

A Qualitative Study Examining the High Turnover Rate of High School Principals in Southwest
Georgia and Northwest Florida

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the turnover rate of high school principals in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position. The high school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention while also adversely affecting student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019). A qualitative approach was applied in this study to analyze data collected from identified high school principals and two teachers per principal participant who worked with the identified principal participant. An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis was used to explore each participant's lived experience and to identify themes.

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Chapter I **INTRODUCTION**

Overview

As a former science teacher, I am passionate about research and scientific inquiry and the intersection of certain phenomena in educational leadership. I was driven by the inner workings of a content classroom, but equally drawn to fulfill a role in which I could support students from a social and emotional standpoint. Hence, I became a K-12 public school counselor and provided counseling, adjustment, and guidance services, thereby supporting students academically and socially. After spending 6 years in that role and experiencing the deep impact counselors can have on students' lives, I was compelled to create even more large-scale change. Becoming an assistant principal allowed me to support not only students but also teachers, staff, and parents. I use my knowledge from previous roles to identify and meet the needs of those under my supervision. In addition, I utilize conflict resolution skills I developed in school counseling, model teaching strategies I studied while still in the classroom and manage fiscal responsibilities.

In my various work experiences, I was struck by the role a principal plays in interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships and in managing the academic and business requirements of the school. I began questioning how high school principals actively impact turnover at their respective schools. My experiences with various principals I worked with led me to understand principal turnover as a dynamic concept.

According to the United States (U.S.) Bureau of Labor Statistics Occupational Outlook Handbook (2021), the 2020 median annual salary for elementary, middle, and high school

principals was \$98,490 per year, a considerable cost, especially in school systems with elementary, middle, and high schools. Offering competitive salaries to retain successful principals helps districts avoid the high costs of recruiting and training new principals, while also ensuring leadership stability, which fosters a more consistent and effective school environment (DeMatthews et al., 2022). In a revised position statement regarding principal shortages, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (2017) indicated school systems across the nation spend an additional \$36,850 to \$303,000 for principal recruitment and ongoing development, and one out of two principals is not retained beyond their third year. Therefore, the cost of replacing principals is considerable (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Another potential financial hazard of principal turnover is the ongoing investment in the search for principals may significantly contribute to funding being diverted for repetitive hiring purposes rather than investing in other needed areas of a school system (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Additionally, in his examination of how the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) impacts school leadership, Rothman (2017) stated, "Improving the quality of leadership may be one of the most cost-efficient and scalable methods of improving instruction and learning in K-12 schools" (pg. 2). This assertion underscores the critical role that effective leadership plays in the educational outcomes of students.

The concern of district leaders over public school principal turnover has driven the search for an explanation and possible solutions to this cost-draining phenomenon. Levin and Bradley (2019) proffered principal job performance predicts turnover, with principals identified as "low performers" more likely to be demoted or to exit the school system entirely. In his national study assessing the risk of turnover among U.S. principals, Alenezi (2020) found

principals were more likely to leave a position if they: did not participate in a principal preparation program, were male, had already earned their doctorate, were a minority, or worked in a school without controlled access to school buildings.

Mandel and Pendola (2021) suggested government policy may be associated with higher rates of principal turnover. Mitani (2018) studied principal working conditions under the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act and found principals were increasingly under more stress and displayed higher turnover rates due to the sanction-based accountability measures by which they were governed. Tekleselassie and Choi (2019) suggested districts construct local policies that can reduce principal turnover, such as offering principals unionization, tenure, training, and development. While additional federal funding for principal support and preparatory programs is available through the Department of Education's Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which replaced the NCLB Act, a 2018-2019 survey of states' use of Title 2 Part A funds found Georgia did not allocate any funding toward supporting principal learning and growth (Isenberg & Weber, 2021).

Makkonen and Jaquet (2021) cited multiple research studies showing the effect principal turnover has on student achievement. In their study, the authors found schools with principals departing within 3 years demonstrated lower student achievement than those schools whose principals remained. Osborne-Lampkin and Folsom (2017) noted high student achievement is associated with high-quality school leadership. Because principals play an important role in student achievement, high principal turnover negatively effects student learning and can prevent improvement strategies from being effective (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018).

Problem

The high school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention, while also adversely affecting student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019). The national average tenure for principals in 2016-2017 was 4 years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). One study included principals in their classification of “leaders” when they stated approximately 41% of leaders had fewer than 5 years of experience in the position (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. iv). According to a presentation of Georgia’s equity plan from the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE), the average principal turnover rate for the state of Georgia was 21.6% for the 2013/2014 to 2014/2015 1-year period (GADOE, 2017). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024) found Georgia had 7,370 kindergarten through secondary school principals, with approximately 450 of them located in south Georgia non-metropolitan schools and 450 located in metropolitan south Georgia schools. In 2019, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2020) found Georgia had 8,240 kindergarten through secondary school principals, with approximately 540 located in non-metropolitan south Georgia areas and 200 principals located in metropolitan south Georgia school systems. With the number of principals located in the southeast region alone, the potential cost of principal turnover is significant.

The state of Florida has 14,090 kindergarten through secondary school principals (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2024). In the 2021-2022 school year, principal turnover in Florida increased to around 16%, reflecting a broader national trend of educators leaving their positions due to burnout and stress from the pandemic's prolonged impact on the education system (Diliberti & Schwartz, 2023). High school principals in Florida face challenges such as intense workload, managing the mental health of students and faculty, implementing remote and hybrid

learning models, and addressing significant student learning loss which increase stress and burnout among high school principals (Inzinna, 2022).

The cost of principal turnover can strain a school system's already limited funding (Yan, 2019). Tran et al. (2018) found 10% of principals in K-12 settings left education completely, while 6% moved to other educational settings (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). Although the cost of replacing principals varies by economic setting, the researchers found replacing a high school principal can cost up to \$51,659.27, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) (2017) indicated school systems across the nation spend between \$36,850 to \$303,000 on principal recruitment, preparation, and ongoing development. Indeed, replacing a principal comes at a significant cost to school districts.

To combat the increasing principal turnover crisis, ongoing support is needed for all principals, from those just beginning their leadership careers to veteran principals (Wilson et al., 2020). Principal turnover can disrupt multiple aspects of the school, including "hiring procedures, vision setting, organizational culture, as well as instructional and managerial leadership" (Panell & McBrayer, 2022, p.12). Compounding this phenomenon, teacher turnover greatly increases during leadership changes, leading to additional costs associated with replacing them (DeMatthews et al., 2021). As principal turnover is associated with teacher turnover, it may play a direct role in the teacher shortage crisis (Buckman, 2021). Likewise, principal turnover is associated with a decrease in student achievement (Henry & Harbatkin, 2019). High school principals who stay in their position 3 years or longer typically have a positive effect on student achievement (Tran, 2017).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who have left their position?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

Research Question 3A (RQ3A): How do identified successful former high school principals in who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Research Question 3B (RQ3B): How do faculty members of identified successful high school principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Significance of Study

The high U.S. high school principal turnover rate is steadily increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention while also adversely affecting student achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges to reducing the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful former high school principals who have left this position. Results of this study may provide knowledge school districts can use in efforts to recruit, select, develop, and retain high

school principals. State Departments of Education may use the results to enhance and alter current efforts to recruit, select, develop, and retain high school principals. In addition, the results of this study may be used to inform potential future high school principals of challenges and barriers related to principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention. Also, school districts and local Regional Education Service Agencies (RESAs) may use the knowledge gained from this study to enhance the recruitment, selection, development, and retention of high school principals.

Conceptual Framework

Maxwell (2012) defined conceptual framework as “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs, and theories that supports and informs your research” (p. 222). Ravitch and Riggan (2016) explained conceptual framework as a grounded argument detailing why a study is valid to intersecting fields, why the methodology used is valid, and ways a research approach is appropriate, and methods are rigorous (p. 43). The conceptual framework provides a logical conceptualization of a problem, who is involved, what questions will be asked, methods to apply, data and methodology to utilize, and recommendations and conclusions (Kivunja, 2018).

While the possible connection between transformational leadership and decreasing principal turnover is not immediately obvious, elements of transformational leadership theory do intersect with strategies to sustain principal retention. In this qualitative study, the researcher will ground the work in transformational leadership theory. Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained transformational leadership as “the kind of leadership that gets people to infuse their energy into strategies” (p. 122). In his study of leadership styles of different nations, Burns (1978) explained transformational leadership as the leader’s understanding of the needs of followers and motivating them with higher aspirations towards a common goal. In his review of

transformational leadership applied to the educational setting, Anderson (2017) credited Bass's (1985) work as the "cornerstone" of research on transformational leadership in the school setting.

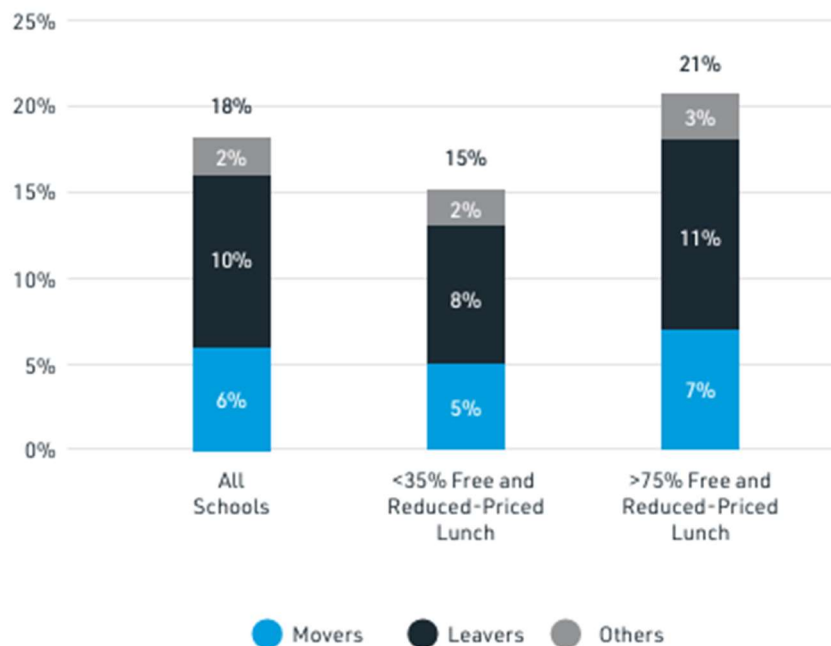
Fullan (2007) stated, "Teaching and educational leadership also involve the extensive emotional labor of being responsible for motivating others and managing their moods and feelings," illustrating the importance of emotion within organizational leadership (p. 466). Husain et al. (2021) found "higher quality" principals, which they identified based on perceptions of teachers supervised by the principals they interviewed, are less likely to leave their positions voluntarily or involuntarily. The authors indicated leaders embodying transformational leadership characteristics improved morale and motivation of teachers and increased learning and teacher performance (Alanoglu & Karabatak, 2022). Moreover, principals who implemented structures and policies unique to their campus needs focused on strengthening teachers by advocating for an improvement in teaching, learning, and leading were more successful than those principals who did not (Murakami & Kearney, 2020). Transformational leadership has also been found to have a positive effect on teacher effectiveness and integrity (Ahmed & Rochimah, 2021).

Lambrect et al. (2020) described the goal of transformational leadership as understanding people and fostering social relationships. School principals must be able to identify their own professional needs and those of the teachers under their supervision and the students' needs while continuing to motivate the group toward common goals. Leithwood (1994) believed transformational leadership is an appropriate approach to school leadership and advocated for the integration of the study of transformational leadership into principal preparation programs. Kouzes and Posner (2007) also underscored the importance of transformational leadership stating, "When people are part of something that raises them to higher levels of motivation and

morality, they develop a belonging to something very special” (p. 122). Understanding how to identify the needs of stakeholders and learning how to motivate teachers toward a common goal are key components of transformational leadership. Additionally, principals using transformational leadership theory can significantly reduce principal turnover, thereby, possibly contributing to a more stable school environment (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005).

Klar et al. (2020) studied 10 school principals located in the rural regions of the Southeastern U.S., and found those principals increased their leadership capabilities using transformational leadership-based professional development (PD). While Davis et al. (2020) found most states do not provide research-based PD for school principals, research indicates additional principal PD is indeed needed (Drago-Severson et al., 2018; Levin et al., 2020; Steward & Matthews, 2018).

Figure 1



Principal Turnover in 2016-2017, All Schools, Low-Poverty, and High-Poverty Schools (Levin & Bradley, 2019)

Principal retention is sustained by simultaneously including high-quality professional learning opportunities, working conditions that are conducive to professional learning, adequate and stable compensation, productive accountability, and allowing principals the authority to make decisions (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Professional learning communities provide an opportunity for amassing new ideas, reducing professional isolation, and increasing critical reflection on one's professional conduct (Coenen et al., 2021). Building collaborative networks of mentorship and professional learning also help mitigate stressors principals face as a result of new challenges, such as the Covid-19 crisis (Wilson, 2021). Removing barriers to principals' learning opportunities, such as lack of time, can reduce principal turnover (Levin et al., 2020).

Additional variables are associated with principal turnover. Yan (2020) found a positive disciplinary environment decreased the chances of principals leaving for another position, as did higher salaries for principals. Possessing a strong sense of control and autonomy can increase job satisfaction among principals, also leading to less principal turnover (Wang et al., 2018).

In his study of the impact transformational and transactional leadership has on organizational turnover, Caillier (2018) ascertained transformational leadership lowered voluntary turnover while transactional leadership increased the number of people quitting. When comparing school leaders using transformational leadership versus those using transactional leadership strategies, teachers reported greater satisfaction from those with leaders applying transformational leadership theory (Fatima et al., 2020). Additionally, Khalil and Hussain (2021) found transformational leadership positively affected teachers' feelings of meaning, self-determination, and psychological empowerment.

Figure 2



Transformational Leadership Model (Airiodion Global Services, 2021)

Transformational leaders support the needs and actions of their followers while promoting positive changes for individuals, groups, and organizations (Bass & Avolio, 1994). In their study of transformational leadership and job satisfaction of secondary education teachers, Kouni et al. (2018) found teachers reported higher job satisfaction when led by principals employing transformational leadership strategies. Swen (2020) found principals used themes of calling and duty to serve to describe their motivation, and suggested investigation into principal motivation is essential in reducing principal turnover. Transformational leadership theory offers a framework to incorporate motivation of principals into principal preparation programs. Principals who employed transformational leadership strategies were found to exert a greater positive effect on teachers and contributed to greater organizational change (Atasoy, 2020).

Oprea et al. (2022) asserted, when leaders communicated values, purpose, and meaning and provided an intriguing vision, “transformational leaders could influence employees to take

on extra responsibilities and to get involved in new projects, more than supervisors who prefer another leadership style” (p. 4227). However, to do so, the authors suggested school principals need both support from their immediate supervisors and autonomy to make decisions involving new projects and responsibilities within the school. Transformational leadership improves employee retention by providing creative vision, purpose, and direction and offering professional development with challenging solutions as a common goal (Saeed & Jun, 2021). Principals must retain the decision-making autonomy of their respective schools to implement solutions created by participants.

Dickens et al. (2021) cited disposition, or one’s personal qualities and characteristics, and the behaviors based on one’s commitments and beliefs, as an important and often overlooked quality lacking in principal preparation programs. In his study of university educational leadership preparation programs for school principals, Johnson (2016) found theory was listed in principal feedback as one of the “least-used areas” by school principals. He suggested because preparation programs are often grounded in theory, school principals are not connecting with practice, underscoring the need for a more comprehensive understanding of connecting practice and theory.

Methodology

In this study, the researcher sought to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate in Georgia as perceived by identified successful high school principals in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida who have left this position. Further, this researcher aimed to examine how the faculty members with whom they worked perceive the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate in the Southeast region of the U.S. that their former high school principals encountered. To identify these challenges and

barriers and examine participants' experiences, the researcher conducted a qualitative study, applying a phenomenological approach. In determining the most appropriate methodology for this study, the researcher first examined case study as a potential choice. Citing Yin's (2003) research in case study methodology, Ebneyamini and Moghadam (2018) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the object of the study and context are not clearly evident" (pg. 1). In accordance with case study methodology, the selection of the case study is related to the research purpose and "related to the theoretical propositions about the topic of interest" (Harrison et al., 2017). However, as this researcher aimed to examine the meaning participants made of the challenges and barriers to reducing high school principal turnover rate in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida as faced by identified successful principals who left their positions and not the system itself, a case study was not the best method for this study.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) relates to how participants think about or make sense of their experience (Smith et al., 2013). As such, IPA was the most appropriate methodology for this study. A single homogenous sample is typically used when employing IPA (Larkin et al., 2019). Purposive sampling is a method used to select participants with characteristics that enable the researcher to explore the phenomena (Nollaig, 2011). Through purposive sampling, I identified three successful high school principals who voluntarily left their positions. Upon identification of three successful high school principals, I then identified two teachers per principal participant who previously worked with the identified successful principal for at least 1 year.

I conducted interviews using a constructed list of questions with participants using bracketing to limit the effects of my own experiences affecting the data. Bracketing is used to

demonstrate validity in phenomenological research (Spirko, 2019). I also triangulated the data to ensure the findings that emerge from the data are valid. “Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives” (Guion et al., 2011, p.1). Maxwell (2013) asserted triangulating data is an effective way for researchers to improve the validity of their studies. This can be accomplished by analyzing data from various sources, such as interview transcripts, school observations, and artifacts. In addition, I employed the member-checking strategy upon completing the transcription of interviews. Member checking allows participants the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure the researcher captured their statements and intent accurately, thus increasing the validity of the findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Limitations

One limitation of the study is the geographic sampling area. All participants will be chosen from one geographic area, specifically those school systems within the Southwest region of Georgia and Northwest Florida. The sample size is also a limitation as it reveals the experiences of a small group of participants in a specified geographic region, each with varying demographics, including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. A further limitation includes restricting the principals being examined to those who work at the high school level.

The researcher’s potential bias is also a limitation. I am a former school counselor with my own experiences in southwest Georgia schools. My bias has the potential to affect data analysis. While bracketing is a valid strategy to limit the effects of my own experiences and conceptualization on data collection and analysis, it is not infallible (Dörfler & Stierand, 2020). Therefore, in addition to the bracketing technique, I will also utilize member-checking to ensure I have accurately captured participants’ words and intent. Member-checking is a widely

recommended method to check the validity of qualitative research (Motulsky, 2021). Reifman et al. (2022) found member-checking was an effective method to understanding the emotional aspects and experiences of the research participants. Another limitation is reflection bias which can change after one has left a profession, and they begin to regard it with a more favorable opinion than when they were actively in it (Buckley, 2017).

Definition of Terms

The following definitions will apply for the purpose of this study:

Development: Development is the structured professional learning that focuses on factors affecting professional growth, i.e., professional preparation.

Educational Leadership: Professional positions in education that require “leadership certificates include educational leadership tiers I and II certificates and other certificates associated with the CPI job titles for leaders such as instructional supervision and director of CTAE or special education,” (Pelfrey & Flamini, 2020, p. 23).

Principal: The principal is “the person who serves as administrative head of a school, and who is responsible for the coordination and direction of all school activities,” (GADOE, 2016, p. 2).

Principal Retention: Principal retention refers to “principals who stayed in the same position at the same school in the following year,” (NCES, 2019, p. 3).

Principal Selection: Principal selection is the process of choosing a principal to fill an identified principal position within a school system.

Professional Learning Communities: “A professional learning committee is a long-term sustainable program” or “network within schools, with a collaborative culture and a focus on learning,” (Trilaksono et al., 2018, p. 48).

Recruitment: Recruitment is the act of searching, attracting, and hiring principals to serve in K-

12 positions.

School Climate: School climate refers to the myriad of factors, such as parent engagement and the social-emotional well-being of students, that contribute to a positive school experience for students and faculty.

Successful High School Principals: For the purpose of this study, the term “successful” is used to identify high school principals who have been in their same position for 3 or more consecutive years.

Teacher: A teacher is defined as an adult hired to perform teaching services to a group of students.

Turnover: Turnover indicates the phenomenon of a principal no longer remaining in the same position 1 year later (NCES, 2019).

Chapter Summary

Current professional preparation and development do not adequately prepare school principals for the challenges faced in leadership roles (Kin & Abdull, 2019). As the world continues to adapt to new challenges, school leaders are faced with preparing schools, students, and faculty to be successful (Kaul et al., 2020). As a 17-year employee of the Georgia public school system, I sought to examine challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate using transformational leadership as a theoretical framework. The findings in this study may offer research-based evidence as to the importance of including the study of transformational leadership in the professional development of high school principals.

In this chapter, I offered personal motivation to study transformational leadership in high school principals. Further, I identified the significance of the study and why further examining this topic will fill a gap in the literature and add to the body of knowledge around the retention of

educational leaders. In the next chapter, the I will outline the salient findings in seminal and current research on transformational leadership, educational leadership characteristics, and principal turnover.

Chapter II LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

In Chapter II, I review the existing literature on the high turnover rate of high school principals, particularly in the regions of Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida. This chapter provides a comprehensive review of the historical context of principalship in America, the current state of principal turnover, and its impact on student achievement and school operations. By examining various leadership theories and their application in educational settings, the researcher aims to identify the challenges and barriers to reducing principal turnover. The insights gained from this literature review will lay the foundation for understanding the complex dynamics and inform potential strategies for improving principal retention.

History of Principals in America

In the early 19th century, as urban school systems expanded, the position of the principal emerged as they were required to manage the increasing complexity of larger educational institutions (Superville, 2021). The position evolved from being teacher-administrators with limited authority to becoming independent, influential leaders with increased responsibilities and professional legitimacy, mainly due to expanding district bureaucracies, self-advocacy, and establishing professional organizations (Hallinger & Bellibas, 2020; Kafka, 2009). Principal positions continued to grow, including increasing administrative responsibilities and professional requirements, by the early 20th century (Superville, 2022). This evolution marked the transformation of principals into central educational leaders responsible for guiding teachers

and overseeing curriculum development (Leithwood & Louis, 2021; Superville, 2022).

Principals became responsible for maintaining order and actively guiding schools toward improved academic outcomes (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Throughout the mid-to-late 20th century, the passage of landmark policies, such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, heightened expectations for principals to improve student outcomes through data-driven decision-making and instructional leadership (Hallinger & Murphy, 2020; Fullan, 2020). Principals are now required to maintain order and actively implement strategies for academic improvement, teacher development, and stakeholder engagement (Fullan, 2020; Grissom et al., 2021).

In the 21st century, principals face increasing demands related to equity, school safety, and social-emotional learning, further expanding their leadership responsibilities (Leithwood et al., 2020). As school leaders strive to close achievement gaps and create inclusive learning environments, principals must implement culturally responsive leadership practices and foster a sense of belonging among diverse student populations (Khalifa et al., 2016). Principals are also now encumbered with increasing concerns over school safety, requiring them to develop crisis management plans, strengthen campus security measures, and address issues related to student well-being and violence prevention (Ahn & Cox, 2022; Berkowitz et al., 2017). More recently, the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated these challenges, forcing principals to manage remote learning, address rising student and staff mental health crises, and navigate rapidly shifting educational policies (Grissom et al., 2021; Superville, 2021). School closures and transitions to virtual instruction required principals to ensure technological accessibility, provide professional development for teachers, and maintain student engagement despite unprecedented disruptions

(Kraft et al., 2020). At the same time, the pandemic intensified mental health concerns, with principals needing to implement trauma-informed practices, connect students with counseling services, and support the well-being of students and staff (Bailey et al., 2021).

Moreover, principals play a critical role in interpreting and implementing rapidly evolving federal and state education policies, including health and safety guidelines, funding allocations, and instructional recovery plans (Harris & Jones, 2020). Principals are now key figures in ensuring school resilience and adaptability amid ongoing educational, social, and public health challenges (Fullan, 2020; Grissom et al., 2021; Superville, 2021).

Principal Turnover in the United States

High school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention while also adversely affecting student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019). Principal turnover has remained a challenge, with a higher prevalence than teacher attrition in the U.S. (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Leader turnover can cause disruptions and growing uncertainties for organization members left behind (Wang & Sun, 2022). Henry and Harbatkin (2019) claimed one in five learning institutions loses their principal yearly. High principal turnover is found to negatively impact students' performances and assessments (Henry & Harbatkin 2019). In the U.S., the recent rates of principal turnover range from 15% to 30%, leaving public school systems and policymakers to face the problem of increasing principal turnover (Buckman & Sloan, 2022). High turnover rates impact school operations, such as the high cost of replacing these principals and poor overall school performance (Horwood et al., 2021). More than half of all new principals leave their positions within the first 2 years (Davis & Anderson, 2021). Thus, with principals as role models

in their institutions, their decision to leave their schools is often associated with subsequent higher teacher turnover (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Principal retention is central to enhancing the school's operations and maintaining positive school and learner performance (Parker, 2019). Rugirrello (2022) cited a report from NASSP that found 4 out of 10 principals will leave their positions in the next 3 years and attributed the reasons behind this exit to increased stress resulting from the pandemic and political tensions. In her survey of 1,686 high school principals across the U.S., Superville (2022) found 83% reported increased job-related stress and cited new demands related to the COVID-19 pandemic. She argued pandemic-related stressors will only contribute to the increasing principal turnover problem.

While many school principals are passionate about their jobs, high stress levels, low job satisfaction, burnout, and attrition are also reported (Horwood et al., 2021). The effects of principal turnover are found to have a relationship with multiple outcomes. One potential effect of principal turnover is the increased financial strain on the school district. In their study, Nielsen and Taggart (2021) described the difficult decision of one elected school board to replace a popular but poor-performing school principal with a less popular but high-achieving school leader. Fuller et al. (2017) suggested using state and local funds allocated through ESSA to provide additional PD for school principals, thereby reducing principal turnover across the U.S.

While principal turnover does not guarantee negative outcomes, Carpenter et al. (2022) cautioned against policies supporting principal turnover, citing the high costs of principal replacement and the unproven outcomes of replacement principals. New demands placed on school principals often lead to additional roles the district must fill (Reid, 2021). In his study exploring school principals' perceptions of their job duties, Reid found most principals cited

school safety and security, increased emphasis on student and teacher emotions and well-being, and developing and maintaining positive relationships with parents and guardians as growing duties they are now tasked with.

Principal Turnover in Georgia

Principal turnover has increased in the recent past among K-12 schools in the U.S. (Johnson & Voelkel, 2021). In Georgia, especially in rural areas, principal turnover rates have continued to rise with the hike associated with poverty in these areas (Tran et al., 2018). In their multi-year study of all 92 rural Georgia counties designated as ‘high-needs’ by the GADOE, Pannell and McBrayer (2022) found a negative correlation between principal turnover and every academic indicator of the GADOE College and Career Readiness Index (CCRPI). The escalation of the situation is worsened by ineffective succession planning in public rural high schools (Cieminski, 2018).

The role of principals in learning institutions is rapidly changing from managing to leading organizations (Anastasiou & Garametsi, 2021). This shift in focus is associated with increased roles and expectations. Principals are experiencing the challenge of meeting expectations while using strained resources in K-12 schools (Louis & Murphy, 2017). Su-Keene and DeMatthews (2022) identified many cases of principal turnover in low-income regions and schools with students of color comprising the majority of the school population. The authors stated 20% of the principals in K-12 quit their job roles annually. Subsequently, K-12 schools experience leadership instability arising from principal turnover, which may inhibit student achievement. Bartanen et al. (2021) examined the effects of principal turnover on assistant principal turnover. Their findings included the increased likelihood of assistant principals leaving their leadership positions and changing schools due to principal turnover. Additionally, school

principals are a critical component of teacher evaluations and are responsible for providing useful feedback to teachers, using student outcomes as the standard of measurement (Kim & Lowery, 2021). The evolving role of principals from managing to leading organizations has led to increased responsibilities and challenges, particularly in low-income and predominantly minority schools, where high turnover rates among principals and assistant principals contribute to leadership instability and potentially hinder student achievement, while principals also play a crucial role in teacher evaluations based on student outcomes.

Principal Turnover in Florida

In their study composed of 2,979 Florida principals, Folsom et al. (2015) found fewer than 20% of principals remained in their positions or stayed in the same school for more than 3 years. According to a national survey of teachers and principals, Florida principals spent an average of 3.8% years at their current school, 47.9% spent less than 3 years at their current school, 43.1% spent 3 to 9 years at their current school, and 9% spent 9 or more years at their current (NCES, 2018). In light of increasing principal turnover, Diliberti and Schwartz (2023) recommended policies be developed to attract and retain high-quality principals, both at the state and national level. Heavy workload, unsupportive district management, hostile working environment, low government funding, and low salaries are some aspects attributed to principal turnover (den Brok et al., 2017; Rumschlag, 2017).

Principal Turnover and the Effects on Student Achievement

Another contributing factor to principal turnover is tied to principal evaluation as less effective principals are more likely to leave their position (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). Citing previous research findings, Nelson et al. (2021) recommended states and school districts seek to make principal evaluations more meaningful for identified principals, especially those typically

receiving negative feedback. High attrition rates may lead to lower performance and trigger the possibility of failing to meet schools' missions and objectives (Califf & Brooks, 2020; Solórzano, 2019).

School principals play a crucial role in shaping the outcomes of students and faculty (Hancock et al., 2019). Research indicates school principal turnover leads to considerable financial strain on school systems left with funding the costs of principal replacement, recruitment, and PD, and also has negative effects on student achievement (Green, 2021). Research indicates principal turnover in the U.S. negatively impacts students and staff and further widens the gap between specific subgroups of students (Ross, 2022). Principal turnover also disproportionately affects students from low-income schools (Blaum & Tobin, 2019). However, schools led by principals who scored higher in pre-service evaluations and participated in new leader PD programs outperformed other schools led by principals who did not (Doss et al., 2022). According to Wang et al. (2021), the successful recruitment and retention of qualified principals depends on a school system's valuing the work outcomes and conditions of school principals.

Principal turnover leads to a loss of resources required to perform and drive school operations (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). High schools frequently face financial loss when they are required to recruit and train new principals. In addition, the U.S. public education system continues to struggle with inadequate staffing and high teacher turnover in many parts of the nation (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019; Dee & Goldhaber, 2017; Sutcher et al., 2017). The inability to replace departing principals and teachers deprives high schools of integral stakeholders to drive student achievement and school operations (Newberry & Allsop, 2017).

Adnot et al. (2017) studied the relationship between principal and student performance, finding higher principal turnover associated with reduced student achievement (Adnot et al., 2017). According to Pannell and McBrayer (2022), principal attrition contributes to a 25% reduction in student achievement. This leads to both ineffective leadership and lower student achievement (Dhuey & Smith, 2018). Cannata et al. (2017) claimed higher principal turnover rates are associated with a negative environment for teachers and students in K-12 schools, many of which are underfunded and struggle to improve standardized test scores.

The lack of teacher motivation resulting from frequent principal turnover is also attributed to lower student achievement (Grissom, Bartanen, & Rogers, 2019). Nyakuti and Kenei (2023) linked poor school performance with the inability to recruit principals who will remain in schools long term. Stronge and Xu (2021) found student achievement and school performance lowered following principal turnover. Medford and Brown (2022) attribute the reduced student achievement to the challenge teachers face adapting after the departure of their principals. Research conducted between 1999 and 2017 on attrition rates among K-12 principals and subsequent voluntary teacher turnover indicated potential ideological differences between new principals and teachers under their supervision (Superville, 2022). Superville recruited 12,000 principals to assess how principal turnover impacted performance during the stated period. The findings indicated by the fifth year of their tenure, principals understand the institutions' and students' demands and are thus able to hire instructors capable of delivering results and high performance. Superville concluded teachers need time to establish routines and stabilize performance and argued principals need a minimum of 3 years to study, understand, and recruit teachers fitting the institutional profile.

Levin et al. (2019) found students and overall school performance are negatively impacted when successful principals leave their schools. Levin and Bradley (2019) argued K-12 schools are less attractive due to limited resources, failure to attract teachers, and low salaries. Notably, Bettini et al. (2022) reasoned K-12 principals leave their roles within 3 years, lacking essential time to implement their ideologies effectively. Su-Keene and DeMatthews (2022) suggested principals are critical stakeholders guiding teachers' and students' performance. Principals impact student achievement and teachers' commitment to institutional objectives or missions (Qadach et al., 2020). Principals develop detailed knowledge of schools they lead and use their experience in strategic management, teaching pedagogy, and establishment of the learning environment, which can be highly beneficial to schools with students from low economic backgrounds (Supriyanti et al., 2021). Experienced principals are focused and respond to institutional demands through strategic planning, allowing schools to achieve high performance through effective responses to time and context (Bondie et. al, 2019; Rivera-McCutchen, 2019). Principal turnover deprives high schools of an integral stakeholder and resource, a situation whose impact extends to the entire institutional performance (Bartanen et. al, 2019). According to Ray et al. (2020), principal turnover in high schools will eventually result in losing a vital resource and lead to low financial performance of these schools.

In their research, Carpenter et al. (2022) linked principal turnover and schools' performance by highlighting the negative trend of student grades in schools experiencing principal attrition. The researchers used qualitative data to assess the relationship between principal turnover and student achievement, gathering data from Colorado schools from 2013 to 2018. The researchers identified an increase in principal turnover rates, with 50% of these schools experiencing principal turnover. Regarding student achievement, the researchers found a

subsequent reduction in institutional performance as a whole. Principals' voluntary or involuntary replacement leaves high schools without established leadership to guide and conduct operations in these schools (Sun & Wang, 2017). In the absence of critical leadership, harmonizing operations is challenging, leading to potential negative effects on student achievement and school performance as a whole (Day et al., 2016).

Challenges to Reducing High Principal Turnover

Schools with high populations of students from low economic backgrounds have many challenges inhibiting successful operations and performance, thus failing to attract effective principals and teachers (Yan, 2019a). For example, these schools experience limitations in the availability of resources to drive institutional performance and operations. Principals are constantly under pressure to deliver positive results despite working with strained resources inhibiting their ability to successfully lead their faculty and schools (Larson, 2021). Additionally, principals managing these schools struggle to attract effective teachers, making it difficult to provide a successful learning environment for students (Thompson et al., 2021). Yang et al. (2021) identified salaries as one of the driving factors in making decisions regarding principal turnover in K-12 schools. Also, principals in K-12 schools experience pressure working in schools with diversified student populations (Ezizwelu, 2020). Yang (2009) argued schools with high populations of students of color often have hostile disciplinary policies. These policies add additional pressure to principals' workloads and contribute to principal turnover.

Description and Critique of Literature

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who

have left this position. K-12 schools are plagued by high principal turnover rates (Yan, 2019b). Yan (2020) stated the challenge of reducing high rates of principal turnover is slowed by inadequate management of schools' financial demands. K-12 schools operate under limited resources, hindering a principal's ability to work and effectively allocate resources that encourage successful performance (Bryant et al., 2017; Gulosino & Miron, 2017; Jiménez-Castellanos & Garcia, 2017). Principals are frequently under pressure to deliver in these underserved schools, especially when considering the low budgetary allocation per student (Weinstein et al., 2018). This situation is complicated by standardized testing despite the massive disparity in funding and other resources allocated between K-12 institutions and private schools. The Learning Policy Institute (2021) also found an inability to control high principal turnover and attributed this failure to the limited funding allocated to K-12 public schools. The inability to secure adequate funding, which may better enable principals to pursue PD opportunities and implement sound educational principles, has made it challenging to reduce the increasing rates of principal turnover (Ross, 2022). Thus, these positions may be unattractive to job candidates, making it complex to get competitive individuals to work in these institutions (Vinovskis, 2019). Working as principals in K-12 schools with limited resources pressures principals. With underfunding likely to continue, these positions may become even more undesirable as more professionals avoid applying to lead schools with strained monetary allocations.

High principal turnover rates hinder effective school operations and performance due to the difficulty filling the gaps left by experienced school leaders. (Snodgrass Rangel, 2018). Leaders selected to fill open positions often have inadequate experience and expertise to handle the challenges of these positions. Subsequently, these principals are forced to retire or quit their positions.

Rising principal turnover rates complicate the effective management of schools. By identifying factors that influence principals to leave their roles in K-12 schools, researchers can develop strategies to reduce these turnover rates. In this literature review, I analyzed various perspectives surrounding principals' high turnover rates in K-12 schools. The following research questions consider the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals and of teachers that worked with them.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1) What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who have left their position?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

Research Question 3A (RQ3A) How do identified successful former high school principals who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Research Question 3B (RQ3B) How do faculty members of identified successful high school principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Significance Statement

The high school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention while also adversely affecting student achievement. Researchers must determine factors contributing to high principal turnover rates and help develop strategies to mitigate them. Grissom and Bartanen

(2019) assessed factors associated with high principal turnover rates and determined these rates are more prominent in rural and underfunded schools. Schools with high principal turnover recorded poor student performance and effective strategies for working with a diversified student population (Burkhauser, 2017). The high prevalence of principal turnover is challenging, resulting in the loss of critical resources demanded in institutional operations. High principal turnover rates are detrimental to districts because they lead to reduced organizational and student performance and increase the possibility of teachers quitting their positions (Henry & Harbatkin 2019).

Conceptual Framework

The Origin of Leadership Theories

Leadership theory is explained using aspects or traits of leadership and provides value by helping one develop, predict, and control leadership (Orberer & Erkollar, 2018). The origin of leadership theories can be traced back to the 1840s when the great man theory originated (Benmira & Agboola, 2021). The great man theory is the first of two theories that comprise the personality era (King, 1990). Both the great man theory and the subsequent trait theory purport that a person is born with the traits of leadership (Malakyan, 2014).

Trait theory, an extension of great man theory, expounds on the traits necessary to become a leader, leaving one with no possibility of obtaining leadership if one is not born with specific leadership traits and suggesting that leadership is predetermined (Hunt & Fedynich, 2018). Trait theory assumes leaders possess specific traits that allow them to lead (Kovach, 2018). As understanding of personality and traits began to grow, researchers began to focus on skills associated with leaders, indicating these traits are either inherited or may be politically or socially related (Asrar-ul-Haq & Anwar, 2018; Safonov et al., 2018).

Behavioral Theory of Leadership

Behaviorism focuses on the concept that all behaviors are learned through interaction with one's environment and those around them, primarily if these people are teachers or other types of leaders (Rudolph et al., 2020). The behavioral theory of leadership focuses on how people can best be led and taught (Arendt et al., 2021). This leadership theory states that behaviors are learned and that natural behavioral factors have little influence on behavior (Borkowski & Meese, 2022).

A typical example of behaviorism is positive or negative reinforcement. If an employee does well on an assignment and is rewarded with praise, a raise, or promotion, they will be encouraged to behave in the same way, which result in a reward in the future (Khan et al., 2020; Kiker et al., 2019). Conversely, if an employee does not do well on an assignment and is reprimanded, they are more likely to attempt to change their behavior to ensure it does not occur again (Khan et al., 2020; Kiker et al., 2019).

Regarding behavioral theories of leadership, Muenjohn et al. (2018) highlighted the range of behaviors that combine to create leadership style and focus on task-centered and people-centered leadership approaches (p. 33). Using McGregor's 1978 study of the relationship between the leader and the follower, researchers focused on the factors of human behaviors as related to motivation (Dolan, 2021). McGregor posited there are two distinct styles of leadership, Theory X and Theory Y (Marak & Troy, 2020). McGregor's theory X paints workers as lazy, non-committed, and incompetent; where theory Y posits them as capable of self-control and direction and indicates they will grow to be useful participants in the organization through the motivation of the leader (Muthuku, 2020).

The behavioral leadership approach is important to leaders because it describes how employees react and behave in their places of work and suggests employers can help change employee behavior to make it more adaptive (Nurbaeti, 2022). This theory can also help leaders and employers better understand the extent to which a person's home environment and lifestyle impacts behavior, helping them see it objectively and to possibly compel leaders to assist with life improvement outside of the workplace (Owens et al., 2019).

The behavioral theory of leadership focuses on helping employees learn to change maladaptive behaviors in the workplace and replace them with behaviors that will help them to succeed (Owens et al., 2019). This is accomplished through positive and negative reinforcement by identifying maladaptive or by modeling the behavior the employer would like to see (Nurbaeti, 2022). The first step is ensuring the employee with negative or maladaptive behaviors is aware of them and why they are detrimental. If people are unaware they are behaving in maladaptive ways, it is far more challenging to change their behavior to more positive ways of approaching problems and issues (Khan et al., 2020; Kiker et al., 2019). Nordin et al. (2021) maintained leaders must continuously motivate workers as they are important assets to their organization. McGregor, in his theory Y, stressed all employees will work to ensure an organization's success when their leader provides meaningful motivation and allows them to exercise free will and creative independence (Mishra, 2022). Conversely, behavioral theories of leadership suggest leaders may be created and one is not necessarily born with the skills to be a successful leader (Awu & Darius, 2022).

Situational Leadership Theory

Situational leadership theory was developed in 1969 by Hersey and Blanchard and uses situational elements to explain a leader's effectiveness and states that leadership is most effective

when learning occurs in the area and context in which it is used (Hunt & Fedynich, 2019; Rosenhead et al., 2019). Situational leadership theory is based on two types of behaviors; task behavior and relationship behavior (de Oliveira Dias et al., 2022). This theory provides leaders with behaviors that can be applied to different situations (Henkel & Bourdeau, 2018). Employees work in apprentice-like positions, so they may apply newly learned information while serving in the position for which they will need it (Rosenhead et al., 2019; Wiewiora & Kowalkiewicz, 2018). As people gain new experiences and competencies, they gradually move from an apprenticeship role to acting as full participants in their community of practice (Daniëls et al., 2019; Rosenhead et al., 2019).

Hersey and Blanchard's 1969 situational leadership theory indicates four leadership styles: leaders tell followers what to do, leaders sell their designs in order to have buy-in from followers, leaders participate by offering less direction and allow followers to be creative in their ideas and make their own decisions, and leaders delegate and take a less active approach, allowing members to make most of the decisions and retain accountability for outcomes (Manyuchi & Sukdeo, 2021). Using situational leadership, a leader's style and approach to leadership are dependent on the characteristics of their followers (Rogelberg, 2007, pp. 724).

The key principles of situational leadership theory are:

- Situational leadership is based on sociocultural theory, conveying people learn best when taught by those who effectively demonstrate the behaviors they are attempting to teach (Kearney et al., 2019). For example, if a person wants to learn to be a doctor, they should study with doctors (Kearney et al., 2019).
- Leaders should apply learned information on the job. Simplistically, the best way to learn is to be led by those with the knowledge that people are trying to attain

(Golensky & Hager, 2020). People are led best by those who are already experts in their fields, regardless of what that field might be (Golensky & Hager, 2020).

- Leaders should treat the people they are working with as apprentices (Zhu et al., 2019). As such, followers enter real-world situations where they observe experts in the field (Zhu et al., 2019). As they become more knowledgeable and accomplished, these new learners take on more responsibility in their environment and rely less on the experts (Zhu et al., 2019).
- People who are taught and led effectively eventually become well-versed through practice and the help of experts in their field (Javed et al., 2019). While the amount of time this takes may vary, the vast majority of new learners will eventually achieve increased skills and knowledge in their fields (Javed et al., 2019). The leader or employer should control the level or pace of the learners' progression throughout this process (Javed et al., 2019).

The situational theory of leadership focuses on teaching others through doing or observation (McCormick et al., 2019; Seidel et al., 2019). This type of leadership can be vastly different from attempting to lead through instruction or lectures and is often effective with certain forms of leadership (McCormick et al., 2019; Seidel et al., 2019).

Transactional Leadership Theory

Burns developed transactional leadership theory and transformational leadership theory in 1978 (Martin, 2016). Widely used successfully in public leadership, transactional leadership theory, unlike transformational leadership theory, employs rewards and incentives to motivate followers (Nguyen et al., 2022; Sobaih, 2022;). Frangieh and Rusu (2021) cited Burns's previous research that asserted leaders must develop leader/follower relationships by establishing

expectations, providing clarification of followers' roles, and including rewards for expected behaviors. Leaders are expected to reinforce positive behaviors and punish negative behaviors, resembling the traditionally accepted definition of a manager (Young et al., 2020). This reward system centers on observing followers' behaviors and using rewards to emphasize and encourage positive behaviors (Baig et al., 2021).

Transactional leadership is an active process that encourages transactions involving reflection on the importance of learning new behaviors and actions (Puni et al., 2020). It also focuses on teaching deep collaborative learning and holistic or process learning (Aboramadan & Kundi, 2020). Relevant professional assessment, including appropriate ethical standards, are a foundation of this leadership theory (Alrowwad et al., 2020). The primary goals of transactional leadership are to personalize the leadership experience to each employee in a specific environment, to encourage collaborative leadership, to use actual simulations of situations in different environments, and to relate this actual type of leadership to other types of learning (Young et al., 2020). Simulated tasks should be authentic to employees, using online simulations or actual simulated tasks, and through practical assessment of what learners have discovered through these simulations (Cho et al., 2019).

Like every leadership theory, transactional leadership involves some method for motivating employees (Berkovich & Eyal, 2019). With transactional leadership, motivation is provided to employees to accomplish goals set for them or tasks assigned to them using a rewards system (Berkovich & Eval, 2019). Paid commissions or performance bonuses are standard (Bian et al., 2019). This transaction of performance for compensation satisfies the wants of both parties, leader and follower (Jensen et al., 2019). The transactional approach to leadership assumes employees provide and receive something in every relationship (Hansen &

Pihl-Thingvad, 2018). The transactional theory also states that both leader and employee play essential roles in the organization (Crews et al., 2019).

Transformational Leadership Theory

Burns perceived transformational leadership as focusing on building one another to enhance performance through motivation (Morrison, 2018). In transformational leadership, managers focus on raising performance expectations. Transformational leadership is instrumental in generating practical approaches to managing and mobilizing stakeholders to higher performance by provoking followers to engage in behaviors beneficial to organizational operations (Lai et al., 2020). Applying transformational theories in organizational operations can inspire followers to immerse and commit themselves fully, thus, creating positive performance (Abdullah et al., 2024; Andriani et al., 2018; Normianti et al., 2019). Based on learning institutions' perspectives, Alessa (2021) stated universities operate in a rapidly changing business environment that necessitates implementing strategies to enable them to cope with the changing dynamics. Focusing on transformational leadership theories enables institutions to respond to changing demands by formulating strategies enabling these businesses to adapt to the evolving environment.

Education Leadership Theories

Positive impact and influence from principals are integral in driving high performance (Granillo, 2022). High school principals are operating and delegating their duties in a rapidly evolving environment, hence the need to foster new and effective strategies to manage operations and lead institutions to higher performance (Butler, 2017; Wharton-Beck et al., 2022). High school principals are confronted with the need to evolve and match the alternating demands in their roles. Principals are experiencing a change in their roles from managers to leaders,

demanding they demonstrate high levels of adaptability to evolving situations (Kalkan et al., 2020). Despite playing a critical role in guiding teachers and students to perform accordingly, principals must demonstrate the ability to inspire followers to high performance and contributions (Hyseni Duraku & Hoxha, 2021; Shyr, 2017). In the context of K-12 high schools, a practical leadership theory and strategy can enable principals to better contribute to and oversee the formulation of positive organizational culture eliminating barriers associated with current negative performance.

Gordon et. al (2023) identified leadership development techniques as an integral approach to enhance the comprehension of the demands and pressures of working in diversified environments, finding in-service teacher training enhances principals' capacity to work and perform in the K-12 high school environment. This training is instrumental in enabling principles to respond to the demands and disruptions in K-12 schools.

Servant Leadership Studies

Many researchers disagree on how to define servant leadership (Pawar et. al, 2020). Servant leadership requires leaders to serve their organization and, as such, inspire followers to work toward the combined good of the organization in which the leader serves (Heyler & Martin, 2018). Originating from Greenleaf's 1970 research, servant leadership encompasses four themes: diversity of thought, creating a culture of trust, possessing an unselfish mindset, and fostering leadership in others (Sarkus, 2022). Aboramadam et al. (2020) found servant leadership produced positive effects on faculty and staff in higher education settings. While servant leadership focuses on positive effects for the faculty and school, emotional intelligence leadership emphasizes the importance of leaders' emotional intelligence in managing their own emotions to create a positive environment (Goleman et al., 2013; Greenleaf, 1977).

Emotional Leadership Studies

One primary distinction between servant leadership and emotional intelligence leadership (EIL) is that servant leadership focuses on the growth and well-being of followers, whereas EIL is centered on fostering an emotionally intelligent and harmonious workplace (Eva et al., 2019; Goleman et al., 2013). EIL combines emotional intelligence (EI) and leadership constructs (Mukhtar & Fook, 2020). Mukhtar and Fook (2020) maintained that EIL uses context in the theoretical framework, a concept that is typically missing from EI literature which focuses on leaders and followers. Research indicates even more than a person's IQ, their emotional awareness and ability to understand and manage their feelings help determine their success in many situations, from education to corporate (Alotaibi et al., 2020). A leader's emotional awareness focuses on appreciating that people's awareness and ability to self-regulate their emotions are critical to their success (Alotaibi et al., 2020). This is particularly true in an academic environment (Doan et al., 2019).

Salovey and Mayer are considered some of the first to examine the concept of EI in the early 1990s (Caruso et al., 2016). Later, Goleman (1995) further examined the importance of identifying emotional variables that would become a measurable construct, similar to the intelligence quotient (IQ). He identified five components that compose EI: self-awareness regarding emotions, management of emotions, recognizing the emotions of others, handling relationships, and self-motivation. Fullan (2007) recognized the importance of emotion within organizational leadership, noting, "Teaching and educational leadership also involve the extensive emotional labor of being responsible for motivating others and managing their moods and feelings" (p. 466). Bradberry and Greaves (2019) discussed four skills associated with EI, as categorized into two components. In the category of personal competency, the authors list self-

awareness and self-management, and within the realm of social competency, they include social awareness and relationship management (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). In their research examining the impacts of a principal's EI on teacher instructional strategies, Chen and Guo (2020) recommended including knowledge of EI components in principal preparation programs to enhance communication with stakeholders and teachers.

Applying Emotional Intelligence (EI) to leadership arises from leaders' comprehension of the interconnections between emotion, biology, and intelligence, which significantly impact individuals' success and overall contentment in life (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2021). Leaders with a high EI recognize that people more in control of their emotional health tend to learn better and live happier and more fulfilling lives (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2021). Leadership programs that include instruction on EI often teach people strategies to manage their negative emotions and enhance their positive ones (Drigas & Papoutsis, 2021).

Leaders relying on EI to be effective must create an environment conducive to emotional learning (Kelemen et al., 2020). Leaders should model EI while interacting with the people they are attempting to lead (Kelemen et al., 2020). An environment that encourages emotional acceptance in all followers should be introduced, as well as an atmosphere that allows creative expression of emotions (Wirawan et al., 2019). The adoption of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in leadership should be promoted through both words and actions, potentially using a phased implementation approach (Wirawan et al., 2019).

Both "healthy" and "emotionally distressed" people appear to benefit from leaders incorporating EI into how they lead (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). However, for this type of leadership to be beneficial and effective, students and employees must be able to be led in this way, which often is seated in their childhoods (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). If a person's

parents did not model emotionally healthy leadership styles, it is often more difficult to incorporate this type of leadership later in life, whether in the classroom or in the workplace (Mysirlaki & Paraskeva, 2020). Thus, leaders should receive training to use techniques that encourage emotional leadership with their followers and that address diverse upbringings (Kennedy, 2019).

Society has changed drastically over the past several years, with people facing complex, unprecedented events (Men & Yue, 2019). Emotional leadership can help prepare people to triumph over the difficulties they will inevitably face in life and help them reach their full potential (Lu et al., 2019). Ultimately, an emotional approach to leadership can help people better endure difficult phases of life and make them better appreciate the positive aspects (Kock et al., 2019).

New research has identified a link between the EI of school principals and how they are perceived as performing their leadership duties (Turke & Wolf, 2019). While the authors found EI is a component of principal leadership skills, they recommended more PD focusing specifically on EI. In their study analyzing competency standards of school principals across different geographical areas, Lambert and Bouchamma (2019) noted empathy is not included in competency standards for school principals. Empathy is a skill directly related to EI (Korkman & Tekel, 2020). Segredo et al. (2017) examined the link between EI, leadership style, and school culture and suggested including EI in leadership theory and a principal's personal development. In their study to determine the impact of a principal's EI and leadership style on teaching strategy, Chen and Guo (2020) recommended evaluating a principal's EI traits when determining principal effectiveness.

Transactional Leadership in Education Studies

Transactional leadership is used frequently in educational settings, with leaders and followers engaging in a reward or contingency motivational relationship (Khan, 2017). Lan et al. (2019) reported a positive relationship between employee satisfaction and faculty and staff members. Similar to the previous study, Musthan (2020) also reported positive impacts on teacher capabilities and innovation. Transactional leadership in education, while purported to have a positive correlation on the relationship with employee satisfaction, does not allow for creativity and instead has been labeled routine and less beneficial than transformational leadership (Putra et al., 2021). Additionally, Erdel and Takkac (2020) maintained one significant difference between transactional and transformational leadership is that leaders employing transactional leadership do so for self-serving purposes.

Transformational Leadership in Education Studies

Kouzes and Posner's 1983 theory of transformational leadership is critical in enhancing school principals' performance and may provide an instrumental approach to mitigating higher attrition incidences (Alegbeleye & Kaufman, 2020; Caza et al., 2021; Clavelle & Prado-Inzerillo et al., 2018). Actions by principals employing transformational leadership strategies may inspire individuals to focus on common goals through a shared belief. In this approach, institutional leadership focuses on generating an effective strategy of mobilizing toward reputable performance by dedicating themselves and handling challenges while also mobilizing others to offer their (Buros, 2022; Hodge, 2020). In Kouzes and Posner's transformational theory, leadership goes beyond the position to recognize the behaviors and practices of leaders. School principals must consider suitable approaches for leading their followers to higher performance and foster innovative approaches to overcoming challenges rather than leaving their principal

positions (Viaud-Macones, 2019). Transformational leadership involves effectively guiding resource mobilization to realize meaningful performance (Kalkan et al., 2020). As such, Vélez et al., (2017) argued the nature of human resource-allocated managerial roles determines institutional image and reputation. Atasoy and Cemaloğlu (2018) linked the effectiveness of institutional leadership with its capacity to operate and make the most of the available human resources.

Alessa (2021) claimed utilizing transformational leadership in a learning institution resonates with four critical areas of management: inspiration, intellectual stimulation, individual and team considerations, and working on an ideal strategy. Through the application of transformational leadership, organizations can mobilize effective resource utilization to drive positive performance and outcomes (Jensen et al., 2018; Top et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2019). Focusing on contention among employees enables transformational leaders to formulate strategies suiting individuals' and teams' demands in organizational performance.

Transformational leadership is at the center of attention in improving performance in K-12 institutions while enhancing the capacity to retain principals (Clifton, 2019). Integration of transformational leadership traits is considered impactful in improving performance and enhancing principals' retention capabilities. According to Clifton (2019), integrating transformational leadership traits allows principals to identify areas of improvement and build leadership capacity. Transformational leadership enhances effectiveness of school principals by focusing on leadership capabilities and improving their capability to handle the challenges of managing their institutions (Singh & Townsley, 2020). According to Singh and Townsley (2020) and Boyce and Bowers (2018), transformational leadership is central to improving the perception of challenges and instilling a sense of belief and innovation to handle diverse institutional

challenges. Moreover, Davis (2022) argued, principals must offer their services beyond their current duties and responsibilities.

Parry et. al (2020) argued the ability of principals to identify differences among students helps them formulate strategic approaches to overcome hindrances limiting effective student interactions. Also, the approach is critical in enabling these principals to work under the immense pressure encountered when managing K-12 schools (Etame, 2017). This understanding is derived from their ability to foster effective and innovative approaches to solving challenges and guiding operations to higher performances. Basar et al. (2021) stated transformational leaders can harmonize diverse thinking among their followers and find suitable approaches accommodating the various inclinations to foster innovation and guide institutions to higher performance. Transformational leadership enables principals and other institutional management to generate alternative and practical approaches to eliminate burnout, stress, and attrition (Tian et al., 2022). The formulation of such mechanisms is central to enabling principals to perform and eliminate burnout irrespective of working in resource-strained environments. According to this source, transformational leadership can keep employees focused and encouraged to perform at the highest levels, thus curtailing incidences of principal and teacher burnout and subsequent turnover.

In Bass's 1978 transformational theory context, the leader generates approaches to motivate the employees (Alhuzaim et al., 2022; Mckenzie, 2022; Subocz, 2022). Transformational leadership supports positive performance by guaranteeing subordinates are aware of their duties and the importance it plays in achieving institutional objectives, prioritizing organization and teams' interests and objectives, and creating teams of subordinates capable of high performance (Han et al., 2023). Walker (2021) identified the role of transformational

leadership in K-12 as improving the principal's performance to enhance the effective utilization of strained resources in educational institutions. Solsona-Puig (2019) proffered that transformational leadership is critical in school management because it helps principals formulate approaches to overcoming barriers in implementing operational strategies, achieving this objective through mobilization to effective management and accountability among stakeholders.

The type of leadership traits employed by school principals is critical in determining the success of educational institutions (Abdullah, 2021; Roberts, 2021). In the context of Kouzer and Posner's 1983 transformational leadership, principals can mobilize teachers and students to work toward shared vision and mission. These policies are central to school success despite the challenges experienced in these institutions (Sun et al., 2017). Traditionally, principals have used accountability performance-based policies, resulting in school principals struggling to meet extensive pressures and an inability to attain positive student outcomes. Over time, challenges in public education have grown, demanding the principals to apply leadership techniques demonstrating the capability to adapt to evolving demands (Worthy et al., 2020). Worthy et al. (2020) stated leaders value learners' input in managing, thus, employee job satisfaction is higher from leaders who idealize transformational leadership practices. Moore (2022) argued the benefits of transformational leadership are its flexibility and elimination of rigid organizational hierarchies. Teachers can work in leadership roles while delegating their duties, enabling them to support their principals in attaining the school's mission and vision (Wana, 2019).

Velarde et al. (2020) identified the need for institutions and institutional leaders to generate an approach capable of dealing with and enabling their organizations to adjust to an evolving organizational context. Transformational leadership is considered performance-oriented

because it enables organizations to acclimate to a changing environment (Koh et al., 2020; Mufeed, 2018). Velarde et al. administered a survey to 476 learning institutions in Kuala Lumpur, and the results indicated transformational leadership was instrumental in recording positive performance in schools of diverse populations. Principals using transformational leadership can guide their institutions to higher performance by acknowledging cultural intelligence and differences in their managerial approaches (Koh et al., 2020). Indeed, transformational leadership is identified as directly impacting organizational health by focusing on approaches suitable for generating conducive working environments (Baroudi & Hojeij, 2018).

Khan et al. (2020) analyzed the impacts of transformational leadership in driving organizational performance by assessing how this leadership strategy fosters practical approaches to eliminating burnout and embracing diversity. Integrating intrinsic motivation can help mobilize employees to achieve (Trigueros et al., 2020). The feeling of accomplishment can drive higher organizational performance by motivating individuals to focus on approaches leading to organizational success. Transformational leadership is leading by example to set a pace for the rest to follow.

Herminingsih's (2020) studied the mediating role between institutional performance and transformational leadership. Findings indicated when principals understand the demands and intentions of teachers and students, they can better focus on creating an environment ripe for success. An essential concept in transformational leadership is the freedom awarded to employees, allowing them to handle managerial responsibilities and develop innovative leadership attributes while nurturing their capacity to perform as institutional leaders. Tepper et al. (2018) defined transformational leadership as managerial competence to mobilize employees

to perform beyond expectations. Therefore, one can argue principals' transformational leadership through this lens is to better understand how they motivate teachers to dedicate their expertise and experience to enhance performance (Bednall et al., 2018).

Wilson et. al (2024) analyzed the effectiveness and limitations of using transformational leadership, offering leadership guidance to high school principals. However, the researchers identified the limitations of transformational leadership in gaining meaningful rapid performance. During the adaptation stage, negative results are often experienced, which can discourage stakeholders, creating a loss of trust in leadership (Heissel & Ladd, 2018). The effectiveness of transformational leadership in achieving a meaningful improvement in student achievement is derived from a critical understanding of the challenges impacting the institution. However, only some transformational leadership strategies offer solutions to avoid the discouragement or departure of teachers (Mense et al., 2018).

Despite the type of leadership theory applied, the challenge of attaining high performance in high schools is evidenced by the failure to effectively recruit principals to replace those leaving. Planning for and managing K-12 institutions can be challenging, and attracting competent teachers is a problem that no leadership theory can solve (Webster & Litchka, 2020). Mense et. al (2018) argued individuals involved in transformational leadership must demonstrate competence and knowledge of the process to challenge current strategies.

Methodology

A basic qualitative design was used for this study. Using purposive sampling, three high school principals were identified and interviewed. Two teachers per principal who have worked with the principal for a period of one year or longer were interviewed. Using pre-constructed, open-ended questions, I conducted one interview per participant. The questions highlighted each

participant's personal understandings and feelings regarding challenges and barriers to reducing high school principal turnover rate.

Chapter Summary

In the literature review, I highlighted the challenges schools face in recruiting and retaining effective high school principals, especially schools with students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. There is abundant research on the prevalence of these challenges. I described issues encountered in mitigating the high rate of principal turnover. The literature reviewed included numerous studies on the extent to which transformational leadership impacts organizational performance. As well, leadership theories were examined to consider its impact on the principal's role in increasing student performance. Additionally, I elaborated on transformational leadership theories in relation to principals' distribution of leadership within their schools, comparing rural regions to urban ones.

The limitations of this literature review include inadequate data on Georgia's and Florida's K-12 principal turnover rates, particularly the lack of previous research on principal turnover. Therefore, in reviewing the literature, I adopted a general approach to consider principal turnover rates in high schools. Also, the literature review is limited to studies published between 2017-2024, minimizing the number of credible sources. Additionally, most research on principal turnover is broad and lacks specificity on the researchers' region of interest. Most studies are focused on teacher turnover, and the approach applied is general, limiting the number of available sources to accomplish this review.

Chapter III METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Effective principals cultivate trust within their school communities (Hobbs, 2022). According to Gill (2021), principals can significantly influence aspects of the educational environment, including student attendance, disciplinary practices, teacher satisfaction, and retention. Principals ensure students have access to high-quality educational opportunities by setting a clear vision for teaching and learning, managing staff effectively, and creating inclusive learning environments (Levin, 2021). Thus, principal leadership development is crucial because it improves instructional practices and better student educational outcomes (Barón et al., 2022).

The retention of high school principals has been an ongoing challenge for myriad school districts nationwide (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). Citing National Center for Education Statistics Commissioner Peggy G. Carr, (Delarosa, 2023) postulated that principals with more experience leave education faster than principals with less experience. Researchers have found school principals leave for other professional engagements due to various reasons, such as job complexity (Mehta, 2015), accountability pressures (Gonzalez & Firestone, 2013), inadequate support (Hansen, 2018), poor compensation (Tran, 2017), and teacher and substitute shortages (Kaufman et al., 2022). Moreover, the high school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention, while also adversely affecting student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019). In their findings regarding principal turnover, Diliberti and Schwartz (2023) suggest that many principals

postponed retirement through the pandemic and principal turnover may begin to increase now that the pandemic has passed.

Based on this background, this researcher sought to examine the challenges of and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate, based on the perceptions of high school principal participants in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida who have left their positions. This researcher also sought to examine how teachers with whom these high school principals worked perceive the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate. In this chapter, the researcher describes and provides a rationale for the qualitative study design. Additionally, the researcher describes the study participants and selection process and explains the data collection and analysis plan for the study. Lastly, the researcher discusses the ethical issues involved in the study.

Research Questions

Research Question 1 (RQ1) What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who have left their position?

Research Question 2 (RQ2) What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

Research Question 3A (RQ3A) How do identified successful former high school principals who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Research Question 3B (RQ3B) How do faculty members of identified successful high school principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Research Design

A research design is defined as the overall strategy or plan used in conducting research, and it defines the logical plan utilized in tackling established research questions through the gathering, interpretation, analysis, and discussion of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, the researcher applied a qualitative design with a phenomenological approach. The main objective of qualitative research is to use narrative reporting to discover and describe what particular individuals do in their daily lives (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Further, qualitative research relates to the observation, understanding, and engagement with people with vast expertise in the domains under study and specifically in relation to their lived experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Humans' lived experiences and perspectives are deeply connected to contexts or circumstances that shape their lives within a qualitative research framework; (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Rubin and Rubin (2012), it is easier and more meaningful for researchers to understand social phenomena by capturing participants' experiences instead of by making predictions regarding their experiences.

A basic qualitative design was used for this study, as it is the most appropriate for determining and understanding participants' experiences in real-life contexts (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The researcher created open-ended questions to capture participants' personal understandings and experiences relating to the challenges of and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate. The research questions allow the researcher to explore the principal participants' perceptions based on the four salient dimensions of the transformational leadership theory: individualism, idealized influence, intellectual stimulation, and inspiration (Sun & Henderson, 2016).

Through an inductive approach, qualitative researchers identify underlying patterns and themes in the data to develop findings (Farinde et al., 2016; Mijović et al., 2018; Park & Park, 2016). In this study, the researcher did not use a quantitative research method because its focus was not to measure and generalize the findings from the population. Quantitative researchers utilize experiments or surveys to gather numerical data (Chu & Ke, 2017; Risso, 2016). They use a deductive approach to isolate specific variables and test correlations, relationships, and causation among variables (Almalki, 2016; Ullah & Ameen, 2018). However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher's focus was answering the why, what, and how questions; therefore, a quantitative research method did not meet the needs of this study.

In the initial stage of determining the most appropriate research design for this study, the researcher examined case study as a potential choice. Ebneyamini and Moghadam (2018) defined a case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the object of the study and context are not clearly evident" (p. 1). However, because this researcher aimed to examine the meaning participants make of the challenges of and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate and not the system itself, a case study was a less viable method for this research study. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) relates to how participants think about or make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2013). Qualitative researchers utilize a phenomenological research design in studying participants' lived experiences associated with a specific phenomenon (Alase, 2017). In phenomenological studies, researchers access participants' memories to comprehend the crux of their lived experiences (Chan et al., 2015; Farinde et al., 2016; Smith, 2018). Because of its focus on exploring participants' lived

experiences, IPA was considered the most appropriate research design for this study. A single homogenous sample is typically used in IPA (Larkin et al., 2019).

Population and Sampling

According to Turner-Bowker et al. (2018), the appropriate sample size in qualitative studies is unclear. Dworkin (2012) argued the sample size in qualitative studies is generally smaller compared to quantitative studies. A smaller sample size is required in a narrow research study because of the comprehensive nature of the research phenomenon (Malterud et al., 2016). A study's sample size also depends on data saturation, information power, and sample specificity (Malterud et al.). For this qualitative study, the sample size included three successful high school principals and two teachers who previously worked with the identified principal participants for at least a period of 1 year. A period of 1 year gave teachers a full academic year to observe the leadership abilities of their principal. The researcher selected participants for the study using a purposeful sampling technique. Purposeful sampling involves the intentional identification and selection of information-rich cases and yields a more detailed understanding of the research topic (Benoot et al., 2016; Nollaig, 2011). Duan et al. (2015) stated qualitative researchers utilize purposeful sampling in strategically selecting participants with specific experiences and knowledge linked to the research phenomenon.

According to Patton (2014), the purposeful sampling of participants is not associated with a determined number but instead with the intent of collecting "information-rich cases [from which one can learn] a great deal" (p. 264). Starks and Trinidad (2007) argued individuals alone have the potential to generate a multitude of ideas, so large amounts of useful data may be collected without having to include large sample sizes. For this study, the purposive sampling technique was deemed appropriate and the researcher identified and selected three successful

high school principal participants and two teacher participants from public high schools who possessed meaningful experiences and knowledge to answer the pertinent research questions. I obtained a list of potential high school principal participants from a former high school principal and a college professor. Once a high school principal participant agreed to participate, they provided a list of potential teacher participants and their contact information. The successful high school principal participants selected for the study voluntarily left their positions of employment, and the selected teacher participants also previously worked with the identified successful principal participants for at least 1 year. The usual sample size in qualitative research is between one and 10 participants. To meet the objectives of the study, a total of nine participants, including three high school principal participants and two teachers per principal participant, met the criteria for this study and were invited to participate.

Ethical Considerations

Before the commencement of data collection, it is important for researchers to meet ethical requirements. Before beginning, the researcher obtained approval for the study from the university's Internal Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix C). According to Martino and Schormans (2018), the role of the IRB is to protect human subjects during the course of research. It is recommended that each participant who meets the eligibility criteria give written consent for their willingness to participate in the study (Rostami et al., 2018; Schmidt et al., 2018). The informed consent form provides information about the study's purpose and scope, the associated risks and benefits, the interview process, and the requirements for data protection (Karbwan et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). Also, included in the informed consent form is the stipulation that participation in a study is voluntary (Colledge et al., 2018; Yin, 2018). In this study, I provided

each selected participant with an informed consent form and the university's IRB approval number prior to the commencement of the data collection process.

Knepp (2018) stated the informed consent form must also explain the withdrawal process. Participants have the authority and freedom to reject or accept an invitation to take part in a study without facing any consequences (Dadzie et al., 2018). Also, individuals who agree to take part in a study may withdraw from it at any point without penalties (Singh, 2018). In this study, I provided all eligible participants with an informed consent form that explained their rights to opt-out of the study at any time without penalty. It is also a common practice for researchers to use incentives, especially thank-you cards, to acknowledge participants for their decision to participate in the study (Yin, 2018). According to Blades et al. (2018), incentives may affect participants' responses to questions. Kramer et al. (2019) recommended avoiding the perception of coercing participants to take part in a study by not providing incentives. Following this recommendation, I did not offer payments, incentives, or thank-you gifts to participants for agreeing to take part in the study.

Researchers should safeguard the research data by conforming to the stipulated data protection guidelines. Mostert et al. (2016) recommended researchers utilize simple data management techniques and practices to create generic naming conventions to shield the privacy of both the institutions and selected participants. It is an ethical requirement for researchers to protect the confidentiality and privacy of individuals and organizations participating in a study (Yin, 2018). Researchers frequently use pseudonyms to conceal the identities of organizations and study participants. In this study, I used pseudonyms, such as Hunter, when reporting the findings, to keep the identities of participants confidential. I will also provide a copy of the bound research report to participants to furnish them with the outcome of the study.

Data Collection Instrument

I utilized semi-structured interviews during data collection. According to Mselle et al. (2018), the researcher can use semi-structured interviews to ask interviewees probing and open-ended questions to obtain a profound understanding of the phenomenon under study. Researchers utilize semi-structured interviews to substantiate the findings. Guest et al. (2017) explained when conducting semi-structured interviews, researchers develop and use an interview protocol that standardizes the process of data collection. They also argued interview protocols that researchers develop must also align research questions with interview questions. Findings by Yin (2018) demonstrated researchers use the interview protocol during semi-structured interviewing to ask participants similar interview questions and enhance the study's reliability. I standardized the semi-structured interviewing process in this study by using the interview protocol. Additionally, I aligned the overarching research questions with the interview questions by including the interview questions in the interview protocol.

Data Collection Procedures

One of the unique characteristics of qualitative studies is that the researcher is the primary data collector because they ask participants questions related to the phenomena under study (Patton, 2014; Yin, 2018). In this study, I served as the main data collection instrument because I interacted with the participants directly. The first meetings with high school principals occurred during the initial delivery of the consent forms. By delivering the consent forms in person, I had the opportunity to establish relationships with study participants. The second meeting with the participants occurred during the collection of the consent forms, and it was during this meeting that I set interview times. I explained the interview process will last for

approximately one hour and recorded by a digital voice recording system. During this meeting, participants also had the opportunity to ask questions about the study.

During the interview phase, I began by reiterating the main objective of the study and any potential risks and benefits linked with the study. I also explained to participants in their places of work that the interview questions were open-ended, and they should be as honest as possible when offering responses. I conducted all interviews in "conversational mode" (Yin, 2011, p. 134) to create a social and comfortable relationship with participants. I maintained confidentiality and the absence of direct identifiers throughout the research process.

Data Analysis and Presentation

I analyzed the data using a five-phased process that included compiling and organizing, disassembling the collected data based on emerging themes, reassembling the data organized around the emerging themes, interpreting the data, and concluding the findings based on the analyzed data (Yin, 2011). I began the first phase of the data analysis process at the end of each interview by typing the notes into a word-processing document while reviewing voice recordings from the interview for familiarization purposes (Yin, 2011). I used field notes to supplement the trustworthiness of the transcribed interviews and provide further insights into the analysis process (Yin, 2018). Next, I combined the transcripts with the organized field notes to gain a comprehensive picture of the data. After compiling the data, I broke it down into themes through the disassembling process in the second phase. I coded the data thematically and organized it based on the themes that emerged throughout each interview. I then used an Excel spreadsheet to categorize common pieces.

After developing the initial themes, I reorganized the data around them and summarized each before reassembling the data. For instance, one emerging theme was *student and parent*

engagement. I grouped all responses related to how teachers felt student and parent engagement impacted their principal's leadership, whether through family engagement and support, lack of community support, and student engagement. According to Yin (2011), the second and third phases of data analysis can be repeated before completing the process. Therefore, I created a matrix showing the data graphically, enabling me to observe broad patterns that developed throughout the analysis. I then moved to the fourth phase of data interpretation. During this phase, I sought to find meaning from the disassembled and reassembled data (Yin, 2011, 2018). I created a narrative based on the analyzed data, including a description of the data and explanation of themes, interpretations, and reviewed literature. I then drew conclusions after interpreting the data.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability implies there is sufficient data to replicate the study using similar data collection processes to generate consistent findings (Karasakaloğlu, 2018). I conducted interviews with participants using bracketing to limit the effects of my own experiences on the data. Bracketing is used to demonstrate reliability in phenomenological research. Additionally, I triangulated the data to ensure the findings that emerged from were reliable. "Triangulation is a method used by qualitative researchers to check and establish validity in their studies by analyzing a research question from multiple perspectives" (Guion et al., 2011, p. 1). Researchers can accomplish triangulation by analyzing data from a variety of sources, such as interview transcripts, school observations, and artifacts. Researchers use methodological triangulation to assess all credible information related to the topic under study to improve data collection quality (Guion et al., 2011). Kural (2018) recommended the triangulation of the research data enhances the validity and reliability of the research evidence. As such, I conducted methodological

triangulation by using the data from semi-structured interviews and reviewing archival records and school documentation to increase the validity and reliability of the data gathering and analysis.

In addition, researchers validate the accuracy of interview transcriptions using member-checking. Iivari (2018) stated researchers validate interview data by sharing it with participants. The role of member-checking is to improve the reliability and validity of the findings (Iivari, 2018). I employed the member-checking strategy upon completing the transcription of interviews. Member-checking allows participants the opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure the researcher captured their statements and intent accurately, thus also increasing the validity of the findings (Yin, 2018).

Validity is the correctness of data analysis and interpretation (Kural, 2018). The three main criteria for determining reliability in qualitative studies include credibility, transferability, and confirmability (Yin, 2018). Credibility refers to a match between the researcher's interpretation and the participants' reality (Denzin, 2017). I used member-checking to enable participants to confirm and rectify any anomalies in the interview data, notes, and observations (Madill & Sullivan, 2018). Confirmability refers to the extent to which researchers collect data by focusing on the participants' perspectives using unbiased approaches. According to Yin (2018), confirmability is determined after researchers have established credibility, dependability, and transferability. I conducted member-checking and attentively listened to each participant's response, and documented my biases, opinions, and viewpoints. Additionally, referred back to the existing literature to increase confirmability while interpreting the results.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position. Recorded interviews using IPA were conducted on identified successful high school principals and two teachers per principal participant. The process of IPA, described by Smith et al. (2013), allowed me to verify and explore each participants' lived experiences. Successful high school principals were identified using the GADOE RESA network and via a list of names provided by my former principal and college professor. Once principal participants were identified, I identified two teachers per principal participant. I analyzed each recorded interview to identify themes that emerged. Findings from these interviews are presented in the following chapter.

Chapter IV PARTICIPANTS

Using purposive sampling, I selected three successful principal participants. For the purpose of this study, "successful" is defined as principals who have served in their roles for three or more years and left their positions voluntarily. Additionally, I identified two teacher participants per principal participant who had worked with the respective principal for at least one year. Teacher participants were selected from a list of names provided by each principal participant. I conducted individual interviews with the principal participants, during which they reflected on their personal lives, backgrounds, professional growth, and tenure as high school principals using the High School Principal Participant Interview Questions (see Appendix B). The teacher participants, in turn, provided their perspectives, offering insights into their own personal and professional experiences, as well as their time working with the selected principals, answering questions from the High School Teacher Participant Interview Questions (see Appendix A). The findings presented in this chapter are based on the in-depth interviews with both principal participants and teacher participants, highlighting the experiences and leadership approaches of successful high school principals.

Principal Participant 1 – Hunter

The first principal participant, Hunter, was given this pseudonym because of his hobby of hunting for arrowheads. The initial interview with Hunter was conducted over the phone, during which, details for the upcoming in-person meeting were arranged at Hunter's requested time. The in-person interview took place at Hunter's school. After entering the school, I proceeded to

Hunter's office in a separate building from the front office. The interview took place in the spring, and students ate lunch in the waiting room of the administration office, supervised by a secretary. The students were neatly dressed in their school uniforms, engaged in friendly conversations, and displayed a cheerful demeanor. Upon entering the office, a radio softly played rock and roll music in the background. Hunter shared a warm greeting and offered a seat, making sure I was comfortable before starting the interview. A large landscape painting, painted by his mother, hung above Hunter's desk. He explained that his mother is an avid painter and appeared to take pride in her ability.

The in-person interview was audio recorded. Hunter expressed interest in whether I would be writing during the interview. I explained that I would be making notes but that I relied primarily on the digital recording device. I assured Hunter that the recording would ensure accuracy and allow for a more fluid conversation.

At my request, Hunter explained at the beginning of the interview that he is from a rural South Georgia town. Hunter is an only child. Most of his cousins work in agriculture-related jobs. His mother decided to leave her career as an architect and began teaching in a small South Georgia private school. Hunter's grandmother was a principal at an Eastern Alabama school for 15 years, and his grandfather was a college professor at a large East Alabama university for 27 years. Hunter was the only one among his cousins to enter education as a career. Before deciding on a career in education, Hunter believed he wanted to go to law school. However, he explained:

I really didn't know what I wanted; I thought I wanted to be an attorney. But everybody I saw that was an attorney that was a friend of my dad's was miserable with their job. They were not happy, so I decided I didn't want to do that.

His aptitude for science, math, physics, and calculus led him towards a career teaching high school science.

Hunter's wife is an accountant with whom he shares one teenage son, currently in high school. Their son is an athlete, and Hunter proudly spoke about his son's cross-country aspirations. Hunter often attends his son's races, cheering him on from the sidelines and celebrating his achievements. His son's passion for cross-country running is a source of immense pride. Hunter and his son also spend a lot of time hunting arrowheads, an activity that has become a beloved tradition for them. He explained that the painting of the riverbank hanging behind his desk, created by his mother, captures one of the spots on the Flint River where he takes his son for their arrowhead hunts. This location, depicted so vividly in the artwork, holds a special place in their hearts and serves as a constant reminder of their shared adventures.

Hunter said the arrowheads they find in the river are notably more polished and shinier than those discovered in South Georgia's fields. He added the arrowheads found in the river do not degrade like those in the field since they are not exposed to the harsh elements. Instead, the river water helps preserve these ancient artifacts, maintaining their sharp edges and lustrous surfaces. Hunter and his son typically hunt for arrowheads by scuba diving in the river. This method allows them to explore deeper parts of the riverbed, where they often find the most well-preserved pieces. The act of diving together enhances their bond and adds an element of excitement and adventure to their hunts. They meticulously search the underwater terrain, alert not just for arrowheads but also snakes and alligators that routinely surface in the Flint River.

Hunter expressed strong feelings towards his son not going into the field of education. He voiced his concerns with a mix of frustration and resignation, emphasizing his belief that the landscape of education has shifted dramatically from what it once was. "I told my son he can go

do what he wants but I will not pay a penny for education," he stated firmly. Hunter elaborated on his perspective, citing one factor that has contributed to his disillusionment with the education sector. "It's just changed too much," he remarked, highlighting how numerous external pressures and internal policy shifts have altered the profession he once revered. He reminisced about a time when teaching was a highly respected and supported profession, both within schools and in the broader community.

One of Hunter's primary concerns was the lack of community support that educators now face. "The community support is not there," he lamented. Hunter recalled how, in the past, teachers were pillars of the community, receiving respect and backing from parents, local organizations, and civic leaders. This support network played a crucial role in fostering a positive educational environment and in ensuring that teachers could focus on their primary mission educating and inspiring students.

Graduating from the same university in Alabama where his grandfather once taught, Hunter began his student teaching career at a high school in Western Georgia, where he taught biology, physics, and chemistry. Hunter's assessment of the educational landscape in Alabama compared to Georgia influenced this decision. He explained that Alabama schools offered lower pay and benefits than those in Georgia, which made the latter a more attractive option for his teaching career.

Hunter's entry into the teaching profession, marked by a series of unexpected and challenging events, profoundly shaped his early career. During his first four days as a student teacher, Hunter experienced a tragic incident that left a lasting impression on him. While serving as an assistant coach for the school's football team, he was present when a student football player suffered a heart attack and passed away on the field. This traumatic event was not only a

shocking introduction to the emotional demands of teaching and coaching but also a moment that tested his resilience and ability to handle crises.

Hunter's supervising teacher was dismissed shortly after the incident, adding to the situation's complexity. This sudden departure left a void in the school's science department. Recognizing Hunter's potential and the urgent need for stability, the assistant principal approached him with a request to continue teaching the class for the remainder of the year. Despite being a student teacher, Hunter was thrust into a full-fledged teaching role much earlier than anticipated.

After several years as a classroom teacher, Hunter served as an assistant principal for 15 years. He served as principal in three different schools for a total of 20 years. While working as a principal, Hunter consistently emphasized the importance of fostering a caring and supportive environment for both faculty and students. He firmly believes a positive school culture begins with showing genuine concern and appreciation for the people who make up the school community. To illustrate this commitment, Hunter shared a deck of notecards he had personally made. These notecards serve as a tangible representation of his dedication to uplifting and encouraging his staff. Each notecard in the deck contained a personalized, handwritten message. These messages ranged from words of encouragement and recognition of a job well done to expressions of gratitude and well wishes. Hunter takes the time to write these notes regularly, ensuring each teacher receives a thoughtful and meaningful message.

Hunter served as a high school principal in a Southwest Georgia high school for 3 years before deciding to retire. The summer following his retirement, he was contacted by his former superintendent who convinced him to come out of retirement and work at a South Georgia charter school. Hunter explained that his role in his current administrative position is to help

wherever he is needed. "I will go to all levels and help with problems, which is the reason they sought me out when I was trying to retire last time," he stated, highlighting the confidence and trust his colleagues and superiors have in his abilities. Over the years, he has held multiple positions, gaining a broad and nuanced understanding of the challenges and dynamics at each educational tier. His roles ranged from classroom teaching to administrative leadership, providing him with a well-rounded perspective on the needs and processes within the school. His diverse background equipped him with the skills to effectively address issues and support the school's mission. Despite his dedication, Hunter said he is in his final year and planned to retire permanently at the end of the current school year.

Hunter explained that his decision to retire was due to completing 30 years of education. Hunter insisted he was not unhappy or disgruntled but that it was "just time." Adding to this, he noted in the current teacher retirement system, once an employee completes 30 years, they earn an extra 2% if they choose not to retire and an extra 3% if they do retire. He referred to it as "throwing money away" if you choose to keep working beyond 30 years. Hunter concluded he enjoyed being a principal, but it was "time to move on."

Participant 2 - Coach

The pseudonym for Principal Participant 2, Coach, reflected his first role as a health and physical education teacher. The first interview with Coach was conducted telephonically, during which we coordinated the details for an upcoming Google Meets session. The telephone conversation was efficient and laid the groundwork for a more in-depth discussion. During our call, Coach shared logistical information about the Google Meets session, including the time and his availability, ensuring that we were well-prepared for the virtual meeting.

The Google Meets session took place one afternoon, with Coach joining from his office at work. His office setting provided a professional backdrop, and he appeared comfortable and at ease in his environment. Seated at his desk, Coach exuded a sense of approachability and warmth. His demeanor was notably friendly and open, characterized by frequent, genuine smiles. Despite the virtual nature of our meeting, his professionalism was evident throughout the conversation.

Coach's ability to balance friendliness with professionalism was particularly striking. His consistent smiles and open body language conveyed a welcoming attitude, making the conversation engaging and pleasant. At the same time, he maintained a level of professionalism that underscored his role as a principal and leader in the educational field. His approach helped create a positive and conducive atmosphere for the interview, facilitating an open and honest exchange of information. Overall, the combination of his friendly disposition and professional conduct left a lasting impression, setting the tone for a productive and insightful discussion about his career and experiences in education.

Coach was born in a small town in Southwest Georgia, a region known for its rural charm and close-knit communities. However, after his parents' separation, his life took a different path. His mother decided to move back to Georgia to seek the support and familiarity of her family, particularly her parents and Coach's grandparents. This return to her roots allowed Coach to grow up surrounded by the solid familial bond of his grandparents, a vital part of his upbringing.

The town Coach grew up in, slightly north of his birthplace, was another small, agriculturally driven community typical of Southwest Georgia. Life in such places often revolves around family, church, and local traditions, shaping Coach's values and sense of identity. His

experience growing up as the third of four siblings instilled a sense of responsibility as a middle child, navigating his role between his older brothers and younger sister.

Coach's own family now reflects that close-knit nature. He is married and continues to live near family, with his adult daughter only about a half-hour away. This proximity to his daughter suggests family remains a central part of his life, with relationships built on closeness and regular contact.

Both of his parents are deceased; his mother passed away 21 years ago, and his father died last year. For the past several years leading up to his death, Coach's father required round-the-clock care due to declining health. Recognizing the need for constant supervision and medical attention, the family decided to place him in a nursing home where he could receive the appropriate level of care. Initially, Coach's father lived in his home in South Georgia, but as his health needs increased, moving him to a nursing home closer to where Coach lived became necessary. This relocation was a significant change for Coach's father, who had to adjust to a new environment, and for Coach, who could now be more involved in his father's day-to-day care and well-being. Before the move to the nursing home, Coach dedicated most of his weekends to visiting his father in South Georgia.

Coach originally intended to obtain his college degree in political science. This field initially appealed to him due to its broad scope and opportunities to understand government systems. He envisioned a future working in government, where he could apply his knowledge of political science to make meaningful contributions to public service and civic life. However, a mentor posed a pivotal question during his time in the Upward Bound program: "What are you going to do in political science?" This question prompted Coach to pause and reflect deeply on his career aspirations and practical outcomes of a political science degree. He realized he needed

to thoroughly consider the specific career paths and opportunities that would follow his studies in political science. The mentor's insistence on "drilling it down" encouraged Coach to think more critically about his future. This process of introspection and detailed planning was instrumental in helping him recognize his need for a more focused and practical career path. The mentor's guidance led Coach to explore other fields where his skills and interests could be effectively utilized. The idea of entering the education field resulted from this exploration. This suggestion resonated with him as he considered educators' impact on shaping young minds and contributing to society. The transition from political science to education was a significant shift, but it aligned with his desire to make a positive difference in people's lives.

Attending a four-year college in Southwest Georgia, Coach embarked on his higher education journey with a clear focus. He first earned his undergraduate degree in education. This initial phase of his academic career equipped him with essential knowledge and skills, preparing him for further specialization. Building on his undergraduate education, Coach continued at the same institution to pursue a master's degree in education. After completing his master's degree, Coach sought to expand his qualifications and knowledge base even further. He enrolled in a college in Southern Alabama to obtain his Education Specialist degree in Leadership and Administration. During this time, Coach engaged in research, practical experiences, and coursework that further honed his expertise and prepared him for leadership roles in education. This degree focused on advanced training and practical skills necessary for higher-level administrative and leadership positions in education.

Coach began his teaching career as a middle school health teacher and was initially certified in the state of Georgia as a health and physical education teacher. He noted, with apparent humor, that because most of his college core classes were political science courses, he

had to "really delve into the standards" to learn the content he needed to teach in his 8th-grade middle school health class. On his first visit to the middle school, Coach explained that the administration expressed the expectations of teaching curriculum from the content standards. This meant dedicating significant time and effort to understanding the content. Despite these challenges, Coach approached his new role with determination, emphasizing the importance of meeting educational standards to provide quality education to his students.

Coach is also certified in Education Leadership, a significant milestone in his professional journey. He said he achieved this certification by successfully passing the certification exam. While he is currently working on his dissertation to obtain a doctorate in Education in Curriculum and Instruction, Coach's path to obtaining this terminal degree was not without challenges. He candidly shared he "sat out a little too long," referring to a period during which he took a break from pursuing further education. Financial considerations largely influenced this hiatus. At the time, Coach supported his educational aspirations and bore the costs of his daughter's college education. The dual financial burden of paying for both his and his daughter's tuition and related expenses necessitated postponing his return to college. Coach prioritized his daughter's education during this period, demonstrating his commitment to her academic success. He recognized the importance of ensuring she had the necessary resources and support to complete her studies. This decision to focus on his daughter's education first, while temporarily delaying his own, reflected his values of family and responsibility.

Coach served as a high school principal for 8.5 years. During his tenure as principal, his responsibilities included overseeing the daily operations of the high school, which included managing faculty and staff, developing and implementing educational programs, and ensuring that the school adhered to state and district policies. Coach's leadership philosophy is grounded

in the idea that motivation, rather than punishment, fosters a positive and productive work environment. He believes a leader's primary responsibility is to inspire their team, in his case, the teachers under his guidance. Instead of relying on punitive measures when challenges arise, Coach emphasized encouragement, building confidence, and focusing on growth.

For Coach, it was crucial his teachers feel supported and know he genuinely cares about their well-being. He viewed leadership as a relationship, one built on trust and respect. By ensuring his staff knew he was there to back them up, Coach built a culture of collaboration where teachers were more likely to take creative risks and be innovative in their teaching methods.

Another key aspect of his leadership was the use of metrics. Coach understood, while motivation and support were essential, data and measurable outcomes were equally important. He believed that metrics in education provided a clear and objective way to track progress, identify areas for improvement, and set achievable goals. By integrating data into his leadership strategy, Coach ensured his team was held accountable for delivering tangible results. His focus on metrics underscored the balance he struck between compassion and high standards in leadership.

Coach's role also involved significant interaction with parents and the community. He believed in the importance of building strong relationships between the school and the wider community. After 8.5 years of service as a high school principal, Coach transitioned to the role of associate superintendent. In this new capacity, he took on broader responsibilities that extended beyond a single school to the entire school district. As an associate superintendent, Coach worked to shape district-wide policies and initiatives, improving educational outcomes across multiple schools. As associate superintendent, Coach collaborated with other district

leaders to develop strategic plans that addressed key issues such as curriculum development, teacher professional development, resource allocation, and student support services. He was involved in evaluating the effectiveness of educational programs and implementing data-driven strategies to enhance student achievement.

Participant 3 - Chairman

Both interviews with Principal Participant 3, referred to as Chairman, were conducted via telephone to accommodate his schedule. The pseudonym "Chairman" was chosen in recognition of his previous role as Chairman of the School Board in his local district, a position that marked his leadership within the community. In the second interview, Chairman shared a detailed account of his educational journey and family background, placing particular emphasis on the value his family has always placed on education.

Chairman has three siblings, all but one of whom reside in the Southeastern U.S., reinforcing their regional roots. He highlighted that his brother, who lives in Cairo, Georgia, recently retired after a career as a high school principal, showcasing the family's deep involvement in education. This connection to education appeared to be a defining characteristic of the family, with multiple members contributing to the system in various capacities.

Chairman was born in a small town in Northwest Florida. His educational path began at a local junior college, which was a smaller institution at the time. Over the years, the college expanded significantly and is now part of the University System of Florida, offering four-year degrees. After completing his studies at the junior college, Chairman transferred to a larger Florida college, where he earned his bachelor's degree. During his time there, he assisted with managing the college football team. This background, combining education, athletics, and community service, has shaped his approach to leadership throughout his career.

He described his upbringing in a family dedicated to education, with his father serving as a minister and clerk of the circuit court for 20 years, and his mother as a teacher. The family prioritized education, with all siblings expected to attend college. Despite not being wealthy, they valued family meals together, which fostered close family bonds. Chairman lived in various places in Florida and now resides in a small Northwestern town in Florida since 1971.

Chairman mentioned that he is married and has one adult daughter who lives in South Carolina. His daughter is a federal judge, and he expressed pride in her accomplishments. He also has one granddaughter who is in the ninth grade. Chairman plans to move to South Carolina in the next few months to be closer to his daughter's family.

Chairman reflected on the strong influence his parents had on shaping his values and aspirations, particularly regarding education. "Well, I've said that my parents were my inspiration," he began, acknowledging the deep respect and obedience that defined the relationship between children and parents during his upbringing. He emphasized the cultural differences between then and now, noting how, in his family, there was no room for refusal or complaints, especially regarding everyday matters like meals. "Back then, you didn't say no to your parents about what they had to cook for you," he explained. The idea of rejecting food or demanding something different was simply not an option in their household. "We didn't talk like that," he said, marking the sense of discipline and acceptance that was ingrained in him from an early age.

Central to his upbringing was the encouragement he received, particularly from his mother. She played a pivotal role in pushing him to pursue higher education. "She especially encouraged me to continue my education," he said, revealing how her belief in the value of education set the course for his future. This encouragement was so strong, that by the time

Chairman and his siblings reached high school, the idea of continuing their education beyond that point was not even a question. "When we were through high school, we did not realize it," he said, noting how seamlessly the expectation of going to college was woven into their lives. It wasn't just an option; it was the next logical step, ingrained as part of their upbringing.

His mother served as a profound source of inspiration. Her unwavering belief in the power of education not only shaped Chairman's trajectory but also reinforced the broader family values. "She was my inspiration," he concluded, reflecting on how her influence extended beyond the immediate family dynamics and into the foundational belief that education was the key to success.

Chairman was a well-rounded athlete during his college years who engaged in multiple sports. Chairman fondly recalled his time in college, reflecting not only on the educational experience but also on the sense of community and camaraderie he developed during those years. "I enjoyed college life," he began, emphasizing that beyond academics, college was about embracing all aspects of the experience. He particularly cherished his time working with the football team, an opportunity that allowed him to build lasting relationships and create memories that stayed with him for decades. "I enjoyed working with the football team," he said, and it was through this involvement that he met many people who continued to be a significant part of his life long after college.

Chairman explained many college connections remain strong, even today. "We still meet every month on Thursday and have lunch," he shared, speaking of regular gatherings with his former coaches, teammates, and other individuals associated with the football program. These monthly lunches, where they reminisce about their shared experiences, are an important part of

maintaining those bonds. He added that these lunches are more than just social events; they offer a space where friends continue to support and care for one another.

The sense of community among Chairman and his former college associates is further strengthened by their broader network, as new members join and take part in these gatherings. "They can hear what we have to say, and they can meet people too," he noted, expressing how these gatherings have become an opportunity for newer generations to learn from the stories and wisdom of more senior members of the group. "Eating is a key word that keeps coming up," he joked, acknowledging that while they may no longer be able to participate in some of the more physically demanding activities of their youth, they can still enjoy the simple pleasure of a meal. These monthly lunches reinforce how important these regular get-togethers are for Chairman and his group of friends. "We don't mess up our Tuesday," he quipped, showing the value they place on these routines that keep them connected and grounded in the relationships they built during their college years.

Chairman began his career in education as a physical education teacher, focusing on middle school students. For two years, he dedicated himself to teaching physical education, a subject that not only promotes physical fitness but also instills teamwork, discipline, and the importance of an active lifestyle in young learners. In this role, Chairman had the opportunity to engage with students during a formative time in their lives, using sports and physical activity to teach life skills and build character.

Despite his success in the classroom and on the field, Chairman furthered his education and expanded his impact on the broader educational system. He decided to pursue a master's degree in administration, supervision, and administration at the same Florida university where he completed his undergraduate studies. While working toward his advanced degree, Chairman also

worked with the college football team, gaining valuable experience in managing athletic programs and further strengthening his leadership abilities.

His first administrative role was as an assistant principal at a junior high school in another small, Northwestern Florida town. Within two years, he was promoted to principal. He then served as the principal of a Florida middle school for 14 years, which he remembered as a challenging but rewarding experience. Subsequently, he became the principal of a high school before moving to a county office position as a personnel director. He also served as the Drug-Free School Coordinator.

After 48 years in education, Chairman retired. He then ran for the school board and served as a school board member for 12 years. He served as the Chairman of the School Board, a role that was rotated among members. He frequently worked in this role due to his extensive knowledge of education. He enjoyed his participation in the School Board, including his involvement with the Florida High School Activities Association, which he found particularly fulfilling. He was a School Board member for 12 years, with no opposition for eight of those years. His tenure included working closely with four different superintendents. Chairman retired at the age of 66 and has been retired for approximately 10 years. He is currently 76 years old. And throughout his career, he demonstrated a strong commitment to education, serving in multiple leadership roles.

Principal 1/Teacher 1 - Addie

Both interviews with Principal 1/Teacher 1, referred to as Addie because of her passion for mathematics, were conducted over the phone. The first interview consisted of introductions, and plans were made to conduct the second interview. The second interview took place on a Saturday morning.

Addie's childhood ambition was to become a teacher. This early interest in education was, however, set aside as Addie pursued a bachelor's degree in accounting. The decision to major in accounting stemmed from a dual interest in both mathematics and the practical applications of accounting. Addie elaborated, "Growing up, I always wanted to be a teacher, but I got a bachelor's degree in accounting. I always wanted to either be a math teacher or an accountant."

Yet despite the successful completion of an accounting degree and subsequent employment in the field, Addie experienced a sense of dissatisfaction. Reflecting on this period, Addie stated, "After I worked in accounting, I was very bored and realized, okay, this isn't really my calling. I really should have been a teacher." The reality of working in accounting did not align with her expectations and intrinsic motivations.

This realization prompted a significant career shift. Addie decided to transition from accounting to education, despite the apparent challenges and uncertainties associated with such a move. Addie described the transition process: "I was one of those who decided to go in the roundabout way. And anyway, once I got there, I loved it." Addie said it was a complicated decision, as it involved a complete reevaluation of career goals and professional identity.

Addie taught school for 10 years. "I was a math teacher for nine years and a kindergarten teacher for one year." Following this, she took a position as a Media Center Specialist for a few years. Following her time spent as a Media Center Specialist, she accepted a position as an Assistant Director of Special Education and Curriculum in a South Georgia town, a position she currently holds.

When asked about the mentors or inspirations who influenced her teaching career, Addie reflected on several key individuals and sources of guidance. Initially, her sister-in-law served as

a significant mentor. "She was a really good teacher," Addie remarked, highlighting the valuable advice and support she provided during the early stages of Addie's career. Addie reflected on her unique journey and the role of her sister-in-law. Although Addie mentioned she did not have any other family members who were educators, she shared a fond memory of how her passion for teaching began in childhood. "I just grew up lining my baby dolls up on the floor, using a chalkboard, always teaching," Addie recalled. This early love for teaching and numbers laid the foundation for her eventual career in education.

Despite not having a strong family background in teaching, Addie found inspiration and support from their sister-in-law, who played a pivotal role in their transition from accounting to education. "I don't have any family members that I know of who are educators, other than my sister-in-law, who's not even blood-related," she noted. After graduating with a degree in accounting and realizing the field did not bring her satisfaction, Addie turned to her sister-in-law for advice. She was a dedicated teacher at the time and encouraged Addie to consider a career in education.

Recognizing Addie's dissatisfaction with accounting, Addie's sister-in-law provided valuable guidance and resources. "She gave me resources, books, and things to read," Addie explained. These materials helped Addie gain a better understanding of the education field and prepared her for the challenges ahead. Additionally, Addie's sister-in-law offered practical advice on classroom management and discipline, drawing from her own experience in a charter magnet school. This advice was particularly valuable as Addie began her teaching career in a Title I public school, which presented different challenges and dynamics than a charter magnet school.

When discussing her teaching certifications, Addie elaborated on the breadth and diversity of her qualifications, highlighting a strategic approach to career development. "I was

mostly middle grades, so I'm certified in middle grades math and English Language Arts (ELA), and that's where my teaching career was held." This dual certification in math and ELA allowed Addie to teach two core subjects at the middle school level. She emphasized a desire to keep her professional options open, leading to additional certifications in various educational areas. "I'm also certified in early education," she continued, indicating her qualification to teach younger students. Addie also pursued certification as a Media Center Specialist. "I went back and got my Media Specialist degree," she noted. "I wanted to keep my options open," Addie explained, "so I got certified in many different areas because I get bored easily." The motivation behind obtaining multiple certifications was partly driven by her recognition of her tendency to become dissatisfied.

Addie began her administrative career in a small South Georgia school district as the Director of Special Education and Curriculum. In this initial leadership role, she managed a relatively small caseload, overseeing the educational needs of approximately 45 special education students. This setting provided Addie with valuable experience and a foundational understanding of special education administration, allowing her to develop key skills in managing programs, supporting students, and collaborating with educators and parents. She worked closely with teachers to develop and implement individualized education programs (IEPs), ensured compliance with state and federal regulations, and provided resources and training to staff to enhance their ability to support special education students.

Addie's career took a significant step forward when she moved to a larger South Georgia school district with more extensive special education needs. In this new role, Addie initially became the Assistant Director of Special Education. "Their Assistant Special Education Director moved up to the director's position," Addie explained, "and I took her spot, which was really an

upward move for me because I went from 45 students to 500." The transition was a substantial upward move, marked by increased responsibilities and a much larger caseload.

As Addie gained more experience, she found inspiration and mentorship from colleagues within her professional environment. Addie emphasized the importance of having supportive co-workers, stating, "I had some really good co-workers who I would go to for questions and concerns." These interactions with fellow educators fostered a collaborative atmosphere where Addie could seek advice, share ideas, and learn from the experiences of others. In addition to personal mentors and colleagues, Addie identified herself as a proactive learner, describing her approach as being a "researcher." She consistently sought out additional information and best practices to enhance her teaching methods. This commitment to continuous learning and self-improvement allowed her to stay informed about the latest educational trends and strategies. Furthermore, she acknowledged the impact of having effective principals during her career. She mentioned working under "a good principal or two along the way," noting that Hunter stood out as a great leader. Addie appreciated the positive working relationship and the supportive leadership provided by Hunter.

When asked how long she had known Hunter, Addie provided an account of their long-standing relationship, rooted in both academic and professional contexts, as well as their shared community ties. "Well, we got our specialist degree together," she began, indicating that their initial meeting took place during their pursuit of advanced education. "That's where I met him. It was probably around 2000." The bond between Addie and Hunter extended beyond their academic endeavors, as they discovered they were from the same community. This commonality strengthened their connection, providing additional opportunities for interaction and collaboration outside of their formal education. Their professional relationship further developed

when they began working together in 2018. This collaboration in a professional setting allowed them to build on their prior acquaintance and work closely on educational initiatives. "We started working together, plus our kids go to school together," explained Addie. She worked under Hunter's supervision when he served as the high school principal.

Principal 1/Teacher 2 - Buffy

The interviews with Principal 1/Teacher 2, known as Buffy due to her being a history buff, took place telephonically. During the first interview, we made introductions and discussed a date and time for the second interview. Conflicts in her schedule delayed the second interview by a few months.

When asked what initially interested her in education, Buffy shared a heartfelt and multifaceted response that illustrated a deep-seated passion for working with young people. "I've always had a desire and a passion to work with kids, nearly of all ages," Buffy began, emphasizing a lifelong dedication to supporting students across different age groups. Buffy's background as an athlete in high school significantly influenced her career choice. "I was always an athlete in high school," she explained, noting that her involvement in sports played a crucial role in shaping her educational aspirations. Buffy developed strong relationships with her teachers and coaches through athletics, many of whom left lasting impressions. "I always loved all the teachers that I had, most of the time," Buffy remarked, highlighting these educators' positive impact on her life.

One particular history teacher significantly influenced Buffy's decision to become an educator. "I had a history teacher in high school that I admired and adored, that taught me so much," Buffy recalled fondly. This teacher not only imparted knowledge but also served as a role model. This experience inspired Buffy to pursue a similar path and make a difference in students'

lives through teaching. Recognizing her potential to continue in athletics, Buffy initially considered playing college basketball. However, her love for history and the inspiration from her high school history teacher guided her toward a career in education. "I knew that probably I was going to be able to play college ball, which was basketball at the time," Buffy said, but the passion for teaching ultimately prevailed. "When I went to ... university, I made it, and I knew that's what I wanted to do. So that's what my focus was on when I got there," she explained. Buffy's educational journey took her to a large university in North Georgia, where she focused on her goal of becoming a teacher.

Buffy taught middle and high school in the public school system for 32 years. In that time, she was a high school teacher for approximately 17 years and currently teaches high school students in a South Georgia private school.

Reflecting on her career in education, Buffy identified several key figures who served as mentors and sources of inspiration, significantly shaping her professional journey. A pivotal influence during her early academic years was a math professor at the university she attended in North Georgia. "She probably has passed away at this point, but she was my math teacher," Buffy noted. This professor played a crucial role in helping Buffy overcome challenges with mathematics, a subject she initially struggled with. "She helped me along the way because my math skills were pretty poor," Buffy recalled. Her guidance and support were instrumental in enabling Buffy to complete the necessary coursework, paving the way for her entry into the field of education in the early 1980s.

Beyond her university years, Buffy found inspiration in some of the administrators who influenced her teaching career. One was an administrator who served as both a mentor and superintendent. Additionally, Buffy spoke highly of Hunter, a long-time friend and colleague.

"He and I were really good friends during my high school and college years," Buffy explained. Hunter later became Buffy's principal around 2018. "It was very odd because I had not reconnected with him until that time," Buffy remarked. Their relationship, built on mutual respect and shared goals, evolved over the years.

Another significant mentor was a former principal who preceded Hunter as principal. Buffy described this former principal as "a transformer" due to her impactful leadership. "She had the same work ethic I do," Buffy noted, emphasizing their shared dedication to school improvement. They collaborated for long hours, showing a strong commitment to enhancing the school's performance. "We were on the school improvement team, pretty much on every team she had during those years, because she knew I would get the job done," Buffy said, highlighting the trust and mutual respect that defined their working relationship. "Their commitment to working day and night until we got the job done inspired me," she stated. The work ethic demonstrated by both Hunter and her other former principal profoundly influenced Buffy.

Buffy shared a family background deeply rooted in education, which significantly influenced her decision to pursue a career in teaching. "My great-grandmother was a 40-year veteran teacher in the ... school system," Buffy began. Though Buffy did not know her personally, her great-grandmother's reputation as a dedicated and well-respected educator left a lasting impact on the community and on Buffy. "She was very well thought of in the community," Buffy noted. In addition to her great-grandmother, Buffy's grandmother also dedicated much of her life to teaching. "I had a grandmother that taught for 20 years in the local schools," Buffy explained. Her grandmother's two-decade career further reinforced her family's commitment to education. Buffy emphasized the influence these two women had on her career choice, stating:

Those two definitely inspired me along the way. I had a lot of people in the community that I grew up with who knew her as well as my grandmother. They were seen as wonderful examples of top teachers in the area.

The admiration and respect the community held for these educators were particularly impactful.

Buffy provided a detailed overview of her certifications. "I was just looking at that the other day because I had to turn in my teaching certificate," she began, indicating that she maintained up-to-date documentation of her credentials. Her certifications include middle and high school, allowing her to teach various subjects across different grade levels. She is certified in political science, American government, English, and social studies in the middle grades area. For high school, her certifications extend to history, a subject area that includes several specific disciplines. "High school history includes behavioral science, history, geography, American government, all of the above," Buffy elaborated. This comprehensive certification allowed her to teach multiple facets of history and social sciences at the high school level. In May 2023, she retired from a Georgia public school system.

Buffy now works as a middle school science teacher at a small private school in South Georgia. "I took the job ..., middle school science, which I have never taught before," she explained, indicating a significant shift from their previous teaching experiences. Throughout her career, Buffy has primarily taught English and history. Buffy teaches three different science courses across multiple grade levels: sixth-grade general science, seventh-grade life science, and eighth-grade environmental science. "This has been a challenge," Buffy admitted. This diversity of subjects requires Buffy to quickly adapt and expand her knowledge base to deliver the curriculum effectively.

Despite the challenges, Buffy embraced this opportunity partly due to personal reasons. "To be honest with you, this is my 33rd year, and I did not need to take the job," she noted, highlighting her extensive experience and implying that financial necessity was not the primary motivator. Instead, Buffy's family, particularly her young son, influenced her decision. "My son is about 11 years old. I had him in the latter part of my life, and I thought this would be a good experience," she shared. By taking the middle school science position, Buffy saw an opportunity to align her professional and personal lives closely.

Additionally, her current school offered Buffy the chance to coach basketball, a role that complements her son's athletic interests. "They wanted me to coach. And my son is an athlete as well. A very good athlete," Buffy explained. This coaching role allows her to stay engaged with her son's activities and provides a means to maintain physical fitness and stay active. "I felt like I would be able to not only keep up with him, but I could also stay in shape," she noted, emphasizing the personal benefits of this arrangement. The combination of teaching and coaching enables Buffy to remain focused on her career and actively involved in her son's development.

Reflecting on her professional journey, Buffy shared insights about her longstanding relationship with Hunter, a respected colleague and mentor. Her connection with Hunter dates back to their time at a small K-12 private school where they both worked. "We were always very close," she noted, emphasizing the strong bond they developed over the years. Buffy could consistently rely on Hunter. "He's a good guy, and I always had mutual respect for him because I could trust him," she explained. Buffy appreciated Hunter's integrity and the positive working relationship they shared. "He was loyal. He was honest. And it was just a good all-around relationship," she remarked. Buffy worked for Hunter for approximately five years.

While serving as a high school teacher under Hunter's supervision, Buffy also served on the school improvement team. This position involved working closely with colleagues to identify areas needing enhancement and developing strategic plans to address those needs. Additionally, she served as a team leader for the high school while Hunter held the principal position. This role involved coordinating and guiding a group of teachers toward common departmental goals.

Principal 2/Teacher 1 - Artie

The first interview with Principal 2/Teacher 1, known as Artie, due to her passion for art, occurred telephonically. We made logistical plans and scheduled the second interview for a weekday at Artie's home. Artie explained her interest in education stems from a combination of familial influence and personal experiences. Her mother played a pivotal role in nurturing her passion for teaching. Additionally, being the oldest of seven girls, she said she naturally assumed the role of a teacher from a young age, guiding and mentoring her younger siblings. Artie reported that early responsibility fostered an inherent passion for education.

Artie pursued her higher education at an East Georgia university, where she earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in photography. Despite her qualifications, she described significant challenges in finding a job in her field upon returning home. Potential employers often deemed her overqualified or were not hiring for positions matching her skills. Her mother offered crucial advice during this challenging period: "If you can't practice your art, teach it." This suggestion resonated with her, aligning perfectly with her natural inclination towards teaching and her desire to stay connected to her artistic passions.

Education runs deep in Artie's family. Her paternal grandfather was a math teacher, and her paternal lineage includes home economics and family consumer science educators. According to Artie, this tradition of teaching in her family further reinforced her decision to

pursue a career in education. The idea of continuing this legacy and sharing her knowledge and skills with others felt like a natural and fulfilling path to her.

Artie's journey as a high school teacher began in the ninth grade. Over the years, she has taught various grades within the high school system, primarily focusing on ninth grade, and covering other levels as needed. She has approximately 15 years of experience teaching high school students. The mentors and inspirational figures shaped her journey in education she encountered along the way. One mentor was a pivotal figure in her development as a teacher. As her master teacher, this mentor provided invaluable guidance, support, and practical teaching strategies that helped her navigate the early years of her career. Another key mentor was the former art teacher at the high school where she now teaches. According to Artie, her expertise and dedication to the arts were a source of inspiration and practical knowledge. Artie also reported that her high school teachers, especially her French teacher and high school principal, were exemplary educators.

Artie's family's profound commitment to education has significantly shaped her career path and teaching philosophy. Her paternal grandfather, a dedicated math teacher, instilled the value of education in the family from an early age. Furthermore, Artie stated that her aunt, who pursued a career in education at the collegiate level, has been another significant influence. Many of Artie's family members entered either education or the medical field. "It's just weird, either medicine or education. Just seeing your blood." The impact of her grandfather and aunt and the broader family commitment to education and medicine provided her with a strong foundation and a deep appreciation for the power of education.

Artie is certified in Fine Art, grades K-12. In her current role, she serves as the art teacher at a South Georgia public high school where she attended as a high school student. This position

allows her to combine her passion for art with her commitment to education. As the art teacher, Artie is responsible for developing and delivering an engaging art curriculum, inspiring students to explore their creativity, and fostering an appreciation for the visual arts. In addition to her teaching duties, Artie holds the position of head of the fine arts, physical education (PE), and credit recovery departments. This role requires her to oversee the coordination and management of these areas, ensuring that each department runs smoothly and effectively.

As head of the fine arts department, Artie works closely with other arts educators to develop comprehensive programs integrating various forms of artistic expression, such as music, drama, and visual arts. In the PE department, Artie collaborates with physical education teachers to promote physical fitness, wellness, and healthy lifestyles among students. The credit recovery program provides students with opportunities to make up credits for courses they have previously failed, helping them stay on track for graduation. Furthermore, Artie is the co-chair of the mentee committee within the Master Teacher Academy. This role involves supporting and guiding new teachers as they navigate the early stages of their careers.

Reflecting on her longstanding professional relationship, Artie said she has known Coach for a significant period. She first met Coach when she started working at the middle school in her current school district. This initial meeting took place around 2008, a period when Artie was establishing her career in education and managing personal milestones simultaneously. She said she had just given birth to her youngest son, pinpointing the time frame of their introduction.

Artie detailed her tenure under Coach's leadership, reflecting a long, collaborative professional relationship. "I worked for him the entire time from 2009 until he left to go to the high school," she explained. The transition from middle school to high school marked a new chapter in their working relationship. "And then maybe a year or two later, I did seemingly

follow him," she continued, noting that she eventually moved to the high school where Coach had taken on a new principal role. This move was not immediate but occurred within a couple of years after Coach's transition. "I went over there as well," she remarked, emphasizing her decision to continue working with Coach in his new capacity. "Until he left being a principal, I worked with him at the high school as well," she concluded, indicating that their collaboration extended until Coach moved on from his principal position at the high school.

While working under Coach, Artie held several key roles, highlighting her versatility and leadership within the school system. "While working for him, I was the art teacher at the middle school; part of the Connections team," she began. Artie's leadership capabilities were soon recognized, leading to a new opportunity when Coach transitioned to a different role. "When he left, the new principal put me as Connections lead," she explained. The organizational changes within the school district presented further opportunities for Artie. "I moved over to 10 through 12 because the schools merged. The city and county schools merged," Artie noted. This merger necessitated a reorganization of teaching assignments to cover a broader range of grades. Artie had the choice to continue teaching at the middle school or move to the high school to serve a larger student population. "They gave me a choice to stay and serve one group of kids or go in the middle and serve more," she said. Artie opted to serve more students, agreeing to move to the high school on the condition that she could return to her preferred role once the opportunity arose.

Upon returning to the high school, Artie discovered a need for leadership within the fine arts department. "When Coach went back, and I got over to the high school with him, I realized that it was a basketball coach that was heading the fine arts department," she remarked. Recognizing her qualifications and leadership experience, Artie requested a meeting with Coach

to discuss her aspirations. "I requested a meeting with Coach, spoke to him, and told him I had leadership experience. I am in fine arts. Can I please return as fine arts lead?" Artie recalled asking Coach. Coach responded positively to Artie's request, acknowledging her expertise and leadership potential. Since then, Artie has been the head of the fine arts department in her current high school.

Principal 2/Teacher 2 - Destiny

The first interview with Principal 2/Teacher 2, who is referred to as "Destiny" because of her strong conviction that destiny guided her to a career in teaching, was conducted over the phone. A Google Meet was scheduled for a Saturday night to accommodate her work schedule. However, we rescheduled the Google Meet for Sunday night because the company arrived at Destiny's house.

Destiny is an international teacher from India. Reflecting on the path that led her to a career in education, Destiny shared a heartfelt narrative underscoring both personal passion and the role of destiny. "It's my passion," she began, expressing an intrinsic love for education and a deep admiration for teachers. This passion, however, was not her initial career choice due to familial expectations. "My mom wanted me to be a doctor, so I went into a science field," she explained, highlighting the strong influence of her mother's aspirations for their professional life.

Reflecting on her journey into the field of education, Destiny shared a narrative that highlights a combination of personal passion and the influence of familial expectations. "I love education. I love teachers," she said. Interestingly, Destiny did not initially choose education as her first career path. "I did not choose this as my first option because my mom wanted me to be a doctor," she revealed, illustrating the significant influence of parental expectations on her early career decisions. Following her mother's wishes, Destiny entered the science field with the

intention of pursuing a medical career. "Unfortunately, I could not get into medical school," she said, describing the challenges she faced in fulfilling this initial plan. Despite this setback, Destiny's path ultimately led her to a career in education, aligning with her true passion. "Eventually, I ended up in education, which was my priority," she noted. "I know it's all destiny," she mused. "We cannot control destiny. My parents wanted me to do something else, but I ended up here, which was my passion." This suggests a belief that her current role was a fated outcome despite the twists and turns along the way.

Destiny's love for education is rooted in her desire to impact the lives of children. "Why do I like education? Because I love kids," she shared. "Education is the best profession out of all because it molds the lives of students," she added. Destiny believes teaching offers a unique opportunity to leave a lasting impression on young minds. "At this age, students' brains are like a blank slate. Whatever we write on it will be impressed on them forever," she proffered. For the past 11 years, she worked in the same school system as Coach. Before joining her current school system, she spent much of her career at a large suburban public high school in North Georgia.

Reflecting on individuals who have shaped her career in education, Destiny shared insights into both mentors and inspirations who profoundly influenced her teaching philosophy and professional development. One of the most significant figures in her life was her biology professor during her student years. She recalled:

When I talk about my student life, one of my biology professors changed my values and thinking about life. She was the main reason for me to pursue this teaching degree. She taught us life skills along with scientific skills. She was my inspiration because, usually teachers teach the content. But she went out of the box and taught me some life skills.

This inspirational approach motivated Destiny to adopt a similar methodology in her own teaching practice. "In my classroom, I talk about how science will impact their lives and how they can take control of their lives," she added, underscoring the lasting influence of this professor's teaching style.

While this professor was a key inspiration, Destiny also benefitted from several mentors throughout her career. At her previous high school, another teacher played a crucial role in guiding Destiny. "She was my mentor. I loved her teaching and how she guided me," she recounted. Destiny faced unique challenges as an international teacher when adapting to a new educational system and culture. This teacher's mentorship was invaluable in helping Destiny navigate these challenges. "I learned a lot about the US culture and how to teach here from her," she explained. After transitioning to her current school system, Destiny found additional mentors who continued to support her professional growth. "I had Coach and other mentors," Destiny mentioned. Each of these individuals contributed to Destiny's development as an educator.

Destiny shared a family background that significantly influenced her approach to education. "Oh, yeah. I'm a mother of five," Destiny began. "If you look at our hand, all fingers are of different sizes and different," Destiny noted, using a metaphor to illustrate the uniqueness of each child and the lessons they imparted. "All five kids taught me everything in my life, which I can apply in my classrooms," she added. This experience of raising five children has equipped Destiny with skills in handling diverse personalities and managing various challenges.

Destiny's family background embraces a tradition of educational involvement, both from her immediate and extended family. "I married into an educational family," she shared, indicating a continuation of educational values and commitment in her married life. Her mother-in-law was a superintendent in her native country, demonstrating a high level of responsibility

and leadership in the educational sector. "She was a superintendent," Destiny explained.

Additionally, "My father-in-law was a professor," she noted, indicating the presence of a strong academic role model in her life. This academic influence extends to Destiny's own parents as well, as her father is a professor. Her family background, rich with educational influence and personal experience as a mother of five, plays a crucial role in shaping her approach to education.

In her current role, Destiny holds multiple positions within her school and district. She is the head of the science department for her school. She is also the gifted coordinator for the high school. Additionally, she acts as the district's science liaison, coordinating science education initiatives across multiple schools. She is Broadfield certified in science and biology, gifted endorsed, and certified in AP Environmental Science.

Destiny shared that she has known Coach since 2013. This connection was significant as it marked the beginning of Destiny's career as a science teacher. "He is the person who appointed me as a science teacher in 2013," she explained, highlighting Coach's role in her career development. This initial appointment laid the foundation for a longstanding professional relationship that has spanned over a decade. "I grew so much under his guidance and leadership," Destiny noted. From this appointment, Destiny experienced substantial professional development, largely due to Coach's encouragement and support.

Principal 3/Teacher 1 - Faith

The first interview took place telephonically. Principal 3/Teacher 1 is referred to by the pseudonym "Faith," which represents her mother's belief in her potential to succeed in education.

We shared logistical plans for the second interview. Faith stated that she would prefer to schedule the second interview to occur during the weekend when she could focus completely on the interview.

Growing up, Faith's parents were farm foremen, and the family worked together on tobacco farms and other agricultural tasks. "We would have to work in tobacco and things of that nature," she recalled, describing the labor-intensive environment of her childhood. This early experience instilled in Faith a desire for a different path. "I wanted more for myself," she noted, expressing a yearning for greater opportunities beyond the confines of farm work. Her mother played a pivotal role in fostering this aspiration. "My mother was an advocate of education," she explained, highlighting her belief in the power of education. She was determined that all her children should be educated, understanding that education was the key to a better future. "Even though we were not what she called poor, we had everything we needed to live comfortably," Faith continued. Despite this, her mother emphasized the importance of education, instilling in her children the value of learning and academic achievement.

This advocacy for education was driven by Faith's mother's own dreams and desires. "It was her desire to have a teacher in her family," Faith revealed. This aspiration became a guiding force for Faith, who internalized her mother's dreams and worked towards fulfilling them. The encouragement and expectations set by her mother were instrumental in sparking an interest in education.

As Faith progressed through high school, this interest was further nurtured by inspirational teachers. "I had teachers who were just wonderful," she recalled. "They let me see the potential that was in me," she explained. Reflecting on her career in education, she shared that her tenure was marked by dedication and longstanding service. "Well, before I retired... the

first time, that is 38 years in the classroom," Faith began, highlighting the period she spent as a high school teacher.

After retiring from classroom teaching, Faith transitioned to a new role within the educational field. "And after that, I went back to school to become a certified counselor," she explained, indicating her pursuit of further qualifications and a new direction in their professional life. "I was a certified counselor for the last 17 years of my working career," she noted. This role involved providing guidance and support to students, helping them navigate academic, personal, and career challenges. "I did 38 years before I retired in June of 2014," Faith concluded, summarizing her extensive experience in education, both teaching and counseling roles.

One significant mentor was Chairman, with whom Faith worked early in her career. "I worked with Chairman after I graduated from college and came back to work at my alma mater," Faith explained. Additionally, she found inspiration and guidance from several of her former teachers. "There were teachers who taught me in the classroom, and they were some of the ones who mentored me," she shared. Returning to work at her alma mater allowed her to reconnect with these influential educators. Other principals also played a vital role in her development as an educator. "Some of the principals mentored me to become the teacher I am today," she noted. These school leaders provided Faith with administrative insights, classroom management strategies, and professional guidance, helping her navigate the complexities of the educational system.

Faith shared the significant impact of her mother's strong will and dedication to her children's success. "Well, no more than the fact that my mother was a very, very strong-willed person," she began. "She wanted all of them to be the best that they could be," she continued,

highlighting her mother's unwavering support and high expectations. Faith's mother was a devoted parent to eleven children, with Faith being the eleventh. "I was number 11, and she pushed all of us to do the best we could be. She wanted us to be upstanding citizens in the world," she explained. Despite the challenges of raising a large family, Faith's mother instilled values of hard work, education, and integrity in her children

Education was a cornerstone of Faith's upbringing, thanks to her mother's advocacy. "She was a proponent of education," Faith stated. This commitment to education was evident in the resources and support she provided, ensuring that her children had what they needed to succeed academically. "We had everything we needed in order to be able to go to school and even go to college," Faith said, reflecting on the sacrifices and efforts made by their mother.

Even while working on the farms, Faith's mother remained dedicated to their educational pursuits. "When I decided that I wanted to go to college, she put me in the field," she shared. Faith attended a large university in North Florida, which was relatively close to her hometown. "She would come visit and bring me money and whatever I needed, whether it was food or snacks," Faith recounted. Faith acquired an educational background with multiple certifications. "I got my Bachelor of Arts in education," she said. Building on this foundation, she pursued further education, obtaining a master's degree. She continued her professional development by obtaining certification in guidance and counseling. And after 41 years, she decided to retire.

Faith shared the exact details of her initial meeting with Chairman were somewhat unclear due to the passage of time. "Well, you know, I can't remember exactly whether I met him as a student when he was a principal and I was a student going to the school where he was a principal," Faith began, indicating the possibility that their relationship dates back to her school years. This suggested the Chairman may have been a principal during Faith's time as a student.

Alternatively, Faith considered the possibility that their initial meeting occurred later, during her professional career. "Or when I met him when I came on as a teacher," Faith continued, highlighting the other possible scenario where their paths crossed in a professional context. The ambiguity stems from the many years that have passed since they first became acquainted, making it difficult for Faith to pinpoint the exact moment she met Chairman. Despite this uncertainty, she emphasized the long duration of their acquaintance. "It's been so many years ago that the information is not clear to me now," she explained, noting the challenge of recalling precise details from such a long time ago. Initially, Faith worked as a teacher when Chairman was a principal. This period marked the beginning of their professional relationship. "After that, I worked for him as a counselor," she added, highlighting a transition in her role within the school.

Principal 3/Teacher 2 - Joy

Principal 3/Teacher 2 is referred to as "Joy," a name chosen to reflect the happiness and fulfillment she finds in her role in education. The first interview took place with Joy telephonically. She was at work during this interview, and we made plans for the second interview, which was also telephonically conducted on a weekday afternoon. Joy participated in the interview from her office at work.

Joy served as a high school teacher for 30 years. Beyond the classroom, she expanded her role within the high school setting. "I worked in high school for 35 years," she added, explaining that her involvement in high school education extended beyond teaching to include other roles and responsibilities. During the last five years of her high school career, Joy transitioned into a more specialized position. "The last five years in high school, I was an educational coach, a science coach," Joy explained. Joy is currently employed at a local technical college in North Florida. She also serves on the Board of Commissioners for her hometown in Florida.

When asked who her mentors were, Joy noted that her father served as a pivotal mentor. Reflecting on their longstanding and multifaceted relationship with Chairman, Joy shared a story that spans many years and various stages of their lives. "I laugh. Let me tell you why I laugh," she began. "I've known Chairman since I was about 12 or 13 years old in high school. He was my junior high school assistant principal when I was in seventh grade," she revealed. The Chairman served as an important authority figure and mentor. Joy indicated their initial relationship was built on the typical dynamics between a student and a school administrator. Over the years, their relationship evolved. "We have grown from principal and student to co-workers and friends," she shared. Joy expressed admiration for Chairman, describing him as a wonderful person.

Joy's interest in education was influenced by her father, who was a dedicated school teacher. Growing up in a small town, she closely observed her father's commitment to teaching and the respect he garnered from the community. "Everybody who knows me knows that I emulated myself after my father," she shared. Joy's father started teaching in 1950 and continued until his retirement in 1985. This long career left a lasting impression on Joy. The longevity and commitment of her father's service inspired Joy to follow in his footsteps.

One of the most influential experiences for Joy was accompanying her father on visits to students' homes. "When he was visiting homes, we would ride with my daddy out in the country," she recalled, describing the personal connection her father maintained with his students and their families. These visits allowed her to witness firsthand the profound respect and admiration the community had for her father. "Just hearing people say my daddy's name with such reverence and respect, that had a lasting impact on me," she explained. "I wanted people to

call my name like that one day." Joy expressed her aspiration to emulate her father's positive influence and respected status within the community.

Another key mentor for Joy was a high school English teacher and co-worker who provided support while Joy was teaching. Joy also comes from a large family and was one of six children, which has influenced her approach to life and education. "My mother was a very, very strong-willed person," she shared. "She wanted all of our children to be educated," she noted, highlighting her mother's devotion to their academic success.

Joy's mother worked part-time while her father worked fulltime as a teacher. Education was a cornerstone in her family. "We have a total of seven college graduates in the family," she noted, highlighting the high value placed on education within the family. The combined achievements of the family amount to nine degrees in total with Joy holding multiple certifications across various educational disciplines. She is certified in middle school science, high school family and consumer science, and administration.

Joy has known Chairman since 1972, a significant year marked by the integration of schools. This year was notable because it was when schools in Florida, including those in her county, were mandated to integrate. "That was the first year we integrated schools totally" she explained. As a seventh grader, she moved to an all-white school where Chairman was serving as the assistant principal. Reflecting on their professional relationship, Joy described the various phases of working with Chairman. She worked for Chairman starting in 1980. During this time, Chairman was the assistant principal when Joy began her career in education.

In 1984 or 1985, Joy moved to another school, where her professional relationship with Chairman continued. Chairman played a significant role in these transitions, often recommending and facilitating Joy's moves within the school system. "Every time I made a

move, it was actually Chairman moving me, recommending that I move," she emphasized, indicating Chairman's influential role in her career development. Their collaboration extended until 1987 when Chairman moved to the high school, a decision, again, influenced by Chairman. Chairman's influence continued even after he transitioned to a role on the school board. "He was on the school board, so I worked for him still there," Joy added. This long-term relationship highlights the sustained mentorship and support Joy received from Chairman. Reflecting on the specific timeline, Joy shared that her daughter is now 28 years old, linking personal milestones with her professional journey. Joy served in various roles while working for Chairman including a home economics teacher, science teacher, a track, volleyball, and cheerleading coach, and a mentor teacher.

Summary

The three principal participants in this study each served as high school principals for over three years before voluntarily leaving their roles. Additionally, the six teacher participants worked under one of the selected principals for at least one year. Although the personal backgrounds, professional trajectories, and family lives of these participants differ, there are notable commonalities. Both principals and teachers shared how their family experiences significantly influenced their decision to pursue careers in education. As Groenewald (2004) noted, "The aim of the researcher is to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts" (p. 44). Utilizing an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), this study revealed that family influences were pivotal in shaping the participants' career choices. In Chapter V, the findings are further analyzed, with themes and subthemes drawn from the lived experiences of each principal and teacher participant.

Chapter V

RESULTS

The high school principal turnover rate is high and increasing, resulting in a loss of resources expended on principal recruitment, selection, development, and retention, while also adversely affecting student achievement (Bartanen et al., 2019). The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges and barriers to reducing the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position.

Understanding these challenges is crucial for developing more effective retention strategies and ensuring stability in leadership, which directly impacts the overall functioning of schools and student success. Purposeful sampling was employed to identify three successful high school principals who had left their positions, along with two teachers for each principal who had worked under their leadership for a minimum of one year. This research presents findings that address the following research questions:

RQ 1: What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who left the position?

RQ 2: What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

RQ 3A: How do identified successful former high school principals who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

RQ 3B: How do faculty members of identified successful high principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Two principal participants were selected from Southwest Georgia, and one from North Florida. Additionally, two teachers per principal were chosen, resulting in a total of nine participants. This approach offered valuable insight into the diverse experiences of participants while uncovering common underlying factors. It also illuminated the challenges contributing to high school principal turnover and explored how both principal and teacher participants perceived the principals' leadership styles in relation to transformational leadership characteristics. The nine participants in this study participated voluntarily and were provided informed consent prior to the start of each interview. Pseudonyms were assigned to protect their anonymity. *Table 1* below, outlines the three principal participants, followed by the teacher participants, and includes relevant background information about all.

Table 1 Principal Participant Demographic Profiles

Table 1

Pseudonym	Family Education Background	Age Range	Subject	Years in Education	Current Status
Chairman	Mother-teacher	70-80	PE Teacher & Principal	>30	Retired
Hunter	Grandmother - college professor Mother - teacher	50-60	HS Science & Principal	>30	Retired
Coach	only member of family in education	40-50	8th Health & Principal	<20	Associate Superintendent

Table 2 provides the demographic profiles of the teacher participants.

Table 2 Teacher Participant Demographic Profiles*Table 2*

Pseudonym	Family Education Background	Age Range	Subject	Years in Education	Current Status
Buffy/Boyd	Great-grandmother and Grandmother - teacher	40-50	MS & HS History	>32	Retired, now teaching private school
Addie/Boyd	SIL - teacher	40-50	MS Math, HS Special Education	>20	Assistant Special Education Director
Destiny/Hadley	MIL - superintendent FIL - college professor	40-50	High School Science	>25	High School Science Department Head
Artie/Hadley	family of educators	30-40	High School Art	>20	High school art
Joy/Judge	Father - teacher	60-70	MS Science, HS Family & Consumer Science	>40	CTAE Coordinator at technical college
Faith/Judge	Parents were farm foremen	65-75	Math & School Counseling	>35	Retired

Interview protocols were developed for each session; however, a semi-structured approach was adopted to gather participants' perspectives (Yin, 2018). Each interview lasted between 30 to 90 minutes and was audio recorded to ensure the accuracy of each participant's view. Each audio recording was transcribed to text following the conclusion of the interview. Member-checking was integrated throughout the interviews to ensure the accuracy and validity of each participant's responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Discussion of Themes

Categorizing information is key for organizing and deriving meaning from raw data while conducting qualitative research. Researchers gain valuable insights into participants' perspectives by meticulously analyzing interview transcripts to uncover critical ideas, patterns, and recurring themes (Saldaña, 2021). This systematic approach ensures a comprehensive and precise analysis, creating a deeper understanding of participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020). Through detailed examination, themes emerge that highlight commonalities and variations across participants' responses.

Data analysis in this study involved the process of disassembling and reorganizing information, including interview transcriptions and field notes. I began by thoroughly reviewing the transcripts from each interview to identify patterns and categories. Additionally, I developed organizational charts to visually map emerging themes. The initial review revealed five primary categories that reflected participants' experiences: (a) family engagement and support, (b) lack of community support, (c) overwhelming workload, (d) student engagement, and (e) transformational leadership characteristics. These categories were color-coded to facilitate organization and retrieval during subsequent stages of analysis.

Following the initial categorization, I reviewed each transcript again to ensure consistency and refine the categories further. For example, under "overwhelming workload," participants described issues related to district requirements, meetings, and time constraints, which I coded as specific sub-categories. The data were then sorted and grouped according to the research question addressed. This process ensured participants' voices were accurately represented and revealed more insights into the complexities of leadership and the challenges they faced. Similarly, the "transformational leadership characteristics" category included sub-

categories such as individualized consideration and inspirational motivation, aligning with established transformational leadership frameworks (Bass & Riggio, 2006). The use of coding and categorization enabled the identification of shared experiences across participants while recognizing each individual's unique perspectives to the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 3 depicts an example of a list of codes developed from reviews of participant responses and the categories that emerged from these statements.

Table 3: *Open Coding Symbols*

Table 3

Code	Code description	Category
LPS	Lack of Parent Support	
CFD	Changes in Family Dynamics	Family Engagement & Support
CFS	Changes in Family Support	
	Challenging Relationships with Faculty	
CRF	Community Engagement Community Support	Lack of Community Support
PB	Principal Burnout	
S	Stress	Overwhelming Workload
PDL	Pressure from District Leaders	
CSAM	Changing State Accountability Measures	
DO	Student Dropout	
LAS	Low Assessment Scores	Student Engagement
DSB	Disruptive Student Behavior	
RM	Role Model	
FC	Foster Creativity	
SCC	Showing Care and Concern	
ET	Empowering Teachers	Transformational Leadership Characteristics
BT	Building Trust	
SCG	Setting Common Goals	
M	Motivation	

Following a thorough review of the initial codes and categories, three overarching themes emerged, reflecting the key aspects of participants' experiences: (a) student and parent engagement, (b) expectations of principals, and (c) transformational leadership characteristics. Identifying these themes was a critical step in refining the data analysis, as it provided a structured framework for interpreting the findings (Saldaña, 2021). These themes represent both the challenges principals face and the leadership practices that influence their professional experiences. I then organized all materials into manageable chunks to facilitate the meaning-making process (Miles et al., 2020; Saldaña, 2021).

To ensure the findings' reliability and validity, I reviewed all transcripts, organizational charts, and supplementary documents. This review process was essential to confirm the identified themes' consistency and verify that the data accurately reflected the participants' perspectives (Miles et al., 2020). The use of multiple data sources, including field notes and organizational charts, contributed to data triangulation, enhancing the credibility of the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Table 4 provides an example of the chunking process used in this study.

Table 4 Theme, Subcategory, and Supporting Commentary*Table 4*

Theme	Subcategory	Supporting Commentary
		"There's been a shift from trying to educate kids to raising children."
	Family Engagement and Support	"It's just very difficult to find a principal nowadays, that will go to their homes and talk to the parents." "No parental help whatsoever." "Parents are not concerned"
Student and Parent Engagement	Lack of Community Support	"You can't do everything in a year or two." "Not being able to let the principal do his or her job." "Disloyalty within the system."
	Student Engagement	"As far as the students are concerned, they get very, very dissatisfied and they want to see the principal removed." "The love of sports sometimes trumps academics." "The scores will be low." "Student achievement is negatively affected by principals leaving."

Student Engagement and Support

Throughout this study, student and parent engagement was the most prevalent theme. When principals are unable to foster positive relationships with families or address student engagement challenges effectively, it can lead to heightened stress, dissatisfaction, and, ultimately, increased turnover (Farley-Ripple et al., 2020). Two principal participants reported the lack of consistent parent involvement and student engagement contributed to frustration and burnout. These findings support the notion that high expectations for family engagement can

place an emotional burden on school leaders, particularly in communities with limited resources or support systems (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Hunter painted a picture of a dramatic shift in parent engagement and family dynamics, which has significantly increased the demands and responsibilities placed on high school principals, further exacerbating the turnover problem. Hunter noted the "dynamic of the family structure has definitely changed." He explained there is often a need for more father figures and parental accountability, with caregivers struggling to discipline their children effectively.

Hunter provided an example of a parent asking a principal to physically discipline her 21-year-old son at a Walmart, illustrating the breakdown in traditional parent-school relationships. According to Hunter, this shift in family dynamics placed a more significant burden on schools and principals, who now have to take on more of a "parental" role for many students. Hunter described his experience as "a dad to about 15 kids" in addition to his principal duties. Hunter also noted principals are expected to handle issues that used to be the sole responsibility of parents. Hunter elaborated:

The dynamic structure, the family has changed to the point where the kids are not as accountable as they used to be, because there's not a father at home. Mom is a wonderful mom, works real hard. But in the end, when they get to be 15, they're more to handle. She can mock and bluff and she can stomp her foot and she can point a finger, but it's a bluff.

He believes the change in family structure and lack of parental involvement is a significant contributing factor to the challenges and high turnover rates for high school principals.

Chairman's experience accentuated the significant role of disruptive student behavior and discipline management in contributing to high school principal turnover. As a former high school

principal, Chairman asserted handling persistent behavioral issues places immense pressure on high school principals, making it challenging to maintain a positive school environment. He identified student discipline as the "number one" challenge contributing to high school principal turnover. These challenges align with recent research indicating student discipline as a leading cause of stress for principals, often contributing to burnout and early career exits (Grissom et al., 2021; Woo & Wang, 2023).

Findings from recent research suggest principals dealing with high levels of student misbehavior experience increased emotional exhaustion, which can lead to burnout and job dissatisfaction (Grissom et al., 2021). The tension between maintaining order and addressing behavioral issues in a way that promotes positive student outcomes further complicates the role, limiting the time principals can dedicate to instructional leadership (Woo & Wang, 2023).

Chairman said, "when I was a principal, I would take disciplinary action like paddling students who misbehaved," though he acknowledged this is no longer allowed. He added, "Kids are waiting till they get 16, and then they drop out. Principals who take the time to get to know students and their families, and show they care, can positively impact student discipline."

Chairman reflected on the importance of fostering respect and ownership among students as a strategy to address behavioral issues and promote positive student engagement. He initiated a

Saturday School program, sharing:

A lot of our concerns were students being respectful to adults. That was another one of our big concerns. We would get Hardee's to provide the hamburgers and provide the drinks. And then there would be more and more kids coming to school to work with us on Saturdays. And since they started working with us, cleaning up, painting, and so forth, then they took ownership of the school. So

they didn't mess up the halls or outside or throw plants on top of buildings, or things like that.

Chairman's account illustrates how student engagement efforts, when paired with meaningful activities, can cultivate a sense of pride and responsibility among students.

Drawing from her experience as a high school teacher under Hunter's supervision, Buffy emphasized the lack of parent support with student discipline exacerbates the principal's challenges. She explained principals often find themselves balancing disciplinary measures with the need to accommodate parental demands. Reflecting on this, she stated, "Usually, the principal has to adhere to keep students and has to adhere to parents and really let them get their way, so to speak, in order to keep his or her job." Her observation highlights the tension principals experience between enforcing school rules and maintaining positive relationships with parents, which is essential for their job security.

Supporting Buffy's perspective, Hitt et al. (2022) found school leaders often encounter pressure to adjust disciplinary decisions to satisfy parents, which can compromise their authority and create additional stress. This dynamic reflects a broader challenge in educational leadership, where principals must navigate the competing interests of various stakeholders, including parents, students, and district administrators. The lack of consistent parental support in student discipline further complicates this role, contributing to emotional exhaustion and increasing the likelihood of principal turnover (Grissom et al., 2021; Woo & Wang, 2023). Buffy clarified her assertion by stating:

The inconsistency has caused for bad leadership, and bad leadership calls for less and less good, qualified teachers. And it's turning out that public school systems are going downhill. They're not as strong as it used to be. And from what I've seen

over the years, people are wanting other avenues like going to charter schools... private schools. They're not supporting public school because of discipline. Number one. There's too many bad factors of systems for public schools to be productive.

Buffy identified discipline as a significant challenge in the local public schools, with inconsistent policies, lack of administrative backing for teachers, and parental influence undermining the principals' ability to manage discipline issues.

Destiny, reflected on her experience working under Coach's supervision and identified student engagement and discipline as significant challenges contributing to high school principal turnover. She explained the dual responsibility of motivating students to stay engaged academically while managing behavioral issues places substantial pressure on principals. These demands align with research indicating low student engagement and frequent disciplinary challenges increase the emotional and administrative burden on school leaders, often leading to burnout and turnover (Grissom et al., 2021; Woo & Wang, 2023). Destiny shared:

Principals play a vital role for ensuring the student's success. They are the main person who can maintain a school climate. They can motivate the staff, and they are the ones who can enhance teaching practices. And they play a major role in everything for retaining teachers, because they are the one who will be influencing, motivating, and encouraging the teachers.

High school principals must not only implement strategies to enhance student participation but also enforce disciplinary policies in ways that align with district expectations and community values. This balance requires considerable time and emotional energy, often detracting from a principal's ability to focus on instructional leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020).

Destiny's observations reflect the broader reality that high levels of disengagement and behavioral disruptions can diminish a principal's capacity to foster a positive school climate, ultimately increasing job dissatisfaction and turnover risk.

Destiny observed Coach and his efforts to foster personal connections with students and enhance engagement. She recalled how Coach sat with students during school lunches, using the opportunity to interact with them informally and build rapport. She also highlighted Coach's practice of standing in the doorway each morning to personally greet students as they entered the building, demonstrating his commitment to encouraging a welcoming environment.

In addition to these efforts, Coach implemented technological initiatives, ensuring all students received Chromebooks to support their learning. This initiative reflected his focus on equipping students with the tools needed for academic success while promoting equity through access to digital resources. Destiny emphasized that Coach's leadership extended beyond student interactions. She said he also actively engaged parents, working to build a collaborative school community. These strategies are consistent with findings indicating principals who build meaningful relationships with students and families contribute to more robust school climates and higher levels of engagement (Kraft et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Similar to Buffy and Destiny, Faith identified the lack of parental support as the primary challenge high school principals face. She said many parents are disengaged from their children's education and hold negative perceptions of school leadership, adding, "Parents are not concerned, and they don't think the principal is doing what he should be doing. As far as the students are concerned, they get very, very dissatisfied, and they want to see the principal removed." These insights reflect the significant role parent-principal relationships play in determining a principal's effectiveness and job security, aligning with existing research on

principal turnover (Farley-Ripple et al., 2020). Grissom et al. (2021) found principals experience job dissatisfaction when their efforts to enforce disciplinary policies or implement school reforms are hindered by parental resistance. Faith's observations highlight how the lack of parental support creates significant obstacles, leaving principals vulnerable to dissatisfaction from multiple stakeholders and making it more difficult to sustain long-term leadership.

Faith explained when parents were dissatisfied with how a principal handled student discipline, they often "ran to the district" to voice their complaints. The parents' reaction created a cascading effect, as district leaders, concerned with maintaining positive relationships with the community and securing their job stability, placed additional pressure on principals to accommodate parental demands. Faith's account highlights how the influence of parents extends beyond the school, directly impacting the principal's relationship with district administrators. District leaders may pressure principals to prioritize parental satisfaction over long-term disciplinary strategies, further complicating their ability to implement effective school reforms (Woo & Wang, 2023).

The responses of Hunter, Chairman, Buffy, Destiny, and Faith emphasized the role of student and parent engagement in high school principal turnover, with both principal participants and teacher participants identifying inconsistent parental involvement, behavioral challenges, and shifting family dynamics as significant stressors. Hunter described changing family structures, where principals assume parental-like roles, adding pressure to their responsibilities. Chairman highlighted disruptive student behavior as a critical challenge, noting how initiatives like Saturday School can foster student ownership and reduce misbehavior. Buffy and Destiny emphasized that principals must balance enforcing discipline with appeasing parents to maintain job security, which can undermine their authority and add stress. Under Coach's leadership,

Destiny observed efforts to build rapport with students and promote engagement through personal interactions and technology initiatives.

Expectations of Principals

Expectations placed on principals are multifaceted, reflecting the need to balance instructional leadership with management and stakeholder engagement. Principals are also responsible for fostering positive relationships with parents and students, emphasizing the importance of family engagement as part of student success (Hayes & Mahfouz, 2020; Sebastian & Allensworth, 2019). Their role involves overseeing organizational management tasks such as budgeting, resource allocation, and daily administrative responsibilities (Grissom et al., 2021). Throughout this study, the expectations of high school principals was a prevalent theme.

Coach asserted high school principals must navigate a multitude of mandates and expectations from the state, district, and local community, which often become overwhelming. He noted the sheer volume of these responsibilities left little time for principals to balance their professional duties with personal and family life and contributed to burnout. He said principals are "overwhelmed by mandates from the state," underscoring how compliance with ever-evolving regulations and accountability measures created significant stress. He purported that changing state mandates contribute to principal burnout, as high school principals must constantly adjust to evolving policies and performance metrics. Frequent regulatory changes increase administrative workload and reduce time for instructional leadership, contributing to emotional exhaustion and stress (Eckert & Simon, 2023; Grissom et al., 2021). Compliance with new curriculum requirements and accountability frameworks can overwhelm principals, diminishing their job satisfaction and effectiveness (Leithwood et al., 2020). The dual burden of

meeting state mandates while addressing community needs further elevates the risk of burnout, leading many principals to leave the profession (Bauer et al., 2019; Woo & Wang, 2023).

The challenge of balancing professional and personal responsibilities aligns with the findings of Grissom et al. (2021), which indicated the high demands of school leadership often result in emotional exhaustion, negatively impacting principals' job satisfaction and longevity. Coach elaborated on the difficulties he encountered in balancing his family life with the demands of being a high school principal. He said managing both personal and professional responsibilities was one of the most challenging aspects of his role. Coach described the strain caused by his father's declining health, which required him to travel every weekend to assist with his father's care. In addition to these caregiving duties, he noted fulfilling his family obligations often conflicted with the time and energy required for his professional responsibilities. These experiences reflect the broader challenges high school principals face and the pressures of balancing family commitments with the demands of leadership that can contribute to emotional exhaustion, stress, and, ultimately, burnout (Eckert & Simon, 2023; Grissom et al., 2021).

Similarly, Addie believed stress on high school principals was the most challenging factor contributing to high school principal turnover. "I think stress is the biggest factor. I think health related things are probably contributing." Her observation aligns with research finding stress significantly contributes to principal turnover, with health-related challenges becoming increasingly common among school leaders. The need to manage limited resources while also addressing complex student needs and family engagement, creating a work environment where maintaining personal well-being becomes difficult and exacerbates these stressors (Eckert & Simon, 2023). Chronic exposure to workplace stress has been linked to cardiovascular problems, anxiety, and other health concerns, contributing to principal attrition as leaders struggle to

sustain long-term commitments to the profession (Ford et al., 2019). Addie's remarks highlight the broader issue of work-induced stress, and how the inability to manage such pressures can lead to deteriorating health and, ultimately, early exits from school leadership roles.

Addie noted student discipline significantly contributes to principal stress, asserting "principals struggle daily with discipline." Managing student behavior demands considerable time and emotional energy, adding to the already extensive responsibilities principals carry. She shared:

I'm constantly being called on by principals to come help with some situation with a sped student. The principals struggle daily with discipline. Then pressure from the superintendent to push test scores. And some people just can't handle it. I can't handle the pressure.

Addie's statement regarding the difficulty of finding teachers aligned with recent research highlighting teacher shortages as a growing concern in education. Factors such as low pay, limited professional development opportunities, and challenging working conditions can make it difficult for high school principals to attract and retain qualified staff (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). The shortage of experienced teachers stresses school leaders, as they must fill gaps quickly, often relying on less-experienced staff or long-term substitutes, which can affect school performance and morale (Garcia & Weiss, 2019).

Joy believes high expectations placed on high school principals represented the most significant challenge contributing to high school principal burnout. She said in her district, high school principal turnover occurred approximately every three years, underscoring the intensity of the role. Joy explained a lack of qualified teachers creates additional burdens for principals, as they must address gaps in instructional quality, sharing:

Those challenges of not having qualified teachers creates problems for principals to deal with. You've got students who are not being successful in the classrooms. When the students are not successful, parents are irate. When parents are irate, they go after teachers and principals and leaders, and that causes those principals to burn out quickly. A lot of people talk about parent involvement, lack of student concerns, etc., and those are challenges and barriers too. But again, if we could staff our schools with qualified teachers, we would have fewer problems.

Joy remarked on Chairman's effectiveness in supporting teachers under his supervision, noting his ability to empathize with their positions. She stated, "I've seen him put himself in a teacher's spot, supporting the teacher's decision and helping parents understand that teachers are here for their children's benefit. No teacher is here to undermine a child at all." Her observations highlighted the critical role that principals play in fostering a supportive environment for educators, emphasizing the need for strong relationships between teachers, parents, and high school principals. However, she concluded the pressures stemming from these interactions can exacerbate the challenges high school principals face, leading to increased burnout and higher turnover rates.

Artie identified overwhelming workload, a subcategory of expectations of principals, as a significant factor contributing to high school principal turnover. She said, "I think sometimes they're chasing the admin, but you can't do everything in a year or two. And sometimes they're looking for someone to make effective change immediately." Her insights highlight the unrealistic expectations placed on high school principals to achieve rapid results, which can lead to stress and frustration. This pressure to deliver immediate change can hinder long-term

planning and development, ultimately contributing to the turnover crisis within school leadership.

Artie elaborated on the ongoing search for effective high school principals, arguing those originating from the community often tend to face significantly less pushback from local stakeholders. She explained:

You have to have a buy-in; you have to get everyone on board, which is difficult for anyone, whether they're from the community or not. I think ultimately, though, it's easier for someone from the community because they've had someone to advocate for them. Because people that know them and have faith in their methods.

Artie's perspective aligns with research indicating community connections play a crucial role in a principal's effectiveness and acceptance. According to Knapp et al. (2016), high school principals who have established relationships within the community are better positioned to garner support for their initiatives and foster a collaborative environment. Additionally, high school principals with local ties may experience greater trust and respect from parents and community members, facilitating smoother implementation of educational policies (Anderson & Johnson, 2019). This inherent advantage can reduce resistance to leadership strategies, ultimately mitigating some of the stressors associated with the principalship, such as burnout and turnover (Davis et al., 2021). Artie's insights emphasized the importance of local advocacy and trust in enhancing a principal's ability to lead effectively, particularly in challenging educational contexts.

Coach's experience illustrated that high school principals face significant challenges due to evolving state mandates, which can be overwhelming and contribute to burnout. High school

principals often struggle to juggle these professional demands with personal obligations, leading to emotional exhaustion and stress, as Grissom et al. (2021) and Eckert and Simon (2023) noted. The high turnover rates among high school principals reflect the intensity of these pressures, exacerbated by a shortage of qualified teachers and the subsequent impact on student success and parent relations. Joy emphasized the crucial role of strong relationships between high school principals, teachers, and parents, asserting effective communication can mitigate stress and intensify the role's challenges. Moreover, Artie pointed out high school principals who are community members often experience less resistance, as established relationships can foster greater trust and support. This dynamic illustrates the need for school leaders to cultivate community connections to enhance their effectiveness and alleviate some of the burdens they face. Addie's observation regarding the stress high school principals encounter, and its correlation with health-related issues, highlights the urgent need for the implementation of strategies aimed at alleviating this stress.

Transformational Leadership Characteristics

When asked about the presence of transformational leadership characteristics in their own practices or those of the high school principals under whom they worked, all principal and teacher participants reported observing all four core components of transformational leadership. Hunter emphasized the importance of modeling the behaviors and attitudes he expected from his faculty, stating, "I'm never going to ask somebody to do something that I will not be willing to do myself at any moment in time," exemplifying idealized influence. He further highlighted the role of trust and motivation, remarking, "As long as people genuinely feel that you have their best interests in mind, they'll perform because they are good people," reflecting his use of inspirational motivation.

Additionally, Hunter emphasized the importance of individualized consideration by showing genuine care for teachers' well-being, explaining he noted non-verbal cues, such as "the crack in somebody's voice, the anger in their eyes," to respond to their needs effectively. His commitment to intellectual stimulation was evident through his development of a pre-administrative program designed to identify and prepare potential future leaders from within the teaching staff, fostering professional growth and building leadership capacity.

Coach emphasized the importance of building trust with teachers and staff by serving as a role model and prioritizing their needs. He said attending school events and supporting teachers and students inside and outside the school helped foster idealized influence. He explained, "Allowing them to see me support them in school, out of school, where someone's child is being recognized, is important." Regarding inspirational motivation, Coach stressed the value of collaboration, stating, "Collaborating with teachers to identify data-driven strategies, rather than just mandating changes, was key to providing inspirational motivation." He added, "I encourage them to try new practices, and nothing is punitive." His continued support of his teachers is evident.

Coach also demonstrated individualized consideration by understanding and supporting teachers' personal and family needs and providing emotional support when required. He tailored communication and expectations to accommodate individual teachers' circumstances, acknowledging their unique challenges. To promote intellectual stimulation, Coach empowered teachers to be innovative, encouraging them to implement new practices, such as daily writing reflections. He further inspired teachers to propose and execute their ideas for improving student learning, fostering a culture of creativity and professional autonomy.

Chairman emphasized the importance of high school principals serving as role models and fostering trust, reflecting the idealized influence component of transformational leadership.

He advised:

Have a conversation with [a] student that you wouldn't know any other way. You may not even remember his name or her name but build trust with each other and get to know them. I can assure you that's so, so important that you set the example for the kids.

Chairman's assertion highlights his belief that establishing genuine connections is crucial for effective leadership. He further stressed the need for principals to motivate and inspire teachers and students toward common goals, emphasizing the value of encouragement and helping them recognize their potential. He remarked, "It's important that you let the kids and teachers know that you're actually wanting the best for them," illustrating his commitment to providing inspirational motivation.

Additionally, Chairman highlighted the significance of showing care and concern for the individual needs, emotions, and development of teachers and students, which reflects his application of individualized consideration. Chairman discussed how effective high school principals can foster creativity and innovation among faculty by encouraging collaborative efforts on committees and projects focused on student success. He noted, "There's got to be some in your committee that are concerned for the welfare, for the better interest of kids. These goals fit the students that you're trying to educate," reinforcing the idea that shared commitment to student welfare is essential in educational leadership.

Under Chairman's supervision, Joy observed his consistent practice of empathizing with teachers and parents, supporting their decisions, and helping parents understand their rationale.

She remarked, "This allowed him to develop trust and serve as a role model, putting the needs of others before his own," illustrating the idealized influence characteristic of transformational leadership. Rather than merely dictating goals and plans, Chairman actively engaged teachers in shaping the school's direction, motivating the team toward a common purpose, and demonstrating his understanding of inspirational motivation.

Joy emphasized Chairman's consistent availability and deep involvement in the school community, stating, "He showed genuine care for the needs and emotions of his faculty and staff," reflecting his leadership style's individualized consideration. She said Chairman exemplified his commitment to intellectual stimulation through his consistent engagement in professional development. "Professional development, learning, encouraging you to incorporate those new ideas in your classroom and sharing new ideas with others. Nothing was ever a dumb idea," she shared. The impact Chairman made on Joy is evident by her reflections on her career.

Faith, who also worked under Chairman's supervision, perceived him as a role model for faculty, saying, "he built trust with faculty by serving as an example and putting the needs of others first." This statement emphasizes the characteristics of transformational leadership, whereby leaders earn the trust and respect of their team through their actions and commitment to others. Faith elaborated on Chairman's use of inspirational motivation, noting he "motivated staff toward common goals" and "inspired them to work toward a shared vision." This ability to unify and inspire staff fosters a sense of teamwork and encourages collective effort toward achieving the school's objectives.

Moreover, Faith highlighted the individualized consideration characteristic of Chairman's leadership style, explaining he "put people where they were profitable." This reflects his keen awareness of his staff's strengths and weaknesses, allowing him to assume roles that maximized

their potential and contributions to the school community. By recognizing and valuing each individual's unique capabilities, Chairman fostered a supportive environment that encouraged personal and professional growth.

Faith also said Chairman "encouraged creativity and innovation among teachers," which further reinforced a culture that embraced new ideas and approaches. By valuing innovation, Chairman empowered teachers to explore and implement new instructional strategies and cultivated an atmosphere in which experimentation was welcomed and supported. This approach ultimately benefits students by promoting diverse teaching methods that can enhance learning outcomes and is indicative of intellectual stimulation. Faith's observations reflect Chairman's practical application of transformational leadership principles, demonstrating his commitment to building trust, inspiring motivation, and fostering individual growth and innovation within the faculty.

Buffy said, as a leader, Hunter exemplified individualized consideration, reflecting upon his ability to meet the unique needs of his staff. She stated, "He served as a role model. Trust, admiration, respect for all teachers. That's what I liked the most about it. He was going to support you as long as you're doing your job [and] were working for the team." This statement reflects the core of individualized consideration in transformational leadership, through which leaders demonstrate care and concern for staff well-being while fostering a positive and respectful work environment. Buffy's remarks also speak to Hunter's use of idealized influence, as he not only modeled the behaviors he expected from others, but also earned admiration and trust by treating teachers fairly and equitably.

Buffy elaborated further, noting Hunter's efforts to motivate and uplift his staff through inspirational motivation. She explained, "Hunter would do things like bring in treats for teachers,

provide motivational quotes, and recognize teachers' achievements publicly." These gestures reflected his intentional efforts to create a supportive environment where teachers felt valued and appreciated. Moreover, Buffy said Hunter extended his care beyond the school setting by assisting teachers' families in need, sometimes even offering anonymous financial assistance. This level of personal engagement demonstrated Hunter's deep commitment to his faculty, reinforcing his ability to inspire staff and maintain high morale through thoughtful and empathetic leadership.

In addition to these qualities, Hunter was particularly attentive to teachers' emotional well-being, ensuring they received encouragement and support when facing challenges. Buffy said Hunter was "very in tune with the emotional needs of teachers" and actively supported those struggling personally or professionally. He also monitored student progress closely, following up on students with academic or behavioral issues and working collaboratively with teachers and families to resolve problems. This hands-on approach exemplifies Hunter's use of individualized consideration, showing his willingness to tailor his leadership to meet the specific needs of both staff and students.

Buffy maintained that Hunter also demonstrated a strong commitment to intellectual stimulation by fostering collaboration and continuous improvement among his staff. She said he facilitated regular meetings during which teachers could exchange ideas, discuss research, and work on enhancing instruction and student outcomes. These meetings promoted professional development and empowered teachers to engage critically with their practices. Additionally, Hunter provided incentives and recognition for accomplishments such as perfect attendance, creating a sense of shared purpose, and encouraging teachers to strive for excellence.

Through these actions, Hunter exemplified the core principles of transformational leadership, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. He created a positive school culture that motivated teachers, addressed their personal and professional needs, and promoted continuous growth and improvement.

Addie noted Hunter prioritized building trust with students and teachers, describing him as a "real people person." Developing trust is a key aspect of idealized influence in transformational leadership, and Hunter embodied this quality through consistent, genuine engagement with those he led. Addie shared an example of how Hunter navigated difficult conversations with teachers:

In a few hours, when he sees you down the hallway, he's going to ask you how you're feeling, how you're doing, you know, what's going on at home? How's your mama? You know, you could tell he truly cared. And so you build up that trust, that relationship. He was very big on relationships. And I think that's why he was so successful.

Addie noted that Hunter "practiced empathy, showed genuine care for their needs, and put their needs before his own" when interacting with students and teachers, further reinforcing his role as a trusted leader.

Addie also highlighted Hunter's personalized approach to working with students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. His commitment to *individualized consideration* was evident in how he connected personally with struggling students, recognizing their unique needs and providing the structure and support they lacked. Addie recalled one student who posed significant challenges: "He was a tough one. He was almost unreachable. He was constantly being suspended. At one time, he was one of our students, but he exited out."

Despite these difficulties, Hunter persisted, recognizing that the boy, "was just craving an adult figure. He did not have that in his life—did not have a father and did not have a mother who showed any kind of concern whatsoever. He was pretty much on his own."

Hunter's efforts to form meaningful connections with students exemplified his mentorship approach, which Addie described as "almost like a mentor-slash-fatherly figure relationship." She said with Hunter's guidance, the boy transformed into a successful student and athlete. Hunter's commitment to preparing students for life beyond the classroom through real-world skills further highlights his leadership's inspirational motivation. His coaching-like style encouraged students to believe in themselves, aligned with shared goals, and pursued personal growth, fostering a culture of success and empowerment.

In terms of intellectual stimulation, Addie said Hunter empowered his staff by entrusting them with the academic aspects of the school. She explained, "Rather than micromanaging, Hunter empowered his team, trusting them to handle the intellectual/academic side of the school. This allowed him to focus on the relational and inspirational aspects of leadership." Hunter's leadership approach exemplified the transformational leadership principle of fostering creativity and autonomy among teachers, providing them the freedom to innovate. Simultaneously, he focused on building meaningful relationships with students and staff. This balanced strategy enabled Hunter to create a supportive, high-performing school environment in which teachers and students could thrive.

Artie described Coach as an ongoing source of inspiration, offering several examples illustrating his transformational leadership qualities. She said Coach ended the daily school announcements by saying, "And if nobody else tells you they love you, I love you. Coach loves you always." Artie said this simple, yet powerful, message resonated deeply with students and

teachers, creating a sense of belonging and care. His consistent demonstration of empathy and commitment to the well-being of others exemplified idealized influence, as Coach not only served as a role model but also made his love and support known to all.

Artie said Coach took the time to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the individuals with whom he worked, helping them unlock their potential. "He gets to know people," she said, "and he learns your deficits, your pros and cons. And he helps you discover how you can be better." By identifying and addressing the unique needs of his teachers, Coach exemplified individualized consideration. He tailored his support to each teacher's personal and professional growth, fostering a trusting environment in which they felt valued and motivated to improve.

In addition to his personalized approach, Coach also encouraged his staff to explore creative teaching strategies, reflecting his use of inspirational motivation. Artie shared how Coach supported her efforts to make art history more engaging for students: "He encouraged me to find creative ways to make art history engaging for students." This encouragement pushed Artie to innovate and motivated her to connect her teaching with students' interests, reinforcing the idea of shared purpose and collective growth.

Beyond his work within the school, Coach also played a significant role in helping Artie build relationships with the broader community. He fostered a collaborative atmosphere beyond the classroom by motivating teachers to engage with their student's families and the local community. This ability to inspire teachers to go beyond their comfort zones demonstrated Coach's understanding of inspirational motivation.

Artie highlighted Coach's focus on data-driven practices, reinforced his commitment to continuous improvement. "He encouraged teachers to meet and review student data regularly,"

she explained. Coach's emphasis on analyzing student performance data ensured instruction aligned with students' needs and outcomes. His openness to new ideas further illustrated his commitment to intellectual stimulation. Artie recalled that Coach welcomed innovative strategies from teachers and actively encouraged them to share their insights with colleagues: "He was also open to new ideas and encouraged teachers to share." This willingness to challenge the status quo and promote collaborative problem-solving fostered an environment in which intellectual growth was celebrated, empowering teachers to develop professionally.

Coach's leadership style, marked by empathy, motivation, and an openness to innovation, inspired Artie and created a culture of trust and growth within the school. His transformational leadership was evident in how he cultivated personal relationships, inspired creative teaching practices, and promoted data-driven instruction, ensuring both students and teachers thrived under his guidance.

Destiny provided several examples illustrating how Coach exemplified transformational leadership, explicitly focusing on idealized influence. She explained, "He will be a role model; he will be the first one standing there and talking to every student and checking on them all the time." Coach's habit of greeting students and teachers by name every morning created a sense of connection and trust, reinforcing his role as a respected leader. This consistent presence and personal engagement cultivated a positive school culture in which students and staff felt seen and valued.

Coach also demonstrated inspirational motivation by holding regular meetings to review student data and align efforts toward shared goals. Destiny said he communicated the school's vision and mission, ensuring everyone understood their role in achieving these objectives. He worked closely with teachers to establish SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant,

and Time-bound) goals, regularly checking their progress to keep them motivated and accountable. His involvement extended beyond administrative oversight; as Destiny noted, "He attended all department meetings to stay involved and provide guidance," reinforcing his hands-on leadership approach. Destiny gave a deeply personal example of individualized consideration when she recalled Coach's support during a challenging time. She shared:

During COVID-19, I lost my mother. She was in the hospital in India, in the ICU.

I had to leave the country, and he cooperated with me so much. He supported me so much. He said, 'Destiny, your mom comes first; you need to go to India and take care of your mother there; we will take care of you. Don't worry.'

This empathetic response demonstrated Coach's ability to prioritize the personal well-being of his staff, creating an environment in which teachers felt valued and supported, even beyond their professional roles.

Coach also exemplified intellectual stimulation by encouraging teachers to innovate and explore new instructional strategies. He provided the necessary resources and training to foster creativity and differentiation in the classroom. Destiny highlighted how Coach empowered teachers by granting them autonomy over their department budgets, allowing them to acquire the resources needed to enhance student learning. This approach promoted independence and encouraged teachers to take ownership of their professional growth and departmental success. Coach cultivated a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement through his leadership. His ability to inspire, support, and stimulate creativity ensured that students and teachers thrived, exemplifying the core principles of transformational leadership.

Summary

Chapter V presents the analysis and interpretation of data gathered from interviews with three high school principal participants and six teacher participants. This chapter outlines themes identified after data analysis, focusing on the principals' challenges and the teacher participants' insights. Additionally, this chapter discusses the impact of transformational leadership characteristics on reducing principal turnover. It discusses the alignment between leadership traits, such as motivation, collaboration, and shared vision, and successful school outcomes. Additionally, the chapter highlights the challenges principals face and the insights teachers provide.

Chapter VI **CONCLUSION**

High school principal turnover is a growing concern in educational leadership, particularly because it has a cascading effect on multiple aspects of school performance. Research indicates that principals are instrumental in shaping school culture, influencing teacher effectiveness, and driving student outcomes (Grissom et al., 2021). Their departure disrupts these areas and can trigger a cycle of instability that becomes increasingly difficult to manage. When principals leave, schools lose critical leadership continuity, which undermines the implementation of long-term strategic initiatives, impedes staff development efforts, and results in fluctuating academic progress (Fuller et al., 2020). Grissom et al. (2021) found that when principals remain in their positions for at least three years, student achievement improves due to sustained instructional practices and more explicit expectations across staff. However, frequent principal turnover forces teachers and students to adjust to new leadership styles and expectations, which may delay academic progress (Boyce & Bowers, 2018). When a principal departs, this support diminishes, leading to a decline in faculty morale and job satisfaction among teachers (Bradshaw et al., 2021).

Principals shape the vision and mission of the school, foster relationships among staff, and build trust with students, parents, and community stakeholders (Çoban et. al, 2023). Therefore, leadership changes can disrupt the sense of stability within a school, negatively impacting the broader school culture. And frequent high school principal turnover erodes these relationships, making maintaining a cohesive and positive school culture challenging. New high

school principals may implement different policies and expectations, forcing teachers and students to adapt to unfamiliar practices and reducing the sense of continuity within the school (Bartanen et al., 2019). Furthermore, community stakeholders such as parents, may lose trust in the school's leadership, leading to reduced engagement and support for school initiatives (Boyce & Bowers, 2018).

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the challenges and barriers contributing to high school principal turnover, as perceived by successful former principals. The data collected from the nine participants in this study provided first-hand accounts of challenges high school principals face and how transformational leadership theory characteristics may alleviate these challenges. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, I sought to better understand the lived experiences of principals who successfully led their schools and those of teachers working under their supervision. Transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes motivating and inspiring followers to achieve common goals through shared vision and support, provides a valuable framework for analyzing how leadership styles can mitigate or exacerbate the pressures that lead to principal turnover (Bass, 1985; Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Research findings contributed to the resolution of the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who have left their position?

Research Question 2: What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

Research Question 3A: How do identified successful former high school principals who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Research Question 3B: How do faculty members of identified successful high school principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

In this phenomenological study, I employed purposive sampling to secure nine participants who were representative of the population of this study. Three principal participants were identified as successful high school principals. Two teacher participants per principal participant, who worked for those principal participants for at least one year were also selected for the study. These criteria ensured participants possessed in-depth knowledge of the core phenomenon of this study. Data were collected from diverse sources, including participant interviews, researcher observations, and memos to enhance validity and ensure triangulation. Data collected through semi-structured interviews through in-person meetings, Zoom, and telephone conversations were analyzed. Data analysis began promptly after the initial interview session. Subsequently, all gathered data underwent extensive coding and analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant themes embedded within participants' narratives. All collected data underwent multiple rounds of coding analysis to uncover patterns and meaningful themes.

Three comprehensive themes emerged, encapsulating the participants' lived experiences: (a) student and parent engagement, (b) expectations of principals, and (c) transformational leadership characteristics. In this chapter, each theme is analyzed in relation to the central research questions and pertinent literature, and this study's limitations and practical implications are addressed.

Summary Discussion of Research Questions

In this qualitative study, I examined the lived experiences of three successful high school principals and two teachers per principal who had worked under their leadership for at least one year. A purposive sampling strategy was employed, allowing the intentional selection of participants whose experiences were highly relevant to the research focus (Morse, 2008). This approach aligns with qualitative research best practices, ensuring participants can provide rich, detailed insights into the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Participants' narratives offered first-hand accounts, reflecting the challenges and successes experienced in their educational roles. The analysis of these narratives involved iterative coding and thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meaningful themes within the data. This method supports the discovery of explicit and latent content, enriching the study's conclusions by comparing themes across participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Creswell, 2013). This analysis process began promptly after the initial data collection to maintain the freshness of the insights and involved multiple coding rounds to ensure rigor. Through this approach, the study captured the interplay between leadership practices and teachers' professional experiences, providing insights into the dynamics of the challenges high school principals face. In this section, I respond to the research questions in the study through the identified themes and current literature.

Research Question 1: What were the career and life experiences of identified successful high school principals who have left their position?

During each interview, participants shared their life experiences and family backgrounds. Reviewing the recorded information multiple times created a clear picture of each participant's story, and the resulting data were then coded into specific themes and subthemes. Notably,

several participants shared similar family backgrounds. Only one principal and one teacher reported no educators in their families.

Coach was raised by his single mother after his parents divorced, while Faith's parents were foremen on a farm. Chairman and Hunter emphasized strong family ties to education, with parents with high academic expectations for their children. Chairman, Hunter, Artie, and Joy each reported having at least one parent employed in the education sector. In contrast, Buffy, Addie, and Destiny indicated close relatives, though not necessarily parents, also worked in education.

Chairman's background reflected a deep-rooted value for education, passed down from both parents and grandparents. His father, a minister and clerk of courts, and his mother, a teacher, emphasized the importance of learning. Chairman shared, "We grew up knowing that education was one of our main goals in life." On his paternal side, both grandparents were educators. His grandfather was a college professor and his grandmother was a school principal, further solidifying education as a central theme in his life.

Hunter also attributed his career path to familial inspiration. His grandparents and mother were educators, directly influencing his desire to work in the field. Similarly, Artie's choice to become an art teacher stemmed from encouragement from her family. After graduating from a prestigious art school, she faced difficulty finding work, but her mother advised, "If you can't do your art, teach it." With her grandfather and other relatives also in education, Artie embraced teaching as a natural extension of her artistic passion.

Joy's father profoundly shaped her journey into teaching. She shared her admiration for him saying, "Everybody who knows me knows I emulated myself after my father, after living in a small town." Joy fondly recalled riding with him on home visits. She said, "My father started in

1950 until he retired at 85, and when he was a teacher, he was visiting homes, and as little girls, we would ride with my daddy out in the country and hear people say my daddy's name with such reverence and respect."

In contrast, Buffy, Addie, and Destiny noted that while their parents were not teachers, other family members had careers in education. Buffy's great-grandmother, a teacher for 40 years, and her grandmother, with 20 years of teaching experience, inspired her to pursue education. She expressed, "They were two influences that greatly helped me along the way." Conversely, Addie found teaching through a career change. Initially earning an accounting degree, she realized her true calling lay elsewhere: "I was very bored and realized this isn't really my calling." Her sister-in-law, a talented teacher, mentored her through the transition, offering crucial guidance. Destiny's influence came through her in-laws rather than her immediate family. She explained that while her parents were not in education, both her mother-in-law and father-in-law held significant educational roles, as a college professor and a school superintendent respectively.

Chairman's extensive career reflects the trajectory of many educational leaders, starting in the classroom and progressing through administrative roles over several decades. Many educators transition from teaching to principalships at various levels and eventually assume district or board-level positions, following a path that aligns with broader trends in education (TealHQ, 2024). Coach's journey similarly mirrored these patterns, moving from teacher to principal and eventually to associate superintendent. This professional trajectory demonstrates the manner in which many educators develop leadership capacities over time (National Education Association, 2023). Hunter's career was deeply rooted in connections to his community and a family history in education that motivated his long-term service.

The career paths of Chairman, Hunter, and Coach highlight how educators balance professional growth with personal challenges. Family responsibilities, like those experienced by Coach, influence leadership approaches, foster resilience and empathy, and are increasingly recognized as key traits for school leaders (National Education Association, 2023). Their lived experiences illustrate the dynamic nature of educational careers, with leadership evolving from personal experiences, professional development, and community engagement.

Buffy accumulated 32 years of experience in education, teaching across both middle and high school levels. Early in her career, she worked in a North Georgia school system, further broadening her professional experience. She then spent approximately 16 years teaching middle school and 15 years at the high school level. Before Hunter's tenure, Buffy had already spent 10 years at the same school. From 2018 to 2021, she worked under Hunter's supervision, serving in teaching, leadership, and school improvement roles. Her certifications cover various subjects, including political science, American government, English, social studies for middle grades, and high school history. Buffy now teaches 6th-8th grade science at Southwest Georgia private school, marking a shift into a new subject area for her.

Addie shared she was seeking more meaningful work, which prompted her transition from a career in accounting to education. Her educational career began with nine years as a math teacher and one year as a kindergarten teacher, followed by a shift into the role of media center specialist for several years. She later moved into leadership, serving as a special education director and curriculum director. Currently, Addie holds the assistant special education director position in a larger school district. Addie's career path highlights versatility and a continuous rise into specialized and administrative roles, emphasizing her adaptability and growth within education.

Artie holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Photography from a prestigious art college and has approximately 14 years of teaching experience at the high school level. Her teaching career began in 2008 at a Southwest Georgia middle school, where she worked under Coach. When Coach transitioned to high school, Artie followed him and became the art teacher, eventually leading the fine arts, physical education, and credit recovery departments. Beyond teaching, Artie has taken on multiple leadership roles. At the middle school, she served as the connections lead, and upon moving to the high school, she requested to assume leadership of the fine arts department. Artie also co-chaired the master teacher academy, reflecting her commitment to professional mentoring. Additionally, with encouragement from Coach, Artie currently serves as vice president of the local Arts Council.

Destiny has 28 years of experience as a high school teacher, with the first 17 years at a large North Georgia high school, and the past 11 years at a rural Southwest Georgia school system. She currently holds multiple leadership roles, including Head of the Science Department, Gifted Coordinator, and Science Liaison for the district. Certified in Broadfield science, biology, and AP Environmental Science, she also holds a gifted endorsement, reflecting her diverse expertise. Her professional growth was significantly shaped by her collaboration with Coach, who hired her in 2013. Under his leadership, she undertook key roles, including department head and coordinator positions, following his recommendations. Coach's mentorship was instrumental in her career advancement, highlighting the importance of administrative support in fostering teacher leadership and development.

Joy dedicated 30 years to high school teaching and spent the last five years as an educational and science coach. Over two decades of her career were shaped by her collaboration with Chairman, under whose leadership she assumed various roles, including home economics

instructor, science teacher, multiple coaching positions (track, volleyball, and cheerleading), mentor teacher, science coach, and Race to the Top coordinator. Chairman played an integral role in her professional development, facilitating her movement across schools and positions to align with institutional needs. Today, Faith serves as the Career Technical Education (CTE) Coordinator at a North Florida technical college. Her career path showed her adaptability and leadership in K-12 and technical education environments, underscoring the importance of mentorship and diverse role experiences in professional growth.

Faith had a 41-year career in education, spending 38 years as a classroom teacher before retiring in June 2014. During the final 17 years of her career, she transitioned to working as a high school counselor. While under Chairman's supervision, Faith taught math and world history under his leadership. After retiring from education, Faith pursued new professional and personal growth by working towards a pastoral degree and currently serves as a pastor. Her career journey reflects longevity and adaptability, transitioning from classroom teaching to counseling and, eventually, to spiritual leadership.

The lived experiences of the principal and teacher participants in this study demonstrated the varied paths within education, blending classroom teaching with leadership and administrative roles. Chairman, Coach, and Hunter depicted traditional career progressions, transitioning from teachers to principals and district-level leaders, with mentorship and personal experiences shaping their leadership styles. Buffy's 32-year career spanned multiple grade levels and subjects, showcasing adaptability as she shifted from high school history to middle school science. Addie's experiences reflected a non-traditional entry into education, transitioning from accounting to teaching and then into administrative roles as a curriculum and special education director. Artie, with a background in fine arts, undertook leadership roles in arts education and

local community initiatives. Destiny's career highlighted subject matter expertise and leadership in science education, shaped by administrative support from Coach. Joy's extensive experience, guided by Chairman's mentorship, spans teaching, coaching, and post-secondary leadership as a CTE coordinator. Finally, Faith's 41-year career illustrated resilience and adaptability, transitioning from teaching and counseling to pastoral work, underscoring the importance of lifelong learning and personal growth. The career experiences of the principal and teacher participants exemplify how diverse experiences and mentorship can foster leadership and professional development in education.

Research Question 2: What were the challenges of former high school principals that may have contributed to the high school principal turnover rate as perceived by identified successful high school principals who have left this position?

According to the principal and teacher participants, challenges faced by former high school principals contributing to principal turnover, as perceived by identified successful principals who left the role, centered around increasing emotional stress, shifting family dynamics, and rising student behavioral issues. These difficulties, compounded by inconsistent parental involvement and pressures from multiple stakeholders, created significant barriers to maintaining effective school leadership and aligned with existing research on burnout and job dissatisfaction (Grissom et al., 2021; Woo & Wang, 2023). The lived experiences of the principal participants highlighted the extent to which student and parent engagement shaped the experiences of school principals, influencing job satisfaction, burnout, and turnover. Hunter, for example, reflected on shifting family dynamics, noting the absence of father figures and diminished parental accountability, which often results in principals taking on quasi-parental roles. The growing responsibilities placed on him as a high school principal led to significant

emotional and administrative strain and reflected the broader trends in which school leaders increasingly manage both operational duties and social or behavioral issues that were once primarily addressed at home (Grissom et al., 2021; Woo & Wang, 2023).

Chairman's experience as a high school principal underscored how disruptive student behavior and disciplinary management intensified stress and contributed to high school principal turnover. He identified student discipline as a primary challenge, a finding supported by recent studies that connect behavioral issues with principal burnout and diminished instructional leadership capacity (Grissom et al., 2021; Hitt et al., 2022). Chairman's introduction of Saturday School initiatives exemplified how meaningful student engagement, coupled with responsibilities like school maintenance, can foster ownership and reduce disciplinary problems. His efforts aligned with research findings indicating that engaging students in meaningful activities promotes a sense of belonging and personal accountability, which enhances school climate and positively impacts student behavior (Kraft et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Buffy and Destiny further illustrated how the interplay between discipline and parental expectations complicated school leadership. Buffy asserted principals often face pressure to relax disciplinary decisions to appease parents, compromising their authority. This tension reflected broader trends in which school leaders must balance maintaining discipline with satisfying parents and district expectations, adding to their emotional burden and turnover risk (Leithwood et al., 2020; Woo & Wang, 2023). Faith emphasized the negative impact of parental disengagement, noting parents sometimes bypass school leaders and escalate concerns directly to district administrators, undermining the principal's authority and creating additional stress (Farley-Ripple et al., 2020).

Destiny's observations under Coach's leadership highlighted that fostering personal relationships with students and implementing strategies like morning greetings and technology initiatives can positively impact student engagement. Coach's efforts to build rapport reflected best practices in leadership that promote a sense of community and trust, which are essential for creating a positive school environment (Kraft et al., 2022). These interactions aligned with research indicating principals who prioritize student relationships and technology access contribute to higher levels of academic engagement and equity (Leithwood et al., 2020).

The challenges described by principal and teacher participants illustrated the complex dynamics between student behavior, parent involvement, and school leadership. Principals must navigate these tensions while maintaining positive relationships with parents, motivating students, and managing discipline, often at the expense of their well-being. Developing leadership strategies that emphasize relationship-building and shared responsibility between schools and families can mitigate these challenges, promoting healthier school climates and more sustainable leadership practices (Hitt et al., 2022; Leithwood et al., 2020).

Research Question 3A: How do identified successful former high school principals who have left this position perceive their leadership style as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Hunter, Coach, and Chairman modeled idealized influence by serving as role models, emphasizing trust, and fostering relationships with staff and students. Hunter exemplified this by only asking staff to do tasks he was willing to do himself, while Coach built trust by actively participating in events and engaging with the school community. Chairman highlighted the importance of connecting with students personally to build trust.

Principal participants demonstrated inspirational motivation by encouraging collaborative efforts. Hunter used motivational gestures, like recognizing achievements, while Coach focused on inspiring teachers by working alongside them on data-driven strategies. Chairman emphasized motivating students and teachers by aligning their efforts toward shared goals. Each principal participant demonstrated individualized consideration by addressing personal needs of staff. Coach offered emotional support, adapting expectations based on individual circumstances. Hunter demonstrated care and concern for teachers' personal lives, while Chairman strategically assigned roles based on teachers' strengths, maximizing their potential.

Each principal participant encouraged innovation and growth, which demonstrated intellectual stimulation. Hunter promoted professional development through idea-sharing sessions, while Coach empowered teachers to try new practices and pursue creative instructional strategies. Chairman fostered collaborative problem-solving through committee work and open idea exchanges. Overall, principal participants created positive school climates by modeling behavior, building trust, motivating staff, and fostering personal and professional growth, demonstrating the practical application of transformational leadership characteristics.

Research Question 3B: How do faculty members of identified successful high school principals who have left this position perceive the leadership style of their former principal as related to transformational leadership characteristics?

Teacher participants in this study perceived principal participants' leadership styles as strongly aligned with transformational leadership characteristics, idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation. Joy and Faith highlighted Chairman's ability to build trust and serve as a role model through his empathetic engagement with teachers and parents. He consistently prioritized the needs of others,

embodying idealized influence by demonstrating integrity and genuine care. His inspirational motivation was evident as he actively involved staff in shaping the school's direction, fostering a shared vision and unifying goals.

Chairman exemplified individualized consideration by addressing teachers' strengths and weaknesses, allowing him to assign roles effectively and maximize contributions. Faith said he encouraged creativity, enhancing a culture of innovation that reflected intellectual stimulation. By promoting an environment that was welcoming of new ideas, Chairman empowered teachers to develop their instructional practices.

Buffy's observations of Hunter underscore his commitment to individualized consideration. He demonstrated genuine care for his staff, fostering a respectful environment and earning their trust through consistent support. Hunter also demonstrated inspirational motivation through his efforts to uplift morale through small gestures, such as bringing treats and publicly recognizing achievements, which made teachers feel valued. Hunter's approach to emotional well-being and attentiveness to teachers' challenges also illustrated his dedication to individualized consideration. He tailored his support to meet the unique needs of teachers, which reinforced a strong sense of community and trust. Furthermore, his commitment to intellectual stimulation was evident through collaborative meetings aimed at improving instruction and empowering teachers to engage critically with their practices.

Artie and Destiny detailed Coach's ongoing commitment to idealized influence through his regular personal engagement with students and staff, greeting them by name and fostering a connection. His hands-on leadership style exemplified inspirational motivation, as he communicated a clear vision and established shared goals during regular data review meetings.

Destiny shared a personal anecdote highlighting Coach's individualized consideration when he supported her during a personal crisis. Moreover, Coach's encouragement of innovative teaching practices and granting autonomy in budget management showcased his dedication to intellectual stimulation. By fostering a culture of creativity and collaboration, Coach ensured teachers felt empowered to explore new instructional strategies. The teachers' experiences under Chairman, Hunter, and Coach illustrated how transformational leadership characteristics significantly influence perceptions of school leadership. Each principal participant's ability to build trust, inspire motivation, provide individualized support, and encourage intellectual growth created positive school cultures that promoted both teacher and student success.

Implications of the Study

High school principal turnover poses significant challenges for educational systems, impacting school stability, student achievement, and staff morale. In Georgia and Florida, the turnover rate among high school principals has raised concerns about the effectiveness of leadership pipelines and the sustainability of school improvement efforts. The purpose of this study was to explore the challenges associated with reducing principal turnover, as perceived by experienced and successful former high school principals. Three main themes emerged following data analysis, providing the foundation for this study. The findings of this study offer practical insights for improving leadership stability in schools. School districts can leverage these results to strengthen their efforts in recruiting, selecting, developing, and retaining high school principals. State Departments of Education may also use the findings to refine existing policies and initiatives to build sustainable leadership pipelines.

Additionally, the study provides valuable guidance for aspiring high school principals, helping them anticipate and navigate challenges associated with school leadership. Moreover, the

insights gained may assist local districts and RESAs enhance their leadership development programs, ensuring long-term effectiveness in attracting and retaining qualified principals. This study framed principals' and teacher participants' experience using Bass's (1985) transformational leadership theory and identified key characteristics that contributed to the success of the high school principals.

The nine participants in this study, drawn from two school districts in Southwest Georgia and one in Northwest Florida, included participants from different geographic areas and ensured a broader understanding of how diverse educational contexts might shape leadership practices. Additionally, including high school principals and teachers provided a well-rounded perspective on leadership effectiveness. Gathering insights from high school principals allowed the researcher to explore leadership strategies from the decision-making level, while feedback from teachers offered a ground-level view of how these strategies were implemented and perceived in practice. This dual perspective enriched the study by highlighting the interplay between leadership actions and their impact on school culture, teacher morale, and student outcomes, which is essential for understanding the nuances of transformational leadership in various educational settings (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005). This approach also demonstrated the extent to which collaboration between school leaders and teachers contributes to sustainable leadership practices that promote professional growth and school stability.

Implications to School Districts and RESAs

School districts can leverage this study's findings by embedding transformational leadership practices into their frameworks for recruiting, developing, and retaining high school principals. Research indicates transformational leadership, characterized by collaboration,

motivation, and shared vision, positively impacts school culture, staff morale, and student outcomes (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

School districts can enhance principal recruitment and selection by focusing on candidates with transformational traits, such as empathy and the ability to foster professional growth. Behavioral interviews and leadership assessments can help identify individuals with these qualities, ensuring alignment with district values. Effective programs should provide principals with training in transformational leadership practices, such as intellectual stimulation and recognition of achievements. Pairing novice principals with experienced transformational leaders through mentorship programs may also ease their transition and foster long-term success (Grissom & Loeb, 2011). High school principals who engage teachers in decision-making processes and co-develop school goals reduce staff burnout and improve retention. This sense of shared responsibility enhances school stability by increasing job satisfaction among both staff and leadership (Lewis et al., 2017).

School districts can provide consistent support to high school principals while recognizing their achievements. This may reinforce the sense of fulfillment transformational leaders derive from aligning personal values with organizational goals and increase high school principal retention. Recognizing contributions fosters motivation and job satisfaction, which is critical to prevent burnout and reducing turnover (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Lewis et al., 2017). Additionally, school districts may reduce turnover by identifying and alleviating challenges such as excessive workloads or inadequate administrative support (Valentine & Prater, 2011).

Finally, data-driven strategies enable districts to monitor the impact of transformational leadership on staff satisfaction, student achievement, and principal performance. This data helps ensure alignment of leadership practices with district goals and facilitates continuous

improvement through feedback and reflection (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). By institutionalizing these practices, school districts can create sustainable leadership pipelines, attracting and retaining effective high school principals while fostering meaningful improvements in student outcomes and school environments.

Implications to State Departments of Education

The findings of this study have several implications for state departments of education, particularly in shaping policies and practices aimed at improving high school principal recruitment, development, and retention. First, state departments of education can utilize findings from this study to refine leadership preparation programs, helping to ensure transformational leadership characteristics such as empathy, collaboration, and motivation are emphasized. As such, they can better equip future high school principals with the skills necessary to create supportive school environments (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Sun & Leithwood, 2012).

Furthermore, the study's results highlight the importance of developing targeted support systems for new high school principals, which state departments of education can implement through mentorship and professional development programs. Inspiring potential high school principals to engage with experienced transformational leaders can enhance their skills and confidence, improving school outcomes (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Lewis et al., 2017).

Additionally, state departments of education can promote policies that encourage collaboration among educational stakeholders, including school districts and local education agencies. By fostering a culture of shared leadership and support, they can mitigate the challenges that lead to principal turnover. (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016).

Finally, state departments of education should prioritize data-driven approaches that assess the effectiveness of their leadership initiatives. Analyzing high school principal

performance data and school climate survey results can help identify areas for improvement and ensure leadership practices align with stated goals (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). Also, state departments of education can enhance the quality and sustainability of school leadership across their jurisdictions by integrating the study's findings into their strategic initiatives.

Limitations of the Study

Identifying the limitations of this study is crucial as it provides readers with a clearer understanding of the potential constraints that may affect the interpretation of the findings. Recognizing these limitations can guide future research efforts by highlighting areas that require further exploration or refinement. Upon examination of this study, three limitations were identified: a) small sample size, b) geographic limitations, and c) the potential for researcher bias that may influence the generalizability of the results (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Mertens, 2020). By acknowledging these limitations, researchers can develop more robust studies that address these gaps, thus contributing to the body of knowledge in educational leadership. Moreover, understanding the limitations of this study can encourage researchers to adopt diverse methodologies and participant selections in future studies, which may lead to richer data and more comprehensive insights into the factors influencing high school principal turnover and the effectiveness of transformational leadership (Patton, 2015; Yin, 2018). Ultimately, a critical examination of the study's limitations serves as a foundation for advancing knowledge in this field and informing practices that can improve educational outcomes.

Geographic Region

This study occurred in two school districts in Southwest Georgia and one in Northwest Florida. The small geographic location presents limitations that may impact the findings and their applicability to other contexts. The educational environments in Southwest Georgia and

Northwest Florida may not reflect the diversity of experiences found in urban or suburban areas or regions with different socio-economic conditions. Educational practices and leadership challenges can vary significantly across geographic locations due to cultural, economic, and demographic factors (Mertens, 2014; Patton, 2015). For instance, rural schools often face distinct challenges, such as limited access to resources and professional development opportunities, which may be less pronounced in urban districts (Bennett, 2016; Redding & Smith, 2016).

Sample Size and Generalizability

The study's reliance on a relatively small sample of nine presents significant limitations concerning the generalizability of the findings. A small sample size restricts the capacity to apply the results to a broader population of high school principals across diverse educational contexts. This limitation is critical because educational settings vary considerably in terms of demographic factors, school size, and local policies, all of which can influence leadership practices and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Teddlie & Yu, 2007).

High school principals operate within a range of unique environments shaped by the characteristics of their student bodies, community values, and the resources available to them. Consequently, a small sample size may not capture the full spectrum of experiences and challenges high school principals face in different settings, leading to a skewed understanding of effective leadership practices (Mertens, 2014; Patton, 2015). Research suggests that diverse samples enhance the richness of qualitative findings, allowing for a more nuanced exploration of issues related to educational leadership (Bennett, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Researcher Bias

In qualitative research, the researcher's close involvement in data collection and interpretation inherently introduces the risk of bias, as personal experiences and perspectives

may influence the study's outcomes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study is susceptible to bias due to my professional role. While I do not work with any of the principal or teacher participants, my position allows me to gather informal feedback from teachers about their perceptions of their high school principal's leadership, which could shape how I frame interview questions, interpret responses, or prioritize themes during analysis. These dynamics increase the potential for confirmation bias, in which interpretations align with pre-existing beliefs or narratives (Patton, 2015).

While working with teachers and high school principals does provide valuable insight, it also poses challenges to objectivity. To mitigate bias, I incorporated reflexivity by actively reflecting on how my position might shape my analysis, and I triangulated data by gathering multiple perspectives from teachers and principals. Transparency throughout the research process further strengthens the study's credibility and addresses potential limitations due to researcher bias (Miles et al., 2020).

Cultural and Demographic Variability

The school districts in Southwest Georgia and Northwest Florida may not reflect the diversity of experiences found in urban or suburban areas or regions with different socioeconomic conditions. Educational practices and leadership challenges can vary significantly across geographic locations due to cultural, economic, and demographic factors (Mertens, 2014; Patton, 2015). For example, rural schools often face distinct challenges, such as limited access to resources and professional development opportunities, which may be less pronounced in urban districts (Bennett, 2016; Redding & Smith, 2016).

Recommendations

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study contributes to the literature on high school principal turnover and the transformational leadership qualities that effective high school principals demonstrate. Through the perspectives of three successful high school principals and six high school teachers, the research identifies key challenges influencing principal turnover. The principal participants' recognition and application of transformational leadership strategies to address these challenges was a central focus. The recommendations for future research emerged from the data analysis, offering insights into how leadership practices can further support principal retention and effectiveness.

Increase Geographic Region

Future research on high school principal turnover and the role of transformational leadership characteristics may benefit from drawing participants from a broader geographic region to widen the range of experiences and viewpoints. Expanding the scope beyond the limited settings used in this study may allow researchers to capture regional variations in leadership practices and educational challenges, which can contribute to more comprehensive insights (Creswell & Poth, 2018). While the nine participants in this study represent an appropriate sample size for qualitative research, the ability to generalize findings increases with a larger, more geographically diverse sample (Patton, 2015).

Increase Sample Size

Smaller or localized samples may limit the study's relevance to educational systems in different regions, where cultural, socioeconomic, and policy factors can shape principal effectiveness and turnover rates differently (Mertens, 2020). Future studies involving multiple

states or diverse educational settings would allow cross-regional comparisons, providing richer data on how transformational leadership characteristics align with principal retention across varying contexts. Larger sample sizes can also increase the study's credibility by reducing the impact of outliers and ensuring findings are not skewed by the unique characteristics of a small participant pool (Miles et al., 2020). By engaging a larger number of participants from diverse educational regions, future research can offer findings that are more applicable across different school districts, enhancing the ability of policymakers and educational leaders to develop targeted retention strategies (Yin, 2018).

Broaden Cultural and Demographic Variability

In future research, expanding the cultural and demographic variability can improve findings depth, relevance, and generalizability. Including participants from varied cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic backgrounds helps ensure that findings are more representative of the broader population (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, diverse samples reduce the risk of bias and promote equity by amplifying the voices of historically underrepresented groups (Tracy, 2020). Accounting for these variables is important in educational research, wherein cultural context and community dynamics significantly impact leadership effectiveness and organizational outcomes (Khalifa et al., 2016).

Summary

This qualitative study explored the experiences of three successful high school principals recognized for their leadership success, alongside input from two teachers affiliated with each high school principal. This study aimed to capture diverse perspectives on effective leadership practices. The research addressed high school principal turnover by identifying transformational leadership characteristics contributing to career longevity. Transformational leadership

emphasizes inspiring faculty, fostering collaboration, and creating a shared vision linked to positive school environments, improved outcomes, and increased principal retention (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). Investigating how these leadership practices influence high school principal effectiveness offers actionable insights for school districts and policymakers seeking to reduce turnover and establish sustainable leadership structures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

In Chapter I, the study introduced the challenges of high school principal turnover, which strains financial resources and disrupts school environments, negatively affecting teachers and students. High turnover forces districts to spend time and resources on repeated recruitment and onboarding efforts, ultimately diverting attention from instructional improvement (Fuller et al., 2020). In Chapter II, the literature review explored the prevalence of high school principal turnover, its impact on student achievement, barriers to reducing turnover, and the applicability of various leadership theories to educational contexts.

Chapter III outlined the phenomenological research design, emphasizing the importance of data collection procedures and maintaining ethical standards to protect trustworthiness (Moustakas, 1994). Chapter IV presented detailed profiles of principal and teacher participants, offering context for their lived experiences. Chapter V explained the data analysis methods and key findings that emerged from the principal and teacher participants' reflections. Finally, in Chapter VI, the researcher provided an interpretation of these findings, connecting them to the broader literature and offering recommendations for future practice and research.

One of the most significant findings of this study was the identification of transformational leadership characteristics across all three successful high school principals. These characteristics were consistently present, reinforcing existing research on the benefits of

transformational leadership in educational settings (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Sun & Leithwood, 2015). My current professional role offers opportunities to observe high school principals and their leadership practices regularly. However, using transformational leadership theory as a lens provided a more focused framework for recognizing specific behaviors and traits that contribute to effective leadership and longevity.

Through semi-structured interviews, principal and teacher participants shared first-hand accounts of their experiences. This dual-perspective approach allowed the study to capture the alignment between the high school principals' intentions and the teachers' perceptions, which adds to the validity of the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Such alignment is essential since teachers' perceptions of leadership significantly impact their job satisfaction and performance, affecting student achievement (Kraft et al., 2016; Robinson et al., 2008).

Framing leadership practices within transformational leadership theory allowed me to identify essential elements, such as the high school principals' capacity to inspire, commitment to professional development, and adaptability in meeting challenges. These qualities align with findings in the literature, indicating transformational leaders empower teachers to take ownership of school improvement initiatives and build a collaborative school culture (Avolio & Yammarino, 2013; Khalifa et al., 2016). Moreover, the high school principals' ability to balance vision-setting with individualized support demonstrates the flexibility of transformational leadership, making it highly relevant to the evolving challenges of educational leadership (Leithwood et al., 2020).

By better understanding how transformational leadership manifests in the daily practices of successful high school principals, this study offers insights for school districts, policymakers, and future researchers interested in reducing leadership turnover. Expanding future studies to

include larger samples and more varied school contexts will be essential for confirming the broader applicability of transformational leadership in reducing principal turnover and enhancing school outcomes.

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Appendix A: High School Teacher Participant Interview Questions

Appendix A
High School Teacher Participant Interview Questions

I am going to ask you a series of questions, please respond and elaborate if you wish.

1. How long have you been a high school teacher?
2. What areas of education are you certified in?
3. What is your current position?
4. How long have you known (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)?
5. How long did you work for (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)?
6. What positions did you serve in while working for (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)?
7. What do you know about high school principal turnover rate in southwest Georgia?
8. What challenges do you feel high school principals face in southwest Georgia?
9. In your experience, what are some contributing factors to the high school principal turnover rate in southwest Georgia?
10. In your experience, what are some contributing factors to the high school principal turnover rate in southwest Georgia?
11. In your experience, what are some of the variables of principal turnover that affect student academic achievement?

Review the following definition and descriptions of the four elements of transformational leadership.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained transformational leadership as “the kind of leadership that gets people to infuse their energy into strategies.” James McGregor Burns (1978) explained transformational leadership as the leader’s understanding the needs of followers but also motivating them with higher aspirations towards a common goal.

4 Elements of Transformational Leadership

1. Idealized Influence – Developing trust of followers by serving as a role model, practicing empathy, and putting the needs of others before one’s own
2. Inspirational Motivation – Motivating followers towards a common goal
3. Individualized Consideration – Showing care for followers needs and emotions
4. Intellectual Stimulation – Encouraging and fostering creativity among faculty members

Resume questions.

12. What is your understanding of transformational leadership?
13. How would you describe (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)'s leadership style as it relates to transformational leadership?
14. How would you describe (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)'s using "idealized influence" as a high school principal?
15. How would you describe (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)'s using "inspirational motivation" as a high school principal?
16. How would you describe (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)'s using "individualized consideration" as a high school principal?
17. How would you describe (Principal 1, Principal 2, Principal 3)'s using "intellectual stimulation" as a high school principal?

Appendix B: High School Principal Participant Interview Questions

Appendix B

High School Principal Participant Interview Questions

I am going to ask you a series of questions, please respond and elaborate if you wish.

1. Where were you born and where did you grow up?
2. Please tell me about your family life growing up, and after you entered the field of education. (Parents, siblings, married/not married, children)
3. What inspired you to go into education?
4. Where did you go to college? What was your first position in education and what areas are you certified in?
5. What inspired you to go into education?
6. How many total years have you served as a high school principal?
7. In how many schools have you served as principal?
8. How long did you serve in your last high school principal position?
9. What is your current position?
10. What do you know about high school principal turnover rate in southwest Georgia?
11. What challenges do you feel high school principals face in southwest Georgia?
12. In your experience, what are some contributing factors to the high school principal turnover rate in southwest Georgia?
13. In your experience, what are some of the variables of principal turnover that affect student academic achievement?

Review the following definition and descriptions of the four elements of transformational leadership.

Kouzes and Posner (2007) explained transformational leadership as “the kind of leadership that gets people to infuse their energy into strategies.” James McGregor Burns (1978) explained transformational leadership as the leader’s understanding the needs of followers but also motivating them with higher aspirations towards a common goal.

4 Elements of Transformational Leadership

1. Idealized Influence – Developing trust of followers by serving as a role model, practicing empathy, and putting the needs of others before one’s own
2. Inspirational Motivation – Motivating followers towards a common goal
3. Individualized Consideration – Showing care for followers’ needs and emotions
4. Intellectual Stimulation – Encouraging and fostering creativity among faculty members

Resume questions.

14. What is your understanding of transformational leadership?
15. How would you describe your leadership style as it relates to transformational leadership?
16. What are your experiences using “idealized influence” as a high school principal?
17. What are your experiences using “inspirational motivation” as a high school principal?
18. What are your experiences using “individualized consideration” as a high school principal?
19. What are your experiences using “intellectual stimulation” as a high school principal?

Appendix C: Institutional Review Board (IRB) Protocol Exemption Report

Appendix C



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
For the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04400-2023

Responsible Researcher(s): Elizabeth Brand

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Kathy Nobles

Project Title: *A Qualitative Study Examining the Challenges and Barriers to Reducing the High School Principal Turnover Rate in Georgia.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (tmwright@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- *Exempt guidelines **prohibit** the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings. Exempt protocol guidelines **permit** the recording of interviews provided recordings are made to create an accurate transcript. Upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview session must be deleted immediately from all devices.*
- *As part of the informed consent process, interview recordings must include the researcher reading aloud the consent statement, confirming participant's understanding, and establishing willingness to take part in the interview. Participants must be provided a copy of the research statement.*
- *Upon completion of the research study, collected data must be securely maintained and accessible only by the researcher(s) for a minimum of 3 years. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.*

If this box is checked, please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at tmwright@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth Ann Olfie 03.13.2023

Elizabeth Ann Olfie, IRB Administrator

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.

Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-253-2947.