulnerability of a principal, shared by Supervisor 4, allowed the opportunity for supportive relationships to form and led to increased growth within his educational community.

Some participants reported that stress could impact the vulnerability and leadership of principals. For example, Teacher 5 described a time where he received feedback from his principal based on pressures from the principal's supervisors, resulting in increased stress for everyone involved. He said: "if you constantly come with problems, you will stress teachers out. Your teachers are not going to want to work with you." He continued to share:

> We already know what the problem is, we can go on with the problem for days, but if you don't help come up with a solution or leave it to the staff to come up with the solutions and then bring them together and you don't want to hear them, then it's like, "well what was that for?" and it defeats the purpose.

The principal's approach described by Teacher 5 created a disengaging environment and did not support the formation of positive relationships.

The supervisor participants emphasized the function of the school system and the impact this had on the school instead of solely focusing on the principals' work and factors that supported principals. The supervisors' understanding of the complexities of cultivating a building culture and the variables that can impact that culture stemmed from their experiences working as principals. While the supervisors did not use the word "relationships," they did emphasize the need to have a team. Supervisor 1 shared her

gratitude for having a team that "cared and really invested in teachers and children." Supervisor 1, who previously worked as a building principal and assisted in the successful turnaround of her school, shared her experiences and how "when the team came together, she really listened to what they had to share, so as the principal, they knew how to align things better before they even looked at the data."

As the participants disclosed their experiences about building principals, there was a shared understanding of trust. Trust was earned when principals listened to staff and gave time and space for employees to be heard and to feel valued. When a trusting environment was developed, the staff engaged positively and productively. The trusting environment promoted staff engagement. In contrast, if an atmosphere lacked the elements of trusting relationships, the participants described their disengagement because they perceived that they could not trust their building principal. Supervisor 1 shared the details of a visit to one of her schools, and her principal expressed, "we felt trusted, we felt comfortable, and that you really believed in us so that we could succeed."

Described in Theme 1, cultivating a culture of trust, many of the participants in this study shared that when principals value employees by listening and intentionally focusing on getting to know the teachers, a trusting relationship was created. Supervisor 3 stated some questions to promote building relationships to encourage principals to build leaders out of teachers, students, and community members. One of the questions was "how do you make sure that people understand that the biggest resources you have are, in fact, right in front of you, the human resources." Supervisor 3 wanted principals, students, teachers, and families to work together to help support the improvement process. The participants reported feeling more engaged in the school improvement

process when the principals formed genuine relationships because they were acknowledged and appreciated. The next theme builds on the foundation of school culture by addressing the need to create a road map for moving forward.

Theme 2: Developing a Shared Vision

Another common finding among the teacher and supervisor participants was the need for principals to create a vision that was shared and clear to employees. Teacher 1 stated a clear and shared vision was "a necessary requirement to promote staff buy-in, because one could have a great big vision, but if your staff does not buy-in, it's still not going anywhere, and this only happens with relationships." This example further illuminates the importance of relationships between principals and their staff for engagement in the improvement process.

Teacher 1 shared that when "the administrator fostered shared beliefs, we were all involved and on the same page." One component of education that is consistent from district-level personnel to teachers leading their classrooms is the need for a vision and that the communication of the vision is clear. Supervisor 3 captured the importance of vision by saying:

> You have to be able to have a vision, but the vision is not your vision. It becomes the school's vision. So, how do you involve stakeholders? How do you make sure that your want is what everybody else wants? How do you eliminate a culture of complacency? How do you bring up low morale? Human resources are your biggest resources, so how do you make teachers leaders, students leaders, parents leaders, community leaders? Everyone is in it together, and no one will argue with

you that they don't want to get better. So, understanding the vision and evaluating

that vision is huge.

Both Teacher 1 and Supervisor 3 emphasized the importance of creating an environment

where a shared vision could develop by including various stakeholders.

The supervisors spoke in depth about the complexities of a strategic plan and the

vision to successfully implement a plan. Supervisor 1 argued that "a plan is just a plan

unless you have the person behind it who is inspiring and committed," while Supervisor 3

stated that:

You have to understand data, and the story that goes with the numbers, so you do

not create a fake plan. You must possess elements of understanding, including the

ability to gather a skillset, to be able to project and strategically design a plan to

support.

Both Supervisor 1 and Supervisor 3 spoke of the importance of a solid plan with a

commitment to support the plan. Another necessary data point for the plan was creating

an environment where various stakeholders and feedback are included in the strategic

development process. Teacher 5 shared that:

A principal who comes in with a shared vision and being on the same page with

the staff is what's going to help turn it around. Making sure that the staff's

concerns and voices are heard is another thing that would promote engagement

for them.

Developing a shared vision is more effective when multiple voices and all stakeholders

can articulate this vision. Supervisor 4 shared that a "principal must have the ability to

understand the context in which they are serving before they start to make a change." He

shared further that being "an active listener and understanding the context they're leading is important. Once they're listening to the thoughts, opinions, and experiences of others, then principals can create a plan that will lead towards a sense of school improvement." This statement from Supervisor 4 contrasted with Teacher 5, who mentioned the principal "comes in with a shared vision." Supervisor 4 suggested principals "listen and then create the plan." Both Teacher 1 and Supervisor 4 agreed in a shared process with more than just their thoughts and opinions to develop a plan.

The participants indicated that a shared vision and a comprehensive strategic plan can help move a school forward in the improvement process. Teacher 4 stated: "an effective principal is knowledgeable of everything going on in the building. They are moving everyone toward the vision that is established by all." The support of the principal to elicit feedback from all school community members promotes a standard message that keeps the school aligned and working together.

All four supervisors communicated a strong belief in developing a plan and establishing goals to evaluate and provide accountability among fellow administrators, teachers, students, and families. Supervisor 3 shared that "producing good outcomes can uncomplicate the system, but we do this with involvement from everyone, and the work has to matter." This statement emphasized the importance of employee involvement in the development of the vision. Supervisor 3 illustrated the need for principals to create an environment of collaboration and shared experiences among employees. Supervisor 4 stated, "dispositions and intentional beliefs, values, or strategies make me think more strategically around how you build systems, so that others can move with intention in a way that helps you meet your goals and the goals of the district." Supervisor 4 understood

how the school system required principals to be intentional with their decision-making to address the ongoing challenges in an HPLP school system. By doing this, principals are addressing systemic issues aligned to the goals and actions of the people supporting the school improvement goals.

Leaders who apply the dispositions in Theme 2, along with the dispositions in Theme 1 can create opportunities as principals to create a shared vision. Principals can engage employees in the shared process when they communicate the plan, vision, and needs. Ideally, this process is completed and implemented with the same people who have a trusting relationship with the principal.

Communication in Leadership

Another critical disposition that emerged from the participants' lived experiences indicated that when developing a shared vision, the leader and other stakeholders required clear communication. The participants who understood the demands and goals for their buildings was the result of clear communication from the principal. When principals had clear communication, this provided opportunities for the school community to develop relationships with the principals, which engaged more participation from other people not yet involved in the improvement process. A platform to facilitate conversations for decision-making was established because of an open dialogue between the principal and school stakeholders. Supervisor 2 said, "communication is huge, but it's a two-way communication street." Most participants agreed that communication is an integral component for the engagement of staff, students, and families in a school turnaround process. Teacher 6 reported:

When I've had a high-functioning principal, it was something where the

expectations were discussed throughout the whole building, but also at home as

well. And when you get parents involved and have them understand what the

expectation are, it runs smoothly.

Teacher 6 expressed her school environment continued to promote the shared

expectations between the principal and everyone involved, including parents.

Both the teachers and supervisors expressed how vital quality relationships and

communication are toward engaging staff. Teacher 1 said the staff were more inclined to

"buy-in." Teacher 6 stated that "keeping the line of communication open to take in

different insights and perspectives and the more we share and combine our thoughts, the

more effective we are as a school." In alignment with the sentiment to communicate

openly, Supervisor 4 shared that "the principal['s] role is truly around improving the

shared understanding of the conditions of the school. As Teacher 6 indicated the need for

open lines of communication, "the most efficient way to improve the cohesive

understanding is through consistent communication and messaging." As Teachers 1, 4,

and 6 demonstrated, communication with a clear vision and knowledge of how to best

implement an improvement plan created positive outcomes with staff.

Several participants also shared negative experiences when a building principal

does not communicate well. Teacher 1 and Teacher 6 had witnessed the dysfunctionality

in communication when all building administrators were unclear regarding the message

and had contradictory advice. These teachers described how these contradictions

promoted disengagement in staff due to inconsistencies or a vague vision of expectations.

The "lack of communication is an ultimate doom when it comes to a school thriving"

(Teacher 6). Following the shared experience by Teacher 6, Teacher 4 was expressive as she discussed the lack of clarity and understanding from her principal. She said, "for goodness' sake, just tell us what the hell you want us to do, and we'll do it, but quit changing it up, and what we do needs to matter, otherwise, you know, quit wasting my time." Teacher 4's display of frustration echoed with her previous parallel experiences when the principal was unaware of the role of an ENL teacher and, as a result, created a lack of relationship with her principal. All the participants spoke of the need for clarity and clear communication when developing a vision, making changes to instructional practices, and altering or adding to school rituals and routines for them to be engaged in the school improvement process.

Consistency in Leadership

Another disposition to emerge from the participants' shared experiences included consistency by the principals and consistency of principals in the school building. The inconsistencies experienced by all the teachers and acknowledged by the supervisors indicated a strong desire for principals to provide consistency as leader of their buildings. The teachers and supervisors articulated the desire for consistent communication from their experiences of inconsistent leadership and communication from those in decision-making roles.

The topic of consistency was demonstrated and explained by the participants with examples of how consistency by principals had impacted the teachers. Teacher 5 described an example of inconsistent practices that were supposed to be supported by the leadership team to help improve traffic flow and chaos in the hallways. The situation involved a school routine in eliminating hallway traffic. The middle schoolers and

76

teachers "were supposed to clear the hallways after each period and then, all of a sudden, without notification, there was no one in the hallway to give passes, and the hallways get filled again." Teacher 5 described how the lack of administrative support and follow-through to ensure students have a pass and permission to be in the hall during class time was no longer enforced, and it created fuller hallways and students missing their instruction. Furthermore, Teacher 5 stated there was no "follow-through," and he reported:

> The consistency aspects of it were not there, and if there's a plan in place, make sure that the plan is known, and follow through with it to keep up with the plan because as soon as you stop, things become an issue, and then kids and staff are like, "why am I bothering?"

Fellow teacher participants echoed the lack of consistency in communication and follow-through with plans as expressed by Teacher 5. Another common experience among the participants was the management of principals to address student behavior concerns effectively and consistently. Teacher 2 reported:

> It is really important that the leadership is consistent with how they handle behaviors. I've seen one student do one thing, and they have a talking to and it's good, another student does the same exact thing, and they are in ISS [In School Suspension]. We're all human, and we have emotions, but I think being a leader, especially in a school that you're trying to get back on track, you must lead and not let your emotions determine how you react to situations with students and have consistency in the expectations for everyone. It provides an even playing field, and that means everyone knows what's expected.

Meanwhile, Supervisor 4 shared his perspective as he worked with his principals to determine what was at the root of student behavior when he was presented with a statement like "we've got to change how kids behave." Supervisor 4 supported his principals by digging apart their questions and asking them to understand what is at the root of the problem, determining the cause, and then addressing those items with actionable steps and consistency in messaging and expectations. He shared, "the principal says to me, 'we've got to change how kids behave.' I have to ask questions about what other things are leading to the behavior of those kids and who's judging that the behavior is bad?" As he determined some of the root causes, he also discussed how the principals should address this to ensure that the message was clear and understood by everyone to improve.

As Supervisor 4 described the need to understand the root and structures impacting the school, Teacher 4 shared her sentiments around the school rules and structures that were led and enforced by the principal. She shared, "it's as basic as knowing your code of conduct, because that is supposed to be the law, and we're all agreeing to that and what your teachers are going to enforce." Teacher 4 desired a leader who knew school expectations and could consistently follow through and support teachers by enforcing policies and having consistencies in how and what was addressed by the principal. Another example that described the school environment, because of inconsistent behavior management from the principal, was when Teacher 1 expressed a moment that created fear and wonder. She said:

Students didn't know if you were going to get in trouble; you didn't last time, but you don't know the equation and expectations, and some friends didn't get the same punishment, which creates another set of issues and creates agitation.

Each lived experience from both the teachers and supervisors highlighted similar outcomes of confusion, lack of clarity, and frustration because of inconsistency regarding how building policies and procedures were followed through by the principal. Teacher 4 said, "when it isn't consistent day-to-day or misapplied, it creates these little fractures, and all these little things just pile up, and in my experience, just break down a school."

Lastly, Teacher 6 echoed frustrations in the focus group with a summary that described her experiences, "we have these staff doing all of these things to then have their efforts go nowhere, so why bother saying anything at this point if our efforts are not going to do anything." The overall desire from the teacher participants was for their principals to have clear and defined expectations about what is and is not acceptable, thus promoting a more consistent message.

Additionally, consistency was presented when the teachers and supervisors spoke about constant changes in building principals and the inconsistencies created because of the lack of leadership. Another finding expressed with similar experiences was the number of principal turnovers throughout their years of working. Teacher 3 spoke about how the high turnover in the principalship created inconsistencies, and the principals "did not have control and looked for areas where they could gain control." Supervisor 1 asserted that "the thing about receivership schools is, it's not like they put the most experienced leaders in there." Four of the six teacher participants shared explicit examples of their principal turnover experiences. Teacher 3 explained:

There is a high turnover rate of the principals. I don't know if it's their choice or higher-ups, but I will say, working under many different people, they have either had a survival mode or thriving mode. Survival is more chaotic and just dealing with [the] day-to-day and not thinking about a strategy to move forward, versus the principals that could more or less slow down and focus on the smaller victories. It's a lot more relaxed to work with somebody with a relentless optimism and [who] has a plan versus someone who's surviving the day. It gives me, a teacher, confidence when I know I don't have to worry about the other stuff because the principal can handle it.

Teacher 3's experience demonstrated the need for a consistent leader that had a shared plan and vision to promote staff engagement. Another example of how principal turnover could influence the engagement process was from Teacher 5, who related:

I remember my very first year. We went through four principals in 1 year. And I was in that building for about 4 years, and we went through about five or six principals [in] under 3 years. Those that came with a shared vision and being on the same page with the staff is what's going to turn it around. Making sure that the staff's concerns and voices are heard is something that would promote engagement from them.

Teachers 3, 5, and 6 described the deficits in communication, vision, and leadership styles created by principal turnover, and they described the lack of consistency from principals. Teacher 3 shared that "only those principals that lead her school with a shared vision were more likely to engage the staff than those without a comprehensive plan to implement." To further illustrate the importance of communication and consistency,

Teacher 6 shared her experiences with multiple principal turnovers. The impact of inconsistent leadership led to a malfunctioning vision within the system.

> I have also experienced an excessive amount of turnaround regarding the school principal. I've been there almost 9 years, and it's about four or five principals, and as Teacher 3 said, new people are either coming in as a survival mode or thriving mode. The unfortunate part is that being a teacher in this building, you never know what you're going to experience, which could make you feel guarded.

Teachers 3, 5, and 6 expressed that the school environments contributed to feeling like they needed to be in survival mode to function. As Theme 1 indicated, the relationships and trust between the leader and staff will help engage staff. Teachers 3, 5, and 6 were disengaged because of unhealthy interpersonal relationships, and a clouded educational vision due to the rotating principal position. Teacher 1 had a different experience with principal turnover, where she observed positive changes that were made because the principal formed positive collegial relationships. However, Teacher 1 elaborated as she shared the actions of district-level administrators in this example:

> I have witnessed a principal who is doing a great job and building relationships, and things look like they are turning around, and then the higher-ups decided to take this person and put them at a different school to see what they can do there. So, instead of maintaining a level of consistency and continuing the relationships that have been built, it sends the school back into an upheaval.

The discussion of inconsistent leadership in these already high-needs schools left the teacher participants questioning the role of the principal, their vision, and the decisions of those not in their building. The supervisors acknowledged the turnover and inconsistency

but did not share the outcomes regarding the continual principal transitions. Supervisor 3 said, "it makes me sad when a leader leaves and you thought you've created a sustainable plan and it falls apart, what is the key to stop it from falling apart? The key is the right leader." Supervisor 2 stated:

> If you're worried about job security, this work is not for you because you probably won't be there long enough to see the fruits of your labor. You will move on to the next challenge or be moved out into some other position in the system.

On the other hand, Supervisor 4 asserted that "sometimes we put the newest administrators in the toughest schools, and they burn out quickly." His statement illustrated the lack of understanding that a newer principal would have when placed in an HPLP school environment and was unable to keep up with the fast-paced and challenging atmosphere.

The challenge of clear communication and consistency from principals in this HPLP and turnaround settings was expressed by Supervisor 1. She empathized with a principal in receivership, saying, "you think you know where you're going. But it's a damn moving target. They keep changing it, and so you're never really sure if you are working towards moving that needle forward." Her sentiments illustrated how even with purposeful intentions, as Supervisor 4 discussed, turnaround school environments created challenges for principals to contend with as they strive for school improvement.

Lastly, Supervisor 3 asked some questions about having a vision, "everybody's at a different level; so as the principal, what tools are you giving people so they can meet the goals and leave successful while all working together?" She was adamant that the

process to improve the school was to "work together and figuring out the simplest path to do so." These questions and her understanding of the needs of the building illustrated Supervisor 3's need to be a reflective leader. Reflective leadership emerged as the final theme in the research because of the complexities of the HPLP schools that required flexible leadership from their principals.

Theme 3: Reflective Leadership

The third theme that emerged from the data analysis is reflective leadership. This theme describes how building principals engaging in reflective practices are better equipped to engage staff during a school improvement process. Reflective leadership has been defined as a high level of self-awareness and awareness regarding the people around you who can analyze how everyone in the organization contributes to the culture (Ersozlu, 2015). Supervisor 2 shared that "to be a reflective leader, you have to be able to listen, you'll have to communicate, and have conversations that make you look deeper." Reflective leadership in this study include principals with a growth mindset who are willing to learn new dispositions and participate in professional development and practice flexibility in their leadership to respond appropriately to the needs of the school community.

Supervisor 2 stated that for building principals to be effective in HPLP schools, they "need to be reflective and humble and recognize that there is some truth in everybody's perspective." Several participants shared how the role of the building principal requires managing a lot of different situations. Decision-making is equally important for reflective leaders because the leader must implement the vision with action. For example, Supervisor 3 said, "you have to stop, readjust, unfreeze, freeze, you name

it. The cycle of change cannot happen if you're not reflective about what is going on and what is needed."

The participants shared that building principals who engage in reflective leadership will take the time to review the feedback from others and use that feedback to inform their decisions. For example, Supervisor 3 said that:

Reflective leadership is Number 1; you'll have to communicate, and you'll have to change communication because you've figured something out that you didn't know before. Communication is such an important skillset, communication is maybe what you want others to hear, but it might not be what you're listening to. It will force you to have a conversation. To look deeper.

Supervisor 3 suggested that looking deeper and understanding the needs of the building and the people impacted provides principals with the necessary information to inform their decisions.

Supervisor 4 agreed with Supervisor 3 when he said, as a reflective leader, "we dig apart the questions and ask more to understand what is at the root of the issue and who is judging this as an issue." Reflective leadership requires interactions with various groups and being aware of the needs in the school community and turnaround environment. Supervisors 3 and 4 had over 20 years of experience working in HPLP schools and leading schools to turnaround. The perspectives of over 20 years of experience provided Supervisors 3 and 4 with an understanding and value of being reflective practitioners. Their years of experience provided them with an ability to recognize the needs of a turnaround principal as they lived this role. In the supervisor

capacity, they offered guidance on how to best address and change their leadership styles to engage staff in the improvement process.

According to the participants, reflective leadership required the building leader to be aware of the needs of the students, staff, families, and themselves. When the participants were asked whether dispositions could be learned, the majority felt learning was possible. Some felt that learning new dispositions was situational. However, if the leader was reflective, Teacher 5 asserted that "building principals can absolutely learn dispositions." He concluded that as they become aware of their skills and abilities to learn new things, they can learn from the people around them to assist in improving. Many of the experiences shared by the supervisors described the need for principals to be aware of their context, their staff's needs, and the members of the community. As reflective leaders, principals have to be aware of their school environment, the needs of their staff, and their own ability to implement the necessary changes required in the transformation process of HPLP schools.

Supervisors 2 and 4 recognized the unique situations of HPLP schools, specifically those in the process of turning around or having met the metrics and successfully turned around. Supervisor 2 asserted that "principals must understand the context they are serving." According to the participants, principals who understood the needs and challenges in their HPLP school environments were more successful in engaging staff. Principals can influence aspects of the school that result in improved outcomes in areas of challenges affiliated with HPLP schools. Supervisor 4 shared that "when a principal is aware of systems, people, and contributing factors to the successes and failures of the school, they can reflect, adjust, respond and address the needs more

appropriately." In contrast to Supervisor 4, Supervisor 2 argued that while "there are some great principals, what makes them great, more often than not, is the context they're working in, not so much the individual." In this instance, the need to be reflective was to understand the context and the contributions the leader may or may not have made because of the environmental factors. Supervisor 3 argued that the building leader "creates the culture in this environment."

Additionally, Supervisor 3 captured a similar sentiment when she expressed that "unorganized systems are very complicated, and you're not going to have good outcomes until it is uncomplicated." She was speaking about the responsibility of principals to understand their environments and the needs of the school. According to Supervisor 3, as reflective leaders, principals take the time to uncomplicate their school environment. Supervisor 4 discussed another disposition and tendency that assisted in reflective leadership and creating an engaging work environment was needed to "understand your employee's emotional intelligence (EQ)." Emotional intelligence is defined as "being self-aware, managing yourself well, reading others' emotions and connecting with others" (Bradberry & Jean, 2009). Supervisor 3 said:

> You need to dig in deep and understand you have human elements that contribute to the outcomes, so how do you emotionally support them? Your EQ has to be high to understand the people. Your strategic mind has to be powerful so that you don't excuse it but understand it. Then you can effectively measure growth and celebrate growth.

Supervisor 2 noted, "the more aware the principal is to the needs of their school community, the better the principal becomes in responding and providing purposeful experiences for the employees."

Growth Mindset

The participants shared that principals with a growth mindset may engage staff in the school improvement process more than principals with a fixed mindset. A growth mindset is the belief that ability and success are due to learning, which requires time and effort (Dweck, 2006). Teacher 4 agreed that principals should have a growth mindset but argued that not every principal does have a because growth mindset, because "if [all] principals had a growth mindset, they wouldn't let anything stop them, and then all we would have are effective schools." This perspective from Teacher 4 provides an understanding that if principals were all open to growth and learning from failures, every school that has failed would have a leader to turn it around the school, and there would be more effective schools. Based on Teacher 4's experience, a growth mindset was a tool principals needed to have to combat the challenges and complications if their schools were to remain open. Teacher 3 reported that her current principal "has a growth mindset and has the vulnerability to say "I don't know what to do." This has been really impressive and encouraging to see from my principal."

Teacher 4 spoke about how a principal should have a growth mindset. She said that "it's been pointed out that certain things need to change, or are not effective, and as the principal, you need to take appropriate steps to try and do what your followers need." Teacher 3 illustrated the willingness that the participants believed principals should have to address challenges in the improvement process. Supervisor 2 shared that "a growth

mindset is part of the skill set in elements of understanding that turnaround principals need to have." She continued to share that "significant challenges and mistakes are made. The job is to learn from those mistakes and to continue trying. This can only happen when the leader has a growth mindset."

Supervisors 2, 3, and 4 all described experiences of failure in their roles as leaders and the learning opportunities that emerged from those failures. Supervisor 2 acknowledged that principals need to admit to not knowing the answer in the process and "being courageous enough to say 'I don't know, but I am going to find out.'" Each supervisor had experience in HPLP settings and understood the challenges of not always knowing what to do. Supervisor 3 stressed principals must "give people permission to fail because it's in failing that we get better; they have to realize that they don't have the answer because if they did, they'd fix it next and so on." While the supervisor participants had different educational leadership experiences, they all shared the commonality of experiencing failure as part of the leadership role of a principal. They agreed that principals in failing schools need to learn from their mistakes and grow from the experience of when they do not know everything. Supervisor 4 took failure as a part of the job even further by developing a school slogan, "failure is temporary, but we expect you to fail along your journey, and that is okay."

Some of the participants shared that those principals with a growth mindset can embrace the idea of failure and use it to promote staff engagement and a collective approach to solve the issues plaguing HPLP schools. For example, Supervisor 4 stated that you need to "create a collective impact which allows people to engage in a process where they own the success and failure of decisions and create the notion of interpersonal

accountability." During Supervisor 4's experience in his current role, he worked with a team in a failing school with challenges where mistakes were made. They collaboratively reflected on this to then realign their roles and responsibilities to support the shared vision and goals. As the supervisors indicated, principals should acknowledge these failures and then continue to solve problems together with their teachers.

As reflective leaders with a growth mindset in failing schools, principals establish how to approach challenging times. Teacher 5 shared how providing a "solution-focused approach was preferred because promoting engagement amongst the staff required the leader to develop solutions and not continue to focus on the problems that everyone already knows." Teacher 5 saw the value of working with their principal and sharing solutions and their willingness to learn from them and others because they demonstrated a growth mindset. This study's teacher and supervisor participants agreed that principals must take time to learn. Supervisor 1 stated you "need to know more about the school, community, partners, parents, children, teams, and the context you are immersed in." Teacher 5 reiterated that "it [is] important for principals to understand the contributions of all the stakeholders as they may offer different and new ways to lead, and the principal may learn and adapt their dispositions," all to benefit the school improvement process.

Supervisor 4 shared another example, and the desired dispositions included principals who were humble and recognized that their failures were opportunities to learn. Supervisor 3 had worked as a turnaround principal and superintendent for schools that required turnaround, and she spoke from her experiences in both roles. She stated:

> Principals can get support from others because they're not going to have all the
> tools, and that's where the disposition is needed. And that's where the humbleness

comes. "I don't know how to do this," which creates a new level of accountability, and "I need someone to help me." It's a forever learner, and principals understand that they're forever learning.

Reflective leadership and possessing a growth mindset were the desired dispositions for principals to engage employees, according to the experiences of the participants. These dispositions and experiences demonstrated that principals need to be continuous learners. Teacher 3 was encouraged when she observed her principal exhibit his growth mindset.

As this study sought to learn more about the dispositions of building principals to lead school improvement, the participants focused on the tendencies that impact school leadership and their decision-making by engaging employees. Supervisor 4 shared that "leaders that are not often successful are those that are just in survival. They don't know how to get unstuck, so they double down on things they can fix and ignore the complex issues that are more systemic." This example from Supervisor 4 illustrated a fixed mindset and how this type of approach prevents principals from being willing to work with staff to learn and grow through the school improvement process. Teacher 6 shared an example of how a lack of learning from mistakes can prevent staff engagement:

> The principal knows that data is a constant thing and uses this to ensure that students are engaged. But [they] turned on teachers and started almost a "gotcha," and if a teacher made a mistake, that was the biggest downfall because it made the entire staff very paranoid. It was no longer about the students, but everybody was surviving the day.

Teacher 6 provided the perspective of a principal who did not have a growth mindset toward school improvement or their teachers' opportunities to learn and grow, resulting in less engaged staff. However, other participants shared the positive outcomes when principals were observed using their growth mindset. Supervisor 3 asserted that a "growth mindset is a component of the elements of understanding as a leader in turnaround settings." In agreement with Supervisor 3, Teacher 3 promoted the success of her principal when mindset and flexibility were part of his leadership practices. Teacher 3 shared, "he's doing a great job. He is constantly reevaluating, constantly trying to learn what we have to do to improve the school, so he can adjust and be flexible when the plan changes."

A different component shared by the supervisors regarding reflective leadership and growth mindset was understanding the elements that are not in your control as the principal. Supervisors 1 and 2 spoke about bargaining units. Supervisor 1 and Supervisor 2 discussed the collaboration and involvement of bargaining units and factors in and out of their control. Supervisor 2 shared that "we deal with unions; this could mean not everyone is there because they care deeply about the mission or want to work in this setting; however, they were transferred into the building." In contrast to that sentiment, Supervisor 1 oversaw a school that worked collaboratively with the union to "create a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for teachers in this school with very specific guidelines and expectations that would be signed to remain in this school." These types of agreements and understandings from unions influenced the decisions of a building principal. Supervisor 1 was realistic with what she could control around teacher placement. In the school environment, placement was out of the control of the principal,

but how teachers were supported, and the principals' awareness demonstrated using a growth mindset.

In addition to a growth mindset, the participants shared their belief in the importance for leaders to have the ability to learn dispositions. The researcher asked a final question to all participants. "Could dispositions be learned?" This was important to the researcher because, as reflective leadership emerged as a theme, it was important to determine if the participants believed their principals could learn new dispositions to help in the improvement process. There were various responses when the participants were asked if they believed dispositions could be learned. Teacher 5 stated that:

Just because you're the principal, [it] doesn't mean you know everything. It doesn't mean you have to know everything. A lot of times, staff, teachers can teach you a lot. I've learned things from custodians. I've learned things from students. You have to keep an open mind and keep the line of communication open to taking different insights and different perspectives and different dispositions from several people because the more we listen and the more we share and combine our thoughts, the more effective we are as a school because we're all starting to get on one accord.

This example further illustrated the need to be continuous learners and reflective leaders with a growth mindset. Supervisor 3 responded similarly with "we are who we are, based on the experiences we have had. The more you expose people to different experiences, the better they will get." Teacher 6 added that when learning a new disposition, "it's one of those things where it's accepting the acknowledgment that you are growing as a

person." The participants discussed how the mindset of building principals is essential to engaging staff in the turnaround process.

Supervisor 2 shared his belief that dispositions are something "you can't really PD (professional development) but instead show how people are important and leaders have a personality and passion, even if this is uncommon, it is needed." Similarly, with dispositions that cannot be taught or learned, Supervisor 3 stated the need for a "strong belief system that understands how to get the potential out of staff and when to push them and when to hold them and be very clear in their expectations." Even as the principal, remaining a continuous learner were the initial responses to the critical dispositions that principals should possess. Supervisor 3 described being reflective as a leader as "deeply rooted in the principal's fundamental nature."

When the supervisors were asked why some principals are successful and others are not, Supervisor 2 was adamant:

Leadership matters. Not everybody's built for that context. Hard conversations with the larger community, emails [that] do not stop when you go home at night or on the weekends. You are called to do this work, and it is not for the faint of heart, and you cannot be worried about job security because you probably won't be there long enough to see the fruits of your labor. Or you will move into some other position in the system.

Supervisor 4 shared that "sometimes principals are put in positions that they are not yet ready for, and they're not supported, even if they are ready when they enter in[to] those roles." Supervisors 2 and 4 recognized the challenges principals face in HPLP environments and throughout their efforts to transform their schools. Supervisor 4

approached many questions during the interview with a lens on the system and not the people. He explained:

> Systems that acknowledge where the gaps are within the organization have some tailored individualized support for administrators to help them along their journey. And there has to be a very open and honest space. You shouldn't be judged by your single worst day. So, we have to create a system where people who want to improve can improve, and while there is a small number of people that do not want to improve, I think the vast majority of people want to feel success in the workplace. We have an opportunity to help them feel that way.

As a reflective leader, Supervisor 4's sentiments focused on the school systems versus the principals and personnel. He believed that the issues were not the cause of the leader:

> Low performing as being underserved suggests that it is a systemic issue rather than the performance of students. I want to make sure that it's clear that I am talking about the systems that lead to the results, not necessarily the people who aren't causing those results to happen.

A final sentiment from Supervisor 3, when asked why some principals are successful and others are not, she responded:

> You must check your bias at the door and truly believe that every child has potential, stop judging parents, and understand that the school will have to take care of more needs than other schools. Earning the trust of teachers was required, but this was done through action and understanding that you build the capacity in your team, and you get them the resources and support a clear vision and goals.

These words encompass the overall theme of reflective leadership styles. The participants echoed in agreement that a growth mindset was essential and adapting and shifting to meet the various needs of the school was a requirement. The ability to adapt and shift requires principals to model and promote continuous learning. Professional development provides opportunities for the school community to grow.

Professional development was seen as a critical component to the disposition of reflective leadership and modeling a growth mindset. When principals have a growth mindset and demonstrate the ability to learn new dispositions, they are leading by example being a "forever learner," as Supervisor 3 called it, and continuing to model learning and trying new things. One of the findings that emerged from Teacher 3's experiences included the desire for relevant and focused professional development. HPLP school principals are often told to shift their school practices and develop a new plan to improve their schools. Professional development is a tool intended to provide relevant strategies and information to build capacity for those who attend these learning opportunities. One role of principals is to provide leadership or seek professional development for the staff. Often, the best professional learning is when it connects to the shared vision of the building and the goals in the school improvement plan. Both the teachers and supervisors believed in the power of professional development. Teacher 3 stated:

> There's nothing worse than going to a professional development and having people preach to you about what they should be doing for classroom management when you would prefer if they came to your class and showed you in your class how this is going to work. It's always very frustrating when it's a slap-in-the-face

type of professional development instead of providing something that could

actually increase the engagement of the school community.

Professional development emerged when the teachers communicated information about

their principals' vision and support during the improvement process.

Another aspect of professional development and alignment to the school vision

and goals was understanding the school environment's data. Data include instructional

outcomes, student and family demographics, program needs and services, and data

relevant to the instructional team. Supervisor 2 expressed, "you have to understand the

instructional outcomes. I've always said that great teachers make great leaders, that

person understood things in that classroom, the differentiation and having different entry

points for student learning and positive outcomes, it doesn't change." When the principal

created opportunities that aligned and provided a focused approach for teachers, teachers

were more invested in their growth and engaged in their learning. Teacher 3 agreed that

desired dispositions included a principal who supported the work of teachers and

purposeful alignment in school-wide initiatives. Both Supervisors 1 and 3 shared their

recognition that principals must be instructional leaders and that one must understand

how children learn. Supervisor 3 stated that "you will always lose the battle if you don't

have people who know how kids learn, and you must involve people in professional

development to build those components."

These opportunities to build capacity and empower the staff are part of engaging

the employees in the improvement process. Supervisor 4 stated that there is a

"commitment to empowering others to have the same level of ownership that they have,

this interpersonal, shared accountability construct." Building capacity in teachers and principals was equally crucial from the perspective of the supervisors.

Supervisor 4 asserted that "school improvement is mentioned so generally that a principal has a difficult time knowing where to start and how to gauge whether their actions are leading toward some type of growth." The uncertainty shared by Supervisor 4 was described as "the absence of mentorship or accountability partners has plagued school leaders, particularly in high-needs areas for a long time. So, one of the things we do is provide a professional coach." Supervisors 3 and 4 explained their experiences of supporting principals as they built their skill sets and staff. If they were lacking, they needed to provide professional learning opportunities and supports.

Overall, professional development supports each theme because as Supervisor 3 shared, "principals will not know everything." The participants described circumstances when principals lacked one of the desired dispositions, the staff was disengaged, and there was no school improvement.

This next section highlights different leadership dispositions that influence the school environment and require flexible leadership and adaptability from leaders to lead based on the needs at the moment. While it is essential to be reflective as a leader and understand the people in the school community, not all principals have these dispositions, resulting in disengaged employees as described by the participants.

Flexible Leadership

According to Teacher 3, flexible leadership means that principals need "to be flexible and willing to change as they lead their school in the improvement process." The participants in this study suggested that principals' leadership styles often need to be

adjusted to address short- and long-term issues associated with HPLP schools. The supervisors and teachers described different experiences of seeing shifts in the leadership style of principals to accommodate the needs of the staff and situations. Teacher 1 stated, "I've seen so many different leadership styles in various building leaders over the years and their variety of skills." Leaders who were unable to adjust their approach resulted in employee disengagement. Teacher 6 shared, "lack of communication is the ultimate doom when it comes to a school thriving. You need to be willing to adapt to help support staff and make sure the school is moving in the right direction."

Supervisor 3 described a situation connected to the adaptability and flexibility of a leader when she shared:

"I don't know how to do this; this is a new level of accountability. I need help." Okay, let's go find somebody that can help you. So, principals understand they are going to be forever learning and this will keep the agenda moving forward.

Teacher 3 had similar experiences to an ever-changing environment and expressed that:

We have to be flexible and forgiving to ourselves with this work constantly changing. It's always nice to see when a principal does the same thing. Asking questions, adjusting to make things work together; bottom-line, the principal will keep us in the right direction.

Teacher 3, who had witnessed multiple changes in building principals, provided this example while reflecting on what motivated her to keep going despite the constant changes. Seeing her principals go through similar struggles and continue to shift, change, and adjust their leadership approach helped her feel engaged in the improvement process.

Supervisor 2 shared his perspectives on the principal's roles and responsibilities to turn around schools in conditions that were not necessarily within their control and required the principal to be a flexible leader. He shared:

> The conditions may not be fair to you as the leader, you may be great and talented, but there is not enough time and a variety of variables that we are responsible for that we cannot change or have influence over. Parent engagement is often criticized in urban environments. It's a variable that we cannot control, we can influence and try to improve it, but we cannot control it. So, you learn and figure out ways to mitigate areas out of your control.

Teacher 3 and Supervisor 2 illustrated flexibility as a leadership disposition for principals in situations that required being flexible to influence the outcomes that were within their control as principals.

As a response to the supporting principals in the turnaround process, Supervisor 3, previously a turnaround principal and superintendent in an HPLP district, stated that it is good to

> Think outside of the box. Every school is different; every year is different; and you can't fit in[to] one mold. Allowing molds to be created and having the best fit to gain understanding helps when you have been in it.

Similarly noting the constant changes in education from day to day, Teacher 5 shared:

> Everything can change in the blink of an eye; you walk out one day and come back the next morning, and it's all totally a different ballgame. So, pulling your teachers aside and asking what you can do to assist instead of chastising them. You do have to hold everyone at an equal amount of accountability, but holding

99

students accountable for their actions as well and understanding where both teachers and students are coming from will help through situations.

A principal's need for control was another example of principals who lack reflective leadership and do not possess a growth mindset and who are not flexible. As expressed by the teachers and supervisors, the need for control did not address the root issue but, instead, it focused on human elements. The lack of control created moments of disengagement, depending on the principal's actions and follow-through.

Effective principals from the participants' experiences were flexible and could change to support the existing needs required in that moment and situation. In support of this perspective, Supervisor 3 said:

Different types of leadership are needed at the different moments when you're moving a school. First, distributive leadership, and then you're going to, in the midst of what gets really hard, become a servant leader. If you need to go co-teach or put kids in the cafeteria while teachers work with those that need more support, you can take the masses with you. Then there comes a time when you're going to just say "no, and this is the way we're doing things."

Supervisor 4 had similar thoughts regarding the different types of leadership building principals would use to engage their staff effectively. He shared the method in which he had influenced principals he supervised:

I use distributive leadership and capacity building and allow learning from my previous roles to assist in the role of superintendent. One experience influence[s] another, thinking more globally without losing the nuanced details of being a person directly engaged in the community and amongst staff and students.

All the participants identified challenges associated with HPLP schools and working to turn around their buildings. Supervisor 3 captured this when she shared, "they're [principals] going to have to roll up their sleeves and figure out how we're going to do this. They're going to be successful." There is no one way to lead this level of transformative work successfully and consistently. Teacher 1 stated that "leaders come in and build relationships, and they put their staff together and hold meetings and have a vision, and they're very ethical in their leadership; that's very helpful for the high poverty schools." The mention of different leadership styles: distributive, servant, ethical, and sometimes authoritative when the answer is no, all required the principals to understand the needs of their schools in that specific moment and context. The ability to remain flexible and adapt was critical so that the right leadership style was used to influence and engage the staff.

Another leadership style that both the supervisors and teachers commonly attributed to included adaptability. Teacher 1 shared an example of a principal "who was flexible and would adapt his leadership behavior to the needs of the current situation." Teacher 3 identified experiences of a leader that would "roll in as a principal and have this major ego. They are unapproachable, and he was unwilling to do things differently. Their way was the best way." Both lived experiences offered a different perspective and varying approaches from the principals toward their roles in influencing change—for better or worse.

Another example where the principal role was not positively illustrated was described by Teacher 5, who shared his lived experiences with a leader who focused on data and used this to define what a student could do without accounting for the "factors

101

that play a role in those things." Consequently, this principal placed pressure on the teachers that created disengagement because he addressed the low scores without considering other factors, and he failed to adjust his understanding to be supportive of teachers. This was an example of an inflexible leader.

Leaders who demonstrated flexibility when needed in the transformational change process were deemed important by both the teachers and supervisors. The turnaround school environment created constant changes that required these principals to shift accordingly. As the participants indicated, if principals did not reflect and adjust, they lost their staff engagement. As reflective leaders who possessed a growth mindset, the participants indicated that principals with these tendencies often promoted staff engagement and feelings of support to improve the schools.

Summary of Results

This descriptive phenomenological study and analysis aimed to explore the perspectives of teacher and supervisor study participant of principals regarding leadership dispositions and their ability to engage staff in the school improvement process. The study focused on turnaround settings and HPLP schools that were determined by NYSED school metrics for performance.

This chapter presented the results and data analysis from 10 study participants; six in a focus group, and four individual semi-structured interviews. Each of the themes emerged from the participants' shared experiences working in HPLP or turnaround schools. The participants' experiences with different principals varied from K–12 grade levels and different content focus areas, which influenced their perspectives of their building principals for this study. The data analysis resulted in three themes: (a)

cultivating a culture of trust, (b) developing a shared vision, and (c) reflective leadership. Each theme represents the participants' perspectives of the critical disposition principals need to demonstrate and to encourage employee engagement in the school improvement process.

The overall findings illustrate principals who can (a) cultivate a culture of trust by forming relationships with their school community; (b) develop a shared vision that is communicated clearly and consistently by all stakeholders because they were included in the development of the vision; and (c) be a reflective leader who has a growth mindset and the willingness to continue to learn new dispositions, participate in professional development, and be a flexible leader who is adaptable to the constant changes in persistently failing schools. These principals would seek and provide professional development for everyone to support the school improvement process.

While each theme can represent different dispositions individually, altogether and combined, the shared perspectives suggest that principals who were successful in employee engagement during the school improvement process possessed most of the identified dispositions in these findings. However, also shared in this chapter are many lived experiences of failed attempts to improve school conditions and improvement status. Supervisor 2 said it best, "you are called to do this work, and it is not for the faint of heart." The findings in Chapter 4 provided insight from 10 participants and their perspectives regarding what they believed were critical dispositions for building principals to engage staff in the school improvement process.

Chapter 5 summarizes the implications and findings of this study. It will highlight the limitations and provide recommendations for future research, hiring practices, and support for turnaround schools.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

Schools deemed turnaround are the lowest-performing 5% of schools in the nation, and they require building-level leaders, school principals, to direct their schools out of this low-performing status (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). The USDOE (2009) suggested that persistently low-performing schools are linked to low-performing leadership due to the lack of positive outcomes. The purpose of this study was to better understand principal leadership dispositions that helped to engage staff in a turnaround setting through the lens of teachers and supervisors of principals in this type of school setting.

This study aimed to contribute to the current review of the literature and offer insight on specific dispositions to engage employees in the school improvement process. With this new knowledge, K–12 public school systems, specifically those chronically underperforming, will be better equipped to support these schools with an appropriately matched leadership team that will dedicate themselves to the challenges of school improvement.

The following research questions guided this study:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of school principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of building principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

These research questions connected the research problem and focused on learning more about leadership dispositions of principals from the perspectives of both the teachers who were supervised by and the supervisors who supervised the principals. The lived experiences of both groups of participants in this study yielded various responses resulting in the formation of three themes and seven subthemes.

The three themes included (a) cultivating a culture of trust, (b) developing a shared vision, and (c) reflective leadership. The interactions of the participants with the building principals resulted in either engagement or disengagement in the school improvement process and working toward becoming a school turned around.

Chapter 5 discusses and interprets the results of this study. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the implications of the findings from the focus group and semi-structured interviews, respectively, of the teachers and supervisors of principals. The second section states the limitations of the study. The third section describes the recommendations for future research, policy, and procedure that may influence the educational setting. The third section also provides suggestions for current and future principals as executive leaders of their buildings. The final section provides a summary of the chapter.

Implications of Findings

The purpose of this descriptive phenomenological analysis was to identify principals' dispositions through the lived experiences of teachers and supervisors of

school principals who had been engaged in the school improvement process. The results indicate that principals must form trusting relationships with teachers and supervisors to engage them in the improvement process. Other results indicate that principals must work collaboratively with all stakeholders to develop a shared vision. The vision must be communicated and consistently implemented for increased engagement and buy-in from the staff to support the school improvement efforts. Lastly, principals must practice reflective leadership and possess a growth mindset. The challenges that principals face in turnaround schools require a leader who will face the obstacles head-on and quickly devise a plan to engage the school community to solve the issues. The findings lead to several implications regarding the body of knowledge, professional practice of educational executive leaders, and K–12 policies and procedures.

Expanding the Body of Knowledge

The theory that frames this research is Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory that assumes effective employee engagement requires meaningfulness, safety, and psychological availability. Kahn (1990) found that individuals who performed their duties based on their perceptions of how meaningful their role was toward their organizations' outcomes and who felt safe and were free from distraction, allowed employees to be available to focus on their work (1990). Employee engagement theory provided a framework for this study to better understand the principal dispositions that were perceived by the teachers and supervisors of school principals as helpful to engage or disengage others in the work of transforming their school environment. The findings from this study support an alignment to the employee engagement theory by suggesting that when principals are invested in providing purposeful learning opportunities for their

employees, employees felt valued, and they invested more in their personal and professional growth and development, thus improving the overall school community.

The results from this study imply an alignment in cultivating a trusting culture for employees to engage in purposeful work with Kahn's (1990) research. The teacher participants wanted their work to matter and to be meaningful. They wanted to be engaged in the improvement process. The supervisor participants of building principals and the teacher participants all stated the need for a clear vision and to include stakeholders in the development and implementation of the vision. The three different themes supported the employee engagement theory (Kahn, 1990) by demonstrating the participants' desire for the principals to lead with dispositions that valued employees and considered their well-being in the school improvement process. When principals possess the dispositions to cultivate trust, develop a vision, and be reflective in collaboration, the school community is more engaging for employees in the school improvement process. Through positive interactions between principals and staff, principals can create an atmosphere of trust and buy-in to engage others in the transformational work required in a turnaround setting. Employees are more likely to support a leader's direction and be more willing to engage in the work when there is an environment of trust and the employees have been included in the development and implementation of a plan.

Theme 1 is cultivating a culture of trust, with a subtheme of forming relationships, which indicates the importance of principals' understanding the role of others in the transformation process with, and what, employees need to feel supported to be engaged in their work. Shuck and Herd (2012) explored employee engagement and leadership behaviors. They found that at the foundational level of leadership, employees

needed to trust their employer (the leader) to engage in the work. The findings in this study support the results of Shuck and Herd (2012) by suggesting that if principals want to move their schools forward in a turnaround setting, they must invest their time in forming relationships with their staff and creating trusting relationships. Principals who do not take the time to develop trusting relationships may see a lack of engagement on the part of their teachers and a lack of support from their supervisors.

The teacher participants revealed that the attentiveness of principals toward them fostered a learning environment that was supportive of engaging in the challenging tasks and high demands of a turnaround setting. These results imply that if principals ignore the importance of cultivating trusting relationships with staff, they will likely struggle with engaging staff and have less success in the school improvement process. The results of this study support the findings in previous studies that emphasized the need for social relationships to combat disengagement in stressful work environments (Breaugh, 2021; Kahn, 1990; Van den Broeck et al. 2008; Villegas, 2007). Woulfin and Weiner (2019) emphasized that relationships were critically important to build capacity amongst staff for whole school improvement and enabling the change process to occur.

Theme 2 is developing a shared vision that includes clear communication and consistent leadership. A shared vision implies that principals have a responsibility to lead the school vision and provide opportunities aligned to the vision to build the capacity and skills of their staff. When principals engage in this leadership disposition, staff will likely be more engaged in their individual learning process. Hitt and Tucker (2016) asserted that when principals collaboratively create a vision and align goals to support the work environment, teachers are more engaged and, as a result, student achievement is

positively influenced. Therefore, the results from this study imply that principals who dedicate their time to inspiring others through established relationships and share in the vision development can more effectively engage their staff in the improvement process.

There were many shared experiences where both the supervisors and teachers described not knowing what needed to be done to improve the schools based on inconsistent communication and messaging from the principals. The inconsistent messaging from the principals often created a school environment of confusion for the participants in this study. The messaging ambiguity led to disengagement of the participants in the school improvement process. As a result, the focus was not on the vision or goals but, instead, focused on the dysfunction and the negative work and learning environment. As a result of inconsistent communication, these findings support the Hoffman et al. (2013) and Leary et al. (2013) studies that illustrated that negative tendencies from principals can impact teachers' feelings when they are not included in the decisions because of confusion which, in turn, can negatively affect the overall school environment.

Lastly, the final theme of this study, Theme 3, is reflective leadership, which includes having a growth mindset, adaptable leadership styles, and a willingness to learn. Principals with flexibility and adaptability as inherent dispositions, can lead their organizations through a school improvement process. The participants in this study described the practice of reflective leadership and possessing a growth mindset as a desired disposition in a HPLP school environment. In the subtheme of Theme 3, flexible leadership, the participants shared their desire for principals with a growth mindset and leaders who were reflective. Reflective leaders was not presented as a disposition in the

literature review and, therefore, it added to the body of knowledge for leadership dispositions in HPLP and turnaround school settings. The participants suggested that their higher levels of engagement resulted from seeing their principals engaged in flexible leadership practices and using a growth mindset.

The results of this study reflect the perceptions and experiences of both the superintendents and supervisors of school principals and teachers who worked with principals, whereas previous studies examining the dispositions of principals in the turnaround school process only included the perspectives from principals or students enrolled in graduate programs (Meyers & Hitt, 2017; Woulfin & Weiner, 2019). There are literature reviews that illustrate the role of principals (Reyes & Garcia, 2014; Woulfrin & Weiner, 2016). Cucchiara et al. (2015) studied the working conditions of teachers in turnaround school settings. There are also quantitative studies that surveyed school principals and prospective students in preparatory programs regarding desired dispositions for principals (Public Impact, 2016; Schulte & Kowal, 2005). The results of this study contribute to the knowledge of principal leadership by bringing the voices of two distinct groups together. Collectively, the two different group perspectives, teachers and supervisors of principals, adds to the research that did not exist and that previous studies did not include.

The contributions in this study to the body of knowledge are helpful for aspiring principals who are building their operational tendencies and professional leadership dispositions. During the interview process, the participants described their self-knowledge and understanding of the process and leadership behaviors they had experienced working in turnaround settings. Further implications from the results

promote shifts in practices and policies for the continuing development of principal leadership in HPLP and turnaround school environments.

Policy and Procedures

The results from this study imply the hiring procedures for principals in HPLP school environments may impact the effectiveness of school principals successfully engaging staff in the school improvement process. The participants suggested that when districts changed principals of failing schools, it was often the result of persistently low-performing schools that lacked improvement in their test scores and graduation rates (USDOE, n.d.). The results imply that the procedures of principal placement matters to the success and support of the turnaround school process. The decision-makers in the principal placement process include district-level personnel. Personnel includes the human resource departments, superintendents, and other decision-makers to determine principal movement and needed changes due to the lack of school improvement.

The participants described the dysfunction that ensued when principals were continually changing within a school. As a result of frequent principal changes, the principals did not have time to form relationships, create a culture of trust, share a united vision, or model reflective leadership. Thus, illustrating that district procedures to move principals when they are doing a good job or making progress has a significant impact on the success of the school. Additionally, as there is a 2-year time frame for a school to improve to be considered a turnaround school, having several principals in 1 year could impact the success of engaging staff in the process because of the lack of time to build purposeful relationships and create a shared vision that would assist in the required. transformational process.

The lack of understanding by superintendents and human resources departments of what critical dispositions help improve schools can create dysfunction in school buildings, especially when principal have not been in place long enough to implement any strategies for turning the school around. Principals may have the essential dispositions but not the time to generate sufficient engagement in the school improvement process, which may then lead to an insufficiently engaged school community. In addition, a shared vision within a school will be lacking, and the demands and flexibility necessary to promote positive change will not occur. Effective, trusting relationships cannot be developed if deficits are present. A school is likely to make minimal gains or is not successfully in achieving a turnaround status.

The practice of hiring qualified applicants with the identified and desired principal dispositions may streamline the candidate pool for applicants who are better positioned for success in HPLP and turnaround schools. An example that illustrates the decision-making from superintendents and human resources departments include a thoughtful interview process that identifies whether the applicant has some of the dispositions identified in this study or the willingness to learn them if they are lacking or not identified as strengths in their leadership capabilities. The importance of hiring principals with dispositions outlined in this study promote further opportunities for success, because the principals can form relationships; develop and implement a shared vision; and demonstrate their ability to be flexible, grow, and learn with the staff—all of which is needed in a turnaround setting. These findings imply a need in human resources departments and higher education programs that develop school leaders to address the unique demands required of principals in failing schools.

In NYS, turnaround schools require a dramatic change in a 2-year period (NYSED, 2019b). As previously mentioned, this time frame demonstrates the need for principals and school communities to show drastic improvement in short periods of time. The results from this study imply that the 2-year time frame may not be the enough time for a principal to effectively implement strategies that result in such dramatic change. At the time of this writing, NYS has over 100 failing schools in need of change, and the 2-year time frame may also imply that the dramatic changes required are not feasible for the majority of schools to successfully turnaround.

Professional Practice

Theme 1 results indicate a strong desire from the participants to have principals who could cultivate a culture of trust and form relationships. Theme 2 implies the need for principals to consistently communicate a clear vision that is supported by the superintendent who would know that this is only possible with time to develop and implement. Once relationships are established, principals can engage the school community to develop a shared vision and learn more about the needs of the school. Principals who do not understand this school context and do not have a shared vision aligned to realistic and actionable goals, which can be supported in this specific demographic and environment, may not succeed given a lack of understanding. In that case, there will not be successful engagement within the school community to support the improvement process. Establishing a clearly articulated and understood vision by employees fosters a safe working environment and, therefore, more engaged employees (Hoffman et al., 2013; Kahn, 1990). Principals who communicate clearly and consistently

can create an atmosphere of engagement more than those who lack clarity and consistency.

Teacher 2 stated that the schools in these HPLP districts often face student management and behavior challenges. These issues tend to occupy extensive time and energy of the principals, pulling them away from other tasks and duties that require their attention. Principals' ability to prioritize what must be addressed relies on understanding the vision and goals, trusting the staff, and being a self-reflective leader who effectively engages the team in the improvement process by accessing the required resources and supports within the teaching community. These findings imply that principals who effectively communicate a vision that is embraced by the school communities, in spite of the day-to-day environmental distractions, can lead successfully in supporting the turnaround process.

Teacher 4 shared that "an effective principal is moving everyone toward the vision that is established by all." With a clear vision and strategic plan, the participants in this study agreed that principals can facilitate opportunities to build the capacity in schools and help improve an HPLP school setting. The participants in this study all shared the perspective that principals with a clear vision and strategic plan can have better employee engagement. Even though the 10 participants had varied educational backgrounds and experiences, they all reported that principals who create a shared vision and plan will lead to greater engagement from staff in HPLP school environments.

Theme 3, reflective leadership, illustrated the desire of the participants to have principals with a growth mindset, who are continual learners that face challenges as opportunities to learn and grow (Dweck, 2006). Principals can adjust to the demands

from the district, state, community members, teachers, and students. Principals who possess a fixed mindset do not approach these challenges with a positive outlook or solution. Fixed-mindset principals struggle to move forward because they cannot rise to the challenges in contrast to those principals who maintain a growth mindset. As a continual learner, principals appreciate the value of continuing professional development and engaging their staff in the professional growth.

Principals who do not possess the desired dispositions that work in HPLP school districts and are placed in turnaround school settings may face significant difficulties in successfully changing a school environment. Based on the results of this study, principals who make an effort to build relationships with their staff include staff in the development of a shared vision and in the decision-making process, and reflective leaders will have greater success at engaging employees. The challenges of turning around a school require the support of everyone involved. Previous research found that school leaders were able to transform failing schools by being responsive to the schools' needs, promoting trust, and providing opportunities to improve and change with increased engagement from all stakeholders (Cucchiara et al., 2015; Reyes & Garcia, 2013; Welch & Hodge, 2017). School transformation requires a team effort, and the team only works when the leader can create the atmosphere for a team to form and flourish. The results of this study imply that principals' dispositions of cultivating a culture of trust, developing a shared vision, and having reflective leadership provide a blueprint to support school districts in appropriately matching principals' dispositions to engage the school communities. An effective building principal teamed with a capable teaching staff can create

transformational changes when allowed sufficient time to implement the necessary changes.

Limitations

There were limitations in the study. The study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. A virtual platform, Zoom, was used which may have restricted additional participants from joining the focus group because they would have otherwise been inclined to attend if an in-person option was available. Additionally, in the focus group on Zoom, the participants chose not to turn on their cameras to protect their confidentiality. The inability to see the participants' faces prevented the researcher from noting any facial expressions or visible attributes that would match the participants' responses as they were shared. An anonymous focus group resulted in the loss of visual input because the researcher did not those opportunities to observe the participants' expressions. The virtual interview platform may also have limited the free-flowing atmosphere and interactions that are generally involved in an in-person focus group. In-person groups may have resulted in more spontaneous exchanges among the participants. In-person interviews with the supervisor participants may also have provided the opportunity for the researcher to connect more deeply with the participants, which may have enhanced the depth of understanding about the experiences and shared data. However, the convenience of the remote option accommodated the participants from three different NYS school districts that all serviced HPLP and turnaround schools.

This study gained perspectives from six teachers and four supervisors. The limited participant pool did not include general education teachers from elementary grade levels or general education classroom teachers at the high school level. Those roles may have

offered additional perspectives that would have contributed to other desired dispositions of principals in the turnaround process.

Recommendations

The findings from this study led to several recommendations for future research, policy and procedures, and professional practice for executive leaders—particularly principals in K–12 urban school settings. Human resources departments, superintendents, preparatory programs for aspiring principals, and current principals can benefit from improving their school district policies to support their persistently failing schools in need of a turnaround.

Future Research

There is excellent potential to expand this research to gather lived experiences across multiple districts within NYS and nationally. This study could be replicated to include more participants. Certified staff from three different school districts and representatives from elementary, middle, and high schools participated in this study. However, future studies that expand the pool of participants may offer a wider variety of perspectives and provide other dispositions for turnaround school principals.

There is potential for a future quantitative study to confirm if the dispositions found in this study are related to principals' success in turnaround schools. This survey would be intended for a larger population of participants that would include superintendents and human resources departments across the United States. This survey would help to determine a ranking of preferred dispositions like the ones identified in this study for a turnaround setting. The result of this future study could provide educational administrative preparatory programs with a clearer understanding of what would help

principals lead their schools with a more extensive demographic supporting the findings. The results might also contribute toward an updated or revised version of leadership standards that would offer a more specific lens to view principals in turnaround and HPLP schools.

As indicated in the review of literature, there remains a lack of understanding that once a school has achieved turnaround status, the long-term sustainability of that school is unknown (VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). The participants in this study did not discuss or reveal a time frame to indicate the sustainability of the improvements made in their schools. Therefore, future research could focus on the sustainability efforts of successful turnaround schools and highlight any new or different dispositions that were observed from teachers and supervisors of school principals as they moved past the 2-year time frame and worked on long-term improvement plans. At the time of this study, no research investigated how turnaround schools in the United States have sustained improvement (Hitt & Meyers, 2018).

Policy and Procedures

As school districts seek to better understand efficient practices in their procedures and develop strategies to turn around failing schools, hiring the right building principals is vital for success. There are recommendation for the director of human resources department to improve hiring practices to be more specific and focused when seeking to candidates who will lead a failing school that is targeted for turnaround. The human resources department personnel, who are typically responsible for screening resumes as applicants apply for vacancies, should work to better align principal applicants and their qualifications for the specific needs of schools in turnaround status. Human resources

directors can send the applicant names to shared decision-making teams for their interview process in schools that are seeking a new principal to lead the turnaround process.

In many larger school districts across the United States, the appointment of a principal is an inconsistent process. When there is time to conduct a thorough interview process, the school with a vacant position has an opportunity to interview. However, in last-minute appointments, the superintendent and district-level cabinet positions decide the next principal. Therefore, superintendents need to better understand the school culture with a vacancy or be aware of the performance of a sitting principal before they make a placement change. The recommendations for human resources departments should be to employ principals equipped to handle the challenges in chronically failing HPLP schools using the identified dispositions to help narrow the search and better align skill sets and people to the schools in need. Individuals in the hiring roles must first understand what is required and needed for effective leadership in a turnaround school setting. Hiring a turnaround-capable principal requires the interview process to discover applicants with the necessary dispositions to combat the challenges of a turnaround school. The interview questions should offer direct and targeted questions that address developing a vision, implementing changes, and prioritizing decision-making, especially during challenging times and how the candidate plans to connect with the staff and get to know them. Lastly, the interview and selection process of principals for school improvement settings should demonstrate whether the applicant is willing to grow and learn. Also, candidates should have successful experience in adapting their leadership style to the needs of the staff/students/school by establishing relationships.

Superintendents need to be mindful of their existing principals' skill sets and ability to transform their schools before transitioning principals from one building to another and potentially creating further dysfunction instead of supporting the turnaround school improvement process. Teacher 1 expressed her frustration when she had a principal who was creating transformational change and making connections with staff but was then removed from the school to go work elsewhere. Furthermore, the shared experiences of continuous principal turnover suggests the need to first consider the negative implications of removing principals who effectively have engaged their staff in the school improvement process. Schools will have more opportunities for a successful turnaround if superintendents know the dispositions that are needed and the potential impact when principals are constantly changed. Superintendents would greatly benefit from this knowledge. A powerful way for superintendents to show their understanding of principals is to model and demonstrate cultivating a district with trusting relationships, a shared vision with principals, and being a flexible leader. In doing so, the school community becomes a reflection of what is valued and practiced from the superintendent seat to the students and their families.

The school district should develop professional learning opportunities that are closely related to the desired dispositions identified in this study. These professional development opportunities could give sitting principals and aspiring principals opportunities to increase their knowledge in areas of growth and fine tune areas of strength. Support for current and aspiring principals might include mentorships with successful principals and administrators with experience in turnaround schools and

relevant leadership professional development directly connected to forming relationships, developing a shared vision, and being a flexible leader.

Additional professional development could be provided to include sitting principals with learning different leadership styles and best practices for responding to challenging circumstances outside of their comfort zone, developing an attitude to promote a growth mindset, and to be willing to overcome the challenges while learning new skills. As current and aspiring leaders apply for positions in HPLP districts, they will have further developed their skill set to hopefully find more success in the turnaround process.

Lastly, higher education and leadership preparatory programs are best supported when they have partnerships with school districts. This partnership should be developed and aligned with a learning program that focuses on the specific dispositions that would prepare future principals to be most effective in improving schools in these learning environments. The leadership programs would need to develop aspiring principals to increase their skill sets to reflect the desired dispositions for a turnaround school setting. When applicants have a clearer understanding of their strengths as a leader, such as the ability to form relationships, develop a shared vision, and continually reflect on their learning to engage their employees, these future principals would be a better choice for hiring and achieving success in turnaround schools.

The final recommendations are for the state and federal governments. Many of the policies in place to support turnaround schools provide funding to support new initiatives and resources so that the schools can see dramatic instead of incremental change. One, the government needs to continue to support the schools financially after they have

achieved the necessary growth within the 2-year time frame. When the funding is removed, it creates new or brings back old problems that may no longer have the support to be improved. Second, the 2-year turnaround period does not allow for most HPLP and failing schools to improve their status. The government should examine their policies such as NYSED, Part 100 regulations and outline a tangible timeline that would make turnaround attainable for more failing schools. The 2-year time frame will suffice to show incremental measurable growth; however, to see continuous, substantial, and lasting growth takes a minimum of another 4 years. The support from the governments should include resources, financial and human, to support continued progress until the school is no longer at risk of falling back into a failing school status.

Professional Practice

The findings in this study described the desired dispositions of principals in turnaround schools or HPLP school environments based on the perceptions of the teacher participants and the principals' supervisors. The overall implications suggest that if principals wish to engage their staff in improving their school successfully, they must cultivate a culture of trust, develop a shared vision, and model a reflective leadership process. Understanding these dispositions is essential, but for the principals to be effective, they need to know how to apply the dispositions in their leadership practice. The blueprint of the results would provide a guide of the necessary dispositions for the aspiring and practicing principals in turnaround settings. The principals should possess many, if not all, of the dispositions identified in this study, as these would significantly improve the chances of the schools making progress.

Turnaround schools are not located in one specific location, and therefore it is challenging to focus interventions and necessary supports to assist in the improvement process. A guide that could offer the necessary support might include a blueprint of the dispositions needed for effective principals in turnaround schools. The blueprint would offer a reproducible guide to follow regarding hiring practices and the dispositions necessary for principals in HPLP and schools in need of turnaround. While each school may have different needs, the findings from this study indicate that these identified dispositions are vital toward making progress in the school-improvement process.

The participants disclosed that the inconsistencies from their building principals created confusion. One recommendation to combat a lack of clarity created from inconsistencies by principals is to develop a comprehensive document and system to address inconsistencies. Areas of inconsistency included communication to staff, follow-through, and expectations as shared by the participants in this study. Therefore, the results from this study suggest that principals develop and share a communication plan that explains how information or changes will be shared across the school. In that plan, expectations for all stakeholders will be explained during the turnaround process. This suggested communication plan would allow for the school communities to better anticipate and engage in the improvement process. The communication plan should be accessible to all members of the school community, and as revisions are required, the plan would go through a shared decision-making process to ensure that multiple perspectives and voices are included in the process, as Theme 2 indicated.

A clearer understanding of what dispositions are perceived as the most critical in engaging staff in the improvement process of a turnaround setting might help bridge the

gap between student achievement and the impact of leadership in this setting. The research connected effective leadership of building principals to student achievement as an opportunity that provides an enriching education to all students, especially those in impoverished communities (Hitt & Tucker, 2016). The participants in this study agreed that they were more likely to engage in their school process and address the needs of their students when they had better relationships with their principals, felt valued, and their work was purposeful toward the improvement of their schools. This study suggests that the dispositions are cultivating a culture of trust and forming relationships, developing a shared vision that can be consistently communicated with all stakeholders, practicing reflective leadership, and adjusting to meet the various needs and challenges of a turnaround setting. Building the capacity in the school district leaders, assistant principals, and current principals can benefit schools and students from the focused professional development to attain these specific dispositions.

The recommendation for professional practice requires school districts to invest in purposeful professional learning opportunities for current principals and district employees interested in becoming principals. Teachers and principals need support and want the time to spent outside the classroom and school to support practical and relevant applications and implementations of strategies and skills that lead toward improvement in their schools. The turnaround school setting is unique and requires a leader to support those needs. As a result of the new knowledge gained from the participants' input, a better understanding has emerged concerning the necessary leadership dispositions that might engage employees to successfully turn around their schools. A clearer understanding is vital to the educational climate, specifically in urban settings, which

continue to struggle with very little evidence of continuous school improvement. Knowledge of what dispositions are most valuable to support teachers, students, families, and the school community in times of challenge will allow principals to match personnel with these school environments, effectively engage their employees, and lead toward improvement.

Executive Leadership

Principals in K–12 education systems need to understand the unique dynamics of an HPLP school and persistently failing schools. These schools are inundated with demands from NYSED, at the state level, with oversight from the local school district's central office. School principals must submit reports quarterly that measure their goals and progress as aligned to the state requirements for improvement as outlined in the DTSDE rubric (NYSED, 2019a). School principals are responsible for identifying the needs of a building and meeting those needs with a developed plan for both short- and long-term improvement (NYSED, 2019b).

In the executive leadership role, school principals lead their buildings and are responsible for continuous decision-making and addressing the needs of their staff, students, and communities. As indicated in the findings of this study, school principals should be flexible leaders enough to engage employees in the school improvement process. The participants in this study also shared that their principals should cultivate a culture of trust with their staff and develop relationships that allow for a shared team approach to develop the school vision. As this transformative work begins, principals can and should demonstrate their ability to be flexible leaders who are willing to grow and learn and change to meet the needs of their schools.

Executive leaders aware of the different requirements to successfully engage their employees and receive feedback from all the stakeholders may use the four frames by Bolman and Deal (2017) to help align and reframe their thinking to make appropriate decisions. Bolman and Deal (2017) suggested that examining situations from multiple frames may help leaders better explore and understand what is happening from that specific frame and perspective. The four frames include human resource, structural, political, or symbolic. School principals willing to reframe their perspectives to address the challenges present in HPLP schools will be more effective at transforming a turnaround school. The three themes in this study aligned with the different frames in the Bolman and Deal (2017) study.

The human resource frame provides the leader with the opportunity to view the interactions between the people and their roles (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The school principal is focused on the people in the human resource frame. As the findings indicated in Theme 1, cultivating a culture of trust and forming relationships was essential for principals to engage their employees. In this frame, the principals should establish trusting relationships and take necessary steps for employees to feel comfortable. Positive interactions between colleagues and the principals can contribute to an increased level of engagement within the school environment. The participants indicated that without knowing your staff, the vision, and the plan, progress cannot be made. The executive leader must understand who the people are in their school. Once the principal has identified the group dynamics, using the shared vision and strategically empowering individuals, the principal can position people within the school to help support the vision and further cultivate a culture of trust. While the principal is focused on forming

relationships and understanding the people and their needs in this frame, the focus from the principal is not on the needs of the school that supports improvement beyond the people in the school community. Principals who lead in the human resource frame are attuned to the needs of the people and supporting them as they navigate the improvement process to turn around the school.

The structural frame provides the leader with a better understanding of the school's responsibilities, direction, and goals. In this frame, the principal is focused on developing the shared vision and understanding the overall outcomes in the school (Bolman & Deal, 2017). Teacher 4 shared her frustrations resulting from a time when it was very unclear what was expected and the confusion it caused. This frame directly connects to Theme 2, developing a shared vision. When the school has a clear vision that is communicated and consistently provided by the principal, teachers and staff are more likely to engage and participate in the improvement process. A reflective leader has opportunities to build the capacity within the staff and provide employees with engaging and relevant professional learning opportunities that are aligned to the school's vision and goals. A principal in a turnaround school setting must be flexible and develop a shared vision with their school community, according to the participants in this study. Therefore, a principal who operates in the structural frame is primarily focused on the vision and strategic plan of the school and moving those initiatives forward with the staff. Principals operating from this frame alone may experience a loss of interactions between the staff and community as they are solely focused on the goals.

The symbolic frame requires the principal to understand the school's history and its community to create opportunities to engage more people toward changing the

organizational culture (Bolman & Deal, 2017). This frame offers the principal a chance to understand their school environment, community, and needs. Theme 3, flexible leadership, is vital because the principal continually reflects on the newly acquired knowledge from listening and seeking to understand more about the school community and is open to growing, learning, and adjusting to meet the needs after establishing an understanding of the school's history. This frame also means the principal has the lens through which to recognize the continued changes and growth and take moments to celebrate the strides forward in the improvement process. Taking time to acknowledge the growth intentionally will encourage staff to engage in the improvement process. However, time focused on the community, history, and story of the school is time not focused on the building needs in terms of forming relationships or developing a shared vision. The principal operating in the symbolic frame is encouraged to take the time to understand the history of their school and be cognizant of past choices so the principal might avoid similar pitfalls that the school may have previously experienced as new goals are developed to assist in the improvement process.

The last frame is the political frame. Principals are provided with the understanding to view the demands of the central office personnel, prioritize decisions, and allocate resources (Bolman & Deal, 2017). The principal can advocate for needed resources to support teachers and students in this frame. With these necessary supports, the principal can address the school deficits and promote opportunities for the school community to engage in the improvement process. Principals who operate in the political frame must understand the needs of their building to support changes that help the school improve. The principal can lead successful changes that they know are within the skill set

of the school community and that are built within their current infrastructure. However, the principal may lose out on the personal interactions and make uninformed decisions that impact the relationships that could be beneficial to the success and progress of a school in the improvement process. The four frames and flexible leadership provide the principal with an opportunity to be adaptable while using a targeted lens in each frame to best understand the different needs and circumstances present in HPLP and turnaround schools.

Conclusion

Schools deemed as turnaround are the lowest-performing 5% of schools in the nation given the nature of challenges in this environment (Hitt & Meyer, 2018). According to researchers, there is an urgency to seek and understand specific evidence and insight of successful and effective leaders. NYS identified 178 schools that fell below the standards and were considered failing. The total number of NYS P–12 public schools that were failing in 2015 equates to over 250,000 students receiving a less-than-adequate education (NYSED, 2015).

School reform remains a focus for the USDOE and individual state governments, as evidenced by the past and present legislation and initiatives to support failing schools (Calkins et al., 2007). The literature review supports that improvement is needed in low-performing schools (Calkins et al., 2007; ESSA, 2018; NYSED, 2019b; Public Impact, 2016; VanGronigen & Meyers, 2019). Once a school has a turnaround distinction, they have 6 months to submit a school intervention plan (NYSED, 2015). One critical component to a school's success, beyond the building leader, is the teachers' engagement

and how they see their role in the improvement process based on measurable outcomes set by the state (Kahn, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to gain more knowledge about leadership dispositions that could provide insight into helping failing schools succeed. The significance of this research indicates the substandard educational environment across NYS and the urgency to address these conditions with government regulations and policies to intervene and support the turnaround efforts (NYSED, 2015). As a result of conducting this research, the data provide more information about the experiences of teachers and supervisors of principals and their interactions working with principals in HPLP or turnaround schools.

There are several critical dispositions principals need to have to support schools. Dispositions are defined as a flexible range of tendencies that engage in a pattern of action that has its source in the interactions of beliefs or values, strategies or ways of acting, and intentions (Freeman, 2003). The literature supports the notion that the principals' role is vital to the success of schools through their advocacy for professional development, building community, and supporting instruction (Garza et al., 2014; Hitt & Tucker, 2016; Meyers & Hitt, 2016). Research suggests that when principals focus on dispositions that increase their ability to relate to teachers and students, it creates a more beneficial relationship that can lead to a more successful turnaround process (Villegas, 2007; Public Impact, 2016).

The role of the school principal is significant in combating the challenges associated with HPLP schools (Calkins et al., 2007). The leader's ability to articulate a clear vision, align goals, and inspire teams promotes the necessary learning environment

for change (Anderson & Wasonga, 2017; Finnigan, 2012; Hitt & Meyers, 2018; Kowalski & Dolph, 2015; Pregot, 2015). In addition to articulating a clear vision, researchers reported the importance of trust and respect between teachers and leaders (Cucchiara et al., 2015). All these components create the dispositions of a principal that influence the school improvement process. The employees' perceptions of the quality of the leader's work environment can cultivate and enhance the employee engagement experience and increase leadership effectiveness (Carasco-Saul et al., 2015). Former failing schools attribute much of their success to the school culture, learning environment, goals, and support led by the principal to achieve their success (Calkins et al., 2017).

The theory that framed this research was Kahn's (1990) employee engagement theory. His work was framed through the lens of the personal engagement of employees in their work. He explored if individuals are engaged more because they had a sense of ownership in their work and felt it was meaningful to their lives and the organization's success (Kahn, 1990). A qualitative methodology was appropriate for this study in alignment with employee engagement theory. A descriptive phenomenological approach was used to learn more about the participants' shared lived experiences. The study set out to answer the following research questions:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of school principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of building principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

A descriptive data analysis process was used to determine the findings in this study, which included multiple steps and resulted in three overall themes. The findings in this study share the perspectives of six teachers who worked in HPLP schools and four supervisors of principals of turnaround schools

Each theme described the participants' lived experiences as they told their stories. The three themes are cultivating a culture of trust, developing a shared vision, and reflective leadership.

The first theme was cultivating a culture of trust, and the subtheme was forming relationships. Principals must engage their staff by understanding who they are both professionally and personally. The purposeful engagement illustrates an effort to show the team that they are valued and that their work is essential. When staff and teachers' are feeling valued, they are motivated to work and invest their time and energy into their success (Cucchiara et al., 2015). The second theme was developing a shared vision. The subthemes were communication and consistency in leadership. The findings in this theme suggested that the principal must provide consistent and clear communication with a vision that all stakeholders in the school community understand and can implement. When there is a shared understanding of the vision, the staff are more likely to engage and foster continuous improvement. The third theme was reflective leadership, with the subthemes, growth mindset and flexible leadership. It is critically important that principals possesses a growth mindset. A growth mindset will allow leaders to continue

to advance in their practices and face challenges by being flexible and adjusting to the needs that are a part of the turnaround process. Principals can transform their schools because they support their staff by cultivating a culture of trust and communicating a shared vision.

The results from this study support and expand on the current research focused on turnaround schools, leadership dispositions, and employee engagement. (Hitt & Meyer, 2018; Kahn, 1990; NYSED, 2019b; Public Impact, 2016). The findings imply that a principal who possesses the dispositions found in this study will be more successful in engaging their staff in the improvement process that is required of a turnaround school. Thus, the school will be more likely to achieve the necessary growth and improvement to turn around the school successfully.

The recommendations developed from this study provide school districts and human resources departments with the opportunity to make thoughtful hiring and appropriate principal placement decisions. School districts and executive leaders must also understand the unique needs of their school settings to provide more purposeful and relevant supports that positively contribute toward the school improvement process. Bolman and Deal's (2017) frameworks are also a vital resource for executive leaders to have as they navigate the challenges and changes associated with school turnaround.

This study explored the necessary dispositions of principals to engage their employees in the school improvement process in HPLP schools and turnaround schools. School leadership is critical to ensuring urban schools' success (Hitt & Meyers, 2018). The shared perspectives of teacher and supervisor participants of this study of principals and their lived experiences relating to working with principals in HPLP and turnaround

schools have become more apparent. Identifying needed dispositions of school principals and the required tendencies to promote engagement are vital to address the neediest of schools.

Principals should form trusting relationships, collaborate with all stakeholders, and capitalize on these relationships to develop a shared vision. With this shared vision, principals can promote staff and instructional changes that support the goals of the schools and assist in making necessary growth toward school improvement. Principals should be reflective and practice a growth mindset, modeling flexibility as a leader. These school environments are fraught with challenges that create significant dysfunction and require principals to adapt, shift their practices, and try new things to combat the obstacles. Based on the findings of this study, the researcher concludes that to support turnaround schools and HPLP schools effectively, principals should embrace the dispositions in this study. In doing so, they will be equipped with the necessary skills to navigate the challenges to turnaround schools in the lowest-performing schools. The ultimate benefactors of an improved school environment are the students and communities where principals serve.

References

Aladjem, D. (2016, September). The future of low-performing schools. *National Association of State Boards of Education*, 32–44. https://nasbe.nyc3.digitaloceanspaces.com/2016/09/Future-of-Low-Performing-Schools_September-2016-Standard.pdf

Aly, E., Hodge, D., & Elmahdy, S. (2019). The relationship between preferred leadership style and personality predisposition. *The International Journal of Educational Organization and Leadership*, *26*(1), 49–74. https://doi.org/10.18848/2329-1656/CGP/v26i01/49-74

Amrein-Beardsley, A. (2012). Recruiting expert teachers into high-needs schools: Leadership, money, and colleagues. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *20*(27). https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.v20n27.2012

Anderson, R., & Wasonga, T. (2017). Mentoring emerging leaders: Perspectives of mentees on dispositions and conditions for leadership learning. *NASSP Bulletin*, *101*(4), 278–298. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636517743566

Archibald, A., Ambagtsheer, R. C., Mavourneen, C. G., & Lawless, M. (2019). Using Zoom videoconferencing for qualitative data collection: Perceptions and experiences of researchers and participants. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *18*, https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919874596

Bakker, A., Demerouti, E., & Schaufeli, W. (2005). The crossover of burnout and work engagement among working couples. *Human Relations*, *58*(5), 661–689. https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726705055967

Bhuvanaiah, T., & Raya, R. P. (2015). Mechanism of improved performance: Intrinsic motivation and employee engagement. *SCMS Journal of Indian Management*, *12*(4), 92–97. https://www.proquest.com/openview/9446a363b9f9ad9b6f4a24971588d5fd/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=546310

Bolman, L., & Deal, T. (2017). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice and leadership.* Jossey-Bass.

Bradberry, T., & Jean, G. G. (2009). *Emotional intelligence 2.0.* TalentSmart.

Breaugh, J. (2021). Too stressed to be engaged? The role of basic needs satisfaction in understanding work stress and public sector engagement. *Public Personnel Management*, *50*(1), 84–108. https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026020912516

Brinson, D., Kowal, J., & Hassel, B. (2008). School turnarounds. Actions and results. Public Impact, Academic Development Institute.

Brown, S. (2015). Comparing the ideal dispositions of administrative internship candidates. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*, *12*(1), 31–43. https://aasa.org/uploadedfiles/publications/journals/jps-spring2015final.pdf

Brown v. Board of Education, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

Buss, D., & Craik, K. (1983). The act frequency approach to personality. *Psychological Review*, *90*(2), 105–126. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.90.2.105

Bussey, H. L., Welch, J. C., & Mohammed, M. B. (2014). Effective consultants: A conceptual framework for helping school systems achieve systemic reform. School Leadership and Management, 34(2), 156–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2013.849684

Calkins, A., Guenther, W., Belfiore, G., Lash, D., & Mass Insight Education. (2007). *The turnaround challenge: Why America's best opportunity to dramatically improve student achievement lies in our worst-performing schools.* Mass Insight Education. https://www.massinsight.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/TheTurnaroundChallenge_MainReport.pdf

Carasco-Saul, M., Kim, W., & Kim, T. (2015). Leadership and employee engagement: Proposing research agendas through a review of literature. *Human Resource Development Review*, *14*(1), 38–63. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484314560406

Cucchiara, M., Rooney, E., & Robertson-Kraft, C. (2015). I've never seen people work so hard! Teachers' working conditions in the early stages of school turnaround. *Urban Education*, *50*(3), 259–287. https://doi.org/10.1177/00420859 13501896

Creswell, J. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches.* Sage.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2005). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Doyle, D., & Locke, G. (2014). *Lacking leaders: The challenges of principal recruitment, selection, and placement.* Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://fordhaminstitute.org/sites/default/files/publication/pdfs/lacking-leaders-challenges-principal-recruitment-selection-and-placement-final.pdf

Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success* (Updated ed). Random House.

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*, *43*(1), 13–35. https://doi.org/10.1163/156916212X632943

Ersozlu, A. (2016). School principals' reflective leadership skills through the eyes of science and mathematics teachers. *International Journal of Environmental and Science Education*, *11*(5), 801–808. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1114323.pdf

Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U. S. C. § 6301 (2015). https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ95/PLAW-114publ95.pdf

Every Student Succeeds Act. (2019). http://www.nysed.gov/essa

Fife, B. (2013). *Old school still matters: Lessons from the history to reform public education in America.* Praeger. https://publisher.abc-clio.com/9780313398100/

Finnigan, K. (2012). Principal leadership in low-performing schools: A closer look through the eyes of teachers. *Education and Urban Society*, *44*(2), 183–202. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124511431570

Flint, M., & Hearn, E. V. (2015, December 11). *Case study: 6 companies that get employee engagement and what they do right.* CMI. https://www.managers.org.uk/knowledge-and-insights/case-study/6-companies-that-get-employee-engagement-and-what-they-do-right/?lang=en#divCMIRegistrationMicrosite

Freeman, L. (2003, November 19–21. *Where did dispositions come from and what can we do with them* [Paper presentation]. Second Annual Symposium on Educator Dispositions*,* Richmond, KY, United States.

Garza, E., Jr., Drysdale, L., Gurr, D., Jacobson, S., & Merchant, B. (2014). Leadership for school success: Lessons from effective principals. *The International Journal of Educational Management*, *28*(7), 798–811. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-08-2013-0125

Gates, S. M., Kaufman, J. H., Doan, S., Tuma, A. P., Kim, D. (2020). *Taking stock of principal pipelines: What public school districts report doing and what they want to do to improve school leadership.* RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA274-1.html

Giorgi, A. P., & Giorgi, B. M. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. In P. M. Camic, J. E. Rhodes, & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Qualitative research in psychology: Examining perspectives in methodology and design* (pp. 243–273). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/10595-013

Glaser, B. G., & A. L. Strauss. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research.* Aldine Transactions. http://www.sxf.uevora.pt/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Glaser_1967.pdf

Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change: Reflections on the practice of instructional and transformational leadership. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *33*(3), 329–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764032000122005

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1996). The principal's role in school effectiveness: An assessment of methodological progress, 1980–1995. In K. Leithwood, J. Chapman, D. Corson, P. Hallinger, & A. Hart (Eds.), *International handbook of educational leadership and administration* (pp. 723–783). Kluwer Academic. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-1573-2_22

Harris, A., Chapman, C., Muijs, D., Russ, J., & Stoll, L. (2006). Improving schools in challenging contexts: Exploring the possible. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *17*(4), 409–424. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243450600743483

Heck, R., & Chang, J. (2017). Examining the timing of educational changes among elementary schools after the implementation of NCLB. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *53*(4), 649–694. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X17711480

Hitt, D., & Meyers, C. (2018). Beyond turnaround: A synthesis of relevant frameworks for leaders of sustained improvement in previously low-performing schools. *School Leadership & Management*, *38*(1), 4–31. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1374943

Hitt, D., & Tucker, P. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research*, *86*(2), 531–569. https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654315614911

Hitt, D., Woodruff, D., Meyers, C., & Zhu, G. (2018). Principal competencies that make a difference: Identifying a model for leaders of school turnaround. *Journal of School Leadership*, *28*(1), 56–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461802800103

Hoffman, B., Strang, S., Kuhnert, K., Campbell, W., Kennedy, C., & LoPilato, A. (2013). Leader narcissism and ethical context: Effects on ethical leadership and leader effectiveness. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *20*(1), 25–37. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051812465891

Hunzicker, J. (2013). Attitude has a lot to do with it: Dispositions of emerging teacher leadership. *Teacher Development*, *17*(4), 538–561. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2013.849614

Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium Standards. (2018). *ISLLC's standards for school leaders*. https://www.fldoe.org/core/fileparse.php/7566/urlt/0075311-orgstand.pdf

Jarrett, E., Wasonga, T., & Murphy, J. (2010). The practice of co-creating leadership in high- and low-performing high schools. *International Journal of Educational Management*, *24*(7), 637–654. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541011080011

Johnson, S., Reinhorn, S., Charner-Laird, M., Kraft, M., Ng, M., & Papay, J. (2014). Ready to lead, but how? Teachers' experiences in high-poverty urban schools. *Teachers College Record*, *116*(10), 1–50. https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/mkraft/files/ready_to_lead_080513.pdf

Kahn, W. A. (1990). Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work. *Academy of Management Journal*, *33*(4), 692–724. https://doi.org/10.5465/256287

Kahn, W.A., & Fellows, S. (2013). Employee engagement and meaningful work. *Purpose and meaning in the workplace.* (pp. 105-126). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/14183-006

Kanfer, R. (1990). Motivation theory and industrial and organizational psychology. In M. D. Dunnette & L. Hough (Eds.), *Handbook of industrial and organizational psychology. Volume 1. Theory in industrial and organizational psychology* (pp. 75–170). Consulting Psychologists Press.

Kowal, J., & Hassel, E. A. (2005). *School restructuring under No Child Left Behind: What works when? Turnaround with new leaders and staff.* Learning Point Associates. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED502903.pdf

Kowalski, T., & Dolph, D. (2015). Principal dispositions regarding the Ohio teacher evaluation system. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice*. 16. https://ecommons.udayton.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=eda_fac_pub

Krueger, R. A., & Casey, M. A. (2009). *Focus groups: A practical guide for applied research* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Kwon, K., & Park, J. (2019). The life cycle of employee engagement theory in HRD research. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *21*(3), 352–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422319851443

Leary, T., Green, R., Denson, K., Schoenfeld, G., Henley, T., & Langford, H. (2013). The relationship among dysfunctional leadership dispositions, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and burnout. *The Psychologist-Manager Journal*, *16*(2), 112–130. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0094961

Lester, D. (1990). Maslow's hierarchy of needs and personality. *Elsevier Science Direct*, *11*(11), 1187–1188. https://doi.org/10.1016/0191-8869(90)90032-M

Lochmiller, C., & Chestnut, C. (2017). Preparing turnaround leaders for high-needs urban schools. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *55*(1), 85–102. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-11-2015-0099

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2008). Early predictors of job burnout and engagement. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *93*(3), 498–512. https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.93.3.498

Maslow, A. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review*, *50*(4), 370–396. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0054346

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.

McCleskey, J. A. (2014). Situational, transformational, and transactional leadership and leadership development. *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, *5*(4), 117–130. https://www.studocu.com/en-us/document/walden-university/leadershipbuilding-sustainable-organizations/situational-transformational-and-transactional-leadership-and-leadership-development/6100663

Meyers, C., & Hitt, D. (2017). School turnaround principals: What does initial research literature suggest they are doing to be successful. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk (JESPAR)*, *22*(1), 38–56. https://doi.org/10.1080/10824669.2016.1242070

National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance. (2015, May). *State capacity to support school turnaround.* https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/pubs/20154012/pdf/20154012.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (1990). *Digest of education statistics, 1990.* https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=91660

National Center for Education Statistics. (2014). *Digest of education statistics, 2014. https://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/viewer.html?pdfurl=https%3A%2F%2Fnces.ed.gov%2Fpubs2016%2F2016006.pdf&chunk=true*

National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education. (2008). *Professional standards for the accreditation of teacher preparation institutions.* Author. http://caepnet.org/~/media/Files/caep/accreditation-resources/ncate-standards-2008.pdf?la=en

New York State Education Department. (2021). *Office of Accountability.* http://www.nysed.gov/accountability

New York State Education Department. (2019a). *Diagnostic tool for school and district effectiveness (DTSDE) process and resources.* http://www.nysed.gov/accountability/dtsde#:~:text=The%20Diagnostic%20Tool%20for%20School,since%20its%20development%20in%202012

New York State Education Department. (2019b, December). *Educator diversity report: Submitted to the governor and legislature of the State of New York.*

http://www.nysed.gov/common/nysed/files/programs/educator-quality/educator-diversity-report-december-2019.pdf

New York State Education Department. (2015). *Education statistics for New York State.* http://www.p12.nysed.gov/irs/statistics/public/

New York State Education Department. (n.d.). *NY State report card data [2014 – 15].* https://data.nysed.gov/reportcard.php?year=2015&state=yes

New York State Education Department. (2020). *Part 100 regulations of the Commissioner of Education.* http://www.nysed.gov/curriculum-instruction/part-100-regulations-commissioner-education

New York State Education Department. (2019c). *Recent news [2019].* http://www.nysed.gov/news/2019/state-education-department-announces-new-school%20accountability-determinations

New York State of Opportunity. (2015). *The State of New York's failing schools 2015 report.* Office of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo. https://www.governor.ny.gov/sites/default/files/atoms/files/NYSFailingSchoolsReport.pdf

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, 20 U.S.C. § 6319 (2002).

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

Perry, A., & Harshbarger, D. (2019, October 14). *America's formerly redlined neighborhoods have changed, and so must solutions to rectify them.* BROOKINGS. https://www.brookings.edu/research/americas-formerly-redlines-areas-changed-so-must-solutions/

Public Impact. (2008, 2016*). School turnaround leaders: Competencies for success.* Author. http://publicimpact.com/web/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/Turnaround_Leader_Competencies.pdf

Pregot, M. (2015). A comparison of preferred urban administrative dispositions between constituency groups. *NASSP Bulletin*, *99*(3), 217–232. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636515602331

Rana, S. (2015). High-involvement work practices and employee engagement. *Human Resource Development International*, *18*(3), 308–316. https://doi.org/10.1080/13678868.2014.1003698

Reyes, A., & Garcia, A. (2014). Turnaround policy and practice: A case study of turning around a failing school with English-language-learners. *The Urban Review*, *46*(3), 349–371. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-013-0261-6

Rothmann, S., Fouché, E., & Van der Vyver, C. (2017). Antecedents and outcomes of meaningful work among school teachers. *SA Journal of Industrial Psychology*, *43*(1), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.4102/sajip.v43i0.1398

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Schulte, L., & Kowal, P. (2005). The validation of the administrator dispositions index. *Educational Leadership and Administratio*n, *17*, 75–87. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ795083.pdf

Schwandt, T. A. (2007). *The SAGE dictionary of qualitative inquiry* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Serrano, S. A., & Reichard, R. J. (2011). Leadership strategies for an engaged workforce. *Consulting Psychology Journal*, *63*(3), 176–189. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025621

Setiyani, A., Djumarno, D., Riyanto, S., & Nawangsari, L. (2019). The effect of work environment on flexible working hours, employee engagement and employee motivation. *International Review of Management and Marketing*, *9*(3), 112–116. https://doi.org/10.32479/irmm.8114

Shuck, B., & Herd, A. M. (2012). Employee engagement and leadership: Exploring the convergence of two frameworks and implications for leadership development in HRD. *Human Resource Development Review*, *11*(2), 156–181. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484312438211

Thorne, S. (2020). On the use and abuse of verbatim quotations in qualitative research reports. Nurse Author & Editor, 30(3), 4–6. https://doi.org/10.1111/nae2.2

United States. (1965). Elementary and secondary education act of 1965: H. R. 2362, 89th Cong., 1st sess., Public law 89-10. Reports, bills, debate and act. U.S. Govt. Print. Off.

U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.) *Transforming Teaching and Leading*. https://www.ed.gov/teaching?src=rn

Van den Broeck, A., Vansteenkiste, M., De Witte, H., & Lens, W. (2008). Explaining the relationships between job characteristics, burnout, and engagement: The role of basic psychological need satisfaction. *Work and Stress*, *22*(3), 277–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370802393672

VanGronigen, B., & Meyers, C. (2019). How state education agencies are administering school turnaround efforts: 15 years after No Child Left Behind. *Educational Policy*, *33*(3), 423–452. https://doi.org/10.1177/0895904817691846

Villegas, A. (2007). Dispositions in teacher education: A look at social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education*, *58*(5), 370–380. https://doi.org /10.1177/0022487107308419

Wallace Foundation. (2003). *Beyond the pipeline: Getting the principals we need, where they are needed most.* Author. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Beyond-the-Pipeline-Getting-the-Principals-We-Need.pdf

Wasonga. (2010). Co-creating leadership dispositional values and contexts survey. *International Journal of* Educational *Management*, *24*(3), 266–278. https://doi.org/10.1108/09513541011031600

Wefald, A. J., Reichard, R. J., & Serrano, S. A. (2011). Fitting engagement into a nomological network: The relationship of engagement to leadership and personality. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *18*(4), 522–537. https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051811404890

Weiner, J. (2016). Possibilities or paradoxes? How aspiring turnaround principals conceptualise turnaround and their place within it. *School Leadership & Management*, *36*(5), 471–492. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2016.1247037

Welch, J., & Hodge, M. (2018). Assessing impact: The role of leadership competency models in developing effective school leaders. *School Leadership & Management*, *38*(4), 355–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2017.1411900

Woulfin, A. L., & Weiner, J. (2019). Triggering change: An investigation of the logics of turnaround leadership. *Education and Urban Society*, *51*(2), 222–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013124517714865

Xu, J., & Cooper Thomas, H. (2011). How can leaders achieve high employee engagement? *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, *32*(4), 399–416. https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731111134661

Zhang, T., Avery, G. C., Bergsteiner, H., & More, E. (2014). Do follower characteristics moderate leadership and employee engagement? Journal of Global Responsibility, *5*(2), 269–288. https://doi.org/10.1108/JGR-04-2014-0016

Appendix A

Participant Recruitment Letter

Date:

Dear (Teacher name/Title and of Supervisor of principal):
Greetings! I would like to invite you to participate in a study that I (Leah Kedley) am conducting as a candidate in the St. John Fisher Ed. D. Program in Executive Leadership. The study will focus on teachers and supervisors of principals who have worked in and with principals in a turnaround school setting.

By exploring the experiences of educational leaders engaged in this work, we may learn more about principal dispositions that promote employee engagement in the school improvement process. The title of this dissertation research study is *Employee Engagement: Exploring Principal Dispositions in Turnaround Schools.*

The purpose of this study is to understand better what dispositions a principal uses to promote staff engagement in the school improvement process of a turnaround school. Participating benefits include contributing to the development and understanding of principal dispositions used in the school improvement process.

To best understand the questions and objectives for this study, I have defined dispositions used in this research:
Dispositions are a flexible range of tendencies that engage in a pattern of action that has its source in the interaction of beliefs or values, strategies, or ways of acting and intention (Freeman & associates, 2003, p. 7).

If you can answer yes to one of the following questions, please consider participating in this study:
1) Are you in a position that oversees a principal in a school with a failing status distinction, presently or in the past?
2) Are you a certificated staff member with student contact? Do you have five years of public school experience? Do you have at least one year in a school environment that is high poverty, low performing (HPLP)?

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be scheduled for a virtual interview in a focus group for teachers or a semi-structured one-on-one interview. The interview will take no more than 60 minutes, and the focus group will last between 60-90 minutes. A one-page informational form will be provided to you that summarizes the details of the

study. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, and you will have the option of terminating your participation at any time without any penalty or repercussions.

Additionally, your participation will be confidential. During all aspects of the study, your identity will be protected with a pseudonym. School districts will not be identified as an additional measure to protect privacy.

For further information about the study, please contact me (Leah Kedley) via email at @sjfc.edu or my Doctoral Committee Chair, Dr. Shannon Cleverly-Thompson, at @sjfc.edu. The research study has been reviewed and approved by St. John Fisher College's Institutional Review Board (IRB).
I appreciate your time and consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Respectfully,

Leah Kedley, Doctoral Candidate
St. John Fisher College
Ralph C. Wilson School of Education
Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership
3690 East Avenue
Rochester, New York, 14618

Appendix B

Protocol for Focus Groups with Teachers

Welcome:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this focus group. My name is Leah Kedley, and I am a Doctoral Student in the Executive Leadership program at St. John Fisher College. I am excited to meet with you today and hear about your experiences in working in turnaround schools.

Overview:

The goal is to understand your perspective on building principals' promotion of staff engagement in the school improvement process. Additionally, I would like to understand what leadership dispositions were critical in the improvement process.

Expectations:

For you:

- We are here to share and listen to your lived experiences
- There are no right or wrong answers.
- We may have different backgrounds and points of view.
- We will take turns sharing. This will be organic but please only one voice at a time.
- You can interact with one another; the focus does not need to be directed towards me.
- Review the definitions that are pertinent to the study in advance.
- Please do not name your school or principal by name.
- This is not an evaluation or comparison of schools or building leaders.

From me:

- I will ask the questions and listen.
- I want to hear from everyone and will make sure all voices have an opportunity to share.
- I may ask probing questions to elaborate more on a thought.
- I am happy to clarify any questions or misunderstandings. Please ask.
- I will provide definitions of terms that are pertinent to the study in advance.

- Your names will not be shared in this study, and the information in this recording is confidential, as indicated in the consent form.

Study Research Questions:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of building principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

Interview Questions: All based on your personal experiences

1. Share a little about your experience working in a high-poverty, low-performing school.

2. Based on your experiences, what do you believe are critical dispositions for building principals to have?

3. What dispositions do you think are necessary for the building leader to possess when leading school improvement?

4. What do you believe is needed from your building principal to turnaround a school?

5. What do you think engages staff in the school improvement process? Are there any specific components from the building leader that you believe engage staff in this process?

6. Can dispositions be learned?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share about any topics addressed in our discussion today?

Probing Questions:

1. Will you share more?

2. Can you give an example?

3. Please describe further.

Protocol for Semi-Structured Interviews with Supervisors

Welcome:

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview with me today. I am excited to hear more about your work with building principals in turnaround schools.

Overview:

The goal is to understand your perspective on building principals' promotion of staff engagement in the school improvement process. Additionally, I would like to understand what leadership dispositions were critical in the improvement process.

Expectations:

For you:

- Do not indicate the school or the principals' names.
- Share freely about your experiences in working with principals and HPLP schools.

From me:

- I will ask the questions and listen.
- I want to hear from everyone and will make sure all voices have an opportunity to share.
- I may ask probing questions to elaborate more on a thought.
- I am happy to clarify any questions or misunderstandings. Please ask.
- Your names will not be shared in this study, and the information in this recording is confidential, as indicated in the consent form.

Study Research Questions:

1. From the perspective of teachers in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

2. From the perspective of supervisors of school principals in high-poverty, low-performing schools, what leadership dispositions of principals promote school staff engagement in the process of school improvement?

Interview Questions: All based on your personal experiences

1. Share a little about your experience working in high-poverty, low-performing schools.

2. Have you worked as a principal previously? If so, are there personal experiences from this time that impact your work supervising building principals through the turnaround process?

3. Based on your experiences, what do you believe are critical dispositions for building principals to have?

4. What dispositions do you think are necessary for the building leader to possess when leading school improvement?

5. What do you believe is needed from your building principal to turnaround a school?

6. Why do you think some principals are successful while others are not?

7. Can dispositions be learned?

8. Is there anything else you would like to share about any topics addressed in our discussion today?

Probing Questions:

1. Tell me more?

2. How did you respond?

Appendix D

SJFC IRB Approval Form

October 29, 2021

File No: 4205-102121-03

Leah Kedley
St. John Fisher College

Dear Ms. Kedley:

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

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Exempt Review project, "Exploring Principal Dispositions in Turnaround Schools: A Descriptive Phenomenological Study of Employee Engagement."

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