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# Retaining Special Education Teachers: The Relationship Between School Leadership and Special Education Teacher Retention in a Low-Income School

Amanda Elizabeth Jones

*Old Dominion University*, [amanda.jones@cpschools.com](mailto:amanda.jones@cpschools.com)

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RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER RETENTION IN A  
LOW- INCOME SCHOOL

by

Amanda Elizabeth Jones

A. A. August 2007, College of the Albemarle

B.S. May 2009, Old Dominion University

M.Ed. May 2013, Norfolk State University

Ed.S. May 2016, Old Dominion University

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Approved by:

Steve Myran (Director)

William Owings (Member)

Annemarie Horn (Member)

## ABSTRACT

### RETAINING SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND SPECIAL EDUCATION RETENTION IN A LOW-INCOME SCHOOL

Amanda Elizabeth Jones  
Old Dominion University, 2020  
Director: Dr. Steve Myran

School districts across America are struggling to recruit, hire, and retain qualified teachers in the classroom (Wushishi, Foori, Basri & Baki, 2014; Simpson, Whelan & Zabel, 1993). In 2006 the national teacher replacement cost in America averaged approximately \$2.2 billion per year (Borman & Dowling, 2008). A once highly esteemed profession is now one faced with many positions left unfilled and students without instructors. The influence of teacher shortages across content areas can be felt by students and teachers alike (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). Although general education teachers leaving their classrooms can negatively impact students in various situations, those students served in special education classrooms in low-income areas are affected even more. The group of teachers identified with the highest attrition rate throughout research is special education teachers with five or less years of experience (Otto & Arnold, 2005). Students benefit from instruction provided by qualified educators (Henry, Bastian & Fortner, 2011), and because teaching experience can increase effectiveness (Freedman & Appleman, 2009); some students are left without the quality instruction that their typically developing peers receive. This qualitative case study explores what special education teachers and administrators identify as leadership practices that combat the issue to special education teacher attrition and encourage teacher retention in a low-income school. The findings gathered through this research add to the existing special education teacher retention literature by including various perspectives in a low-income school. The information

from this research is critical as these teachers require resources, opportunities to perform, appropriate professional development (Berry, 2008) and administrator support.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my babies, Charlie Rae and Stryder. You two are my greatest accomplishments.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

A study in the American Educational Research Journal found when teachers leave mid-year, students miss 54 days of instructional growth when compared to peers in classes where the teacher stayed all year (Sparks, 2018). The negative ripple effect of high teacher attrition will continue to be felt through student performance and stakeholder satisfaction. About one-third of teachers leave the classroom within three years, and teacher attrition continues to be problematic (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). To demonstrate, in October 2017 Virginia had 1000 teacher vacancies; those classrooms were occupied by substitutes who were responsible for instruction (Strauss, 2017).

While students can suffer in all academic environments due to teacher attrition, students with disabilities require high levels of consistency and support, and instructors often must create differentiated materials based upon students' levels of functioning derived by collected data. Since these students have high levels of need and require additional assistance, they are negatively impacted because the teachers are struggling themselves (Billingsley, 2004a). The percentage of students in special education programs has grown faster than students in general education; in 2007 these percentages were growing three times faster (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007). In 2012, 6.4 million children were receiving special education services, and in the 2018-2019 school year the number increased to 7.1 million (National Education Statistics, 2020). And while the percentage of students in special education programs continues to increase, finding, supporting, and maintaining special education teachers has been and continues to be a significant challenge (Billingsley, 2004a).

Teacher retention continues to be a focus since it is significantly problematic in low-income schools (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). In these challenging schools, teachers are not only more likely to attrite, they are also more likely to be less qualified and less prepared (Levin et al., 2015). Both factors play a role in the achievement gap of students in low-income areas compared to students in more affluent schools (Adnot, Dee, Katz & Wyckoff, 2016). These low-income buildings often have fewer resources, more students on teacher caseload and high teacher burnout (Levin et. al, 2015). Students in low- income schools are already facing challenges and since teacher attrition is prominent in these buildings; they also miss out on consistent teachings of prepared instructors. It is important to gain insight from both administrators and teachers to determine if they are identifying the same factors that encourage teacher retention. If administrators do not understand what teachers need, they will not be able to implement those retention strategies and support efforts will be misguided and ineffectual.

To maintain quality teachers in their current positions, we must understand what teachers are identifying as leadership practices integral to their retention. Furthermore, it is necessary to determine whether the building-level leader is identifying similar practices and whether they are currently including these practices in their leadership repertoire.

### **Research Questions**

To understand these and address the relationship of teachers' persistence and leadership practices, this research was guided by the following questions:

1. From teachers' perspectives, how and in what ways does a principal foster or impede special education teacher retention?
2. From a principal's perspective, how and in what ways does he or she influence special education teacher retention?

While preparing for this research, a review of literature on characteristics of teachers who were considered “teacher leavers” (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017) and the influence teacher attrition has on students, district level, and state level educators was conducted. To do this, teacher attrition was defined, and research surrounding the factors causing teacher attrition was identified. Further discussion on teacher attrition in special education and low-income areas and the impact on students are included. Literature about teacher retention, the factors that influence it and its importance are reviewed and synthesized. This section also addresses teacher attrition in terms of its causes and implications for school climate. While discussing these two topics, particular attention is paid to facets of school-level leadership identified in research and the role leadership plays in both attrition and retention.

Although abundant research exists on teacher retention and leadership, our understanding of leadership practices and retention efforts of special education teachers in low-income schools remains limited. And even when there is a comprehensive understanding of factors influencing both attrition and retention in this area, it is unclear how many of these practices are being implemented. For the purpose of this research, the perspectives of teachers and leaders will be analyzed from a low-income school serving a high number of students requiring special education services. A framework from literature was developed to define attrition, retention, and the influence leadership has on them in order to answer these research questions.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY**

It is valuable to seek information and insight into a teacher’s decision to leave the educational setting in which they work. To provide students quality instruction and provide educators an environment that meets their continued needs, efforts must be made to fully investigate and understand what is working in regard to teacher retention and what is not

working. Insight from individuals who are in the field provide the most powerful view of the educational institution they are working to serve. A review of the research on influential factors causing teacher attrition can help inform policymakers and leaders so they can strategize on how to decrease the attrition and build systems that foster teacher retention. “The special education profession should not be a revolving cycle of new teachers who change careers after only a few years” (Thornton, Peltier & Medina, 2007, p. 234).

### **Key Terms**

To inform the reader and support understanding throughout the text, key vocabulary is defined below:

- Assistant Principal: An administrator who follows the direction of the building principal and manages a series of responsibilities; in this case this assistant principal monitors special education programming.
- Attrition: The act of teachers leaving their current organization.
- Efficacy: A self-perception related to an individual’s confidence in completing certain tasks.
- Low-income school: A school that is also considered Title I due to having at least 40% of its population identified as students from low-income families, receiving free or reduced lunch.
- Primary school: School serving preschool through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade.
- Principal: Building leader who supervises assistant principal(s), faculty and staff and makes school-wide decisions
- Retention: The act of maintaining teachers’ employment with the current organization.



- Special education teacher: An individual who is responsible for providing specially designed instruction and acting as a case manager of student caseload.
- Teacher: For the purpose of this research this term is used to describe special education teachers, unless otherwise specified as a general education teacher.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **Overview**

To understand what teachers and building leaders are identifying as effective leadership practices for teacher retention, this study first identifies and defines the problem of teacher attrition. Factors contributing to attrition and how attrition is present in special education, with a specific emphasis on low-income schools. A definition of teacher retention and what research has identified as major topics influencing teachers to maintain their positions is provided. Finally, this research discusses the benefits of teacher retention and why literature and research find they are significant.

Common themes found throughout this research lead back to the research questions. Looking through the lens of teachers and administrators, this study will expand on current literature as it relates to special education teacher attrition in low-income schools. This information will enhance administrator knowledge and create more effective leadership practices moving forward. This research and information will allow the readers to gain important insight into what teachers need and how those needs can be met and applied by practicing administrators.

This literature review is organized by research and factors influencing teacher attrition and retention. A framework for understanding is developed through this literature. As mentioned, teacher retention is a dilemma for districts across the nation. As general and special education teachers are leaving their classrooms, student achievement is being negatively affected (Freedman & Appleman, 2009), so one is left to wonder who is responsible and what can be done. First, the researcher defines and considers the cause and influence of teacher attrition and

teacher retention. Next, the researcher discusses school-level leadership and what the research says school leaders can do to minimize teacher attrition and promote teacher retention. Research suggests the components of school leadership contributing to attrition include the absences of administrative support, shared decision-making, teacher efficacy, and a positive school climate.

### **Special Education Teacher Attrition**

Teacher attrition is the act of teachers leaving their current positions for a different teaching position or leaving education completely (Otto & Arnold, 2005). Individuals who were once motivated to provide instruction to students are now making the decision to leave their classrooms behind. In this country alone, approximately 500,000 teachers leave their positions each year (Boyd et.al, 2008). Teachers who are more likely to leave their current positions or teaching altogether are often considered less effective than those who chose to stay (Goldhaber, Gross & Player, 2010). If teachers who are leaving are less effective, some state teacher attrition could be considered a positive process. Some studies show teacher turnover is a positive component of education and necessary for student and school benefit (Ronfedlt, Loeb & Wyckoff, 2013), as too much stability in the workforce can sometimes lead to individuals becoming complacent (Macdonald, 1999). While others say that not only does teacher attrition negatively impact specific students but really the entire school (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). The discussion then becomes, how much of teacher turnover can be considered beneficial and how to find that equilibrium. Ingersoll (2001) agrees organizations should maintain a certain level of employee turnover in order to achieve balance and maintain efficiency, however, the level of attrition is problematic.

Some teachers are leaving the profession due to retirement. Although this group of educators is often mentioned in literature, they rarely remain the focus of research, since they

only make up about 33% of the attrition population (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Although retirees do not make up a great percentage of the attrition total, these individuals may be able to provide insight into factors other than the availability of retirement benefits that encouraged their departure. It is beneficial to speak straight to the source, the teachers who have left, in order to determine the cause for teacher attrition. Unfortunately, it is often difficult to research those known as “teacher leavers” (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017). Whether the leavers chose another profession or retirement, those individuals are no longer associated with a school or district and become hard to research. Since they have left their classrooms, they have left unknown their reasons for any discontent.

### **Factors Contributing to Attrition**

While special education teacher attrition is identified as being a concern for school districts, it is also important to understand the reasons behind why this attrition is occurring. To help formulate a full understanding of attrition and what leads to it, an analysis of what literature identifies as contributing factors is described below. The factors that contribute to attrition are lack of administrator support, teachers’ sense of unpreparedness and uncertainty, stressful workplace conditions, and teachers’ sense of powerlessness.

#### **Lack of administrator support.**

Leukens (2004) identified nearly 40% of the teachers who chose to leave the profession cited a lack of administrative support as their primary reason for leaving. Teachers show intent to leave when administrator support is perceived as inadequate (Billingsley, 2004b; Nancy & Calabrese, 2009). Although teachers cite the lack of administrator support as an influence of attrition, it is defined differently throughout literature and research. If what administrative support looks like cannot be identified, it may be difficult to prepare administrators to be

supportive and assist them in reflecting on their own practices. Leaders can be left trying to determine if they are providing adequate administrative support to their teachers. No matter how the term is defined, research shows the decrease in teacher commitment is usually related to the teachers' negative perceptions of administrative support (Choi & Tang, 2009). Administrator support, stress, and workload are cited as major influences on poor job satisfaction (Vittekk, 2015).

Teacher job satisfaction is a major component that influences a teacher's decision to stay in special education, transition to general education, or exit education altogether (Gehrke & McCoy, 2007). As school leaders work to provide support for the teachers, they are increasing job satisfaction and encouraging increased commitment to the field (Shields, 2009). However, administrator support can be an intangible concept by many school leaders and, therefore, hard to implement.

House (1981) identified four forms of support as administrative support: emotional, instrumental, informational, and appraisal. In relation to these four areas, some factors were found to negatively influence teacher job satisfaction and increase teacher attrition. Although various factors were recognized as influencers negatively impacting teachers' perceptions of administrator support, three stood out: absence of administrative awareness, inappropriate administrative disciplinary decisions, and an administrator's negative attitude toward an inclusive culture within a building (House, 1981). House (1981) defined emotional support as the administrator's actions showing concerns for teachers' work, ensuring open communication, and respecting and valuing teachers. Instrumental support touches on administrators being present when teachers face daily challenges and frustrations. Teachers are looking for administrative assistance and help to navigate through day-to-day challenges that may arise.

Informational support comes through professional development opportunities, observational feedback, and classroom support strategies. Finally, support considered appraisal support can be interpreted as clear guidelines and timely and meaningful feedback (House, 1981).

Although the lack of administrative support is shown to influence a teacher's choice to the classroom; some say that is only one of the factors. With or without administrative support, teachers must often find the will to continue teaching within themselves. Research shows beginning teachers often lack the confidence to continue independently and require some level of support (Cancio, Albrecht, & Johns, 2013). A teacher's commitment to providing instruction to students is tied to his or her feelings of self-efficacy, high expectations for his or her students, and the motivation and effort to work hard at such a task (Kushman, 1992).

#### **Teachers' sense of unpreparedness and uncertainty.**

The concept of self-efficacy is based on an individual's self-esteem and an image of oneself formulated by thoughts, feelings, and experiences (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Capara & Pastorelli, 1996). As new special education and general education teachers come into their professions, they often feel unprepared. Districts all over the country are amending the hiring standards for teachers and offering jobs to individuals with little to no preparation or preparation from alternative preparation programs (Darling-Hammond, Chung & Frelow, 2002). Teachers who identify as being unprepared are twice as likely to leave the field of education, compared to those who report they feel prepared (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver, 2016). They look to the building-level administrator for help to become confident and knowledgeable of not only the content but also the dynamics of teaching in their specific buildings. When teachers are ill-prepared, they are less likely to believe in themselves or possess a productive level of self-efficacy.

When teachers feel stressed, frustrated, and have high levels of anxiety, these feelings can causally relate to a teacher's leaving (Giacommetti-Meyers, 2005). Teachers seem to be the least efficacious within the first two years and are more likely to leave (Day and Gu, 2010). As teachers lack the confidence to complete the tasks related to their jobs, they are less likely to stay in these positions. Among teachers who lack self-efficacy and have a higher potential for burnout, physiological and emotional stressors are often more prevalent which can increase absenteeism (Schonfield, 2001). The common consequences of low self-efficacy in teachers include attrition and high absenteeism, and ultimately, poor instruction. When educators have a lack of self-efficacy, there is a direct correlation to collective teacher efficacy (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010).

When teachers feel that they, as well as their teaching colleagues, can all serve the needs of their students, this is an example of collective efficacy (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). When teachers demonstrate a level of collective efficacy, teachers, administrators, and students benefit, since collective efficacy has been found to have a positive influence on student achievement (Goddard, 2001). In schools where teacher attrition is a concern, the teachers appear to lack self-efficacy and in turn, the school may lack collective efficacy as well. Teachers often attrite when they do not have access to knowledgeable and skilled peers for collaboration (Bruce et. al, 2010). Schools that do not have efficacious teachers often do not create an environment where collective efficacy can occur resulting in negative effects on the school morale and climate (Goddard, 2001).

### **Stressful workplace conditions.**

When a school climate is not conducive to student learning, or meeting the needs of the teachers and staff, it can create issues for all stakeholders involved. For example, when a school

struggles with student discipline and unclear expectations for students or staff, the school climate is more at risk to be problematic (O'Donnell & Swanson, 2016). When the school climate of an organization is strained, it will result in adversely impacting teacher retention and commitment (Weiss, 1999). School climate can be quite influential in how teachers respond to their working environment; determining whether to remain in the building or to leave. Both emotional and physical exhaustion can be linked to the decision to leave the classroom (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017) and therefore, teachers need administrators and mentors to get through daily challenges.

School climate impacts the success of teachers and, ultimately, students. Collaboration is an integral component of school climate and creates an environment where individuals can learn from each other and grow together. There is a connection between a school environment and the organization's social characteristics, and this link can influence the commitment of new teachers (Weiss, 1999). While negative school climates and poor working conditions are influencers on teacher attrition, they also can deter people from initially accepting a position in these buildings (Darling-Hammond, 1984).

The climate of a school is one of the essential predictors of teacher burnout; the result of not being successful when dealing with stress (Lim & Eo, 2014). The burnout of teachers, along with other helping professionals, can be explained through three categories: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Jackson, Schwab & Schuler, 1986). Under the overarching concept of burnout, emotional exhaustion can be explained as the state caused by unending stress. Depersonalization is removing the personal factor when referring to people. And the third category can be described as feelings of low personal accomplishment (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), often leading to lack of motivation and commitment, and therefore, low self-efficacy.



**Teachers' sense of powerlessness.**

In addition to the absence of administrator support, a deficit of teacher efficacy, and stressful working conditions, teachers often identify a lack of shared decision-making as a reason why they left their position. Many teachers feel they do not have a voice when it comes to creating policies and making decisions within their buildings (Kelleher, 2003). For example, teachers in urban schools expressed having less power over the curriculum compared to their peers in more affluent areas (Lippman, Burns & McArthur, 1996). In these environments where teachers have a lack of decision-making or voice, they may feel the only way to have a voice is by declaring their exit, one of the few things they can control. The decision for teachers to exit could be seen as a refusal to participate in jobs under specific conditions (Glazer, 2018), and if they do not feel they have power, they may feel driven to make such a decision.

As researchers learn that teachers cite a lack or presence in decision-making, a logical response would be to encourage teachers to participate in decision-making within the building. However, as Mayer et. al (2013) describe, there are certain obstacles that arise when teachers engage in the decision-making process. One obstacle explained is the principals' willingness, or the lack thereof, to allow teachers to act as decision-making agents. This can be a challenge due to principals not wanting to relinquish their power thereby hindering shared decision making (Smylie and Brownlee-Conyers, 1992; Hallinger, Murphy & Hausman, 1992). Another possible obstacle is the reaction of teacher peers in response to other teachers being a part of decision-making. Donaldson, et.al (2008) expand on teacher decision-making challenges and state some teachers may hesitate to invest in decisions they were not included in, even if their colleagues were a part of the decision-making process.

### **Attrition in Low-Income Schools**

Teacher attrition is troublesome to all socioeconomic groups; however, this is particularly a concern in low-income schools. The attrition rate in low-income, urban schools is higher than those not considered low-income (McKinney, Berry, Dickerson & Campbell-Whately, 2007). Schools with low-performing, high-poverty students often have higher teacher attrition rates (Guarino, Santibanez & Daley, 2006), and it seems there may be more than one reason why. Although the higher rate of teacher attrition may be influencing the underachievement of students (Hammonds, 2017), it could also be that the underachievement of students increases teacher attrition. Additionally, teachers who teach in low-income areas often have caseloads higher than normal and lower resources (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). No matter the cause, teachers are leaving these classrooms more than other environments. Teachers in high-poverty schools are less likely to move to a different school than teachers in medium-poverty schools but were more likely to leave the teaching profession altogether (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). As if the students do not face enough challenges when attending schools in low-income areas, including poverty and less educational resources, they are also less likely to be taught by teachers with more than five years of experience (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). Teachers in these types of schools often need professional development on subject-specific areas as well as effective instruction in the areas of the school's vision and goals (Mendez-Morse, 1991). As teachers who work in special education and/or low-income schools require high levels of support since teacher attrition in these areas are high, specific teachers and their colleagues are not getting the required resources and training to ensure longevity; they are leaving before they can get what they need.

Due to the high attrition rates in low-income area schools, leadership supports and practices are often analyzed and effective leadership strategies are identified to determine their

influence in retaining qualified teachers (Hammond, 2017). Some researchers identify the characteristics associated with schools serving students who are considered disadvantaged to be the reasons for teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 1999). Although there may be other factors influencing high levels of teacher attrition, it is the principal's leadership that has a stronger impact on retaining teachers in low-income areas (Ladd, 2011). While researching teacher attrition and retention, the challenges associated with teaching in low-income areas cannot go unnoticed, but for this study, school-level leadership is maintained as the focus.

### **Special education teacher attrition.**

The special education teacher retention rate after just one year of teaching is significantly less than their general education peers (Brownell, Smith & Miller, 1995). As the number of students who qualify for special education services continues to increase, the demand for special education teachers is expected to increase as well (Otto & Arnold, 2005; Cooc & Yang, 2016). Although general education teachers and special education teachers may face different challenges, they share many of the same factors that influence teacher attrition, to include the shortage of administrative support (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007).

State and federal educational agencies now enforce increased accountability linking teacher effectiveness to student performance. Therefore, as teachers feel the pressure for their students to perform, teacher retention is affected (Gaytan, 2008). Special education teachers who are considered less prepared than their peers due to alternative preparation programs (Strauss, 2017), are often placed in classrooms where students may never have achieved passing scores on statewide assessments. Very often, teachers who earn their licensures through alternative preparation programs are provided training on policy and procedure but not as much content specific areas, when compared to their general education peers. Possibly the most difficult

challenge in the special education field is the absence of special education teachers who are qualified (Billingsley, 2007) due to the high number of teachers who participated in alternative preparation programs. Currently, these alternative preparation programs often do not develop the skills that foster longevity in education for everyone (Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014). As stated previously, when teachers in the building struggle, the collective efficacy and morale can be negatively influenced. Additionally, there are many reasons why teachers struggle to maintain self-efficacy as well as efficacy of their peers.

Special education teachers who are new to not only teaching but also understanding the world of special education rely heavily on experienced administrators (Hope, 1999). While these teachers may rely heavily on administrators for support, building administrators do not often have specific training and knowledge of special education (Lasky & Karge, 2006). Many special education teachers identify themselves as insufficiently prepared (Kilgore & Griffin, 1998) resulting in a lack of self-efficacy. Many special education teachers, while trained on concepts related to special education, are not provided content-specific instruction. Although these individuals are not specifically trained to teach educational subjects, they still maintain responsibility for content instruction, similar to general education teachers. Some special educators report they lack the content knowledge and experience, which has been shown to result in lower self-efficacy in the classroom (Greenlee & Brown, 2009). When teachers believe in themselves and each other, research shows that collective teacher efficacy has a positive influence on student performance in low-income schools (Goddard, 2001). Due to the alarming attrition rates, divisions across the country are offering alternative education programs. While alternative preparation programs can be proven useful in addressing the national teacher

shortage, these programs are often criticized for being costly and at times, can have lower standards compared to traditional teacher programs (Robertson & Singleton, 2010).

### **The Impact of Teacher Attrition on Students and Student Learning**

Although some teacher attrition is beneficial (Adnot, Dee, Katz & Wyckoff, 2016), the current attrition rate is causing long-lasting detrimental effects on schools around the world. Adnot et al. (2016) recognize that if teachers lack essential skills, attrition for those teachers may be necessary and positive. While some amounts of teacher turnover can encourage fresh perspectives and ensure teaching practices do not become stagnant (Ingersoll, 2001), the negative effects of teacher attrition at its current level outweigh any possible benefits (Murnane & Steele, 2007). Teacher attrition negatively impacts student achievement (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017) in addition to negatively affecting entire schools and districts (Glazer, 2018). Teachers must be competent for classroom instruction to be effective (King & Bouchard, 2011). One of the most powerful influences on student learning is the quality of instruction (Leithwood, et. al. 2004). Teachers become more knowledgeable and better skilled as time goes on; therefore, efforts are being made to retain teachers in their current positions (Ferguson, 1991).

Although districts are implementing efforts to retain teachers, attrition continues to be a concern. Therefore, divisions have no other options to recruit replacements. The task of recruiting, hiring, and retaining quality teachers is a challenge for districts across the world (Tickle, Chang & Kim, 2011). A consistent dilemma with high attrition is more teachers are leaving the field than are being replaced, and the ones that are filling the empty positions may be less effective than those they are replacing (Strauss, 2017). As a result of teachers choosing to leave the classroom, the districts are left to face the negative results. The time and money that goes into finding and recruiting a replacement can be a nuisance, but the variance in salary and in

productivity must also be considered (Papay, Bacher- Hicks, Page & Marinell, 2017). Novice teachers are less likely to be retained than experienced teachers (Strauss, 2017) so the process becomes cyclical. To address the challenge of teacher attrition, research has been done to identify influential factors in decisions to leave cited by teachers who have left. This information is researched so attrition can be decreased. Research on teacher attrition has been done in great detail; citing certain topics as influencers of teacher attrition including school leadership. There are common themes identified to include: administrative support, working conditions, student discipline, and lack of teacher input over schoolwide decision and policy making (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Teacher shortage is a dilemma that has been plaguing educational organizations for decades (Wronowski, 2018). Although the reasons behind the shortages are not easily agreed upon, districts are taking notice and working on efforts to address them

### **Retention**

Teacher retention is described as teachers choosing to remain in their current teaching assignments in the same school (Billingsley, 1993). Teachers who choose to stay in their positions gain knowledge, experience, and become more efficacious as time goes on (Freedman & Appleman, 2009). In an effort to minimize attrition's lasting effects on students and schools (Vitteck, 2015), efforts are being made to encourage retention. Quality teachers are imperative to the success of a school and the students within it (Hanushek, 1992). When comparing students who are taught by highly qualified teachers and those who are taught by teachers who are unqualified, the difference can be a grade level of achievement in one school year (Hanushek, 1992). It is important to note for the purpose of this research, the term highly-qualified is correlated not with the quality of teaching practices but more so related to certification (Greenlee & Brown, 2009).

Policy makers in education have developed a number of ways to get people into the classroom and keep them, such as student loan forgiveness, alternative certification programs, increased pay, and even housing options exclusive to teachers (Hanushek, Kain & Rivkin, 2002). These efforts are well intended; however, mentoring and administrative support are more influential in the retention of teachers (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003). Of course, efforts to make schools more effective should not be the same for each building, but many schools will have the same characteristics (Griffith, 2003) and practices. Although great research has been done on tackling teacher attrition and supporting teacher retention, it remains a complex and multi-faceted concept (Hughes, 2012). As teacher attrition continues to be a problem for school districts, teacher retention remains a goal.

### **Factors That Encourage Teacher Retention**

Teacher retention is a priority for school leadership and to fully understand the concept of retention and what leaders can implement to support it, it is imperative to start with the research. The literature identifies various leadership practices that some say support retention, five of these practices are described below.

#### **Administrative support.**

Administrative support is often defined differently among researchers. For example, in one study administrative support was defined as “the school’s effectiveness in assisting teachers with issues such as student discipline, instructional methods, curriculum, and adjusting to the school environment” (Borman & Dowling, 2008, p. 380). Others have described administrative support as being a combination of four practices to include: building school vision; developing goals and priorities; administering individualized support, and helping to develop a collaborative school culture (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). No matter the specific details in the definition, it is

apparent that administrative support continues to be a focus of research in retention literature and a frequently cited topic in literature on attrition.

Administrators who teachers perceive to be supportive have been identified as counteracting the major stressors teachers face (Texas Center for Educational Research, 2006). School leaders and teachers both benefit when leaders can identify how to support teacher satisfaction (Hammond, 2017). The leadership of a strong principal helps to foster an environment encouraging teacher retention even in situations where teacher turnover is commonly found (Player, Youngs & Grogan, 2017). As teachers get the support they need, they have high levels of teacher satisfaction and therefore, a positive perspective toward their job (Hepburn & Brown, 2001).

### **School leadership.**

School leadership is frequently cited as a major component to retaining teachers. For the purpose of this study, school leadership encompasses practices including administrative support, building teacher self-efficacy, creating a positive school climate, and shared decision-making; each of these topics are supported through research. Through the lens of school leadership, research has identified components of how building principals can implement strategies to retain their teachers, and in turn, improve the organization and student achievement. If the goal is to retain teachers in their positions, research shows teachers identify increases in efficacy when they receive high levels of support from their building leaders (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

School leadership is a common focus of educational research when looking to identify how to better support teachers and better serve students. School leaders are responsible for playing a significant role in student outcomes and school improvement, whether directly or



indirectly (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Although school leaders are often not expected to affect the performance of students directly, research supports that school-level leadership can directly influence the behaviors and motivations of their teachers (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016). In efforts to assist teacher retention in their buildings, administrators utilize various strategies, practices, and approaches.

A leader who is effective in supporting teacher retention will engage staff and inspire them to find their motivation, drive, and purpose that may have been previously undeveloped (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008). Effective leadership can be described as transformational and more likely to reach teachers' motivation in order to foster and support increased teacher efficacy (Marks & Printy, 2003). As administrators work through teachers to help students achieve, the needs of the teachers cannot go unnoticed. Effective administrators prioritize the diverse weaknesses of their teachers while building upon their strengths through established relationships (Marks & Printy, 2003).

The role of the school leader is one that is a compilation of many facets to leadership; to include not only a relationship with individuals within the organization but also maintaining an instructional focus. Administrators are personally tasked with ensuring academic growth and achievement within their buildings (Murphy, 1988), but relying solely on an instructional focus might not meet the needs of the teachers. Therefore, building administrators are expected to encourage teacher retention by supporting teacher needs and build student achievement by meeting the needs of the students. The marrying of these two leadership focuses can be identified as "integrated leadership" (Marks & Printy, 2003). Over the past years, researchers have sought out an integrated form of leadership that combines teacher capacity building and leadership that focuses on instructional practices (Hallinger, 2003). As educational policy and

stakeholders are seeing the need for both an increase in teacher retention and student achievement, it seems logical the leadership model would be one that integrates two main focuses in its approach.

### **Building efficacious staff.**

Self-efficacy can be described as a perspective a person has within oneself and can be considered personal; however, self-efficacy can often be influenced as well by the school (Hughes, 2012). Research shows that teachers who lack self-efficacy are not retained in their positions (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). High efficacy in teachers is positively linked to high quality instruction and student achievement (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007) where student and teacher relationships are a priority. So, one must consider what creates efficacious teachers, how does the efficacy manifest, and what enables the efficacious teacher to stay.

An efficacious teacher determines what challenges to take on, strategizes possible solutions, and commits to solving them (Lim & Eo, 2014). These individuals demonstrate efficacy and confidence through focused instruction, collaboration with colleagues, engagement of students, and managing challenging behaviors in their classrooms (Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Teacher efficacy can be divided into four sources: mastery experience, physiological arousal, vicarious experience, and social/verbal persuasion (Bandura, 1986). Mastery experiences can be described as opportunities for direct teaching; these are considered the most influential on teacher efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Physiological arousal would be a person feeling confident and identifying success, vicarious experiences are observing similar peers effectively teaching challenging concepts, and social and verbal persuasion can be seen when an individual gets positive critiques from other stakeholders (Bruce, et. al., 2010).

School leaders can help to build efficacy in teachers by supporting their needs and creating opportunities for them to learn, grow, and feel supported. Even before teachers are hired in their positions, the quality of teacher preparation is essential for teacher efficacy. Teacher preparation efforts play an important role in retaining special and general education teachers (Edgar & Pair, 2005). Once they are hired, school leaders must work to support efficacy in teachers through their administrative practices. For example, teachers would prefer individualized, timely, and constructive feedback on their teaching methods that could actually benefit their teaching pedagogy (Minnici & Behrstock-Sherratt, 2013). This type of criticism works to better the teacher and encourage self-efficacy.

In addition to timely feedback, the use of quality professional development helps to build and encourage teacher self-efficacy. This form of support is highly effective and can meet the ongoing needs of the teachers (Cramer & Cappella, 2019). While the best form of professional development may not always be specified, it is clear that quality professional development is incredibly important (Gaikhorst, Beishuizen, Zijlstra & Volman, 2015) to teachers and other educators. When viewing teaching through a lens that shows education as a profession with lifelong learning, then it is clear to see how professional development creates rewarding and ongoing careers in the field (Anderson & Olsen, 2006).

Not only the self-efficacy of teachers, but also the collective efficacy of teachers is positively aligned with student performance in more than one subject area (Goddard, LoGerfo & Hoy, 2004). Once the teachers believe in themselves and those around them, student achievement increases. When teachers are efficacious, they deliver quality instruction and gain experience. This quality instruction helps to improve student achievement, and high student achievement increases a teacher's confidence level and efficacy (Greenlee & Brown, 2009).

This process of high achievement, increased teacher efficacy, improved teacher retention and experience, and quality instruction is cyclical. Unlike individual teacher efficacy, collective efficacy is aligned with the group's assigned tasks, the level of effort applied, dedication, and the sharing of stress, thoughts, and achievement (Goddard, Hoy & Hoy, 2000). Just as teacher efficacy can have positive effects for teachers and in turn, students, collective efficacy is no different. As administrators work to support teacher efficacy of individual teachers, when they help to create an environment that supports collective efficacy, the entire school benefits. Some researchers say collective efficacy can be used as a predictor of teacher satisfaction or even burnout within the climate of a school (Lim & Eo, 2014).

#### **Positive working conditions and school climate.**

School climate might possibly be considered the strongest indicator of teacher retention (Hughes, 2012). The working conditions and school climate of a building can have drastic impacts on teachers, both positive and negative, depending on the building. Weiss (1999) states new teachers are often the ones to feel the most effects regarding workplace conditions. In organizations with a positive work climate, there is valuable colleague collaboration, shared collective goals, and conversations to strategize discussed concerns with various opportunities to work together (King & Bouchard, 2011). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) state there is data to support how the working conditions of a building are causally linked to teacher shortages.

The working conditions of a school can either foster or reduce teacher retention. As research has evolved, school leaders are now able to gain insight into how working conditions can influence and increase job satisfaction and higher commitment (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss, 2001). In buildings where the school climate encompasses certain characteristics, teacher retention can be a result of other benefits such as higher student achievement and high

expectations for students and staff. Tichnor-Wagnor, Harrison and Cohen-Vogel (2016) found that effective schools have the following: a collaborative culture, a supportive climate with high self and collective efficacy, development that is both supported and maintained, and collaboration that includes students. School leaders have the opportunity and power to work to address school climate (Hughes, 2012). They have the power to make many necessary adjustments that can support or harm a teacher's ability to perform (Gersten, Keating, Yovanoff & Harniss (2001).

It is not enough for building leaders to merely initiate welcoming environments and practices; they must also maintain them. The continued efforts of learning and growing together are what create an environment that fosters longevity with staff and satisfied members. Higher teacher satisfaction and higher teacher efficacy are directly correlated with lower levels of burnout of teachers (Lim & Eo, 2014). As leaders consider professional development opportunities and social experiences for their staff, they may want to consider doing this on a continual basis. When a school encourages teacher and administrator collaboration and where administrators allow teachers to participate in making decisions, the school has a higher morale, and the teachers are more likely to continue their positions (Weiss, 1999).

### **Shared decision making.**

Although in the past, administrators had more authoritative roles in decision-making, it is now the expectation and highly encouraged that teachers and administrators collaborate and share in the process (Leech & Fulton, 2008). Shared decision making allows for administrators to seek input from individuals who are associated with the policymakers in education and can include not only teams of building leaders and teachers but also parents and community members (Meyers, Meyers & Gelzheiser, 2001). Griffith (2003) describes an environment where staff

feels empowered, are encouraged to be creative, and where the teachers collectively have a sense of responsibility as school openness. In these environments, principals listened to input from staff and parents, and these individuals identify themselves as influential in school decisions (Griffith, 2003).

When teachers are encouraged to participate in decision-making, maintain autonomous positions, and work in schools that have high levels of organizational capacity, these individuals are more likely to feel supported and content (Demerouti et al., 2001). Not only do many teachers want to participate in the decision-making regarding curriculum and policies, but also want the power to make decisions for their own classrooms as well. Teachers thrive when the expectations are made clear but also when they have a certain level of autonomy within their position (Hughes, 2012).

### **The Importance of Retention**

Teachers are essential components to student achievement (Borman & Dowling, 2008). As it is clear students require trained, knowledgeable, and qualified teachers to support their instruction, the focus of research for many years has been how to prepare, recruit, train, and keep teachers in the classrooms (Borman & Dowling, 2008), yet the shortage continues. Although recruitment and retention are often seen as two separate issues (Wronowski, 2018), they both can have negative consequences on the teacher shortage epidemic.

School-level leaders can play pivotal roles in maintaining quality instruction for their students and productive environments for their staff, but they must have the roadmap to do so. Although some reasons for teacher attrition can be intrinsic, when provided with the information and tools to assist teachers, school-level leaders may have influence over teacher retention rates. And through increased retention of special education teachers, students will benefit as well

(Wronowski, 2018). Students often perform better when provided instruction by seasoned, experienced teachers (Darling-Hammond, 1999), but it is not only their performance rates that are influenced. When teachers are satisfied and content in their positions, the relationships they foster with students, colleagues, and communities are improved as well. These individuals work with the whole child, dedicating time and effort to not only test scores but also a student's social and emotional health and their overall well-being. Leaders have the opportunity to serve the needs of their teachers so the teachers can meet the needs of their students (Hughes, 2012).

### **CHAPTER III**

#### **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Chapter three will provide a roadmap of how this study was completed when considering perspectives on special education teacher retention. The previous chapter has provided an overview of what the available research says about broad topics of attrition and retention and what research cites as the causes and possible solutions. Chapter three will present how the information was gathered and analyzed for the study. This study was guided and formulated to answer the two questions as to how and in what ways building leaders impede or assist in teacher retention, from both the teacher perspective and the administrator perspective.

For this study, a qualitative approach was selected because it was important to discover what individuals in practice were experiencing daily. To understand the causes for attrition and help encourage the increase of retention, this researcher wanted to know what the teachers were identifying as to their needs and whether they felt their needs were being met by their current leadership. This qualitative research was done through a case study since the specific school studied has low teacher attrition, long-standing administrators, services a high student population of students in special education, and is considered a Title I school.

#### **Design**

While trying to expand on the relationship between school-based leaders, teacher values, and teacher retention, the use of qualitative research design can help illuminate the information and allow themes and concepts to develop on their own. When looking to understand what leaders can do to help retain special education teachers in low-income schools, one must understand what the individuals are experiencing and provide them with a voice to share these experiences as explanations as to why they left or chose to remain. Through this single case



study, the researcher gathered an in-depth understanding of how this issue manifests in this particular condition and will be able to organize the research in a way that can be informational to other schools (Creswell, 2007).

In this research, the qualitative case study approach encourages understanding or making sense of how individuals perceive their role in the world of education and retention of teachers. “Sensemaking” is a priority here as the research is formulated to understand how or why individuals perceive their roles in this realm (Conrad, 1996). For this study, a case study was appropriate as it is essential to understand the multi-faceted dilemma of teacher attrition. In this research, various pieces of information were collected, analyzed, and considered, in addition to semi-structured interviews with key personnel who share insight into current successful teacher retention practices. School teachers and administrators were given an opportunity to discuss firsthand what they identify as what is working, what is not, and why.

Case studies often incorporate various types of information gathering to include records, documents, direct and participant observations, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2003). This type of design will give insight into the participants’ behaviors and their reactions to behaviors of others. When looking at complex systems and interactions between members within the school setting, relationships must be considered, and the use of qualitative research can help to identify how the relationships influence the research (Brooks & Normore, 2015).

Qualitative research is often effective as it is open-ended and allows participants to provide their input in their own words instead of statistical means (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through this approach, the participants and the researchers can establish close relationships and collaboration; some would say this is a benefit (Crabtree & Miller, 1999). Although it could be seen as detrimental, as a researcher may impose a certain amount of bias or could allow their

relationship to impede with the study, it is encouraged that a researcher disclose their relational connection to the research topic and participants (Brooks & Normore, 2015). While this approach is critiqued for these reasons, the purpose of qualitative research is to learn from the participants and their experiences without destroying the data complexity (Atieno, 2009), and the selection of the research design and specific methodologies seemed appropriate for this study.

A benefit of utilizing a qualitative case study as an approach is it allows multiple data sources to be considered and analyzed. The case study approach is one that has a function considered to be pragmatic and often leads to action (Bromley, 1990). This is done so the various components of a concept can be broken down and understood (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Stake (1995) and Yin (2003) formulated two approaches that create a case study method; the two approaches are similar yet different. Both approaches to case study methodology are based on a constructivist paradigm. Yin (2003) suggested that the case study approach should be considered when looking to answer questions such as “why” something is happening and also “how” it is happening. Furthermore, Yin (2003) suggested a case study approach would be appropriate if and when the researcher desires to understand how the conditions of a situation can impact a phenomenon. Although researchers are not encouraged to generalize information since each case is individualized, case studies do provide information that can be generalized when there are multiple representative participants included in the research (Creswell, 2007).

## **Methods**

### **Participant Selection**

For this study, purposive sampling was used to determine an appropriate district and school to conduct the research. Purposive sampling, or non-random sampling, is where a researcher chooses individual participants for specific reasons; this limits the number of

participants but results in more focused research (Conrad, 1996). Non-random or purposive sampling was chosen when selecting participants for this study as there were certain characteristics for each participant that seemed significant. Purposive sampling provides an in-depth perspective and understanding of a specific topic. While there are fewer participants, this is common when the researcher is looking for more “depth” than “breadth” (Conrad, 1996). This type of sampling allows the focus to move on internal validity rather than external. Although random sampling does often support generalizability of content (Palinkas et al., 2015), the researcher made additional efforts to encourage the information can be generalized over varying scenarios. It is more important to choose participants with specific intent and to prioritize the information from specific types of participants rather merely on convenience.

These participants were chosen with a specific goal in mind as each of their roles serve a position that is directly affected by leadership practices. The participant sample included eight special education teachers who have worked in the field of special education for five years or longer and are in their current positions for at least three years. Two members of the school’s administrative team were also participants in the sample; the principal and assistant principal lead a building in a low-income area and have self-perceived effective retention strategies. The criteria for the administrator participants included that he or she had to have been an administrator for three or more years. For the purpose of this research, only special education teachers and school administrators were used as participants.

The participants included eight special education teachers and two administrators; for the purpose of this research, pseudonyms were used to ensure anonymity. The teachers included: Ms. Peters, Ms. Halloway, Ms. Edwards, Ms. Andrews, Ms. Owens, Ms. Isom, Ms. Roberts, and Ms. Oliver. These teachers range from teaching special education preschool, to students with

learning disabilities, Autism, cross-categorical needs, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disabilities. Additionally, the building principal, Ms. Alexander was interviewed two times; one time in person and the other via virtual means. Ms. Alexander served as a special education teacher, then was promoted to special education administrator and became the assistant principal and principal of the same building where she leads today. The assistant principal, Mrs. Richardson, was interviewed as well as part of this research. She has been an administrator at two Title I schools; with a total of 24 years in education. She has many responsibilities, one of them being monitoring and supporting special education programming within the building.

Figure 1

*Participant Information*

Pseudonym	Position	Years in Education
Alexander	Principal	29
Richardson	Assistant Principal	24
Halloway	Special Education Teacher K-2	11
Edwards	Special Education Teacher K-2	23
Oliver	Special Education Teacher K-2	16
Andrews	Special Education Teacher K-2	28
Peters	Special Education Teacher K-2	17
Roberts	Special Education Preschool Teacher	21
Owens	Special Education Preschool Teacher	19
Isom	Special Education Preschool Teacher	27

**Site Selection**

The school chosen for the research is an urban school in the southeastern region of Virginia in the United States. This school serves 934 students in grades pre-kindergarten through second grade and has a special education population of 17.3%. Within the student body, 52.8% are considered economically disadvantaged and are eligible for free and reduced price lunch. The ethnicities include African American 44.6%; Caucasian 29.2%; Hispanic 12.2%; Multi-Racial 10.2%, Asian 3.2%, Indian American 0.3%, and Native Hawaiian 0.2%. The

administrative staff at this school includes two assistant principals, three instructional coaches, and one principal. There are currently 152 instructional and building faculty and staff members to include teachers, teacher assistants, guidance counselors, office, and custodial workers. Of the teaching staff, there are currently 3% who are considered inexperienced, and 4.5% of all teachers are currently provisionally licensed. Of these provisionally licensed teachers, 3% are special education teachers. The school is in a low-income area and serves students with varying special education needs within the building. This school was chosen for the case study as it is considered a low-income area, it has a high population of students with special education needs, and there is low teacher attrition.

### **Data Collection**

Although there are multiple data collection methods to choose from, for this research, interviews, document analysis, and an observation were deemed the most appropriate. These three methods of information gathering for this research are considered the most used sources (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The majority of information for this research was collected through personal interviews with the principal and teachers within the selected research location. When attempting to understand a phenomenon such as teacher attrition, a variety of sources should be considered. These sources and why they were chosen are described below.

#### **Interviews.**

Information and insight from selected members were collected through semi-structured interviews. The interview consisted of ten open-ended questions concerning the participant's perspective on leadership practices on building teacher efficacy, promoting a positive school climate, and shared leadership and decision-making. In addition, the interview included teachers' perspectives on leadership practices they identify as influences on their decisions to

stay or leave special education. Each of the interviews ended with an opportunity for the participant to share any additional information he or she would like to include for the research.

The building principal was approached and asked a series of questions through a semi-structured interview. These questions guided the participant in providing information regarding what she identified as the leadership practices that were currently in place and which of those she felt were beneficial to the act of retaining teachers. The administrator was encouraged to share leadership practices she or her colleagues have implemented. The assistant principal was asked what practices she and her administrative team instilled to support the teachers. In addition to the school leadership, the eight teachers were interviewed as well. They were encouraged to share reasons why they chose to continue in their positions. Each participant was asked to provide firsthand knowledge as to which leadership practices were beneficial to teacher retention and which were problematic. Follow-up interviews were scheduled with four of the teachers and the school principal, and new questions were populated based on collected data and asked of the participants. These follow up interviews took place to gain additional insight and depth to the participants' original answers.

The interviews were recorded for later review, after permission was requested from each interviewee. There were specific questions for the participant depending on their positions; the administrator was asked different questions than the teachers. It was important to have varying questions dependent upon roles as there will be specific factors that will need to be examined and understood. During these interviews, there were times the researcher and participant would veer from the planned questions and allowed the interview to take a different turn. The researcher and interviewee were made aware of this possibility before the interview began. The interviewees agreed that if needed, a second interview may be requested should there be a need

for further explanation of an interviewee response. The determination of these individuals was completed once the researcher saw how each participant responded to the interview process and questions.

During the interviews, the researcher took anecdotal notes for later review and guidance when creating the follow-up interview questions. The notes taken during the initial interviews, combined with the interview transcript, allowed the researcher to carefully construct follow-up questions to collect further data. The researcher was able to identify areas that certain topics needed more clarification and deeper examples of responses seeming important but possibly broad. The follow-up interviews required the participants to think of specific experiences that aligned with and expanded on their earlier responses.

#### **Documentary evidence.**

As a part of the research, a request was made for documents that illuminated the strategies and practices applied by the school leaders. These documents included a blank copy of the teacher evaluation document and a detailed explanation of the processes, the master calendar for all professional development training and explanation of the need for the professional development, and a list of the scheduled meetings for the special education department with administration. The documents gathered from these components of the school allowed for the researcher to align the information with the interviews and find any potential patterns. Once the researcher received the evaluation forms and procedures used for teacher evaluations, this provided a helpful view of what the expectations are for special education teachers in the building. This document also allowed the researcher to see how the administrators provide feedback to these teachers, as well as the frequency and subject matter of professional development training sessions.



When reviewing and analyzing these documents, they were considered from the perspective of how these documents support the needs of teachers and teacher retention. The division wide teacher observation form was reviewed and analyzed as to how each component supports the specific needs of the teacher based on their environment and the needs of their students. Additionally, the master calendar of the staff training and professional development was analyzed through the lens of supporting teacher retention. This document provided insight into what training was selected by the administration, what the focus would be, who would be the audience, and who would be carrying out the training.

### **Observations.**

To fully comprehend a principal's role in the attrition or retention of his or her staff, it was going to be helpful to gain insight using observations of the school setting. This would allow the researcher to see how the individuals interact with one another and if the information gathered using interviews comes to fruition in real-life scenarios. The use of interviews and review of documents, while necessary, may not capture the complexity of the relationships between building administration and teachers when facing real-life challenges in the trenches of the educational setting. Certain areas were to be the focus during the observations including the accessibility of administrators to support teachers throughout the workday, opportunities for building teacher efficacy, and whether or not examples of administrator support were evident.

While the initial intent of this study included observations of both a special education teacher and school administrators to gain information and insight, some practical challenges arose. On March 13, 2020, the governor of Virginia announced all public schools were to close for two weeks due to a global pandemic of COVID-19. The closure was then extended on March 23, 2020, to be in place for the remainder of the academic school year. It was evident at this

point that the observations could not take place since the individuals would be functionally unavailable and therefore, adjustments were made.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were recorded and uploaded into a computer program to transfer the audio into text format. The text was then coded through an open coded system where patterns and commonalities were drafted and documented. Coding the data from the informative interviews were analyzed, as a process to quantify the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding is often a reflection of a researcher's first impressions; these are often messy and seemingly not connected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). After the process of open coding was completed, axial coding was used. This type of organizing is done by procedures compiling data in a variety of ways based on categories. Categories will often be created by considering the context, conditions, strategies, and consequences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Through axial coding, information is taken from disorganized, meaningless fragments and put into pieces of a bigger puzzle that begins to create a picture that tells a story. The audio recordings were reviewed numerous times in order to ensure that what was brought forth through the computer program was actually said in the interview. This allowed the researcher to familiarize herself with the participants' answers during the interviews.

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed using an online website source. These transcriptions were then reviewed for errors and each transcript was sent to the interviewee. Once the interviewee confirmed the transcript accurately captured their perspectives and position on the related topics, the transcripts were uploaded into a coding program called NVivo to begin the data analysis. This next phase was a continuous process with ongoing refinement and revision.

The researcher began this phase by reading through the entire interview transcript and identifying sections of the interviews that seemed to stand out as highly important. Each interview transcript was read through closely and as the researcher continued to read; common themes began to emerge. As the transcriptions were reviewed, themes and major topics were illuminated, and this information drove the creation of codes. From these broad categories, the researcher went through each transcription and category to determine how the information could be organized even deeper. From these categories and sub-categories, common themes continued to arise. Specific statements and information from each interviewee were placed into the appropriate categories to help create depth of each concept. Once all the transcripts were coded, the researcher analyzed each category to better refine them and from there, further analysis was done of all sub-categories. There were pieces of data that could be placed into more than one node, so each of these were analyzed closely to determine which category was the best fit.

Additionally, the documents were carefully analyzed to see how they aided or impeded retention. The items were reviewed to identify the components each piece of documentary evidence had, how they were consistent with one another, and how they corresponded with the literature. There will be specific pieces of the documents embedded into interviews to see how the different groups of participants reacted to the document.

### **Validity and Transferability**

To build in trustworthiness in the study, the participants were encouraged to review their transcribed responses from the interviews. This allowed the participants to correct or elaborate further if there was some type of discrepancy in the text. The researcher and participant collaborated on any discussion of changing the transcriptions. In addition to maintaining honesty and integrity during the research, maintaining confidentiality was also a priority. The name of

the school and each participant will remain confidential and pseudonyms will be assigned. It was explained to the participants that each recorded interview and transcript would be kept confidential and be destroyed once the research was complete.

In addition to ensuring trustworthiness, the researcher identified the limitations of a qualitative case study and the concept of generalizability by providing information to support transferability. Transferability is important as the data in the research must mean something to the reader and be able to have an impact on different settings (Kuper, Lingard & Levinson, 2008) than the one described in the study. While the setting, participants and methods are highly specific for the purpose of this research, the data and information gathered through this study can be applied to many different educational settings. The leadership practices that were discovered through this study can be applied by educational leaders all over to support special education teacher retention.

### **Summary**

For this study, a qualitative case study was chosen as the approach to further understand what teachers and school leaders say is helping with teacher attrition. Interviews and document analysis were done as data collection for research consideration. Chapter 3 has outlined what data were collected, how it was done and what the plan was for analysis of this information. As you will see in the next chapter, Chapter 4 includes the discussion of the findings.

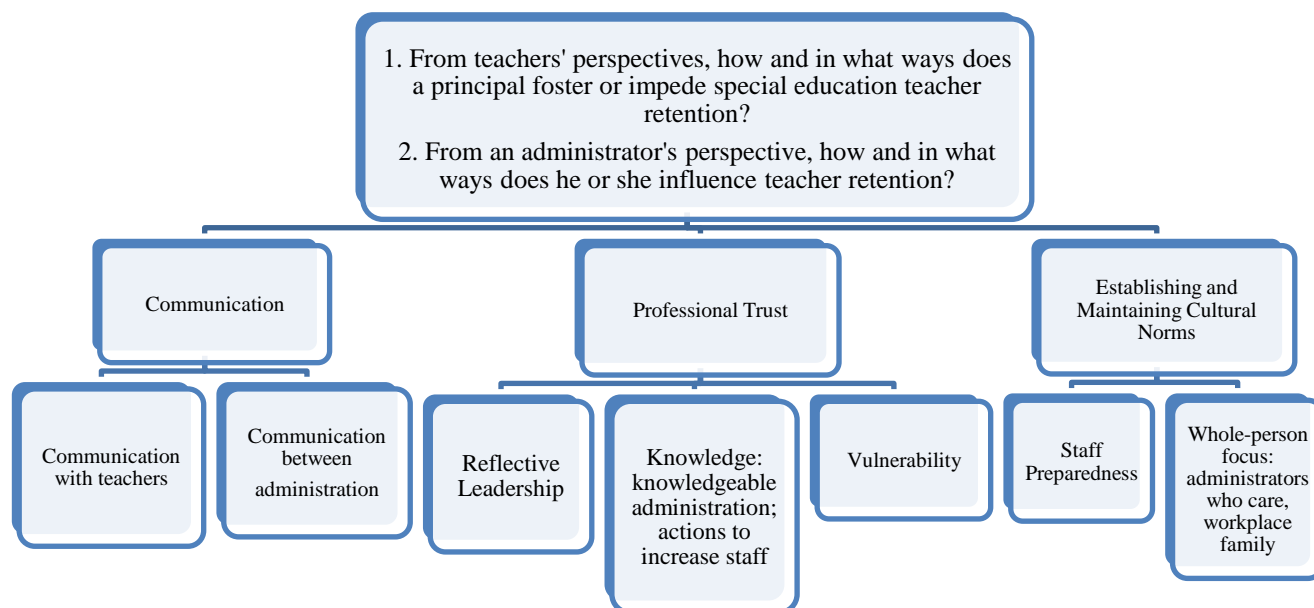
## **CHAPTER IV**

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Overview**

The purpose of this research was to answer the following research questions: (1) From teachers' perspectives, how and in what ways does a principal foster or impede special education teacher persistence in teaching, and (2) From an administrator's perspective, how and in what ways does he or she influence teachers' willingness to persist in their roles as teachers. This information was gathered from special education teachers and two school administrators in a low-income school. The data below was gathered through semi-structured interviews with special education teachers and administrators as well as document analysis of the teacher observation tool and the outline of the professional development for the year. The findings on administrative practices that help retain special education teachers in low-income schools are categorized by themes such as: Communication, Professional Trust, and Establishing and Maintaining Cultural Norms.

Figure 1.

*Thematic Concepts***Discussion of Findings****Leadership Practices**

The researcher wanted to determine what leadership practices have been observed from teachers as well as the administrators' observation of themselves and/or their peers. So often in research 'administrative support' is described as what is needed for teacher retention (Marks & Printy, 2003). The participants in this study confirmed this connection. This research was formulated by the drive to understand what administrative support looks like through the lens of specific leadership practices from those in the field, specifically in a building where teacher retention is so high. Through the interviews, the participants identified the themes and sub-

themes below. These concepts were evident through a deep level of saturation and were supported by the data collected through the interviews.

### **Theme 1: Communication**

As part of the interviews, the participants were asked to share what the dynamics of communication look like in the building. Each participant was asked to describe the communication between themselves and the administration and provide their personal experiences with communication. Upon further discussion, the two sub-themes, communication with teachers and communication between administrators, were discovered.

#### **Communication with teachers**

When teachers were asked what they needed from their leaders, communication and communicative administrators continued to come up in the interviews. Ms. Andrews stated that her current leader is “accessible” and “supportive.” Ms. Peters explained that even when the principal is not in the building, she responds quickly to her unavailability so the teacher can go to someone else for support at that time. Fellow teachers, Ms. Roberts and Ms. Owens identified that open and quality communication are incredibly important, and this communication should be safe; teachers should be able to communicate without fear of being reprimanded. Mrs. Isom explained the way the communication with her administration makes her feel,

Every administrator I've had here has been very approachable, and even if they're busy, they'll stop and say, I'll get with you in a minute. And they always come and find me to see what it is and if I need them. Like I never feel like I have to be super formal with my administrators here. They've always been on like first-name basis. You don't have to call them Mr. or Mrs. you know, you can call them by their first name and that makes you feel like you're kinda [*sic*] on a level playing field with them, and they always have

treated me like I'm the professional in that area that I do. So, and you know, that's said to me often, especially in the last couple of years is [*sic*], you are the professional in this area.

This type of communication helps to encourage teachers and administrators to have continued open communication where both members feel safe. Ms. Andrews shared that when she goes to her administration, she is there for a specific reason, and she is “expecting to get that support” [*sic*] and when her administration is accessible, she feels like they are supporting her.

The teachers remained realistic and identified that not every administrator can be available at any given moment. Fortunately, the administrative team has taken steps to maximize their availability to their teachers to include access to their electronic calendars and their personal cell phone numbers so they can be reached outside of work hours, if needed. From the administrative perspective, Ms. Alexander does her best to communicate effectively with her teachers. She explained that her communication methods include weekly newsletters, emails, and one-to-one meetings when needed. Ms. Roberts identified the memos as helpful as the teachers are not “waiting around to see what’s gonna [*sic*] happen next week.” Ms. Richardson explains that even sometimes communication can come in the form of notes to the teacher. And while teachers are encouraged to use practices of formal scheduling, Ms. Alexander and her administrative team try to maintain an open-door policy and allow teachers to stop in when they need to discuss something that is pressing. Ms. Owens spoke about how the actions of the administrators often going above and beyond their normal daily routine to communicate with their staff makes such a difference in teacher demeanor and school morale.



### **Communication between administrators**

In addition to the communication needed by administrators to teachers, communication between administrators was determined as a common sub-theme. Ms. Alexander described the opportunities for administrator collaboration and communication. The administrative team ensures they adhere to a standing meeting each week so they “stay on the same page,” and administrative expectations to the teachers are clear. She explains that consistency to the teachers is important and while each member of the administrative team has a different background and brings forth a different perspective, this ongoing communication allows for continuity from the administrative team. Ms. Alexander shared her mindset on why administration collaboration is critical,

Sometimes if we don't have this, we're not giving the same message to the teachers because we all three come from different experiences. Like my experiences, many years as a teacher and then being a special ed administrator [*sic*]. Ms. Richardson was an AP [Assistant Principal] of sped [special education] at another school for five years and you know, our newest administrator with coming from out of the classroom and her perspective as a general education teacher [*sic*]. So, I think all of us coming from different perspectives on how to answer a question and just trying to be consistent. Ms. Richardson further helped to illuminate the citing of administrative communication as important. She identified administrative practices they implement when communicating and collaborating through leadership challenges and decisions. When asked to elaborate on this communication, Ms. Richardson explained,

As a leadership team, we look at, you know, what's in the best interest of the students.

We have to look at the whole picture. And we also try to factor in is this feasible? You

know, and we really look at the why. Why would we make this change? Why would we implement this? Or why would we remove this? You know, what would be the purpose? Who, who is it in the best interest of, um [*sic*], if we make the change. Most of the time teachers are, you know, thoroughly happy. If you don't make a change, I think it's important to let them [the teachers] know all of the reasons why you are not able to make that change or even come into agreement to see is there a hybrid approach and making that change. You know, is there something we can move towards and try it? Um [*sic*], we do make changes because just like we tell them that, you know, each student is an individual and just like a student needs a differentiated instruction[*sic*]. Okay, that didn't work. We'll try something else. Same thing. We are practitioners, we put things into place, but if those practices and programs are not successful as we're monitoring the data, then perhaps we need to either, you know, modify it or perhaps we need to change it. And these administrative efforts do not go unnoticed by the teachers. Ms. Peters describes her interpretation of the administrators "seem to work as a team."

While each of these participants identified differing points on the topic of communication, whether it be formal, informal, planned, or organic, it is apparent how important communication is between all members in this environment.

Although each of the participants shared different and highly specific examples of communication, each individual identified communication as a highly important and evident leadership practice that supported their retention and the retention of others. While communication can take different forms through formal or informal modes or occur between administrators and teachers or just between teachers, regardless of its characteristics, according to these individuals, communication is ongoing and highly supported by the administrators.

## **Theme 2: Professional Trust**

A recurring theme throughout this research came back to professional trust. There was a clear connection between administration and staff that allowed for both sides of the professional relationship to feel safe as they navigate through various challenges. In this research, under the umbrella of professional trust, common sub-themes continued to appear to include reflective leadership, knowledge, and vulnerability.

### **Reflective Leadership**

The practices of reflectiveness and flexibility are ever-present through this research. This finding was brought to light by descriptions of episodes where the current administration demonstrated what some staff described as professional trust.

Being reflective and flexible while leading is not a new concept to this building; the current administration learned these practices from their previous leadership. The prior principal would lead the building and if the feedback was negative, the administrative team would come together and determine the best way to manage the situation and what changes to make, if possible. Ms. Alexander explains the process,

I mean, I learned that as a special ed [*sic*] administrator, look, if I get something wrong, I'm going to just say, "Hey, I was looking at it in the wrong direction. I need to, we need to, go a different direction on this if this is really how we're supposed to answer that question." When I was an AP, I learned from the principal, and that's what he would do. So, even if we had the best-made plans, and then we started getting feedback, we would say, whoa, okay, okay, let's stop. Let's start again. And maybe not the whole thing but tweak it [*sic*]. We would try our best to get feedback from the beginning.

Not only has Ms. Alexander learned and implemented reflective leadership teachings from her previous administration, she describes that she is still learning and partaking in reflective practices where she is led by others. Ms. Alexander cites a current situation,

And I really think this whole pandemic school closure is teaching people to do that because I think [name of supervisor] said it multiple times that, you know, we are flying the plane while it's being built. That's what's happened, and I think really we're doing that a lot of the time anyway as school leaders. We have to be okay with saying, oh my gosh, I got it wrong. We got [*sic*] to back up. We got [*sic*] to regroup. We got [*sic*] to do it again.

Ms. Alexander attributes this type of flexibility and reflective practices in leadership to the success of her building as well as the recent success of the division during the recent COVID-19 pandemic.

Another example of reflectiveness comes in the form of surveys sent out by the administrators to the staff to seek input for consideration of bettering the school. Ms. Owens describes the surveys as “what we like and what might not be working” and shares that she feels the administrators change their practices based on the teacher feedback. This is further elaborated on as practices implemented by school administration when they demonstrate what Ms. Halloway describes as “emotional intelligence.” She stated,

the ability to be able to kind of see where people are coming from. Um, guide them in the right direction but not tell and then demand. And kind of being differentiated to each staff person, like in their needs too, but just kind of knowing emotionally where people are and understanding where they're coming from.

She described that administration supports their teachers by being reflective and meeting the needs of their individual staff members.

Not only is the administration meeting the needs of the teachers, but in turn, the students as well. One teacher describes an example of how the administration supported both the needs of the students and the staff by “manning the cafeteria.” Ms. Oliver explained that at one point this year there was not enough staff to cover the tasks related to the cafeteria so in addition to addressing student behavior, they were cleaning the tables and sweeping the floors. The administrators, from the teachers’ perspective, are flexible and base their actions on the needs of the students and staff. For example, Ms. Halloway explains there have been times she was unable to attend a training or leave her classroom to attend a meeting and administration was flexible and understanding. She shared that as long as you are in communication in regard to what the students need, administration will understand. Ms. Roberts shared the same sentiment; she felt the administration trusts her to make the right calls for her students.

There was mention where previous administration did not seem as flexible and understanding as one teacher described. Ms. Oliver shared she felt that this principal was unable to commiserate with them as staff when big changes were expected. She recalls feeling that there was little understanding, no flexibility, and an absence of reflective leadership. She felt as though these traits were missing and the lack of acknowledgement by this principal influenced the mindset of the teachers and the morale as a whole. She thought, “Oh my gosh, have they forgotten what it’s like to be in the classroom?”

While Ms. Oliver and others shared the current administration effectively demonstrates reflective leadership, some feel too much reflection can lead to too much change at one time. Ms. Peters explains,

I think this year there's been almost too many changes all at once that it just seems like it's constantly changing, which I mean I know things do because you're just trying to get it to work the best way. But when you have newer teachers and things like that in the building and it's confusing to them, you know, and it becomes like, who do I go to for this? Who do I go to for that? Um, and then there's been some administration that we've had that I think are almost too quick to jump on the bandwagon. We had some administration that was like, well, it works at that school. We're going to try it. Okay, well our populations are different, you know, so you know, too many changes.

Overall, the teachers identify the reflective leadership practices the current administration implements and the trust they instill help to make the school a better place and one where they can meet the needs of their students.

## **Knowledge**

### **Knowledgeable Administration.**

As the participants responded to interview questions, knowledge was a common sub-theme to be discovered. Multiple teachers discussed how different it can be to have a building leader who understands special education. One teacher described a lack of knowledge in special education as a “weakness,” and that is not the situation with this current administration. Ms. Owens explained how having an administrator knowledgeable in special education has been “wonderful” and has helped her do her job well. As many of the teachers agree, special education knowledge is imperative to effective administration. Ms. Peters exclaimed it can “make it challenging to work with that administrator who doesn't have the sped [*sic*] knowledge.”

Ms. Oliver shared that when administration is not knowledgeable about special education that you start “burdening yourself.” In this school however, the principal has an extensive background in special education and the assistant principal, Ms. Richardson, learned through on the job learning experiences. Ms. Richardson shared the following,

When I was new assistant principal, I was really new. I mean I had some sped [*sic*] experience, but when you get into the administrative role, then you have to have a lot of experience and its learning on the go. I depended a lot on my sped [*sic*] administrator. I depended a lot on my school psychologist and on my social worker. And I cannot say that I've had any part of that team in either building that wasn't just exceptional. And so I've learned a lot from them. I always take notes or write things down. I ask a lot of questions because I wanted to know. And as I grew, I tried to share what I knew with the sped [*sic*] teachers, especially because with one school being so transient, they were coming and going and we were starting to get new sped [*sic*] teachers.

#### **Actions to Increase Staff Knowledge.**

In addition to the knowledge of the administration, Ms. Alexander and her team adjust so that both special education and general education teachers increase their knowledge. According to the teachers, Ms. Alexander has allowed the special education preschool teachers to manipulate their out-of-classroom obligations so they can meet as a team and plan for their students where they can share ideas, strategies, and increase their collective knowledge. And when schedules align, special education teachers are encouraged to join the collaborate planning meetings with their grade level general education peers. Ms. Halloway stated that even when “we can’t be there, they give us the resources to be able to be as inclusive as possible.” Ms. Gates shared that to address the needs of her teachers, the administrative team is making changes

to the master schedule next year to ensure more availability for teacher general/special education collaboration.

Ms. Richardson shared her focus for ensuring her staff has access to materials, content, and training to increase their knowledge of writing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and the components to include the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Additionally, Ms. Richardson described the process she uses for training her staff,

We look at how to work with general education. We went from a school where most of the teachers were self-contained to starting to have them push to try different inclusion models to help those students. And so I started training the teachers, even the general education teachers who wanted their students to go through special education. One of my requirements was we need to make sure we're doing everything we can prior to that. So, looking at just, just the total special education process, even researching and helping teachers find different interventions to use with students, whether it was for academics or behavior. My job as their administrator is to just provide as much support as I can. And I love doing that through trainings. It was like the 'train the trainer' model. Once I learn from the Department of Exceptional Learning, I then train my staff.

Not only do the current administrators seem to have at least a basic knowledge and experience with special education, they take purposeful steps to increase their knowledge and their staff's knowledge.

### **Vulnerability**

While the staff identifies the necessity for building administrators to be reflective and knowledgeable of special education, they also appreciate vulnerability and transparency. When



teachers go to administration for questions or guidance, these leaders are not afraid to reach out to others for support. For example, Ms. Owens explains that there are times that teachers go to administration with questions, and they recommend collaborating with fellow special education teachers in the building. And Ms. Peters identifies that administration often brings in additional resources for the teachers to include the behavioral consultants. Ms. Richardson explained that she has sought out support from the behavioral consultants, school psychologists, and other resources for her teachers. Ms. Owens feels that this leadership practice of vulnerability allows the fostering of collaboration and communication between the teachers and other division staff.

It is because the administrators show vulnerability to their staff, the staff can be vulnerable themselves. The teachers do not fear their administration and are not afraid to admit their mistakes. Ms. Isom elaborates,

when you do make a mistake, I mean, you know, like paperwork or something, it's like, you know, we can fix it. It's not the end of the world. We can fix it. I never feel stressed to bring anything to any of them.

Ms. Richardson identifies the importance to understand that teachers are humans, and they are doing a job they love the best they can with what they've been trained for. Further, she shares, "when you are transparent with people, they do build a better relationship with you." It's these relationships that teachers cite as helpful to get them through the obstacles associated with their profession, to include students with challenging behaviors, progress/data, and disagreements with parents. Ms. Edwards, Ms. Oliver and Ms. Owens all shared personal experiences with administration where they felt they could be vulnerable with their leadership because as Ms. Owens described, "trust is a big, big part of that."

Professional trust was a common theme throughout this research process. In this school, leaders and teachers participate in a working relationship where they can learn and grow together while they face many challenges. The leaders seek input from the staff and demonstrate reflective leadership to meet the needs of the teachers. Both teachers and administrators are not afraid to be vulnerable with one another while they gain knowledge and experience in their specific roles.

### **Theme 3: Establishing and Maintaining Cultural Norms**

#### **Staff Preparedness**

This school places new teachers in a Teacher Academy. This ongoing program connects new teachers with experienced ones through a mentor-mentee relationship. These mentors help to support growth and knowledge of not only special education processes but also dynamics of everyday life as a teacher in this specific building. The participants in the academy are not always brand-new teachers but can also be teachers who have taught before and are just new to the school. These teachers meet once per month with the reading specialist and instructional team. One of the research participants who also serves as a mentor explains that this opportunity really helps to prepare the teachers. Ms. Peters, a mentor, explains that teachers often come ill-prepared from their teacher-preparation programs, and this academy helps as they are sometimes initially “overwhelmed.”

As with any school, teachers require professional development (PD) throughout the school year. In this case specifically, the administration has amended their typical PD delivery. Administration identifies the many talents and skills of their teachers and encourages them to be the ones to provide the PD rather than an outside resource. Ms. Owens explained the process,

This year in particular, as far as like our monthly professional development meeting we have, they've tried different ways of doing it and they found that the teachers really liked, like centers around the school, different classrooms had a teacher presenting on different topics and you could choose which one you wanted to go to. And then they repeated it another month because people liked it so much so they could, you know, go to another session that they couldn't go to the first time. So that was like an almost immediate reaction to their survey that we liked it.

Ms. Roper agreed, and that the administration does what they can and ensure they have what they need, however, she does cite PD as a weakness for the overall division in comparison to her last division she worked for.

Ms. Alexander feels the high teacher retention of the building is attributed to many factors, to include hiring teachers who are interested in the specific characteristics of the school. She stated, “when we hire people, we hire because they want to come to a Title I school. That’s their why, their purpose.” Low-income schools have many challenges and if you have individuals who do not understand and do not have a drive to work with the families who attend these types of schools, the teacher may struggle, and therefore want to attrite. In addition to hiring individuals who are interested in teaching in a school that serves low-income families, all the teachers may require additional support to serve this population. Ms. Richardson explained that the teachers are provided trainings to include behavioral interventions, strategies, and trauma.

### **The Whole-person focus**

The most popular finding throughout the interviews was that the school and its members are part of a caring environment. From the administration to the staff, individuals feel cared for

and appreciated. The individuals in the school are described as going above and beyond their typical responsibilities to ensure others in the building feel valued and appreciated. The teachers cite how their fellow colleagues and their administrators help to create an environment where they feel valued.

### **Administrators Who Care**

Teachers shared multiple examples of personal experiences where they felt administration cared for them. From specific, individualized notes for each teacher on holidays, to how the assistant principal walks the halls and checks in daily by popping her head in the door to see how everyone is doing; the teachers feel valued at this school. Ms. Roper gives one example that has made a lasting impression on her when there was a scary situation with her husband's job,

[The assistant principal] caught me in the cafeteria just to say hello and she, she just said, how are you doing? And I never break down. I just started breaking down. She pulls me, just come into my office, and she pulls me around to the side of the cafeteria and she just holds my hands and she's looking at me straight in the eye and she's praying with me and tears are streaming in my face and I'm like crying, but I'm so moved that she stopped everything that she was doing. The fact that she even, you know, just says, "Hey, how are you, sweet lady?" But you know, I had to walk out of the building around outside the building to go back to my trailer in the back of the building because I was like, I couldn't stop crying, but I never forgot that little act of kindness. Those things, teachers don't need much. Most teachers don't. They just need to be acknowledged. They need to be seen.

Not only does the administration make these teachers feel appreciated, they also make them feel included. Ms. Peters shared that administration is always working to include special education in general building items, whereas previous leadership would often unintentionally exclude them.

In addition to using their interpersonal skills to build relationships with the faculty and staff, administration also comes up with creative ways to promote camaraderie, team-building and bonding with one another. These opportunities have included seasonal activities during previously scheduled PDs, activities at the local YMCA where they worked on taking care of oneself and overall well-being, and also an activity where each person discovered their love language. And to go one step further, the administration shared the love language results with the entire faculty and staff so the individuals who work together on a daily basis can work more effectively and have better communication. Ms. Richardson even admitted that she was once very task-oriented earlier in her career but identifies that she has grown and has “learned how to become more people-focused first.” Ms. Owens feels that the fact that they are “treated like people, like individuals, that really helps.” Ms. Peters reflects on her first experiences at this school,

when I first came, [the previous principal] was very strong on like family stuff as far as like, if something's going on, go. We'll take care of everything here. Which then makes you feel like everyone here is a family, cause [*sic*] they're taking care of what you can't when you're dealing with something else. And so, I think as we've gotten some new administration, I think they come in and they see where they might not necessarily see it somewhere else. They see that and they're like, oh, okay, how can I keep this going? How can I continue? Because that's only going to make your employees better if they know that they're taken care of and supported and happy and can work well together and

know like, if I have to go do something, someone's going to help me out and take care of it.

It is apparent administration has continued to uphold the practices that those before them have implemented in regard to supporting the professional and personal needs of the teachers.

### **Workplace Family**

The most clearly defined theme of this research is tied to workplace relationships. The teachers expanded on their appreciation and love for one another as top reasons as to why they stay in their current positions. What one teacher described as a “dysfunctional family” is one that is also described as supportive and sincere. Multiple examples were given as to times when faculty and staff rallied together to help and support a fellow colleague. They describe a bond that many explain has been in place for years and has been maintained by faculty and staff year after year. Ms. Isom shared that the staff here are always there for one another, especially when one of them is struggling through something. While teaching here, her father passed away and her mother moved in with her. During both of these situations, her peers were there to support her along the way, both professionally and personally. Ms. Owens identifies many of the staff as her friends and feels they are the reason she continues to come into work every day. Ms. Owens and Ms. Peters both agree that the close-knit culture of teachers began before the current administration and that although new administration has begun to lead, they identify the importance of continuing the culture. When asked about the work family at the building, Ms. Oliver shares,

We have got your back. And that has really proven to be true. I had, well, you know, [sic] when the government shutdown happened a couple of years ago. I went in my classroom one day and I hadn't told anybody about it. One of my teacher friends on

Facebook had seen my personal post about my husband's furlough right now. Just pray this government shutdown ends. I wasn't saying anything about our situation, just saying the government is shut down, and the next week I had a \$300 envelope full of gift cards and cash that the staff had come together and done. And they did it for one other staff member whose husband was also on furlough. Like if they get a hint of anything going wrong, if we know you are suffering in some way, the staff, and that is, I guess, you know, our leadership and our staff is a family and we truly care about each other, so it's a unique school.

When asked the question of whether it is the staff or the administration that continues this family feeling in the building, Ms. Peters says it is both.

Maintaining a positive work climate and culture was a common theme in this study. Both teachers and administrators spoke passionately about the family-like culture that the school has. The professionals feel prepared, supported and even if and when they do make mistakes they are in a loving and caring environment where they are more than just employees but also members of a work family.

### **Summary**

This chapter outlined the data and findings as gathered in this study to determine what building level administration and special education teachers identify as leadership practices that aid in special education teacher retention in low-income schools. For the purpose of this study, eight special education teachers were interviewed and two building level administrators to include one principal and one assistant principal. In the initial interviews, each interviewee was asked the same questions, when follow-up interviews commenced, some of the questions varied to specific positions or roles. This strategy of questioning allowed for a deeper understanding of

each person's perspective on specific topics. The interviews varied in length and on average, the follow-up interviews lasted longer than the initial interviews. Critical data was gathered through these interviews and led to the developments of the following themes: Communication, Professional Trust, and Establishing and Maintaining Cultural Norms.

The theme, communication, was brought forth by data gathered through the interviews. While attempting to understand how communication is carried out in the building, each of the participants explained what communication meant to them and how the communication between administration and staff manifests within the building. The teachers identified how they participate in communicating with their building-level leaders. Information was also gathered on how the administrators perceived their communication to be with teachers and also their communication between one another; these two types of communication served as the sub-themes under communication. The comparison of these perspectives was telling; although these two groups of individuals play different roles, they have active parts in the communication.

The second theme to be developed based on data was professional trust with sub-themes: reflective leadership, knowledge, and vulnerability. Professional trust became a theme as the interviewees continued to share and discuss how they felt at ease and able to trust their administration and their colleagues. While working in a low-income school and in special education, it is probable there will be issues that arise that may require assistance and input from different levels of support. In this school, individuals identified there were many times when they sought out assistance from their peers or colleagues. While these individuals did not know a resolution, they demonstrated vulnerability and worked collaboratively to find the answer. Additionally, the participants expanded on reflective leadership practices where the teachers identified how administrators would use the input from the school staff to make any possible and



adjustments to best fit their needs. They described the administration as open and flexible in their leadership in most cases; however, there have been times administrators were unable or chose not to adjust. Even in those times of inaction, administrators demonstrated vulnerability once more by being transparent with the staff and explaining the reasoning behind the decisions. The members of the administrative team also provided insight into how they use their reflective leadership to support professional trust and exhibit knowledge and vulnerability to their staff.

The third and final theme to be derived from this data is establishing cultural norms and climate with sub-themes of staff preparedness and whole-person focus. Information gathered through the interviews and document analysis supported this theme since it is evident the administrators practice to initially and continuously prepare their staff as well as themselves. In an area where students are facing many challenges at home and in the educational program of special education, the teachers are facing challenges as well; administrators are supporting their ever-changing needs. As well as analyzing and addressing the need for continuous staff preparation, there was an identified approach of a whole-person focus through this data. The administrators and teachers provided insight into how the building-level leaders and teacher colleagues are supporting one another both professionally and personally. The actions of the administrators and teachers help to create a climate that is both loving and supportive.

Through this data, the researcher was able to learn a great deal about day-to-day practices by both special education teachers and administrators. The findings and their connections to literature are provided below in Chapter 5.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Overview**

In response to the increased rate of teacher attrition, the purpose of this research was to identify how leadership practices influence teacher retention from the perspectives of administrators and teachers. The research was guided by two research questions: from teachers' perspectives, how and in what ways does a principal foster or impede special education teacher persistence in teaching and from a principal's perspective, how and in what ways does he or she influence teachers' willingness to persist in their roles as teachers? This chapter will provide a summary of the methodology, a summary of each finding from the research data, and the connection to the literature.

### **Summary of Methodology**

This research was completed through a qualitative case study that included interviewing ten participants; eight teachers and two administrators and a document analysis. This information was gathered through requests made to the school. Each interview was recorded, transcribed using an online program, and reviewed by both the interviewer and each participant. Once it was confirmed that each interview transcription effectively captured what the participants intended, the transcriptions were then coded using a purchased coding program. The coded information was reviewed and analyzed to create categories. The categories were then reviewed further to create sub-categories that allowed for a deeper understanding of the content.

### **Summary of Findings**

Once the data were gathered, organized, and coded, the themes began to develop. The first theme that was discovered was communication with sub-themes of the two types of communication: administration with teachers and communication between administration. The

differentiation between types of communication was important since they both had specific characteristics and were ever-present in the research data. The second theme was professional trust with sub-categories of reflective leadership, knowledge and vulnerability. This theme was discovered from insight and perspective from both teachers and administrators. The third and final theme was maintaining and establishing cultural norms with sub-categories of staff preparedness, whole-person focus and workplace family. These categories turned themes helped bring to life the findings below.

### **Communication**

One of the themes discussed in Chapter 4 was communication. Data was collected on the two types of communication present in this study, communication between administrators and between administrator and teachers.

#### **Finding 1: Interpersonal Relationships**

Based upon the data gathered through the interviews, teachers and administration rely heavily on communication and collaboration with one another. The teachers provided insight from their experiences with a very communicative administrator versus one who was not as communicative but more declarative. As the teachers described, administration communicates with the teachers and is accessible for opportunities to communicate. The current administrators have implemented practices that allow for communication with one another as well as opportunities for communication with teachers. This is clearly a priority for both teachers and administrators.

It was incredibly important for teachers to have access to their administrators when they need them. At the level of experience and expertise many of these teachers were, the need may be minimal, therefore when the teachers go to an administrator for assistance or to communicate

a concern-- they really need that support. According to these findings, for teachers to feel supported, they must have a way to communicate with their administrators, and not only communicate with them, but have an established relationship with them that allows for such conversations. When an administrator lacks interpersonal skills or is functionally unavailable, the relationships struggle and therefore, the building struggles overall. When relationships are established, expectations can be clear, and problems can be addressed. The teachers identified to the benefits of having a communicative administrator they can come and talk to when needed, therefore interpersonal skills are integral.

### **Professional Trust**

The second theme to emerge from the data was professional trust. For the purpose of this research, professional trust encompasses reflective leadership, knowledge, and vulnerability. In Chapter 4, the theme is discussed to provide a foundational understanding of this theme. The findings correlated to professional trust, and the sub-themes are provided below.

#### **Finding 2: Trust and Change**

Through this research, trust and change continued to be brought forth from the data. With respect to trust, teachers identified needing to be able to trust their administrators but also to be trusted. They did not want to be micromanaged, as they feel they have the skills to meet the needs of their students. And when they require support to meet the child's needs, they can come to the administrators they trust, to collaborate with them to make the best decision for the child. The teachers also desire to know the administrators are supporting them both in the daily practice of the school day but also in decisions that impact the teachers. Whether it be a specific student struggling with behaviors or a staffing need, teachers must feel like they are working with someone instead of just for them.

The specific challenges associated with special education in a low-income school can manifest through staffing shortages, excessive caseloads, special education-related questions, students with challenging behaviors, and the need for resources and/or training. These factors came up in many of the interviews for this study. Teachers identify they feel as though they can trust their administrators to support them in these needs, and the administrators will have the knowledge and skills to address their questions/concerns. The teachers are able to extend trust that the administration will do what is necessary through their direct daily practice and through their additional actions as a team.

With change, the data shows that administrators must be reflective and open to necessary adjustments based upon the needs of the teachers. While both the teachers and administrators have their thoughts as to how the school year will go, being open and flexible to change will allow for progress for them individually and as a school. The teachers appreciated the efforts of the administration to seek input and provide them a voice in decision-making for the school. With some of the past administration that has not always been evident, and in those experiences, school morale suffered.

As clearly defined through the data collection, professional trust can make all the difference. The building principal can lead without concern, and teachers can provide the instruction the students need without fear of criticism. While it may take some effort to establish such trust, when efforts of both sides are evident, progress can be made toward this accomplishment. Additionally, if the leadership brings forth necessary change to a building, the teachers should be in a state of understanding so they feel as though they can depend on and be at ease with whatever transformation is coming. When relationships are established, trust and acceptance of change can help both the teacher and administrator navigate their roles.

### **Establishing and Maintaining Cultural Norms**

The final theme discussed in Chapter 4 was establishing and maintaining cultural norms. Through this research, the data showed cultural norms as a major theme and includes the following sub-themes: staff preparedness and a whole-person focus. The teachers and administrators shared who was responsible for the cultural norms and school climate in the building and how the staff and administration made them feel.

#### **Finding 3: Cultural Norms and Climate**

Under this theme of establishing and maintaining cultural norms, staff preparedness was revealed as being an important factor in both the administrative sense as well as teaching. The participants were asked how they were prepared for their current roles and whether they felt adequately prepared to either teach special education in a low-income school or to support and monitor special education programming. Although many of the participants had varying backgrounds and preparation, it was evident continued preparation and support is present in this school. The administration went into detail about how they were prepared and how they continue to participate in experiences that increase their knowledge and expertise. Additionally, both administrators and teachers spoke on the opportunities that have been made available and continue to be made available, with adjustments as needed. As this theme is closely correlated with reflective leadership practices, both sets of participants described how staff preparedness is present in establishing and maintaining cultural norms and climate in the school.

When completing the document analysis of the teacher observation form, there is one section that is rather minimal, and discusses the social and emotional development of students under the section of Professional Knowledge. While there are sections for additional comments, it does not mention, however, the teacher's ability to attend to such social/emotional or

behavioral needs. The teachers shared how there were times they strayed from their original lesson plans for instruction. Does this mean the teachers are not doing what they are supposed to be doing, or are they doing exactly what they are supposed to be doing? If they had to manipulate their schedule one day to meet the needs of the child, especially in a special education classroom or in a building that serves low-income families, do they have the flexibility to push their math lesson back for the time being? It does not appear the observation form outlines for such flexibility. Fortunately, the administrators at this building can approach the situation through the lens of openness and understanding. While I agree the document does encompass different places to enter additional information, there remains an area to check boxes, and this type of document may not provide for additional factors to be considered. The observation tool, being division wide, is broader. Some may say that due to this document being division wide, there is a need for the use of the comment boxes instead of specific components. While that may be the case, because the use of comment boxes can be seen as optional and/or left up to interpretation, that could be problematic for some teachers who are being formally observed.

The outline of the professional developments for the school year was also reviewed. This document showed all of the trainings that the teachers will participate in, to include: Equity, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) and Safety, Enhanced Student and Teacher Assistance Team (ESTAT)/Child Study Committee (CSC)/ Eligibility, Calm Down, Behavior Strategies, and YMCA Team Building. These are delivered by various members, most commonly the administrative team. As determined through the interviews, there were additional opportunities added throughout the school year to expand on overall well-being and additional team-building activities. This document appears to be specific to this building and better

describes the ways in which these individuals will be supported throughout the school year. The teachers shared these scheduled experiences that stuck out to them as part of the ways their current administration supports their well-being. While these activities were planned ahead of time, the teachers made mention of the frequent social experiences they had with administration and were appreciative of how they were treated. Through the actions of their administrators, the teachers identified feeling like their administration goes above and beyond their obligations to care for and support them. While the teachers are instructors and administrators are considered instructional leaders, there is much more than the traditional type of instruction taking place. Teachers are being provided emotional support from their administration, and they feel as though the administrators and fellow staff members care for them as individuals, not just employees.

In addition to the direct actions and efforts of administration to support the teacher's needs, and in turn, to increase retention, they can support the familial environment of the school. By encouraging and providing time for teacher collaboration and by reinforcing a caring, respectful environment, the teachers and staff can grow together not only as fellow employees but as a unit. The challenges of being a special education teacher in a low-income school can be lessened by recognizing that you are not alone and knowing you have support not only from administration but also your peers. These special education teachers return to work each day because of the people they work beside, what some describe as a work family. These individuals identify they feel cared for by one another and can rely on one another, no matter the reason.

### **Connection to Literature**

As divisions face the battle of special education teacher attrition, research supports the efforts of leadership practices and administrative support (Billingsley & Bettini, 2019). However, the definition of these terms differs throughout the research. This section provides an



overview of how the findings connect to and extend on the current literature. Additionally, this study provides substantive examples for practitioners to consider and allows literature to drive the information from this research.

### **Interpersonal Relationships**

According to Marks & Printy (2003), when administrators are effective with establishing relationships with teachers, they can address the professional needs of teachers through these relationships. Interpersonal relationships in schools allow necessary communication to take place, allowing individuals to have difficult conversations with one another. These conversations must also take place so teachers and administrators have clear expectations of their role, as this type of communication has a positive impact on teachers (Huges, 2012).

Communication and interpersonal relationships are facets to administrative support that can either be an influencer of teacher attrition or support retention. House (1981) states there are different types of support: instrumental, emotional, appraisal, and informational. House's interpretation of appraisal and emotional support falls under the purview of communication and interpersonal relationships. These types of support encourage open communication and promote interpersonal relationships.

### **Trust and Change**

Trust is evident in not only this research but also in retention literature. The component of trust in a professional relationship between teachers and administrators is present as administrators work to build teacher efficacy. Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver (2016) state teachers who identify as being unprepared are leaving twice as much when compared to teachers who identify as prepared. The need for teachers to trust their administrators, themselves, and their colleagues has a direct correlation to teacher retention. In that trust of administrators,

teachers can depend on the knowledge of their administrators and know that their administrative team is working to increase their own professional knowledge and the knowledge of the staff. When teachers do not have access to the knowledgeable or skilled peers in their building, they are more likely to attrite. (Bruce et. al, 2010). Not only is trust required but also flexibility of leaders; Leech & Fulton (2008) identify that administrators are encouraged to collaborate and share decision-making experiences with the staff. The need for flexibility and reflective leadership is now more present than ever as school administrators have transitioned from the traditional authoritative leadership style to more of a collaborative approach.

### **Culture and Climate**

The research determined that establishing and maintaining cultural norms is incredibly important to teachers and their satisfaction. Literature supports this concept as Hughes (2012) identifies that school climate might possibly be the strongest indicator of teacher retention. Teachers in this research and in the research found in the literature often attrite due to physical and emotional stress and exhaustion (Rinke & Mawhinney, 2017) and if there is not a supportive culture climate, the teachers may be unable to handle their stress and exhaustion. In this research, these administrators have worked diligently to both establish and maintain cultural norms and efforts to support the teachers' needs through a collaborative and supportive approach that addresses their professional and personal well-being. According to Weiss (1999), when teachers are given access to collaborate and feel supported, school morale is higher, and teachers are more likely to remain in their positions.

## **Implications for Practice**

### **Relationships and Climate**

According to this study and available literature, interpersonal relationships are integral to the success of school buildings. Building leaders should work to ensure there are organic and scheduled opportunities for needed communication. The communication between administrators helps to indirectly facilitate the communication between administrators and teachers. Although communication can sometimes be challenging, when interpersonal relationships are made a priority, communication is more likely to happen freely and respectfully. When building principals make themselves available for needed communication, teachers feel supported and those relationships benefit. Both administrators and teachers are equally responsible for creating an environment that fosters relationships and a positive climate.

A workplace with a positive climate where individuals feel cared for and valued, helps to support retention of employees. As each administrator comes into their leadership role, he or she should identify which cultural norms are toxic and which support growth, and then work as a collaborative team to address or enhance those norms. Working in a school where challenges are high and attrition is a concern, administrators must consider how to support the professional and personal needs of their staff. While great efforts must be applied to ensure an instructional focus, equally so, administrators should also promote and expect there to be a focus on the personal well-being of his or her staff. Creatively planning activities to support mental health, stress management, and team-building opportunities are all ways an administrator can help build and maintain a positive working environment.

While administrator efforts should be considered and analyzed, there may be situations that require little to no intervention. Should an administrator enter a building that has a

successful and supportive school climate, there may be no need for action, only support. In the high stress profession of education, specifically in special education in a low-income school, teachers may rely heavily on their colleagues for support. Collegial support may only require support from the administrator, and in those times, it may be more beneficial for the administrators to only consider how to further expand and extend the support system that is already in place.

### **Listening and Leading**

In addition to the interpersonal relationships and the positive school climate, reflective leading and listening must occur for school success. Building leaders who are effective in retaining teachers implement reflective leading and listening. They not only make time to communicate with their teachers and staff but also create action from their input. Whether it be the use of anonymous surveys, formal and informal communication between levels, or collaborative decision-making, administrators must seek input from other individuals in their building and be willing to adjust based on that input, if necessary.

Reflective leading encourages administrators to be flexible in their leadership practices so they are meeting the ever-changing needs of their staff and students. However, it is recommended that administrators identify strategies to maintain balance and determine whether to adjust practices. There may be occasions that although teachers are requesting changes in practices, due to external factors, these changes may not be possible or appropriate at the time. By administration identifying when to maintain consistency or be flexible, the individuals they lead will be able to trust their leadership.

There may be times the teaching staff may find it difficult to trust their leadership, their colleagues, and/or themselves. Building administrators can address this need since they have the

power to build efficacy within their teachers. It is critical for a principal to have a deep understanding of the needs of his or her staff and to work to support those needs through a variety of ways. By encouraging teacher efficacy, collective efficacy can increase and therefore, building morale and success. When administrators are aware of the skills and weaknesses of their staff, they can work to address these and therefore, help support their students. The awareness of strengths and weaknesses is also imperative for administrators and their staff to identify what they consider as supporting teacher retention. If, like many pieces of literature on this topic, the two groups identify differing supportive measures, that could explain how to support teacher retention in the future.

### **Limitations**

Through this qualitative study, the teacher and administrator perspectives and experiences were collected, organized, and coded so there is a better understanding of what these individuals need in order to decrease teacher attrition in this specific population. By only limiting the sample to teachers and administrators, the research was limited to only considering these two groups of individuals. Currently in this research, the perspective of general education teachers, division leaders, and additional stakeholders were not considered. Although this information could be useful moving forward, it did not remain the focus of this study.

In addition to the participant sample of this research serving as a limitation, time may also be considered a limitation. I only completed the research during one academic school year, as I feared not having access to teachers over the summer months. It would have been beneficial to compare their responses to information gathered a year later. Along with the participant sample as a case study, and time, my own personal bias can be seen as a limitation. My background as a special education teacher in a low-income school may have inadvertently played

a part in my interpretation of the participants' responses. Although I took precautions to best remain unbiased and allow the data to reflect in the research, it would be irresponsible to not identify my background and how it plays a role in my everyday life, including my research.

While the participants' sample included members of different races and backgrounds, all the participants were female. It can be said that a male participant may have provided a different perspective to the research than an all-female participant sample. While education is predominantly female with 76% of teachers in the 2017-2018 school year being female and only 24% being male (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2020b), it is a limitation that this study does not include male perspective. For future research, it would be beneficial to include both males and females in the research to determine what male teachers or male administrators identify as facets of school leadership that influence teacher retention.

A final limitation is due to the research being a qualitative case study. For this research, one low income primary school was used therefore limiting the number of participants and also limiting the environment. This study included 10 participants in a setting that has specific characteristics, and therefore, the research results could be considered difficult to generalize across various settings. While generalizability may be perceived as challenging, this research contributed to the theoretical understanding of special education teacher retention.

### **Implications for Future Research**

As an implication for future research, this study had findings to include professional trust, therefore, future researchers may want to investigate the correlation between teacher retention as it connects to trust theory. Many of the interviews conducted continued to include trust in some form whether it be trust between administrators, trust between the administrative team and

teachers, or trust between teachers. It would be interesting to determine how this concept directly influences teacher retention using trust theory.

An opportunity for future research could address the limitation of an all-female participant sample. If a researcher chose to utilize a school or a division for their research that has a large male presence in the teachers and/or administration, it may serve as a telling example of male perspective on the topic of retention. Additionally, the consideration of increasing the participant sample to include various roles in the educational setting may bring forth the male perspective. For example, should a researcher elect to interview division leaders to include the superintendent, assistant superintendent, etc., or even the school board members, it is more probable there would be males present in these roles.

The third implication for future research could include strategic retention efforts. While this study identified the link between administrative efforts and special education teacher retention in a low-income school, it cannot go unnoticed that those retention efforts may not be meant for everyone. While the efforts of administration can help to encourage special education teacher retention, the question then becomes whether the goal is to retain all special education teachers because some may be considered ineffective. When retention efforts become focused on effective teachers, this is considered strategic retention, (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). This study did not investigate the comparison between whole group retention efforts and strategic retention in the low-income school setting. An extension of how strategic retention efforts by administration in a low-income school when attempting to retain high quality, effective special education teacher may provide additional information in future research.

The fourth and final implication for future research is the completion of observations as part of the study. As mentioned previously, it was the attempt of the researcher to conduct

observations of the interaction between school administration and special education teachers in the low-income school. Unfortunately, the unprecedented event of the global pandemic of COVID-19 made these observations impossible. It is felt by the researcher that observations may provide additional and important perspectives into the actual daily practices of how building-level leadership influences special education teacher retention.

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this research was to answer the two questions: (1) From teachers' perspectives, how and in what ways does a principal foster or impede special education teacher retention? And (2) From a principal's perspective, how and in what ways does he or she influence special education teacher retention? Through this study, the researcher attempted to close any gaps of understanding and eliminate ineffective retention efforts by administration. By completing this research and attempting to solve these questions, administrators will be able to not only identify what teachers need but also strategies to address those needs.

The findings of this research support various themes to include interpersonal relationships, trust and change, and cultural norms and climate. These constructs resonated in this selected school where both teachers and administrators identify how current leadership practices support what special education teachers require and how those practices foster teacher retention in challenging, low-income schools. As identified throughout the conceptual framework based upon literature, special education teacher attrition is a concern across the country, therefore, this information gathered from a building getting retention right, should be considered and shared.



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## **APPENDIX A: TEACHER INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and the interview process. This interview should not be longer than about an hour long and will be audio recorded. Your personal information will be kept confidential throughout the process and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of this research. The audio recordings will be transcribed and you will be provided access to the transcription to ensure accuracy of your responses. Once the research is complete the audio recordings will be deleted. I will now begin the interview and the audio recording.

#### Teacher Interview Protocol

1. Please provide a summary of your teaching experiences in the Title I setting.
  - A. What were some challenges?
  - B. What were some successes?
  - C. Describe your educational and professional journey that has lead you to your current position.
2. What are the biggest challenges in a Title I school?
  - A. Challenges in instruction?
  - B. Challenges in management?
  - C. Leadership issues?

D. Etc.

3. How have you been trained and prepared for your current role?
  - A. Do you feel your training and teacher preparation was adequate?
  - B. What areas do you feel you could have been more prepared for?
4. Describe the interaction between you and your fellow colleagues. Describe your access to one another for collaboration.
  - A. Is there mentorship in place here?
  - B. What does that program look like?
5. What do you think special education Title I teachers need?
6. How do you feel school leaders influence retention?
7. What would you say has attributed to your retention personally?
8. How have your building administrators influenced teacher retention in your building?
9. What would you identify as the most important leadership qualities and practices in order to support special education teacher in Title I schools?

**APPENDIX B: ADMINISTRATOR INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

## APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and the interview process. This interview should not be longer than about an hour long and will be audio recorded. Your personal information will be kept confidential throughout the process and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of this research. The audio recordings will be transcribed and you will be provided access to the transcription to ensure accuracy of your responses. Once the research is complete the audio recordings will be deleted. I will now begin the interview and the audio recording.

Administrator Protocol

1. Please describe your professional experience that has led you to your current leadership role.
  - A. What were some challenges?
  - B. What were some successes?
2. What challenges do Title I special education teachers face?
3. How were you trained for leadership in the field of special education?
  - A. What is your comfort level with special education?
  - B. What do you identify that support should look like in Title I in comparison to general education teachers?
  - C. In what areas do you feel that you were not prepared for leading special education Title I teachers?

4. Please define what the term 'administrative support' means to you.
5. What key components do you think are necessary to special education Title I teacher retention?
6. Can you provide a specific example of how your previous experiences have influenced teacher retention?
7. How does your administrative team determine which professional developments are provided to your teachers?
8. What kind of support do special education teachers need in Title I?
9. How do you work through challenges with them?
10. How do you communicate and provide feedback?
11. What would you describe as the most important characteristics and practices that support special education teacher retention in Title I schools?

## **APPENDIX C: FOLLOW UP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research and the interview process. This interview should not be longer than about an hour long and will be audio recorded. Your personal information will be kept confidential throughout the process and you will be assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of this research. The audio recordings will be transcribed and you will be provided access to the transcription to ensure accuracy of your responses. Once the research is complete the audio recordings will be deleted. I will now begin the interview and the audio recording.

#### Follow Up Interview Protocol

1. What specific examples can you share with me in regards to Administrative Practices:
  - A. What are some specific examples of communication between you and administration?
  - B. Can you identify an example of reflective leadership?
  - C. Can you think of a time when you observed the building leaders being understanding and/or flexible?
2. Can you provide examples of how you are being prepared for your ever changing role?
3. What specific challenges do you identify in special education as well as Title One?
4. How would you describe the cultural norms in the building?
  - A. Can you give some examples of the caring-whole person feeling here?
  - B. How would you describe how the inclusivity and sharing in the building?

C. Can you give me examples of how you see knowledge being built within the school setting?

**VITA**

AMANDA ELIZABETH JONES

Old Dominion University  
Educational Foundations & Leadership  
120 Education Building  
4301 Hampton Boulevard, Suite 2300  
Norfolk, Virginia 23529  
757-683-5163 (Office)  
757-683-4413 (Fax)

**EDUCATION**

Ph.D. Educational Leadership, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, August 2020  
Ed. S. Educational Leadership, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, May 2016  
M. Ed. Urban Education Counseling K-12, Norfolk State University, Norfolk, VA, May 2013  
B.S. Human Services, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA, May 2009  
A.A. College of the Albemarle, Elizabeth City, NC, August 2007