FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO THE RETENTION OF PRINCIPALS IN HIGH-POVERTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS: A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

by

Rosalyn Smith Graham

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

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APPROVED BY:

Frank Bailey, EdD, Committee Chair

Jared Bigham, EdD, Committee Member

Erik Lowry, PhD, Committee Member

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand factors that motivate longstanding principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and self-determination theory were used to guide the research questions. The epistemological paradigm was subjectivism. Thirteen principals shared their subjective views. My ontological assumption was constructivism because it involves an individual's own understanding. My axiological assumption was that research is value-laden and biases will be present. Data collection included in-depth interviews, a focus group, and an analysis of documents. Analysis occurred through coding, within-case analysis, pattern identification, thick case description, and across-case analysis. The participants remained long term at high-poverty schools because of their conviction that the principalship was a mission and a calling. Character traits played a role in motivating the participants toward longevity, evident in several themes: treat all with respect, loving children, and loving education. Principals' self-perceptions also played a role in contributing to long-term principalship. These self-perceptions included wanting to stay, creating and developing teams, taking care of your teachers, and creating communities. Professional learning opportunities were important to the principals. In addition to professional development courses, principals found networking, curriculum development, and constant learning important. This study revealed the significance of sharing necessary skills and strategies and describing the intrinsic rewards of being the principal of a high-poverty school to current and future high-poverty school principals. Effective long-term principals in high-poverty schools provide stability to their schools and to the communities they serve.

Keywords: longstanding principalship, high-poverty schools, effective principals, principal leadership, principal turnover, principal retention

Dedication

This research study is dedicated to my family because they have encouraged me to continue during times of adversity. They have also imparted those qualities that we need to learn while we are here on Earth so that we may become more Christ-like. This research study is also dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for giving me the Holy Spirit for guidance, faith in times of uncertainty, and strength to complete it.

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I acknowledge and honor my family, friends, and committee members for seeing me through to the completion of this study.

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List of Abbreviations

Adequate yearly progress (AYP)

Basic needs theory (BNT)

Causality orientations theory (COT)

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET)

Goals content theory (GCT)

No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB)

Organismic integration theory (OIT)

Relationship motivation theory (RMT)

Self-determination theory (SDT)

Socioeconomic status (SES)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Chapter One includes the background, situation to self, problem, purpose, and research questions designed to elicit information contributing an understanding of the factors related to longstanding principalships in high-poverty communities. Chapter One begins with an overview of Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory as related to the satisfaction of principals who continue working in high-poverty schools. The researcher investigated the experiences of the participants through one central research question and three research sub-questions. The central research question was the following: What lived experiences of principals serving in high-poverty school districts contribute to them remaining in their current positions for five or more years? The research sub-questions were (a) What character traits help principals remain as high-poverty, long-term school leaders?; (b) What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?; and (c) What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalship of high-poverty schools?

Background

"No one knows who I am," exclaimed a senior in a high-poverty, predominantly minority, low-performing high school in the Austin area. She explained, "I have been at the school four years and had four different principals and six different Algebra 1 teachers during that time" (Fuller, 2012, para. 1). According to Fuller (2012), 25,000 (25%) of principals in the United States leave their schools each year, adversely affecting millions of children's lives. In this study, I addressed that phenomenon in hopes of determining factors that could contribute to prolonging a principal's longevity to stem the tide of departure and provide a more stable administrative support framework for students

Correlation exists between the effectiveness of schools, successful leadership, and student achievement (Seashore-Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). For schools and districts to devise programs and policies that not only increase principal quality but also retain principals in the highest-need schools is a matter of national urgency (McKibben, 2013). Attracting and retaining qualified principals continues to be a difficult task for public school districts around the nation (Hewitt, Denny, & Pijanowski, 2011). These trends contributed to my desire to understand the dynamics of effective longstanding principalships in high-poverty communities.

Historical Overview

Educational reform was part of President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty in the mid-1960s (McKee, 2010). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act was passed as part of that war and was the most far reaching federal legislation affecting education ever passed by the U.S. Congress. The Act funded primary and secondary education, emphasized equal access, and established high standards and accountability. Currently underperforming schools are pressed to increase test scores (Brewer & Klar, 2014). Unfortunately, children attending high-poverty schools are unlikely to achieve as well as their peers in wealthier school districts (Brewer & Klar, 2014). Consequently, as low-performing schools continue to experience pressure to improve, retaining principals in these schools is problematic.

School leaders, and those who take part in making and passing educational laws assess current and historical data. That search relates to poverty, education, and agree that retaining principals is difficult (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013). Retaining principals of high-poverty schools with low academic scores is more difficult due to the pressure to improve failing scores. These high-poverty schools face insurmountable trials. Failing test scores often correlate with high-poverty communities. Though achievement gaps based on racial

differences have narrowed, the opposite has been true of the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families (Reardon et al., 2013). The difference in average test scores between children whose families are in the 90th and those in the 10th percentiles of family income distribution grew by 40% (Reardon et al., 2013). Disturbingly, more than 72 million children under age 18 in the United States live in poverty (Yang, Maribel, & Koball, 2017).

At the turn of the 21st century, the federal government attempted to address educational inequities legislatively through the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB). The purpose of the NCLB Act was "to ensure that all children have a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain high-quality education and reach, at a minimum, proficiency on challenging academic achievement standards and state academic assessments" (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, para. 1). However, in a 2013 Stanford study, Reardon et al. found no support for the hypothesis that NCLB has been successful in narrowing achievement gaps.

Society-at-Large

In a review of 40 years of research on school leadership, Hallinger (2011) reported, "Effective leadership for learning is adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions of the school over time" (para. 1). This idea posits that leadership is more than a basic list of procedures (Brewer & Klar, 2014). Effective principals enhance student learning by who they are and by their values, virtues, dispositions, attributes, and competencies. The strategies they select and how they adapt their leadership practices to their unique context can also enhance student learning (Brewer & Klar, 2014).

Strong and visionary principals build positive school climates and seek to understand policies to facilitate their effective implementation. They also lead teachers, schools, and community members to reach school improvement targets (Tekleselassie & Villarreal, 2011).

However, despite the obvious positive effect principals have, very few qualitative multiple case studies on specific factors that affect the retention of longstanding principals in high-poverty school positions exist (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). In this study, I addressed the gap in research by detailing factors that contribute to the longevity of public school principals serving in high-poverty communities. High-poverty school districts with high turnover in the Southeastern states may benefit from the results of the study because the findings illuminate those factors that contribute to the longevity of principals and districts can implement practices that will help foster those factors. This implementation may lead to higher retention rates and positive impact for the school and the community it serves.

Theory

Attracting and then retaining qualified principals is becoming increasingly difficult for public school districts around the nation (Hewitt et al., 2011). Principal shortages have been reported at the elementary, middle, and secondary levels in public schools nationwide (Myung, Loeb, & Horng, 2011). In addition, the average tenure of a high school principal at a school with over 75% of the students qualifying for free and reduced lunches is 3.25 years (Fuller & Young, 2010). The theories underpinning this issue are Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and self-determination theory (SDT). These theories form the basis of motivation for principals of high-poverty schools. Herzberg (1959) identified motivator and hygiene factors to work. The motivator factors are the intrinsic factors that promote positive satisfaction, while the hygiene factors cause dissatisfaction when removed but do not promote intrinsic rewards (Smith & Shields, 2013). SDT consists of six mini-theories: cognitive evaluation theory, organismic integration theory, causality orientations theory, basic psychological needs theory, goals content theory, and relationship motivation theory (Smith & Shields, 2013).

Situation to Self

As an African American Christian educator, my passion is to reach out to African American impoverished youth. In South Carolina, 44% of black children, 15% of white children, 40% of Hispanic children, and 19% of Asian children live in poverty. I am always disappointed during my school's review of adequate yearly progress (AYP) because of the numbers of African American students who score poorly on standardized tests. I know more can be done. These students can and must achieve to break the bonds of generational poverty.

I have taught elementary school at the same school for 12 years, and during this time, I have had four different administrators. I have observed the effects of different types of leadership and how principals directly influence teachers' learning. Principals typically transfer to less-challenging schools as they gain experience (Béteille et al., 2012). However, as teachers and principals learn together, they can magnify their effect on student achievement. The literature identifies a direct correlation between successful leadership and student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2013). This correlation places into perspective the depth of influence principal turnover can have on schools.

An epistemological paradigm answers the how and what questions (Yin, 2009). Constructivists believe that knowledge is built through experiences as opposed to discovered. Individuals can build their knowledge through involvement and encounters with other individuals and through actual happenings rather than through being taught (Gay, 2013). This study is based on the epistemological paradigm because the principals' experiences that result in longstanding principalships were examined during the interviews. My epistemological assumptions were the feelings toward students and families who experience poverty. I know high-poverty should not equate to low test scores and believe a solution exists.

As an African American educator, I feel a deep desire to assist high-poverty schools by researching the factors that contribute to the retention of longstanding principals who have served five or more years in these schools. Because high-poverty schools are linked to lower-achieving students, educational leaders are confronted with demands for accountability, for meeting standards of AYP, and for restructuring. This can be stressful for all involved. Half of newly hired middle school principals remain at the same school for three years, while only 30% remain at the high school level for three years (Fuller, 2012). My ontological assumption was constructivism because it involves an individual's own understanding and an epistemological paradigm. My axiological assumption was that research is value-laden and biases will be present. I reported on my values and biases and on those found in the research.

Problem Statement

Principal turnover has been well researched over the last decade, but very little empirical research concerning the factors promoting longevity in poverty-stricken schools has been conducted (Hewitt et al., 2011). Understanding why principals of high-poverty elementary and secondary schools stay in high-poverty South Carolina school districts was the focal point of this study. South Carolina school districts that are considered high poverty are generally in rural and urban areas (Suber, 2012). These school districts usually struggle with retaining principals and low academic performance. The literature identified a direct correlation between successful leadership and student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2013). This correlation puts into perspective the depth of influence principal turnover can have on schools. Declines in student performance follow principal departures (Miller, 2013). Student performance takes 5 years to increase (Miller, 2013). A constant churn of principals can make it hard for schools to implement new policies and programs and to commit to improvement (Holme & Rangel, 2012;

Miller, 2013). Persistent poverty school districts in South Carolina included Dillon 4, Lee, Allendale, Florence 4, Hampton 2, Jasper, Marion 7, and Orangeburg 3 (Salazer, 2014). The numbers indicate the school district within that county. Allendale is South Carolina's poorest county, with a poverty rate of 41% (Salazer, 2014). Determining factors that contribute to longstanding principals in high-poverty schools would benefit South Carolina due to the high rates of poverty and the need to have effective principals.

Attracting and retaining qualified principals is becoming increasingly difficult for public school districts around the nation (Hewitt et al., 2011). According to a representative sample of national private and public school principals from 2011 to 2012, 6% of principals moved to a new school and 12% left the principalship all together (Goldring, Taie, & Owens, 2014). Thus, for schools and districts to devise programs and policies that not only increase principal quality but also keep effective principals in the highest-need schools is a matter of national urgency (McKibben, 2013). School districts also incur costs as the result of principal turnover. A 2014 School Leaders Network report estimated developing, hiring, and training a single principal costs districts at least $75,000. No universal solution to the problem of principal turnover exists. Giving principals more time to make progress makes sense, but policymakers and district leaders must also put better principal selection processes in place to find the best candidates to fill positions in struggling schools (Samuels, 2012). The problem is few studies provide in-depth understanding of the experiences, motivations, and characteristics of leaders who persist in high-poverty schools.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the contributing factors that motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-

poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. Because the average tenure of a principal in a high-poverty school is three to five years, *persistence* indicated remaining in the principal position for five or more years, as defined by Béteille et al. (2012). Also, per Béteille et al., high-poverty schools were chosen based on a 60% or more free and reduced-price lunch population. The theories guiding this study were Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and SDT. The Herzberg (1959) motivation-hygiene theory identifies the factors related to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The higher-level factors, motivators, outweigh the negative factors of being a principal (Smith & Shields, 2013). These motivators (challenging work, meaningful work) give positive satisfaction (Smith & Shields, 2013).

In contrast, the hygiene factors (salary, job security) are maintenance factors because they do not cause dissatisfaction until they are absent and therefore, do not provide positive satisfaction or lead to higher motivation (Smith & Shields, 2013). Herzberg's (1959) work related to this study in that principals of high-poverty schools receive intrinsic rewards. These intrinsic rewards exist in the daily work they do to have a positive effect on the lives of students, teachers, and communities. SDT is concerned with the natural or intrinsic tendencies that motivate people to behave in healthy ways (Ryan & Deci, 2002). SDT related to principals of high-poverty schools because although they face difficulties, some continue to thrive and have a positive effect on students (Ryan & Deci, 2002). In this study, I examined how specific factors, such as intrinsic rewards, contribute to the retention of longstanding principals in high-poverty schools of South Carolina.

Significance of the Study

My findings may serve to help high-poverty schools of South Carolina improve principal training so principals might have positive effects in high-poverty schools. Further research is

needed to determine what factors help principals have such positive effects on their schools' needs (Brewer & Klar, 2014). A leader alone cannot turn around a failing school. School leadership involves the actions of a team (Brewer & Klar, 2014). Principal turnover continues nationwide, and studies have identified a myriad of reasons why principals leave (Casey, 2016). Research on the effect of principal turnover on student achievement and teacher retention also exists, as well as growing research on how to recruit and grow a principal pool from current assistant principals and teachers (Casey, 2016). Missing from the research, however, are the voices, perspectives, and lived experiences of the principals who choose to stay (Casey, 2016). Sapienza (2013), in a study conducted in suburban Long Island, New York public elementary schools, reported a lack of research on the characteristics that contribute to the longevity of principals in high-poverty schools. Thus, I examined the factors that contribute to the retention of principals in high-poverty schools in South Carolina.

The practical significance of this study may be to aid South Carolina high-poverty principals and similar school district principals in persisting in their positions during times of difficulty. This longevity can improve student achievement (Béteille et al., 2012), which is especially important in South Carolina because South Carolina ranks 37th in education in the nation (State Highlights Report, 2016). This research could also aid other states with similar high departure rates of high-poverty principals. Ultimately, I hope this study will inform practice in the school districts of South Carolina and provide superintendents and district leaders with suggestions for retaining principals while simultaneously increasing test scores.

The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory supported this study by providing more research on the factors that influence the persistence of principals in high-poverty areas. Herzberg (1959) determined which work environment factors caused employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Herzberg's theory related to this study because principals have several opportunities to meet the many motivator factors outlined in the theory. SDT also supported this study by providing more research concerning the motivation behind the choices people make without external influence and interference.

Research Questions

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the contributing factors that motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. The central research question (CRQ) began with an overview and sub-questions are more detailed.

CRQ: What lived experiences of principals serving in high-poverty school districts contribute to them remaining in their current positions for 5 or more years?

Principals who have persisted in their high-poverty leadership positions are inspired to do so. Their inspiration comes from lived experiences. These experiences can help inspire other principals to have success that could increase their longevity. Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory forms the basis for motivation factors that lead to satisfaction. These factors of satisfaction are experiences in growth, achievement, responsibility, and work itself.

SQ1: What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools?

Tenacity is significant for principals in high-poverty areas because for a principal to implement policies and practices that will positively influence the school's performance takes approximately five years (Hull, 2012). Tenacious individuals are characterized by having enhanced energy levels that can lead to positive outcomes, such as effective leadership (Clercq & Belausteguigoitia, 2017). Many principals in high-poverty areas do not persist longer than three

years, so they are not able to implement many positive changes that would aid in meeting state and federal standards (Superville, 2014).

SQ2: What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?

Perception is a process individuals use to explain and give meaning to their surroundings. Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory of efficacy holds that while perceptions of self-efficacy are multifaceted, they can be measured with an acceptable degree of accuracy. Many factors influence perception, some of which include attitudes, motives, interests, experiences, and expectations (Robbins, Judge, Millet, & Boyle, 2013). When individuals attempt to interpret what they see, that perception is influenced by the characteristics of the perceiver (Robbins et al., 2013). As high-poverty school principals continue in their long-term principalships, personal attitudes, interests, experiences, and expectations influence their perceptions of job satisfaction.

SQ3: What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools?

Research-based leadership policy should be implemented in school and community settings (Brewer & Klar, 2014). School districts can aid in the retention of high-poverty principals by providing networks that promote longstanding principalships in high-poverty schools (Superville, 2014). Programs aid in retaining principals and incorporate problem-based authentic learning activities rooted in the realities of a principal's job (Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espionoza, 2017).

Definitions

Terms pertinent to the study include the following:

1. *Accountability rating*—The labels assigned to districts and campuses that designate acceptable and unacceptable performance in South Carolina's current academic accountability

system are *met standard*, *met alternative standard*, *improvement required*, *not rated*, and *not rated: data integrity issues*. Labels assigned prior to the 2011–2012 school year were *exemplary*, *recognized*, *academically acceptable*, and *academically unacceptable* (Casey, 2016).

2. *Economically disadvantaged*—Casey (2016) defined economically disadvantaged students as those who are eligible for free or reduced-price lunch or are eligible for other public assistance.

3. *High-poverty school*—Béteille et al. (2012) defined high-poverty schools as those that have low socioeconomic status (SES) based on a 60% or more free and reduced-priced lunch population.

4. *Longevity*—Seashore-Louis et al. (2010) defined longevity as persistence in the principalship for 5 or more years.

5. *High-poverty or poor*—Bishaw and Glassman (2016) defined individuals living below the federal poverty threshold as high-poverty and poor.

Summary

Most high-poverty schools receive a new principal every three to four years, with schools averaging 2.78 principals every 10 years (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Due to the increased workload and demands placed on principals at high-poverty schools the turnover is greater than that of wealthier school districts. While not all turnover is bad, a limited but growing body of research suggests that change in leadership has several negative outcomes, including declines in student achievement, interruption of program or reform implementation, low teacher morale, and development of resilient cultures that resist change (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010).

Multiple studies show that principal turnover is likely to be higher at schools with larger populations of high-poverty students (Boyce & Bowers, 2016). Just as a principal's presence can

improve student achievement, a principal's departure can have the opposite effect (Béteille et al., 2012). In this multiple case study, I hoped to contribute to the literature concerning the factors that explain the longevity of principals serving in high-poverty South Carolina public schools.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter is a review of the literature on the theoretical framework of this study, the evolving role of principals, the need for continuous leadership in areas of high poverty, and the high cost of turnover. The purpose of this review is to provide an overview of the theoretical framework, to provide a comprehensive overview of prior research, and to identify gaps in the prior research concerning longstanding principals in high-poverty schools.

Theoretical Framework

This study applied two motivation theories—the Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory and self-determination theory (SDT)—to the factors that contribute to longstanding principalships in South Carolina. Motivation theories are developed on assumptions about the nature of people and about the factors that give incentive to action (Deci & Ryan, 1985). According to Maslow's (1970) theory of hierarchy of needs, people are motivated for a variety of reasons; some needs are more basic than others are. Maslow identified basic needs as biological and psychological, safety, love and belongingness, esteem, cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and transcendence. The Herzberg theory and SDT deepen the understanding of persistence in principalship among the study participants by delving into the factors and assumptions of what gives them the incentive to persist.

Herzberg (1959) conducted studies to determine which factors in an employee's work environment fostered satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Two types of factors contribute to an individual's cause to work—motivators and hygiene. Motivators (challenging work, meaningful work, praise, recognition, opportunities for advancement) provide positive satisfaction, while hygiene factors (salary, job security, supervision, company policies, working conditions, and job

structure) are maintenance factors that do not cause dissatisfaction until they are absent and thus do not provide positive satisfaction or lead to intrinsic rewards (Smith & Shields, 2013). In a principalship, the opportunity to meet the higher-level needs (motivators) results in intrinsic rewards outweighing the negative factors (Smith & Shields, 2013).

SDT grew out of the field of psychology and human motivation, particularly in the areas of intrinsic motivation and intrinsic needs. SDT postulates that all humans have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Carl Rogers expanded on SDT, contending that motivation is highly valued in the real world because of its power to produce (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Ryan and Deci (2000) noted, "Perhaps no single phenomenon reflects the positive potential of human nature as much as intrinsic motivation, the inherent tendency to seek out novelty and challenges, to extend and exercise one's capacities, to explore, and to learn" (p.70). Central to SDT is the difference between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Comparisons between intrinsically motivated people and extrinsically motivated people found that those who were intrinsically motivated to act have more interest, excitement, and confidence, resulting in higher performance, persistence, and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 1991), heightened vitality (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999), and self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995).

SDT has grown over the past 40 years; it is multifaceted and consists of six mini-theories that emerged from research to explain a set of motivationally based phenomena (Casey, 2016). These six mini-theories are (a) cognitive evaluation theory (CET), (b) organismic integration theory (OIT), (c) causality orientations theory (COT), (d) basic psychological needs theory, (e) goals content theory (GCT), and (f) relationship motivation theory (RMT). In addition to the six mini-theories, Gagné and Deci (2005) reported that SDT has been recognized in other realms

such as the work place, and it has aided in employee functioning and well-being. This study relates to the Herzberg theory and SDT because longstanding principals of high-poverty schools are motivated to continue in their positions despite the challenges. This study advances the Herzberg theory and SDT by answering the question of what motivates these longstanding principals of high-poverty schools.

Cognitive evaluation theory (CET) proposes that innate psychological needs for self-governance and underlying intrinsic motivation are the same (Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 2001). Where intrinsically motivated behaviors are authentic to self and volitional, controlling external events pressure people to think, feel, or behave in particular ways and can undermine intrinsic motivation and influence a person's perceptions of competence and self-determination (Deci et al., 2001). CET explains the effects of external repercussions on internal motivation (Deci et al., 2001). OIT suggests that the concepts and process of internal motivation, as presented in the CET, are not relevant for some activities and posits that, in the course of life, people experience a multitude of behaviors and responsibilities that are not necessarily interesting or enjoyable (Vansteenkiste, Niemiec, & Soenens, 2010). OIT proposes that different kinds of extrinsic motivation are known and the degree to which it is experienced can differ (Ryan & Connell, 1989).

Causality orientations theory (COT), the third SDT mini-theory, focuses on individual differences in global motivational orientations (Vansteenkiste et al., 2012) and proposes that environmental evaluations and personality orientations influence intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1980; Ryan & Deci, 2002). COT posits that all three orientations exist to some degree in everyone, and depending on the activity or action, people will respond accordingly (Vansteenkiste et al., 2010). COT details the extent to which a person is influenced by rewards

of others and ego-involvement. These individuals place high value on wealth and other extrinsic factors.

Basic needs theory (BNT) is the fourth mini-theory of SDT. BNT refers to the "psychological well-being and optimal functioning being predicated on autonomy, competence, and relatedness" (Ryan & Deci, 2002, p. 12). SDT posits that people innately look for challenges in their environment that fuel their intrinsic motivation and satisfy their basic psychological needs. BNT defines innate psychological nutriments that are necessary for psychological and physical health and social well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2002). Nutriments promote growth, provide energy, and maintain life. BNT refers to the need for psychological nutriments or essential nourishment for psychological health.

Goals content theory (GCT) differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic goals; extrinsic goals are defined as driven by ego (wealth and reputation), while intrinsic goals favor self-actualization, community, and relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Vansteenkiste, Lens, and Deci (2006) found that intrinsic goals that are authentic to self and related to community contribution and personal growth are more likely to retain or satisfy the basic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. In contrast, extrinsic goals or aspirations of worth are not likely to be related to need satisfactions (Kasser & Ryan, 1996; Ryan & Deci, 2000). As Vansteenkiste et al. (2006) observed, the problem is that such pursuits are not likely to provide genuine satisfaction of basic needs, which is essential to healthy personality development and well-being.

Relationship motivation theory (RMT), the sixth mini-theory of SDT, focuses on relatedness as the basic psychological need for human growth (Ryan, 1995). RMT focuses on the need to be connected with others and when the needs of autonomy and competence are met

personal growth will occur (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Deci and Ryan (2014) further asserted that people need to experience autonomy and competence within the relationship for the relationship to thrive.

Related Literature

The Evolving Role of the Principal

At the start of the 20th century, the principal's jurisdiction was unclear. Rousmaniere (2013) asked, "Was it the mechanical management of children at recess, the examination of student academic work and the disciplining of their behavior, or the authority to purchase equipment and hire teachers?" (p. 28). Most principals at the elementary level continued to teach and attend to the administrative roles delegated by the superintendent as well as perform janitorial work and serve as community liaisons (Rousmaniere, 2013). In the 1930s, attention on the role of the principalship resulted in two camps: (a) administrative progressives who advocated for the development of school systems driven by values of fiscal economy and organizational accountability, and (b) pedagogical progressives who promoted a child-centered, humanistic approach to education (Rousmaniere, 2013). Pedagogical progressives such as John Dewey and Lucy Mitchell promoted a child-centered curriculum that was based on the needs and interests of the students (Rousmaniere, 2013). Conversely, for administrative progressives, focus included individualized education where students were tracked to prepare them for society.

The principal's role continued to evolve in the 1950s. In 1954, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* that separate schools were inherently unequal and racial discrimination in public schools was unconstitutional. In 1955, the Supreme Court ruled on relief of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case and urged states to dismantle segregation "with all deliberate speed" (Duignan, 2016, p. 1). Desegregation decimated the black school

principal force in the South (Senate Select, 1970). Black principals were role models and respected leaders in their communities. They served as liaisons between school and family as well as mediators between black and white segments of society. Local school boards mostly neglected black principals, resulting in them having more autonomy than their white peers and authority to shape personnel, implement programs, and raise money for needed resources (Rousmaniere, 2013).

In the 1950s and 1960s, while scientific knowledge and the strengthening of democratic institutions to fight communism were central to American schools, the U.S. Supreme Court's *Brown* decision and the larger civil rights movement were affecting American public education as well. In many cities and towns in both the North and South, questions of what school was supposed to accomplish and who it was intended to serve raised doubts about local principals' authority (Duignan, 2016). In the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Section 402, Congress authorized research on "the lack of availability of equal educational opportunities for individuals by reason of race, color, religion, or national origin in public educational institutions at all levels in the United States, its territories and possessions, and the District of Columbia" (p. iii). Coleman (1966), in response to Section 402, found that schools in the United States were highly segregated and noted inequalities in American public schooling and within the public schools themselves. The report asserted that students' background and socioeconomic status (SES) were more significant in determining educational outcomes than were measured differences in school resources.

In the 1960s, the principal's role included being a facilitator and monitor of program implementation and ensuring compliance with federally funded programs. Principals also became involved with curriculum revision, staff development, and classroom intervention,

leading to the perception of principals as change agents (Rousmaniere, 2013). As the public education system transformed in response to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, which instituted federal funding for social enrichment programs for poor children, and the 1968 Bilingual Education Act, which provided special aid for children with limited English proficiency, principals bore the responsibility of implementing policies and shaping the progress of racial integration in their schools (Rousmaniere, 2013).

In the 1980s, the principal's attention turned from the challenge of achieving equity in schools to alignment with new state and federal demands and student accountability (Rousmaniere, 2013). In 2009, Race to the Top legislation was introduced by the federal government to overhaul underperforming schools (Howell, 2015). This legislation had four components: (a) new standards and assessments, (b) massively improved assessment and data systems, (c) greater quality of teachers and principals, and (d) a focus on turning around the bottom 5% of schools (Howell, 2015).

The role of the principal continues to evolve. However, the one constant throughout history has been an emphasis on student learning. Effective principals are instructional leaders and managers. They shape a vision of academic success for all students; they create a climate conducive to learning; they cultivate leadership in others; they improve instruction; and they manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Administrative progressives believe, "A strengthened principal's role was the lynchpin to social efficiency-oriented reform because the principal would be the local professional agent who would implement central office policies in the local school" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 32). The challenges inherent in the expectations of the principal's role in school improvement are complicated by the fact that the job still holds many of the same tasks and managerial

components as it did many years ago, despite the changes in the broader context of education as it exists today (Rousmaniere, 2013). The complexities as well as the core purpose of the principal's role are described by Rousmaniere (2013):

> Modern principals came to have less to do with student learning and more to do with upholding administrative structures and responding to public pressures. Yet by the nature of their background and role as educators, principals have always been concerned with student learning, and principals across time have played a pivotal role in shaping the educational culture of schools. (p. 5)

Rousmaniere's (2013) historical examination of the principal presented a picture of complex and contradictory responsibilities in the evolution of this important figure in the U.S. educational system. Roles and responsibilities run the gamut of employer, supervisor, professional figurehead, and inspirational leader, all while daily serving as the link between "a large bureaucratic system and the individual daily experiences of a large number of children and adults" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 3). The creation of the principal's role in the late 19th century changed internal power relations in schools as visualized by the researcher in Figure 1.

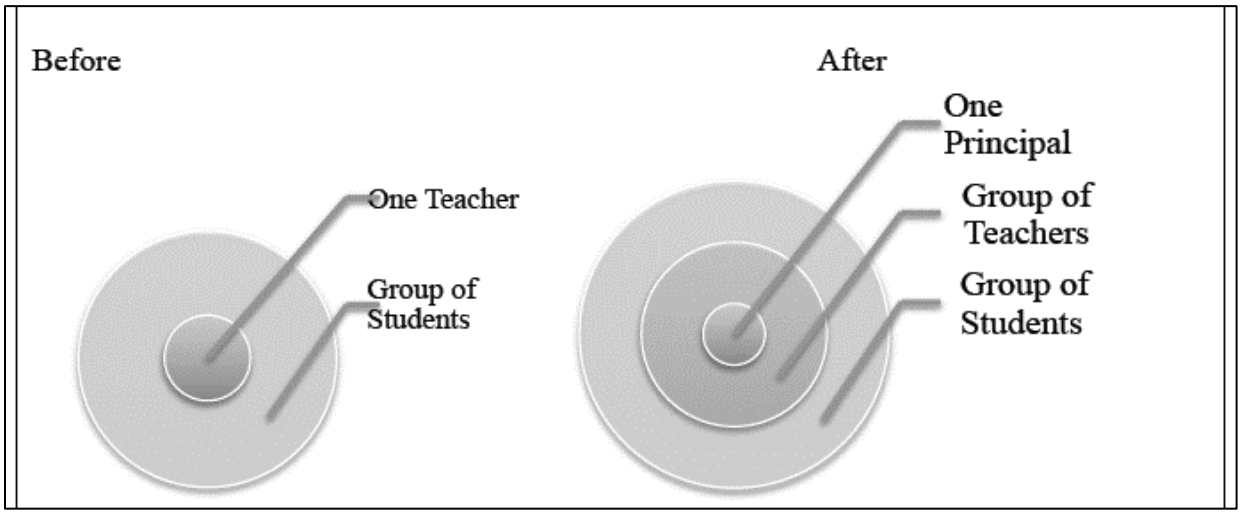

Figure 1. Schools before and after creation of the principal role in the late 19th century.

The growth of school administration was informed by education reformers who saw the bureaucratization of school organizations as the means for improving learning (Rousmaniere, 2013). As authority moved from the classroom to the principal's office, the principal performed important but routine functions in public education. Similar to the roles of middle managers in corporate bureaucracy, principals were conduits between central office administration and the school for implementing newly designed school systems at the beginning of the 20th century (Rousmaniere, 2013). The philosophy of John Dewey guided progressive educational thinkers to see how democratic practices in school would assist students in understanding how to understand and participate in a democratic society (Rousmaniere, 2013). Within this frame of thinking, the idea of democratic practice extended to inclusion of the community, especially during the post-Depression era in the United States. Despite principals' work at the school and community level, "The language and priorities of democracy were tempered by the language and priorities of educational management" (Rousmaniere, 2013, p. 60). Many reform initiatives followed, ranging from more accountability through standardized assessment systems, to programs of school choice meant to challenge the large bureaucracy of schooling and bring free-market competition into public education, to charter school legislation (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Great teachers can create and sustain a great classroom, but only a principal can create and sustain an excellent school. However, as Branch, Hanushek, and Rivkin (2013) found, principals believe the management component of principalships has shifted to that of human capital managers. Although much research promotes instructional leadership as a key component for an effective school leader (Branch et al., 2012; Coelli & Green, 2012; Dhuey & Smith, 2012), principals are unable to spend the majority of their time on that task.

Perhaps this imbalance sheds some light on the principal retention issue. Grissom, Loeb, and Master (2012) tracked Miami-Dade County public school principals and identified the time they spent on instructional leadership activities. Instructional leadership activities were defined as (a) coaching teachers to improve instruction, (b) developing the school's education plan, (c) evaluating teachers or curriculum, (d) informal classroom observations, and (e) planning or participating in professional development. Overall, Grissom et al. found that the participating principals spent 13% of their day on instructional leadership activities.

Principal leadership has transitioned to instructional-centered leadership. For example, Tulsa and Washington D.C. public schools redesigned their instructional leadership director program in 2013 to expand the number of principal supervisors. Principal supervisors in these regions have more of a hands-on experience within the schools they oversee and in turn are more apt to provide the much-needed support to the principals. This is an example of a principal supervisor providing needed support. Jennifer Pense, the principal of Skelly Primary School in Tulsa, admitted that she initially had a hard time being completely honest with Robinson (the school principal supervisor) about the difficulties she faced as a first-year principal (Saltzman, 2016). Pense stated, "When your supervisor comes to your building or sends an email that says, 'I want to talk to you,' there's always this, 'Oh, did I do something wrong?'" (Saltzman, 2016, p. 52). Eventually, their relationship strengthened, and "Pense now feels completely at ease with the relationship and understands the importance of being honest with Robinson" (Saltzman, 2016, p. 52). As Pense remarked, "It doesn't feel evaluative. She's truly a coach. That has taken away a lot of the fear of asking for help and not having to feel like I need to be perfect" (Saltzman, 2016, p. 52).

Another form of principal leadership is distributed leadership. Jones, Hadgraft, Harvey, Lefoe, and Ryland (2014) stated, "A leadership approach in which individuals who trust and respect each other's contributions collaborate together to achieve identified goals" (p. 13). Distributed leadership is built on respect rather than regulation:

> Its culture and values are based on trust that supports individual autonomy; acceptance of the need for change and development; a focus on activity undertaken collectively rather than by individual leaders in formal (structured) positions; and agreement by participants on mechanisms designed to resolve conflict given the participation of more people in a distributed leadership approach. (Jones et al., 2014, p. 131)

Educational Reform

The principalship has evolved along with educational reform. In 1958, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover identified a rebellious youth culture as a menace, which resulted in more aggressive discipline policies being implemented in schools and discipline procedures being assigned to administrators (Rousmaniere, 2013). In the 1960s, the Effective Schools Movement emerged. The principal's role included being a facilitator and monitor of program implementation charged with ensuring compliance with federally funded programs. Principals also became involved with curriculum revision, staff development, and classroom intervention, leading to the perception of principals as change agents (Casey, 2016). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, Civil Rights initiatives, which included racial integration of schools, support of minority cultures, and efforts to achieve equity, led to tensions, with school principals in the middle of the conflict (Rousmaniere, 2013). In 1965, the Elementary and Secondary School Act was passed and resulted in federal funding being provided to schools for enrichment programs for poor children (Title I).

In 1966, the Equality of Educational Opportunity Report, commonly known as the Coleman Report, was published and challenged beliefs that funding, teacher preparation, curriculum development, or educator professionalization had a greater impact on students than background and SES (Rousmaniere, 2013). The Coleman Report detailed the degree of segregation of minority groups of pupils and teachers in the schools and the relationship between students' achievement. Because Coleman (1966) determined that funding, teacher preparation, curriculum development, or educator professionalization had a greater impact on students than background, educational quality was assessed in terms of curricula offered, textbooks, laboratories, libraries, and the personal, social, and academic characteristics of the teachers and the student bodies in the schools. Coleman found that African American students and teachers were unequally segregated from their white counterparts and that the average minority pupil achieved less and was more affected by the quality of his or her school than the average white pupil.

In 1968, the Bilingual Education Act was passed, requiring educators to provide assistance for children with limited English proficiency (Rousmaniere, 2013). The 1969 Supreme Court decision in *Tinker v. Des Moines* supported constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression for students and teachers, while the 1975 Education for All Handicapped Children Act mandated that schools are responsible for the education of children with disabilities (Rousmaniere, 2013). A number of social and political forces from post-World War II through the 1970s affected public schools, created demands for new policies, and led to principals focusing primarily on understanding and applying system guidelines (see Appendix A).

The decade of the 1970s was especially tumultuous for public education. Many high expectations for federal educational programs were not achieved (Rousmaniere, 2013). By the

end of the 1970s, most teachers belonged to collective bargaining units, thereby complicating relationships between teachers and principals (Rousmaniere, 2013). The call for changes in public schools continued into the 1980s. By the early 1980s, most of America's citizens and political parties agreed that the United States was in an educational crisis. The first premise for this belief was based on the decline of test scores supported by the trend data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress and other tests, which were linked to the nation's economic problems of the time (Rousmaniere, 2013).

Although the first decade of the 21st century produced books, programs, and strategies that strive to be the voice for educational reform initiatives, very few reforms were articulated through theoretical case lenses (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). Instead, many books written to inform the work of improving schools were based on engaged debates over policies implemented (Knaak & Knaak, 2013). The following reform movements provide a holistic view of past efforts to address the needs of all students, all of which have affected the role of the principal.

Many national education goals found in Appendix B led to more changes in education, and the role of the principalship changed simultaneously in accord with their implementation. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was a reform that aimed to improve student achievement and close achievement gaps (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). Title I, Part A, supported programs and resources for disadvantaged students. Title IA funding was designed to aid in closing the achievement gaps via highly qualified staff in each classroom. Title II, Part A, called for resources to be provided for improving teacher and principal quality. It focused on preparing, training, and recruiting high-quality teachers and principals. Title II, Part D, mandated for improved student academic achievement using technology in schools. Title IV,

Part A, called for resources to establish a safe and drug-free learning environment to make student achievement possible (Congressional Research Services, 2001).

In 2010, the Obama administration offered revisions to NCLB in the way of flexibility, resources, and accountability for results (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). The suggested overhaul to NCLB, called A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2010), identified five priorities for education reform:

1. Develop college and career-ready students.
2. Provide great teachers and leaders in every school.
3. Provide equity and opportunity for all students.
4. Raise the bar and reward excellence.
5. Promote innovation and continuous improvement. (p. 1)

Further, the federal government has not only provided the means for states and districts to focus on improving education in general, but also more specifically to focus on improvement in low-performing schools located in high-poverty areas.

Failure to improve schools in the last few decades is not due to a lack of funding or ignorance on how to improve low-performing schools—it is due to the will and persistence to not do what we already know (Brown, 2012). For example, Brown (2012) studied two high school principals in Texas, responsible for turning around low-performing schools, who demonstrated effective leadership practices. After several years of being considered dropout factories, new leadership with specific processes and procedures was appointed to these two high schools, and the schools were turned around in a short time. While these successes are limited in

scope, they are high priority, not peripheral, elements of organization performance (Brown, 2012).

Reform movements and the era of accountability can be argued as a move in the right direction for education in the United States (Brown, 2012), and within them, the role of the principal continued to evolve (Casey, 2016). However, the constant throughout history has been the emphasis on student learning (Casey, 2016). Effective principals are instructional leaders and managers. They shape a vision of academic success for all students; they create a climate conducive to learning; they cultivate leadership in others; they improve instruction; and they manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Effective Principals

Effective school leadership is one key to promoting success (Wallace Foundation, 2013), and the principal is best positioned to ensure consecutive years of effective teaching for students (Briggs, Davis, & Cheney, 2012). Research suggested that principals contribute to school success by creating an environment of collegial and productive collaboration among staff, wherein optimal learning environments are created versus directly affecting student academic outcomes through identified leadership behaviors or roles (MetLife, 2016). Thus, through their leadership, principals influence teacher and instructional quality by informing instruction through retention and selection of high-quality teachers (Chiang, Lipscomb, & Gill, 2012).

Brewer and Klar (2014) determined four central leadership practices that influence learning: positioning the course, encouraging others to grow, reorganizing the company, and directing the curriculum. Ylimaki and Jacobson's (as cited in Gurr, 2015) case studies of successful leadership depicted how incorporating these core practices promotes student performance. According to Hallinger (as cited in Brewer & Klar, 2014), "Effective leadership

for learning is adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions of the school over time" (p. 425).). "Effective principals help define and promote high expectations, they attack teacher isolation and fragmented effort, and they connect directly with teachers and the classroom" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 13).

University of Washington researchers found effective principals also emphasize research-based strategies to improve teaching and learning and they initiate discussions about instructional approaches, both in teams and with individual teachers (Mendels, 2013). They pursue these strategies despite the preference of many teachers to be left alone. In practice, leaders must become intimately familiar with the technical core of schooling that is required to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Porter, Murphy et al. (as cited in Wallace Foundation, 2013) reported the principal "pressing for high academic standards will, for example, map out rigorous targets for improvements in planning to get the faculty on board to do what is necessary to implement and support students and teachers in meeting the goals" (p. 9). Porter, Murphy et al. reported principals will challenge low expectations, advocate for district funding of students with special needs, communicate with families so that they are aware of the learning goals, and monitor test results (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

Today, effective principals need to be human capital managers with the ability to hire new teachers who have the skills and practices necessary to enhance student achievement and to dismiss teachers who are underperforming because teacher quality appears to be the fundamental element affecting student performance (Briggs et al., 2012). An effective principal organizes the school community around instruction and high expectations, holds teachers and students accountable, and provides high-quality professional development for all staff (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The Illinois Education Research Council investigated the relationships of

principal characteristics to teacher qualifications and student achievements using Illinois data (Johnson, 2014). The purpose of the study was to measure the impact of principal characteristics (academic background, professional experience in Illinois public schools, and principal's race) on growth in student proficiency and teacher qualifications over time. From 2000 through 2006, statistical data were collected from Chicago elementary and middle schools, non-Chicago elementary and middle schools, Chicago high schools, and non-Chicago high schools. The teacher variables were school-level measures of experience and academic background. Student variables were selected from previous evidence supporting poverty concentrations (Johnson, 2014). Students who resided in higher concentrated areas of poverty were variables in this study. A summary of the findings revealed that principal experience of 6 or more years at a school had positive effects in elementary and middle schools on student achievement, and if the principal had years as an assistant principal at the same school, positive effects were also found on student achievement growth (Johnson, 2014).

State and district administrators recognize the need to embrace school leadership as being essential for successful school reform (Wallace Foundation, 2013). As state boards began to pay attention to improving school leadership—in response to NCLB and accountability mandates—subsequent research validated examples of effective practices, especially for large urban districts (Wallace Foundation, 2013). A recently published report of the Wallace Foundation's (2013) research and field experiences noted that four practices were believed central to effective school leadership: a vision of academic success, a hospitable school climate, a cultivation of leadership in others, and improved instruction.

Other research revealed similar findings. Since 2001, New Leaders (2012) has trained over 800 leaders who have made a difference in the lives of over 250,000 students. New

Leaders' mission is to offer states and districts tools and strategies to get more excellent leaders in schools and help all principals get better. A review of this research (Wallace Foundation, 2013) identified four core leadership practices: setting direction, developing people, redesigning the organization, and managing the instructional program. Setting direction entails the leader building a shared vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, creating high performance expectations, and communicating the direction needed (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Developing people involves providing individual support and consideration, offering intellectual stimulation, and modeling appropriate values and practices. Redesigning the organization includes building collaborative cultures, modifying organizational structures to nurture collaboration, building productive relations with families and communities, and connecting the school to the wider community (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The core strategy of New Leaders is to manage the instructional program by staffing the program and monitoring the progress of students, teachers, and the school (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

An effective leader at a high-poverty, high-performance school is one who knows how to use varied styles of leadership as necessary for students to succeed, is focused on high expectations, and fosters a safe, orderly, and collaborative climate conducive to learning and success for every child (Parrett & Budge, 2012). School principals, especially of low SES schools, who view their role as transformative rather than static, should develop a collaborative vision, make change happen, and create a school culture where teachers can teach, and children can learn (Blankstein, Noguera, & Kelly, 2016). In a study of the relationship between effective school research and principals of high-performing, low SES schools, Suber (2012) contended that school principals demonstrate success through close physical and psychological involvement with classroom instruction and student learning. Suber sought to learn the characteristics of

principals of the very few high performing, high-poverty elementary schools in urban and rural South Carolina; no effort was made to connect this finding to principal leadership style.

Characteristics common to leaders of effective schools regardless of the students' SES included "(a) alignment of instruction, (b) supervision of teacher behavior and student achievement, (c) professional development, and (d) a positive school culture" (Suber, 2012, p. 2). Suber (2012) also asserted that leaders of effective schools generally exemplify transformational leadership. Suber had only one research question for his grounded theory case study of two exemplary high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools in South Carolina: "What are the leadership characteristics of principals who promote student achievement in high-poverty, high-performing elementary schools?" (p. 3). Exploring the characteristics of principals through the effective school research lens, Suber assessed principals' effectiveness on the following factors: "(a) instruction and assessment, (b) supervision of teacher behaviors and student achievement, (c) professional development, (d) teacher attrition, and (e) school culture" (p. 5). Using a mixed-methods approach, Suber surveyed teachers to discover each school's climate and culture, observed interactions and processes in each school to determine their impact on student achievement, and interviewed principals about their day-to-day activities (one similarity to the present study).

Suber (2012) found that effective school characteristics were present in schools that epitomize teacher empowerment, strong relationships with the community, a visible team effort, and collaboration. Leaders who promoted these characteristics created a culture of student and teacher success. The high-poverty school principals who promote teacher empowerment, community, teacher relationships, and who set effective examples for all invested in the welfare and success of a school and its students are the ones who affect student achievement.

Leithwood and Sun (2012) noted that leadership practices targeted directly at improving instruction had significant positive effects on teachers' working conditions and positive indirect effects on student achievement. The positive targeted teacher instruction caused an increase in student achievement (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). However, when leadership was shared between teachers and principals, teachers' working relationships were stronger and student achievement was higher (Leithwood & Sun, 2012). Leadership effects on student achievement, occurred largely because effective leadership strengthened the professional community, encouraging teachers to work together to improve their practice and to improve student learning.

A school's climate is created by the school administrator's leadership style (Suber, 2012). The elements that contribute to creating a school's climate are the perspectives of principals and teachers. Principals can set up a positive milieu, culture, or instructional climate that supports teachers' professional learning, thus leading teachers to report high levels of instructional climate in high-performing schools (Seashore-Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010).

Leadership in Areas of High Poverty

The stark reality is that only a small number of principals persist past three years within high-poverty school districts (Rousmaniere, 2013). Those who persist have additional stressors within their leadership roles. These stressors include the challenge of ensuring high-quality education for all and reducing educational disparities between high- and low-performing students (Rousmaniere, 2013). Less money in the community equates to fewer financial resources available to the schools in the community. These multiple layers of forces that work against student success in school create a challenging milieu for moving schools from low to high performing (Rousmaniere, 2013). Consequently, these stressors countermand a principal's longevity since current research demonstrates that "effective principals are responsible for

establishing a school wide vision of commitment to high standards and the success of all students" (Wallace Foundation, 2013, p. 1).

Low achievement and high dropout rates among poor students continue to plague public schools in the United States. Hayet, Woods, and Martin (2016) posited, "Our nation will profit by or pay for whatever they become" (p. 1). Unfortunately, while reform movements have been the process for begetting change in schools, they have not brought about the change needed for poor students (Hayet et al., 2016). Importantly, principal retention in high-poverty schools would aid in transforming these schools. As an example, a principal of a high-poverty, high-performing school in rural Missouri implemented the concept of educating the whole child along with the synergy of expectations (Hayet et al., 2016). Educating the whole child is based on the leadership practices of providing for basic needs, academic interventions, reading, extended academic time, and relationships (Hayet et al., 2016). While the importance of relationships may seem obvious for children living in poverty, these relationships are a key factor (Hayet et al., 2016). Strong, secure, safe relationships help stabilize children's behavior and provide the core guidance that children need to build successful social skills (Hayet et al., 2016). Further, an important reason to cultivate a relationship with disadvantaged elementary students is to help them feel connected with their teachers.

The Missouri students showed improvements in their reading and vocabulary abilities after connecting with their teachers and leaders (Hayet et al., 2016). Moreover, the students of the Missouri elementary school have strong connections with their teachers because of the emphasis on knowing each child well set forth by the principal and embraced by the staff members (Hayet et al., 2016). The Missouri principal in this study built strong relationships with the students and student's families. This requires time and retention on the part of the principal.

Factors such as lack of proper housing, unemployment or underemployment, poor or nonexistent medical care, poor environmental factors, and lack of access to social benefits cast a heavy burden on children and families living in poverty. In America, 16.4 million poor children and 7.4 million live in extreme poverty. Poor children under the age of five are the poorest age group in America, and one in four infants, toddlers, or preschoolers are poor during the years of greatest brain development (Child Trends, 2016). Schools compensating for all of those factors is impossible; however, schools investing the resources necessary to help children succeed academically is possible, and the principal plays a key role (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010).

School leadership, from formal and informal sources, helps to shape school conditions (including, for example, goals, culture, and structures) and classroom conditions (including the content of instruction, the size of classrooms, and the pedagogy used by teachers). Many factors both within and outside schools and classrooms influence teachers' sense of professional community. School and classroom conditions, teachers' professional communities, and student/family background conditions are directly responsible for the learning of students. Many schools serving poor children and poor children of color have observed school-related factors that may contribute to the further decline of childhood and future adulthood opportunities to achieve social mobility and to participate actively in the best of what American society has to offer (Adams, 2015). These factors include teachers and other adults who are not highly skilled and who hold low expectations for these children (Adams, 2015), which is unfortunate because the power of instructional leaders is their ability to maintain the focus of school processes on student achievement through their influence on the organizational conditions and instructional quality in the school (Smith, Doyle, & Bierly, 2016).

Beyond the mandates, tensions, and social debates that have long swirled around public schools in the United States, many Americans today still tend to believe that education provides children the equitable opportunity to become economically self-sufficient, to participate in society as responsible citizens, to promote cultural unity, and to enhance individual lives (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013). But the reality is that a majority of public school students and more than three of four black and Hispanic children are unable to read or compute at grade level in the fourth or eighth grade and will be unprepared to succeed in our increasingly competitive global economy (Reardon et al., 2013), and poverty plays a large role in this imbalance. As Aliyu (2016) pointed out, "There is a significant relationship between the family socioeconomic status and academic achievement" (p.1).

In 1966, the Coleman Report identified a negative relationship between poverty, race or ethnicity, and academic achievement (as cited in Adams, 2015); this finding led to the establishment of the Head Start preschool program. Subsequent decades of research have focused on trying to figure out exactly why this relationship exists and persists, but the studies, usually sociological in nature, have been unsuccessful in identifying specific biological, educational, or policy causes of the relationship between poverty and poor academic achievement (Adams, 2015). Poverty and its ill effects on education exist, but schools with high rates of principal retention can counter these effects.

The Accountability of Principals

Over the past two decades, public schools in the United States have experienced an increase in the expectations of students, teachers, and principals. Additionally, several studies indicated that at the state level, accountability reforms have led to increased student achievement (Goodman, 2012). These reforms resulted in added pressure placed upon principals. From high-

stakes testing to high standards for curriculum and instruction, the expectations for student achievement seem to have been ratcheted up. Principals strongly influence teacher quality: therefore, student achievement through the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers and through the creation of a school culture focused on learning and characterized by high expectations for all students is significant (Briggs et al., 2012). This strenuous demand placed on public school principals contributes to the shortage of qualified candidates for available principal positions (Hewitt, Denny, & Pijanowski, 2011). In their 2011 survey of teachers in 245 Arkansas school districts, Hewitt et al. (2011) found that testing and accountability mandates within the past 15 years were the leading reason why educators were not pursuing principalships. In addition, because of amplified accountability on principals and the "relative change in risk-reward structure of low- versus high-performing schools," some principals believed that their pay did not adjust to compensate for the hours required to adequately perform daily (Li, 2012, p. 2).

Major educational reform efforts, e.g., the National Defense Education Act of 1958, the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (see Appendix A), the Goals 2000 (see Appendix B), and the NCLB, have been introduced within the last 30 years. These reforms originated from the idea that American schools were failing and needed reform on the local, state, and federal levels. After the implementation of NCLB, principals were given the power and authority to make school building-level decisions as proactive measures to comply with federal and state guidelines. Thus, the role and accountability of school principals were impacted. School principal roles now include increased amounts of complex issues, regulations and mandates, formal accountability policies and procedures, staffing challenges, and professional development strategies. Expectations associated with increased accountability were added to the already

arduous role of the principal, raising the concern that the role has become unmanageable. Additionally, the literature raises significant concerns about the practice of punitive forms of accountability, and little to no evidence suggests that these punitive sanctions have had any impact on school performance or leadership (Fullan, Rincón-Gallardo, & Hargreaves, 2015).

However, some argue that while federal and local accountability may be pushing more principals toward a focus on instructional leadership, the reasons for the shift are more rooted in bureaucratic compliance than they are in building capacity within the teaching ranks to improve instruction and learning (Fullan et al., 2015). Fullan et al. (2015) have written at length about the importance of capacity building over punitive accountability. Calling accountability a rigid priority and attitude, Fullan et al. stated, "Accountability assumes that the most important thing to do is to make sure that a person down below acts in line with the directions of criteria passed down by someone higher up" (p. 26). Fullan et al. argued that accountability is more than measuring results. Schools compensating for all those factors is impossible; however, schools investing the resources necessary to help children succeed academically is possible, and the principal plays a key role.

Principal Turnover

Evidence shows that a greater number of school administrators leave urban schools than schools located in suburban or rural settings (Goldring, Taie, & Owens, 2014). Schools with the highest concentration of low socioeconomic students and overall low student academic performance have higher rates of administrative turnover than schools in more stable neighborhoods (Reames, Kochan, & Zhu, 2013). Toner (2013) found that across the country, schools are increasingly churning through principals, and the problem is worse in urban districts with dwindling resources. These schools are routinely paired with first-year principals who lack

the experience of their suburban counterparts (Clifford, Menon, Gangi, Condon, & Hornung, 2012). When principals were surveyed as to their reasons for leaving, the following issues came up: (a) external mandates from national or state sources, (b) need for more time with family, (c) time requirements of the position, (d) frustration with barriers, (e) internal mandates, and (f) burnout (Reames et al., 2013). Mascall and Leithwood (2010) posited that the current accountability climate in the United States may also be the reason why principals leave, inferring that low student achievement leads to frequent principal turnover. Fuller, Hollingworth, and Young (2015) suggested four indirect working conditions that affect principal turnover and principal effectiveness: (a) state policy, (b) leadership preparation programs, (c) degree of autonomy, and (d) district policy/supervisor qualities.

When 114,330 principals were surveyed in 2012–2013 as to their intentions of staying or leaving their positions after the school year, 78% of the principals reported they were staying at their current school (Goldring et al., 2014). Of those over the age of 55, 20% of public school principals reported they were leaving, and 38% of these individuals reported that they were retiring. Goldring et al. (2014) reported that 20% of new principals left within two years and that the highest number of principals departed from schools with the lowest adequate yearly progress (AYP) scores, verification that the schools that are struggling tend to be more at risk of not having stable leadership. Moreover, Burkhauser, Gates, Hamilton, and Ikemoto (2012) found that when a first-year principal left, the school struggled in subsequent years. The negative consequences for student achievement were significant.

Montgomery County High School (Kentucky) is an example of the effect of inconsistent leadership. Since August 2012, the high school has had 10 changes in school leaders. The impact of such changes has been apparent in the most recent test score data. As of 2014, the

district ranked in the 91st percentile in the state. However, Montgomery County High School ranked in the 24th percentile in the state and is in the category of *needs improvement* (Kentucky Department of Education, 2014). This designation could stem from the lack of consistent leadership at the high school. Since 2012, the school has had two head principals, six assistant principals, and three curriculum specialists. Of the five administrative team members for the 2014–2015 school year, four of them were new to the district and three of them had no prior administrative experience. The high turnover of school leadership has not established a clear vision of success for either the teachers or the students. In schools where the principals remain more than 5 years, teachers are also more likely to remain as well (Hull, 2012).

School administrator turnover can be attributed to several reasons. The professional stress of the position is a major factor—of those who leave the profession, as many as 58% cite the stress of the job (Sorapuru, 2012). Only 37% cited salary as a factor in their dissatisfaction with the job (Sorapuru, 2012). Another suggested reason for the high turnover rate for school leaders is the lack of proper training prior to accepting the position. The criticism of training programs offered at college and universities is that the admission criteria are often lenient compared to other fields (Lee, 2012). This leniency can affect the quality and character of candidates who apply for positions. Other critics of the education leadership programs contend that such programs do not adequately prepare these future leaders for the variety and scope of modern students and educational issues (Lee, 2012). Additionally, discrepancies exist between what is generally taught and what is the reality of school leadership (Lee, 2012).

To ensure that the most qualified candidates are applying for leadership positions, admission to training programs must become more selective (Lee, 2012). One useful framework for thinking through the complexity of types of principal turnover comes from Farley-Ripple,

Solano, and McDuffie (2012). They identified four roles (teacher, assistant principal, principal, and central office) and three levels within education systems (school, district, and state) to illustrate possible career transitions for principals. When arranging a matrix of all possible transitions that a principal could annually experience, 60 possible transitions were presented, which did not account for additional types of jobs that principals could assume outside of education. Given the multiple roles and workplaces principals can experience, researchers must distinguish diverse types of principal transitions when examining factors influencing principal turnover (Farley-Ripple et al., 2012).

McKibben (2013) examined the influence of principal preservice training programs on principal turnover but found no considerable influence of district-level preservice training programs on the probability of principals moving to another school or leaving the principal profession; these findings were based on multinomial logistic regression on the Schools and Staff Survey and the Principal Follow up Survey in 2008–2009. The Schools and Staff Survey helps leadership seek out honest opinions about their school. The Principal Follow up survey is a questionnaire that rates the school principal. McKibben speculated that gaining access to preservice training programs did not necessarily imply the value of these programs and that the quality of training should also be considered. Given the limitation of research in this area, more studies remain to be conducted to reveal the relationship between the content, attributes, and quality of principal preservice training programs and their relationship to principal turnover.

More recently, Fuller et al. (2015) summarized four indirect yet powerful working conditions that influence principal turnover in small and midsized urban districts: (a) state policy, (b) leadership preparation programs, (c) principal autonomy, and (d) district policy. Fuller et al. found that intrinsic rewards, overall workload, and a feeling of effectiveness were important

factors influencing principal retention. Of the principals surveyed, 86% agreed they should be held accountable for student outcomes. Although many principals agreed to be held accountable for student outcomes, 84% reported high stress two or more days per week related to the impossibility of the job due to long hours and intense pressure to raise achievement.

School Principal Retention

The problem of principal turnover has been well researched over the last decade, but very little research concerning the factors contributing to principal longevity in high-poverty schools has been conducted (Hewitt et al., 2011). Attracting and retaining qualified principals is becoming an increasingly difficult task for public school districts around the nation (Hewitt et al., 2011). A recent figure from a nationally representative study indicated that schools experience a new principal every three to four years, averaging 2.78 principals over 10 years (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). High-poverty schools experience a higher than average turnover. Principal turnover in high-poverty districts averages 27% annually (Superville, 2014). Nearly 50% of our country's principals leave in their third year (Superville, 2014).

A limited but growing body of research suggests that change in leadership has several negative outcomes, including declines in student achievement, interruption of program or reform implementation, low teacher morale, and development of resilient cultures that resist change (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). These studies also suggest that rapid or frequent changes in school leadership can be highly disruptive and hinder improvement efforts (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). Although gains in student achievement temporarily slow whenever a new principal arrives, the impact is felt more at the high-poverty, low-achieving schools (Seashore-Louis et al., 2010). These adverse effects influence high-stakes testing and the expectations for student

achievement are amplified. Concurrently, principals are being held accountable for increasing student achievement (Blankstein et al., 2016).

Tekleselassie and Villarreal (2011) analyzed data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (7,740 principals nationwide) to examine the factors associated with principals' mobility and departure intentions (Reagan, 2016). Tekleselassie and Villarreal found that work-related stress and autonomy in the position contributed to the departure of public school principals. Moreover, they found that a personal sense of worth in the position, salary increase, satisfaction with the district, and enthusiasm about the principalship reduced the intention to leave the position, as did the requirement of training for principals. Fuller (2012) focused on the relationships between demographics, SES, student achievement, and principal turnover and indicated that principal turnover appeared to be higher in low-performing schools and those located in areas of low SES. As principals become more experienced, those principals who remain in the position tend to move to schools that are easier to run—schools with higher income, higher-achieving students, and fewer minorities. High-poverty students having the same principal throughout their enrollment at a given campus has become unusual (School Leaders Network, 2014). High-poverty schools are 50% less likely than middle-class schools to be led by the same principal over 6 years (School Leaders Network, 2014). Even more troubling, one Texas study found that 12% of poor-performing leaders were shuffled among underperforming schools each year but rarely moved out of the profession (School Leaders Network, 2014).

Mentors and coaches are typically reserved for early-career principals and principals in need of intervention (School Leaders Network, 2014). They have been proven highly effective at building principal instructional skill when the following components of the program are in place:

- tight match between the expertise, needs, leadership style, and school experience of the coach and protégé principal;
- coach focuses specifically on improving instructional leadership;
- sufficient training and resources for the coach;
- coach work is integral to the professional development continuum;
- building leadership knowledge within an existing framework; [and]
- support the specific needs of their principal protégé. (School Leaders Network, 2014)

Principals frequently express, "If only I was allowed to. . ." and "I am not adequately supported to do this job" (School Leaders Network, 2014, p. 17). No manner of additional training and add-on support will keep principals on the job if district and school conditions make effective leadership impossible (School Leaders Network, 2014). Two efforts are needed: (a) address policy barriers that hamper principal success and (b) develop more supportive structures within the district that enable principals to learn and improve (School Leaders Network, 2014).

Retention requires sustained efforts by tenacious leaders. Reducing the rate of turnover while simultaneously increasing principal effectiveness is essential for creating the robust learning environments that every child deserves (School Leaders Network, 2014). In their analysis of public schools in Memphis, Chicago, Baltimore, New York, Washington DC, and Oakland, Burkhauser et al. (2012) examined principals in their first year on the job. Burkhauser et al. focused on understanding the likelihood of principals staying in their positions, as well as their practices, attitudes, and perceptions of their schools. Among the researchers' findings were suggestions for increasing the likelihood of principal retention. Gaining teacher buy-in was strongly associated with the likelihood that a first-year principal would return the following year and was the foundation for all the researchers' recommendations. *Gaining teacher buy-in* was

defined as getting teachers to buy into the vision and proposals of the principal. A rule of thumb is that a principal should be in place five to seven years to have a beneficial impact on a school (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The average length of a principal's stay in 80 schools studied by Minnesota-Toronto researchers was 3.6 years (Wallace Foundation, 2013).

High Cost of Principal Turnover

The majority of states and preparation programs do not know with any certainty if principal preparation investments help sustain principals in the job (Briggs et al., 2012). Average districts lose anywhere from 15% to 30% of principals each year (Béteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2012). Each school vacancy requires extensive costs to replace these individuals. The resulting churn causes student achievement to drop in math and English language arts in the year following the vacancy, and the next principal up to three years to regain forward progress for the school (Béteille et al., 2012). States with the highest proportion of novice principals also have the lowest graduation rates. The principal-graduation rate relationship is as predictable as the relationship between SAT scores and college GPA (National Center for Education Statistics Institute of Education Sciences, 2013). Long-term principals have a positive effect on graduation just as above average SAT scores correlate with an above average college GPA.

Regular rotation of principals by their districts every three to five years has more of a negative than positive effect on improvement efforts (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) came to this conclusion after they analyzed case studies on 18 different organizations. Hargreaves and Fullan addressed the fallacy of replacement in leadership. Good principals should be allowed to remain in place to support and expand meaningful service opportunities. Holme and Rangel (2012), in a qualitative case study on five high-poverty, low-performing high schools in Texas, suggested that higher teacher and principal turnover creates an

instability that affects a school's ability to sustain school reform efforts. Holme and Rangel looked at how educators interpreted and responded to high-stakes accountability pressure. Data from the schools that showed instability with leadership pointed to difficulty in establishing shared norms and systems to achieve schoolwide goals (Holme & Rangel, 2012).

Frequent principal turnover could interrupt the implementation or even terminate long-term instructional programs, thus causing loss of institutional memory, inconsistency of instructional goals and reform agenda, and a loss of educational resources (Béteille et al., 2012; Ni, Sun, & Rorrer, 2015). Beteille et al. (2012) found that higher turnover was associated with lower student performance on reading and math achievement tests, apparently because turnover takes a toll on the overall climate of the school. Manjula and Manichander (2016) stated:

> Schools experiencing exceptionally rapid principal turnover, for example, are often reported to suffer from lack of shared purpose, cynicism among staff about principal commitment, and an inability to maintain a school-improvement focus long enough to actually accomplish any meaningful change. (p. 77)

Many states have incorporated sign-on bonuses for principalship positions. In some instances, where candidates are hard to attract, particularly given the challenge of some of America's toughest-to-lead schools, districts are offering signing bonuses to out-of-town hires. In Chicago, high-quality out-of-town principals are paid $25,000 to sign a contract, a practice common to 373 other districts in 2012.

Summary

A prevalent need for effective school principals at poverty-stricken schools is obvious. A large body of research demonstrates that the early learning experiences of aspiring principals play a large role in their later successes (Matlach, 2015). Historical events and continued

changes to governmental policy inform the principalship. Over the last century, the roles and responsibilities of the principal have evolved from being a teacher/principal with minimal administrative tasks to being one who must facilitate integration, ensure implementation and compliance of state and federal programs, serve as a community liaison and data analyst, and maintain instructional and student learning focus. Throughout this period, while the policies may have changed, the added responsibilities remained (Casey, 2016). Researchers theorized that the changes in governmental policy and aggressive approach to closing the achievement gap have affected principal turnover (Casey, 2016). Seventeen years after the phenomenon of principal turnover was identified, principal turnover continues at twice the rate of the business sector goal of 10%, with a 15% to 30% turnover rate (Casey, 2016). Schools with high-minority, low-income, and low-achieving student populations are at the higher range of turnover rates. Researchers have identified why principals leave, as well as the affect principals have on the school community in terms of teacher retention, student achievement, program stability, and the district's ability to recruit qualified replacements (Casey, 2016).

An abundance of research on inhibitors to pursuing and remaining as principal exists. However, a gap remains in the research between what factors motivate aspiring principals to enter the principalship and what factors contribute to the retention of longstanding principals in high-poverty schools (Sapienza, 2013). This study attempted to ascertain what those factors are. The theories guiding this study were Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory and SDT. The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory identifies factors that relate to job satisfaction and dissatisfaction. SDT includes six mini-theories that could cause motivation to act without external influence.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the contributing factors that motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. In this study, longstanding was defined as five or more years of service in a high-poverty school. The research design, site selection, and participants are discussed in this chapter. Additionally, sampling procedures; the researcher's role; data collection methods such as in-depth interviews and focus groups; data analysis methods; trustworthiness with credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability; and ethical considerations are also discussed.

Design

This study was a qualitative multiple case study that focused on high-poverty public schools of South Carolina. Case study research is a qualitative approach wherein the investigator explores real-life cases over time and reports case themes (Creswell, 2013). The investigator used various forms of qualitative data such as interviews and focus groups. Qualitative studies clarify the meaning and beliefs of participants while giving understanding about how the context influences their behavior (Maxwell, 2013). Yin (1994) emphasized that multiple cases strengthen the results by replicating and increasing the robustness of the findings. One benefit of the qualitative multiple case study is conducting the investigation within a real-world context (Yin, 2009). This type of design was appropriate for this study because the researcher collected data from different principals at high-poverty schools and determined patterns in the findings. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. This study

investigated the how and why of long-term principalship in high-poverty schools rather than testing a hypothesis.

Research Questions

CQ1: What lived experiences of principals serving in high-poverty schools contribute to them remaining in their current positions for 5 or more years? The research questions were the following:

SQ1: What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools?

SQ2: What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?

SQ3: What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools?

Setting

The principals interviewed in the study were from Spartanburg, South Carolina School Districts Three, Six, and Seven. Each principal in this study leads a high-poverty school. Spartanburg School District Three had an enrollment of 2,975 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12. School District Three employed seven principals (four women and three males). One third of the student enrollment was eligible for free lunch. The student population in Spartanburg School District Three consisted of 73% Caucasian, 15% African America, 7% Hispanic, 4% Multiracial, and 1% Asian and Native American. Three out of seven principals qualify as long-term. Principals and assistant principals were in each school. A superintendent oversaw each school's administration (Spartanburg School District Three, 2018).

Spartanburg School District Six had an enrollment of 11,147 students in grades pre-kindergarten through 12. Half of the student enrollment (52%) was eligible for free lunch. Of the students in Spartanburg School District Six 18% lived below the poverty line. The student

population consisted of 45% Caucasian, 31% African American, 16% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 4% Multiracial, and 1% Native Americans and Pacific Islanders. The principal turnover rate was two out of 13 qualifying as long-term. Principals and assistant principals were in each school. A superintendent oversaw each school's administration (Spartanburg School District Six, 2018).

Spartanburg School District Seven had an enrollment of 7,943 students in grades kindergarten through 12 and employs 13 principals. Of the student enrollment, 71% was eligible for free lunch. Thus, the student population provided an adequate pool of participants due to the high percentage of students who qualify for free and reduced meals. The student population in the Spartanburg School District Seven is predominantly African American and consists of 56% African American, 32% Caucasian, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian, and 3% other. Five out of thirteen principals qualify as long-term. Diversity among the principals existed in the Spartanburg School District Seven schools with five female and eight male principals. Principals and assistant principals in each school and a superintendent oversaw each school's administration (Spartanburg School District Seven, 2018).

Participants

The 13 participants for this study were selected using the homogenous purpose sampling technique (Creswell, 2013). Participant parameters included principals who served five or more years in high-poverty schools, male and female, and varied ethnicities. I used the homogenous purposive sampling technique to identify and select information-rich cases related to long-term high-poverty principalships. Table 1 contains a description of the education and teaching experience of the 13 individuals who participated in the study.

Table 1

Description of Participants

Participants	Years of teaching experience	Years as principal of high-poverty school	Education
George	6	5	Doctorate
Joseph	6	38	Education specialist
Paul	5	5	Masters
Sally	9	19	Masters
Dorothy	4	24	Masters
Sylvia	14	20	Doctorate
Carl	17	17	Doctorate
Will	5	13	Doctorate
Tim	9	11	Masters
Caroline	8	14	Masters
Michelle	18	13	Doctorate
Lucy	10	17	Masters
Mark	3	20	Education specialist

Procedures

First, I identified several institutions in which I wanted to conduct this study. I sought preliminary permission from those institutions to conduct the research (see Appendix C). I then sought approval from Liberty University's institutional review board to conduct the study and collect data (see Appendix D). I contacted potential participants were contacted through email (see Appendix E) and determined eligibility based on their email responses. I sent consent forms to those eligible and included in the study all who returned their consent forms (see Appendix F). I interviewed either in person or by the phone those selected for the study.

The Researcher's Role

As the human instrument, I was a participant and factor in the research. I am an African American female who attended some of these same district schools as a child. I guarded myself against any bias to ensure that the research was not tainted. I was not connected professionally or personally to any of the participants. I am a certified early childhood elementary educator. I received a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary studies (sociology/ business) in 2001 and a Master of Teaching degree from Converse College in 2004. I have taught for 5 years as a kindergarten teacher and 8 years as a first-grade teacher. My desire is to make a significant contribution to the research regarding the connectedness of education and poverty among students in high-poverty schools. My bias is that academic success can and must increase among high-poverty, low-performing schools by retaining more long-term principals. This concern stems from reading the statistics reported each year concerning high-poverty schools with below-average state standardized test scores. I know more can be done to increase academic success for these children, and I am passionate about finding solutions to this problem.

Data Collection

During data collection, the researcher must focus on the actual type of data and the procedures for collecting them (Creswell, 2013). In practice data collection involves the researcher gaining permission, conducting a good sampling strategy, and determining how to record and store information (Creswell, 2013). When data collection includes multiple sources of evidence, researchers use triangulation of the data to establish the trustworthiness of a study. Data triangulation consisted of in-depth interviews with 10 current long-term principals of high-poverty schools, a focus group with three retired long-term principals of high-poverty schools, and an analysis of data school brochures and online report cards to compare the principals'

comments with the schools' teacher retention rates and achievement scores during the principals' tenure.

Patton (2002) detailed three types of interviews: the conversational interview, the general interview approach, and the open-ended interview. The researcher typically begins with the conversational interview. In the current study, I began with the conversational interview to get to know the interviewee or focus group members, and then moved on to the general and open-ended questions. The interviews and focus group were audio recorded. My research was based primarily on their experiences as they related them to me in the interviews and focus groups. I used the information I gained from the individual interviews to ask more questions during the focus group. Document analysis included statistics from state and school websites. I examined how faculty retention and school performance compared among some of principals interviewed. The document analysis helped to confirm information attained from the interviews.

In-Depth Interviews

Interviews are the most common form of data collection in qualitative research (Jamshed, 2014). Interviews are essential for case study designs because most case studies are about human affairs or behavioral events (Yin, 2009). Yin (2009) stated, "Case study interviews require you to operate on two levels at the same time: satisfying the needs of your line of inquiry while simultaneously putting forth 'friendly' and 'nonthreatening' questions in your open-ended interviews" (p. 107). Most qualitative research interviews are lightly structured, semi-structured, or in-depth (Jamshed, 2014). I conducted semi-structured interviews in the principal's schools or my home school. The interviews were conducted during the afternoon and most lasted from 20 to 45 minutes. I hoped the participants would feel comfortable to share information about their

experiences as principals at high-poverty public schools. The open-ended interview questions were the following:

1. Please introduce yourself to me and walk me through a timeline of your career from your start at a university.
2. Why do long-term high-poverty public school principals remain in their principalship?
3. How have the challenges you have faced as a long-term principal inspired you to continue in your principalship?
4. How have specific strategies supported your work as a long-term principal?
5. How do your values and beliefs contribute to your practices as principal of a high-poverty public school?
6. How are you defying the odds by being a longstanding (i.e., served in same position 5 or more years) principal of a high-poverty public school?
7. Why are you defying the odds by being a longstanding principal of a high-poverty public school?
8. Which self-perceptions are the most significant in leading a high-poverty school?
9. How do you relate to your teachers and other school staff?
10. Which professional learning opportunities contributed the most in your long-term principalship?

Question one was intended to be relatively straightforward and nonthreatening, and served to develop rapport. Questions two through four delved into the topic of longevity and the causes, strategies, and challenges of sustaining a long-term principalship in a high-poverty school. Several studies detailed the significance of the principal's longevity in high-poverty schools (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Researchers in those studies found that effective

longstanding principals of high-poverty schools play a significant role in student achievement and attendance. Some researchers now say that principals are second only to teachers in their impact on student achievement (Wallace Foundation, 2013). Further, though research on the challenges of leading high-poverty schools exists, very few researchers have investigated why principals of high-poverty schools pursue a long tenure.

Question five allowed the participants to reflect on personal views of values and beliefs that have contributed to their sustained principalship in a high-poverty school. This question can help the participants think more deeply about their own valuable insight. This question is influenced by Creswell (2013), who discussed types of questions that could reveal valuable insight. Questions six and seven let the principals discuss their own views and reasons for defying the odds. Questions eight and nine focused on areas of the high-poverty principalship that show progress. These questions also allowed the principals to share their specific practices. Question 10 allowed the participants to reflect on the professional learning opportunities that contributed the most in their long-term principalship. This question can help the principal think more in depth about the significance of professional growth and which trainings/courses contributed the most to their longevity. Each research sub-question relates to the interview questions. Research sub-question one refers to character traits and relates to interview questions 2, 5, 6, 7, and 9. Research sub-question two refers to self-perceptions and relates to interview questions 2, 3, 8, and 9. Research sub-question three refers to professional development and relates to interview questions 4 and 10.

Focus Group

Conducting a focus group is a method to collect data through a group interview process (Morgan, 1996). I conducted a focus group with three retired principals. During the focus

group, I asked the retired principals about their perceptions, beliefs, ideas, and opinions about their roles as long-term principals serving in high-poverty schools. I conducted the focus group via a conference call one afternoon. The focus group lasted an hour. The focus group members were able to remain in their homes and participate in the focus group via conference call. These individuals were retired and had served at least five years in high-poverty schools as principal. I guided the discussion to ensure the group was focused and did not stray off topic. The data collected from this group were useful in generating a richer understanding of long-term principals' experiences and beliefs serving in high-poverty schools. This focus group helped to answer research sub-question 1: What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools? The standardized, open-ended questions for the focus group were the following:

1. Which character traits were the most valuable while you served in leadership of a high-poverty school?
2. What are the most important character traits that aided the principal while serving as a long-term leader in a high-poverty school
3. Which specific traits are more significant than others in developing tenacity as leaders of high-poverty schools?
4. What aided you in developing tenacity as a leader of a high-poverty school?
5. What were your reasons for serving long-term as a leader in a high-poverty school?

The focus group's interview questions were directly related to the research because the character traits of long-term principals of high poverty schools are discussed. Focus group interview questions one through three answer SQ1. SQ1 asked for the character traits that helped principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools, focus group questions one through three

were intended to determine the character traits that were the most effective in leadership, in developing tenacity, and in aiding in their tenure as principals of high-poverty schools. These character traits gave the study more depth in relating the most effective leadership characteristics. Questions four and five were designed to delve into what aided them in developing tenacity and the reasons why they served long-term and answered SQ2. SQ2 asked for self-perceptions that contributed to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools, tenacity, and reasons that contribute to longevity stem from self-perceptions.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a type of qualitative research in which documents are explored by the researcher to give meaning around a topic (Bowen, 2009). According to Yin (2014), "the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 107). Documents used in this study provided a more comprehensive case study picture, verified information received during the individual interviews and focus group interview, and triangulated the data (Yin, 2014). Although not all online information can be trusted, the internet provides a wealth of knowledge that is crucial in case study research (Yin, 2014). Employing the internet to gather data from the state's online report cards and school brochures provided detailed information on teacher retention and standardized testing data. I collected teacher retention rates from the principals' online report cards for school years from 2013 to 2018. I collected test scores from spring 2016 to spring 2018. I compared the percentage of students who exceeded or met the standards of the South Carolina College-and Career-Ready (SC READY) assessment in mathematics and English to the district and state levels of achievement. The first administration of the SC READY assessment was in spring 2016.

Data Analysis

Yin (2014) outlined a clear procedure for conducting multiple case studies that I was used in this study. The steps include selecting a theory or concept; choosing appropriate cases; investigating and analyzing each case separately; determining cross-case conclusions; checking those conclusions against the theory; and writing the final report. The first step in the data analysis process began as I took notes, conducted the individual and focus group interviews, and collected data from the state's online report cards (Yin, 2014). An outside aide, who has a doctorate degree, assisted with the transcriptions and the document analysis.

The second step included multiple readings of the transcripts to eliminate inaccurate information and to organize the data. An inductive analysis began with obtaining an outside aide. The outside aide and I found "a collection of instances from the data, hoping that issue-relevant meanings will emerge" (Creswell, 2013, p. 199). We carefully analyzed the transcriptions, then we later organized the data into major themes. The analysis relied on interviews of those currently serving in principalships of high-poverty schools and of the focus group comprised of principals who previously served in high-poverty schools. We formed broad categories to organize the data and to note significant concepts. The outside aide and I noted significant concepts after reviewing the transcripts several times. After noting these concepts, I took the responses from the interviews of the current principals and from the focus group of previous principals and organized them into significant themes. I then used coding for pattern identification that related the central phenomenon to other categories. Open coding, which defines and develops categories, was used to decipher whether there were related themes (Bowen, 2009).

Lastly, I conducted a within case and across-case analysis, looking for patterns of behavior and perceptions. I used data I collected from the schools' online report cards to compare and contrast teacher retention rates and achievement scores during the principals' tenure. I aligned, where I could, the data with the principals' comments.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is especially important in qualitative research when addressing the research findings' credibility and transferability. Triangulation helps to assure data is trustworthy because two or more methods were used to address the credibility. In this way, the findings accurately described the data. Another method to ensure credibility and trustworthiness is member checking. In member checking, the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Rossman and Rallis (2003) stated, "You [the researcher] take emerging findings back to the participants for them to elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about" (p. 69). Through triangulation and participant validation, the research was credible and rigorous. The results of this research can be applicable to similar situations or individuals. Rich, thick description allows readers to transfer information over to other settings (Creswell, 2013). Trustworthiness includes establishing credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the extent to which a research account is believable and appropriate. I employed themes from multiple sources of evidence to provide corroborating evidence. I included rich, detailed, thick descriptions and employed member checking by sharing the transcripts and drafts with participants to ensure credibility of the findings and to ensure my

perceptions did not influence the interview responses. All deviations between the intended meaning and the perceived meaning of the responses were corrected.

Dependability and Confirmability

Dependability and confirmability were addressed by the use of rich detail. Dependability allows for data collection and analysis to be audited and for the study findings to be reliable. By reviewing the process by which accounts are kept, the auditor eliminates the possibility of error or fraud (Koch, 2006). Confirmability refers to the findings being based on participants' responses and with no bias from the researcher that could skew the data. Confirmability is the degree to which the outcomes can be confirmed by others. Member checking, triangulation of the data, peer debriefing, peer reviews, and an audit trail were used to pursue confirmability.

My use of thick description helped establish confirmability and dependability. Thick description provides more than the surface appearance, but also includes emotion, social relationships, voices, feelings, and actions (Ponterotto, 2006). The data were reported in detail, thereby aiding future researchers to repeat the work. I provided meaning to the information so that those without knowledge of leadership in education would understand the data.

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized to other settings (Patton, 2015). I used thick description to show that the research findings can be applicable to other circumstances. I described the research context so that information can be transferred. I provided a detailed account of each participant's experience and made connections. This should allow potential appliers to make transferability conclusions.

Ethical Considerations

Three ethical guidelines were followed to protect the human subjects involved in this study. These guidelines included protection of participants from harm, assurance of the confidentiality and security of research data, and avoidance of deceiving subjects (Creswell, 2013). I did not use deception as a technique. I sought the approval of Liberty University's Institutional Review Board. All participants signed consent forms, agreed to participate, and understood their rights to voluntarily participate in the study (see Appendices E and F), withdraw from participation at any time, ask questions, and have confidentiality respected throughout the research. The names of the principals were protected using pseudonyms. The school districts in which they taught were not pseudonyms. All data were locked in a filing cabinet; electronic files were password protected, and schools' names and participant pseudonyms were used.

Summary

This study was designed to understand the contributing factors that motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. This chapter contained a description of the design, research questions, setting, participants, procedures, researcher's role, and data collection. Data collection methods included conducting in-depth interviews and a focus group, as well as reviewing online report cards for each school and school brochures. Data analysis methods included a professional transcriptionist, a coding system, and inductive analysis. Trustworthiness and ethical consideration measures were implemented to ensure credible data and protection of the participants. Using these methods, I was able to investigate the factors of principalship that contribute to and motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina school districts.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the contributing factors that motivate longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. The purpose of this chapter is to describe the participants and to share themes. This study analyzed the experiences of 13 participants with over five years of experience as a principal in a high-poverty public school. Results from one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and a review of the state's online report cards and school brochures are presented in this chapter.

Participants

The 13 principals interviewed for the study had varied years of experience in leadership of high-poverty public schools. The six female and seven male principals had five to 30 years of experience leading high-poverty public schools. Each principal, presented here with pseudonyms, had previous experience teaching in a public school before becoming a principal.

George

George is an African American middle-aged male. George is very formal and business like. When I conducted the interview, George had prepared notes for possible questions. George was the only participant who revealed that he had grown up in a disadvantaged environment. George expressed his joy in serving students and faculty. He was one of the few participants who shared the significance of engaging the entire school staff, from the custodian, bus drivers, nurses, to the teachers because they all played a part in educating the students.

George overcame difficulties at an early age after the passing of his mother when he was in grade school. Despite early obstacles, he obtained a bachelor's degree, and 6 years after he

began teaching, he was promoted to his first assistant principalship at a high-poverty public school. He has served 11 years as principal of two elementary schools.

Joseph

Joseph is a male, Caucasian senior. During the focus group Joseph spoke about his principalship, as well as his service in the military. Joseph was one of few participants who remained at the same school his entire career. Joseph's pride for his career was evident as he spoke. Joseph believes all children are capable of learning. Joseph was not hesitant in expressing his thoughts during the interview.

Joseph has served as a teacher and then principal of the same Spartanburg School District Two high-poverty elementary school for 38 years. Joseph is now retired and participated in the focus group of previous principals. Joseph's wife was a music teacher, and his son and daughter-in-law currently work in education. Joseph's enthusiasm and eagerness to talk was evident during the focus group. He also has a true passion for educating underprivileged students. He believes that every student deserves a great teacher and equal opportunity to succeed. During our conversation, he indicated the importance of relationships with all school staff.

Paul

Paul is a male, Caucasian senior and participated in the focus group. Paul really enjoyed discussing his past and spoke for several minutes of his past career highlights. Paul exuded joy in his career in education. Paul expressed a genuine love for the students and the faculty he served with for many years. Paul also believed that all children are capable of learning and excelling.

After Paul graduated from college, he took a teaching position at a predominantly African American, high-poverty elementary public school. Early in his career Paul knew he wanted all

students to have a good education because he felt he was not afforded one while growing up. Paul's wife is an art teacher who also taught in public schools. Paul worked in a public school as a teacher, principal of a high poverty school, and as the assistant superintendent in the Spartanburg School District Two. Paul is now retired.

Sally

Sally is a Caucasian female. Sally is a very kind-hearted leader, and this was exemplified in her tone during the individual interview. Sally discussed the significance of each child. Sally's demeanor was one of confidence and she talked more freely than the other participants. Sally finds joy in her service to the children and their families.

Sally never sought to be a school administrator. However, her life experiences led her in that direction. Sally began her career as a teaching assistant but went back to college to complete her undergraduate degree to obtain her teaching certificate. She taught elementary school for 9 years and became the literacy coach at the same school. She was approached several times to apply for an administrator's position before she finally agreed. She has served as a principal of a high-poverty school for 19 years and enjoys every aspect about it.

Dorothy

Dorothy is a Caucasian female. Dorothy began her teaching career in special education. She was approached by her superintendent and asked to pursue an administration career. Later, she enrolled in the Administrators Academy and completed a master's degree in administration. She was able to obtain an assistant principal position and later the principalship at the same high-poverty elementary school.

Dorothy's positive and upbeat personality made it easy to believe that she truly loves the students and teachers at her school. Dorothy spends most of her day at school and eats all three

meals there. She has developed such closeness with her faculty that she keeps a calendar of special events of family occasions, deaths, retirements, and sicknesses. She sends cards and emails to let the families know she is thinking about them. She would rather serve at a high-poverty school than at any other school.

Sylvia

Sylvia, a Caucasian female, spent 5 years as an assistant principal and has served for the past 15 years at a high-poverty elementary school now in the role of principal. Sylvia began her career as an elementary school teacher in Georgia and then entered the administration field. Sylvia believes she is making a difference with the whole child. Sylvia also believes in setting goals to help students, teachers, and herself. She is upbeat and willing to try something new to make a difference for her students. Sylvia was the only principal who discussed the importance of her students' voices and ideas. Sylvia obviously loves her students.

Sylvia expressed the importance of providing students with opportunities in the arts. She discussed how her students were able to act in plays, and she has artists and musicians visit the school. She shared that many of her students are not able to afford lessons in the arts, so she brings those experiences to them.

Carl

Carl, a Caucasian male, has served as a principal of a high-poverty school for 17 years and loves his career so much he does not want to leave. He believes everyone from all income levels wants a great education for their children. He treats all parents and families the same, and he promises his parents honesty. He rarely wears a suit coat because he wants to be approachable to the families in his community. Carl was more reserved than many of the other participants, but his love of education was apparent.

Carl expressed the significance of his teachers. He strives to do all he can to help lighten some of their duties. Carl is more comfortable working with high-poverty students and making a difference with teachers, students, and community than working in a more affluent school district. Carl feels empowered by his district to try new things. Carl believes that his teachers, students, and parents come first.

Will

Will, a Caucasian male, began his career as a middle school educator. He taught seventh and eighth grade students for five years before becoming assistant principal at a high-poverty school. He served as an assistant principal for three years before becoming principal of the same school for the past year. Will's personality was more reserved than other participants, but he was very willing to participate. Will expressed the importance of his teachers and staff support. He also wanted to do all he can for his teachers.

Will completed his master's and doctorate degrees, which have helped him stay informed on the latest educational practices. He stays current by reading books on poverty and best practices. He believes learning and growing with the students and faculty is important.

Tim

Tim, a Caucasian male, graduated from college with a mathematics degree and began a career as an insurance salesman. He went back to school to obtain his teaching certification and taught middle school and high school mathematics for 12 years. Tim was more reserved than many of the others were. Although Tim had a quiet demeanor, his passion for reaching children of lesser means was very clear.

Later, he became an assistant principal at a high school for 4 years and the assistant principal of a high-poverty school for a year. He has now been the principal of the same high-

poverty elementary school for the last six years. Tim has a strong sense of faith as a Christian, and he is a witness for Christ. Tim noted his love of Christian inspirational books and quoted from some that have inspired him. He also believes it is critical for his teachers to love what they do, so that this love will extend to the students.

Caroline

Caroline is a Caucasian female. Caroline began her education as an elementary school teacher and later became a curriculum facilitator. Caroline applied for and was hired as an assistant principal while still studying for her master's degree in administration. As an assistant principal, she began to think of having her own school. Caroline served two years as an assistant principal and the next 12 years as the principal of a high-poverty school.

Caroline expressed her desire to be present throughout the full day, so she regularly eats all of her meals at school. She also enjoys visiting with the students in the classrooms and at after school activities. She expressed the need to continue looking forward. Caroline reiterated the need to make necessary changes for the good of her students and staying on top of current professional development. Caroline believes administrators need passion, personality, and heart for the school and community.

Michelle

Michelle, a Caucasian female, has served in education for over 31 years. Michelle believes that the high poverty students can learn if given equal opportunities. She began her career as a fifth-grade teacher and guidance counselor.

She became an assistant principal of a high-poverty school for three years. She has served as principal of the same high-poverty school for the last 10 years. Michelle believes administrators must have a servant's heart and be student centered to lead a high-poverty school.

Michelle seems to relate better to high-poverty students than to affluent students. Michelle has a desire to make her school better every year. Michelle is very passionate about her parenting program that strives to improve parenting practices. The children may lack resources, but Michelle believes she and her faculty can level the playing field by providing the best quality education.

Mark

Mark, an African-American male, received an undergraduate degree from Wofford University and worked in insurance. He later gained a master's degree in elementary education and taught three years before becoming an administrator. He has been principal of two high-poverty schools. Growing up, Mark was a poor student in high-poverty schools, thus, his passion to serve this population. He knows the importance he plays in being a positive African American male figure for his students.

Mark shared the importance of reading to children at an early age. Mark enjoys meeting others who place students above their own interests. He believes in paying close attention to the data to monitor and adjust strategies, so everyone will be successful.

Lucy

Lucy, an African American, earned an undergraduate and master's degree in elementary education. Lucy exemplified professionalism in her speech and in the way she conducted herself. After several years she still carried that same professionalism during the interview. Lucy served as a teacher for 10 years and then as principal of the same high-poverty elementary school for another 17 years. Lucy's demeanor is very professional and her love for children was very apparent.

Lucy is an example to me because she served as the principal of my elementary school.

Lucy and I have not had any contact for over 27 years. Lucy was excited to learn of my educational pursuits and expressed that her principalship was successful due to her past students' successes. Lucy was willing to help in any future endeavors.

Results

After I read, reread, and coded the transcripts, I found 29 categories, which I then collapsed into 10 themes (see Table 2). Table 2 contains the categories within each theme. Each theme is described with quotations from the interviews and the focus group, reflecting why principals persist in high-poverty South Carolina schools.

Table 2

Themes by Research Sub-Question

Research sub-question	Theme	Category
What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools?	Treat all with respect	
	Love children and education	
	Excellent leadership skills	Know thyself Possess character Practice empathy Listen Have high expectations Practice leadership
What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?	Job is a mission, calling, passion	
		Want to stay Finish the job Make a difference See results
	Build and develop teams	
	Take care of your teachers	
	Create community	In the school In the neighborhood
	Manage perceptions	
What professional learning opportunities contribute to a principal's long-term principalship of high-poverty schools?	Professional development	Curriculum development Networking Courses Reading
	Constant learner	

Theme Development

A distinctive feature of qualitative research involves the data analysis. I analyzed information from one-on-one interviews, a focus group interview, and the state online report cards to describe how the participants persisted in their principalships in high-poverty schools. I collected data through face-to-face interviews and conference calls. I used the state report cards

to compile data on teacher retention rates and English and mathematics achievement. I collected retention rates from 2013 through 2018. I collected school achievement scores from spring 2016 to 2018. These forms of data provided triangulation that strengthened the analysis. After I developed codes from emerging patterns in the data, I separated the codes into themes that described leading a high-poverty school.

The interviews revealed that the participants believed teaching to be their mission. Individual interviews were the main source of data for this study. I conducted one-on-one interviews with 10 of the 13 participants. The questions were based on a standard open-ended approach to gain a detailed description and avoid the simple *yes* or *no* response. I conducted face-to-face interviews that lasted from 30 minutes to 90 minutes. The setting for the interviews was primarily at the schools where participants served as the principal. Overall, the participants were positive and forthcoming in sharing their experiences.

After completing the one-on-one interviews, I conducted a focus group. Joseph, Paul, and Lucy participated in the focus group. I conducted the focus group via conference call. The participants were at ease with each other. I gave each participant the opportunity to respond to each open-ended question. I was blessed to see that, although all three had different years of leadership experience, they all had the unity in their purpose to lead high-poverty schools long term. To maintain the nuance of the conversations, I recorded the responses verbatim. The emerging 10 themes are as follow.

Treat all with respect. The first theme that emerged from the data was fostering a community with respect. The principals reported they believe strongly in helping the children understand that they have as much opportunity as everyone else, and that no one is better than they are. They reported they treat everyone with respect and expect everyone who comes to the

school to do the same, which along with longevity will lead to student success.

Tim admonished principals not to think they are better than the children are, “You’ve got to be able to relate to the children and don’t think yourself higher and mightier than they are.” Mark reported, “I strongly believe that you have to care about each other, you have to treat each other with respect.” Carl stated, “Everyone wants the same thing for their children. They want the best education possible.” Caroline made sure her teachers treat all children equally and are just in their dealings with them:

> I want all children treated equally. I want children to be given second chances. Teachers who are all about just putting their thumb on kids and suspending them every time they do anything wrong or who punish the whole classroom, they don’t last here because that’s not my values. You either have to buy into the beliefs and values that we’ve put together as a community school, or they leave.

Tim reported teaching children to respect everyone, “It’s my job to make sure I point children in the right direction and treat people with respect whether it be from taking care of a building to picking up the trash or taking care of animals.” Will urged principals to “just treat people fair. I think there’s the old saying they don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Dorothy and Mark reported that they strive to treat all children the way they would treat their own.

> As I talk with the teachers, I always say I wouldn’t do anything for these children that I wouldn’t do for my own child and if you continually think in those terms you won’t bring a lesson to the classroom that you wouldn’t provide for you own. (Dorothy)
>
> Kids should treat adults with respect, but adults should also treat kids with respect. You should treat a child exactly like they’re your own child. How hard would I work for my

> own child; how would I treat my own child? I believe that so strongly that if people work in this building, they have to follow that belief. (Mark)

Love children and education. Principals voiced a strong opinion that long-term principals and their staff must love to teach and love the children they serve, the second theme. Lucy, a retired principal, indicated, "Most of the basic characteristics that you find under servant leaders would fit, but for me [was] the one of loving the children. Each day the children came through our doors [knowing] that they were loved and cared for." Lucy also reported, "If you let the parents know that you truly care for their children as much as they did, you could get them to do pretty much anything you wanted them to do in the school setting."

Sally stated her fundamental belief: "All children deserve the right to be successful." Michelle stated, high-poverty students "lack things but they're not dumb." George strongly believed that as principal of a high-poverty school, he defied "the odds by the fact that I believe all students can learn. I don't care where they're from. I don't care what they've been through." George also reported that principals "must have a genuine love for students and their learning." He further reflected:

> I believe that all students can learn if they're getting the right tools and resources. As principal, I'm in a position to help ensure that students in the building in which I am assigned are provided those resources to help them be successful.

Caroline reported why she became a principal of a high-poverty school:

> I knew at some point that I wanted my own school, and I wanted to be able to be in charge of that and to have teachers teach the way I felt children should be taught and treated the way I felt children should be treated.

Sylvia stated the philosophy that made her successful, "I think you have to believe that all

children can learn. I do. It's not because they can't learn, they just haven't had the experience." She also stated her mission was for students' success both in school and in life. "If you're a real educator, you are in for creating students' success, but not just in the classroom—life success. Making good choices, willing to take a chance, willing to fail to learn, all those wonderful things."

Mark also believed that children can succeed with love and education. He shared:

> The simple why [I stay] is I care enough about the children. It's worth it to me to put up with all of that to try to help the children. I believe in the children. I believe they can succeed, and I believe they need to be cared for; they need to be loved; they need to have a school that's a great school, that's clean, and where people are treating them with respect, and where the teaching strategies are strategies that are gonna help them, and that we need to work like crazy in order to get them there even when it's tough.

Sally reported that it is important students not be defined by their circumstances and that it is the responsibility of the principal to make this clear to the students. Sally noted:

> I believe that if you truly are trying to make a difference with students that have ability and should and deserve the opportunity as kids that are not in high-poverty areas, if you're really doing it for the right reasons and not just a stepping stone in your career or that kind of path; if you're doing it for others and really trying to make a difference in a child's life, then you almost get addicted to staying in a school that's high poverty because you've watched kids learn, be successful, and break the cycle they're a part of just because of a little bit of a difference you've made or the accountability you've provided to the educators that work with these students.

Excellent leadership skills. The third theme indicates another character trait described

by the long-term principals was an attribute identified as *having excellent leadership skills.* These leadership skills include the following traits: know thyself, possess character, practice empathy, listen, have high expectations, and practice good leadership. The long-term principals provided a number of responses in each of these categories. The character trait of knowing their strengths and weaknesses was significant.

Know Thyself. Several long-term principals reported that they had to acknowledge their weaknesses and find ways to overcome them to become stronger leaders. Caroline reported:

> I'm willing to admit when I made a mistake and I think you just have to be aware of where your weaknesses are and those things you have to try to work on where you can, you have to admit where you're not strong and surround yourself with people who are stronger there. So, my self-perception is I know that I'm not all powerful.

George reported that reflection helped him accomplish what he wanted to do as principal of a high-poverty school:

> Who am I? What beliefs brought me to this point? I had to constantly reflect [on] myself. I had to constantly reflect on my strengths, what was I doing right, what was I doing wrong . . . I don't have to have the answers for everything right now; I don't have to resolve every little issue right now.

Joseph stated, "Character is important." George reported he possessed drive that helped him accomplish what he put his mind to. George noted:

> I just developed within me self-drive that there is no situation that was gonna keep me from reaching my goals. I had that same mindset coming into the principalship that when it comes to students, regardless where you live, where you're from, what you've been through. If you apply yourself, if you take advantage of the resources being made

available to you, you can overcome whatever you're going through.

Practice Empathy. Both Paul, a retired long-term principal, and Will reported a long-term principal with excellent leadership skills must practice empathy. Sally stated it is important to understand and have empathy for the students' lives, in particular:

> Not letting behavior issues or home lives or anything like that deter from good instruction going on in the classroom and making sure we're accountable for the kids to move and to close the gaps and for them to move to the next level.

Listen. Joseph and Dorothy listed listening as another important leadership trait for a long-term principal. Dorothy stated, "We have conversations, we talk. I have an open-door policy." Joseph, a retired principal, reported that becoming a good listener is important so others can share. Joseph elaborated:

> And you have to learn to listen. I wasn't a very good listener at times. I wanted to interject . . . you find yourself sometimes wanting to get on with the program rather than to let someone share or air or whatever they want to do with you.

Have high expectations. Although Will reported earlier that empathy and understanding were necessary, he also indicated, "At the same time you have to have high expectations and not let people make excuses." In the same manner, Sally indicated the importance of the leadership skill of having high expectations as follows:

> My values help me know that they can learn, and they can succeed and all of our behaviors during the day and our actions during the day should speak that, and that's not necessarily with words but the things we do and our high expectations we have because they'll meet our expectations.

Practice leadership. A final trait leading to excellence in leadership described by several

principals was practicing leadership. Although other, more formal manifestations of leadership are described elsewhere in the principals' interviews, the few comments expressed in this category express an aspect of leadership often not described in other places. Sylvia reported, "I know being a leader is something He's given me some gifts for in that direction." Paul, a retired principal, reported:

> A lot of it has to do with leadership. A lot of it has to do with the style they bring in there and the response they get from the faculty. They have to buy into it and ownership has to come. They have to own what's going on.

George reported two things principals needed when practicing good leadership—positivity and a sense of humor:

> You always want to say something positive. You always want to find something that's good. That encourages people to continue to do their best. Keep your sense of humor, be able to laugh. I oftentimes say if you can laugh about it, you can live with it. There is something happening every single day in a school that at the end of the day we ought to be able to look back and at least have a laugh together.

Job is a mission, calling, passion. Job commitment is the fourth theme emerging from the data. The long-term principals called their commitment to their school different things—heart, service, passion, a calling, a ministry.

Mark stated those who work in high-poverty schools do so because "it's like a ministry. You just feel like you really can help and that you're gonna work hard to help, and that's why I have remained for so long." Michelle reported that certain people are "made to work with different types of people." Tim posited that, "They probably remain in their principalship because they love what they're doing. I think you have to have a passion for children."

Sylvia described why she believed principals stay at high-poverty schools, "I can tell you exactly why. You have to have heart. You have to know that you're making a difference and you have to see that you're making a difference." Caroline also reported that she has:

> a heart for this school and this community. I just love helping the people. If you aren't the kind that really wants to help people . . . I think you're not gonna make it. You have to have a servant's heart.

Retired principal Joseph and current principal Dorothy called their principalships a mission:

> It's a mission to me and it was a mission to [Paul]. What we did was a mission to our communities, to our parents, to our students, and to our teachers. It had to be because for him to stay as long as he stayed in education, for what I did in education. (Joseph)
>
> It's a mission, more than just a job . . . I believe the Lord has placed me here for such a time as this. As long as He's calling me to do this and another door doesn't open in a different place, I will stay . . . It's just about giving back to the people you serve with and I think the more you do that and the more you understand where they're coming from in their daily lives so that you can minister to them. If not you, then who? (Dorothy)

Want to stay. When asked why they stay or stayed in their long-term principalships, several principals reported that they want or wanted to finish what they started and did not want others to intervene in the process.

Finish the job. Sally said, "You're not sure you want to give it away because somebody else might not take care of it." Carl felt the same as Sally, stating:

> [One] of the reasons I don't want to leave because there's certain people here I don't want to leave . . . [I don't want to] see what they started not get to where they wanted to get to, because when the leadership changes, they might very well say we don't need a

STEM coordinator anymore, or the literacy coach has to do it a different way.

Unfinished business. Lucy, one of the retired principals, reported she "did not want to leave what we had developed and what was working very well not only for me but for the children. The children trusted us, and they really were comfortable." Michelle stated, "Just that desire to make sure we're reaching everybody is what keeps me doing it. I want to make it better the next year." Carl reported others may not do the same things as he is doing at his school; therefore, he has unfinished business:

> I think as I get more years, some of the knowledge I get, I've learned some of the things that we do here other principals wouldn't necessarily be doing or think to do. It makes me want to stay with my people because I just don't feel like we're done yet. Until we get where I want to be, I don't want to leave. I want our kids to have equal footing with [highly affluent schools]. So, until we get there I don't want to leave yet.

Caroline and Sylvia both indicated they are not finished:

> I still feel like I have work to do and I feel like I've invested so much here in particular at this school. I'm not ready to give it to somebody else. It's my baby and I'm not done with it. I haven't raised it yet. We're getting close but I'm not there yet. (Caroline)
>
> If we give up, we've lost the power of *yet* and when we . . . lose the power of *yet*, we need to move on. We just need to move on and let somebody else with that vision come in and make that happen. I feel like I still have it [the power of *yet*]. (Sylvia)

Making a difference. Several principals reported that they stay in the principalship of a high-poverty school because they want to make a difference in the lives of the students. Will indicated, "[Teachers] get an education [degree] because they love giving back and they love to work with kids. [It] helps working at a high poverty school when you see a difference, you're

making a difference." When asked why he stays, Carl reported:

> Part of it was making a difference with the kids and then from there it's grown to not just making a difference for the kids; it's now making a difference for teachers, trying to grow people where they want to be, making a difference in our community as a whole.

Seeing results. Some long-term principals attributed their longevity to the fact that they wanted to see the results of their efforts. Lucy, a retired principal, reported, "I didn't see a need . . . to go anywhere else [because] what I felt was important in educating young people was happening at that school." Sally and Sylvia also reported staying so they could see the differences they are making in their children and in the community:

> If you're doing it for others and really trying to make a difference in a child's life, then you almost get addicted to staying in a school that's high poverty because you've watched kids learn, be successful and break the cycle they're a part of just because of a little bit of a difference you've made or the accountability you've provided to the educators that work with these students. (Sally)

> You have to see that you're making a difference. That is exactly what happens here. Our population becomes more and more challenging, yet we are maintaining good student performance and also making a difference with the whole child from character development to making good choices that we hope extends a life. (Sylvia)

Build and develop teams. All of the long-term principals described how important teams, the fifth theme, are to their success in high-poverty schools. When asked what contributes to their success, Caroline reported, "I think it's the people that surround me" and Carl said, "I have really good staff first and foremost." However, a team is not limited to administrative or teacher teams. Paul, one of the retired long-term principals, indicated that all

members of the staff should be members of the team, “It’s important that you have teams—wherever you are, be it administrators, teachers, class teams, even on down to lunchroom teams. All these people are part of the program.”

To have good teams, the principals reported that they have to hire the right people. When asked why she is successful, Sally stated, “I think it is the team that I have with me. The most important thing I do is hire good people and that’s been the reason we’ve been successful.” Sylvia also credited her faculty for her success, “I think having a really strong faculty that I’ve been able to hire over the years. They stick with me. I don’t have a big turnover. I have the most amazing staff.” Lucy, one of the retired principals, indicated, “When you find a group of people to work with [that] are like-minded, it makes it easier.”

Tim and George described the challenges in creating an effective team:

> You have to hire good people. Your first couple of years is always difficult because you haven’t hired any of those people. You inherit what is there before you. Once you start hiring people, there’s some strategies that you bring on and things start to develop around you. (Tim)
>
> Work at creating a team environment within the administration and within the teaching community. It’s not gonna be easy. Not all teachers are open to change but if you are successful at it, you’ll find that it really, really makes a difference in the culture and the atmosphere within the building. (George)

The long-term principals also reported that they knew their strengths and weaknesses and built teams to help them where they were the weakest:

> In those areas where I was weaker, I had to look for staff members . . . that were stronger in an area than me and then bring them onboard with me and say, ‘Let’s work on this

> together.' That way our strengths and weaknesses balanced one another. (George)
>
> I'm confident in what I know needs to happen. I don't have all the skills necessarily to make it happen, but I know how to find the right people and the right resources to make it happen. Everybody feels supported here. I feel supported by my teachers; my teachers feel supported by me. (Sylvia)
>
> Sometimes you get really tired but like I said, you surround yourself with good people that encourage you and help you understand that tomorrow is a new day, it's gonna be okay, and you've done the best you can do, and you've done right by these children each day, that you can lay your head down and it's gonna be okay and the Lord will take care of the rest. (Dorothy)

Part of building successful teams is how they are developed and nurtured. Several of the principals described how they develop relationships with people to empower them to become effective team members. Michelle reported, "I know what their strengths and weaknesses are and where I can push and who I can ask to do different things. I think knowing them and building that relationship is kind of where that is." Tim reported that, "I think it's very important that we develop relationships with teachers, not just within the school but outside the school because you talk about longevity. . . it's a partnership because I realize I can't do it without them and we're all in this together." Mark wanted his staff to take ownership, "Folks have to feel like they are playing a role in what's going on in the school. They have to feel like, 'I have ownership in what's going on here.' That's how I relate to people." Carl expressed how he hires good people and empowers them:

> I try to empower my people and that has helped me a lot because I can spread a lot of the workload around . . . I trust them so much when they come to me, we can just let them

> run with it and let it go. So, I think the idea of hiring good people as a practice and helping them grow to where they want to get to, makes ultimately my job easier.

Take care of your staff. One of the attitudes that principals perceived as helping them to be successful as principals of a high-poverty school, thus the sixth theme, was that they take care of their teachers. Paul, a retired principal, addressed the issue of constant top-down reforms:

> Don't try to tie their hands all the time and try to keep as much of the district stuff off of them, keep them unburdened as much as you can. You can't just keep throwing it [new programs every year] out here. You're frustrating teachers. It's too much coming at them.

George urged principals to "be supportive of teachers. Find ways to lighten their load." Tim reported, "You've got to make sure . . . your teachers are enjoying their jobs. If you have a teacher that loves coming to work, that's gonna be contagious to her children." Paul also stated, "Give them liberty to teach." Carl described how principals should be able to lighten their load:

> I don't pretend for any minute to say that my job is any harder than a classroom teacher's job. I have a lot of respect for my teachers and what they do. I think they understand that and I try to keep a lot of the minutia off them. If I can take care of it, I will.

Create community. Principals serving in high-poverty communities believe they are successful because they are able to build community in the school and in the neighborhood, a seventh theme.

In the school. Related to creating community in the school, Michelle reported, "I love the people I work with. We have composed a great faculty around here and they are of the same mind. We do what we need to do for children and for their families." Dorothy spends a lot of

time creating a family-like atmosphere at her school:

> I really believe it's the relationships. They're huge. We're a family here and we really look out for each other not only in school but outside of school. I think that's key that we spend time together, we bring our children together. I do a lot of handwritten cards and phone calls, text messages. Things like that to just help them know I'm here for them and if there's a need, I'll be ready to do whatever it is in order to make it happen.

Sally, George, and Will also reported the importance of developing a culture of family in the school:

> I want them to know that we're in this together and that, of course, we care about each other and we're a family and we're a team because it would certainly be sad if we went through it 30 years and didn't establish any relationships with the people we work with. (Sally)
>
> It's extremely important to create a culture within the building that has more of a family feel to it. Create a culture within a building where each individual sees their place and their role and their responsibility as being important. The custodial staff is just as important as the school nurse. The school nurse is just as important as the teachers. The parents are just as important as the students. No matter who comes in that building, create an atmosphere where they feel welcomed, invited, and excited about being in the building. (George)
>
> I think it's important to realize we have our rules and procedures we have to follow but we're dealing with kids and it should be a happy place, a fun place, it should be a place people enjoy coming to work, the adults are getting along, the adults enjoy coming to work and kids pick up on it. It should be a place where all of our parents enjoy coming to

> and feel like they have a resource here and have help here. It's all about helping. (Will)

In the neighborhood. Good principals extend their relationship-making skills into the surrounding neighborhood as a means of creating community. Caroline stated, "You have to want to be a part of that community." Dorothy agreed, "I think one of the key things that we do is build community partnerships and in doing that needs are met." Paul, a retired principal, also concurred, "You have to do a lot of work with your different organizations within your community." Dorothy expanded on the interviewees' beliefs about building community in the neighborhood:

> I remain in this principalship because of the families, the community. I really believe in consistency and making sure we're here and helping meet their needs, and as we do that, they're able to emerge into a community-type program and they become a family. I can't say enough about our families. I mean just to go and spend time in the community with them is huge. And when children are asking you to go to their—my Hispanic families are asking me to go to churches with them. (Dorothy)

> Very rarely will I wear a suit jacket or a sports coat because most of my parents don't go to work that way and I don't want them to feel uncomfortable coming in to talk to me. I want them to know I'm approachable, I'm just like them. I live in this community, so basically, they're my people, I'm their people, and we're one in the same. (Carl)

Manage perceptions. The success and longevity of principals in high-poverty schools is related, in part, to how principals perceive themselves and how others in the school and in the community perceive them. Managing those perceptions emerged as the eighth theme. Paul, one of the retired principals, reported the importance of "how the community perceives you as a leader, how your faculty perceives you as a leader, and how the kids respond to you." Paul

continued, “You are your own person. You portray an image whether you realize it or not. How that image is perceived is very important in how you are received.”

Mark managed the perception of himself because he wants the children to be successful. He stated, “I can achieve anything. I have to model that, I have to believe it. I have to help children believe that they can achieve anything.” Other ways to manage the perception others have of you, according to Will, is to “be transparent. If you make a mistake, own it, own your mistake, and realize that parents sometimes make mistakes as well. Try not to judge people.”

Caroline, Tim, and Carl described how they manage the perceptions others have of them:

> I just became embroiled in the lives of the people in this community and they began to trust me because I was helping them, and they saw that I cared about their children. I think you have to have that kind of personality and passion. (Caroline)
>
> You kind of got to get down there with the masses and you’ve got to be a part of them, you’ve got to be one with them, you’ve got to relate to them . . . you’ve got to prove that you’re not there to judge them, you’re there to help them. It takes time for that. Year after year it gets easier each year because they know that you took care of my brother and my sister so now you’re gonna take care of me. (Tim)
>
> I don’t look at our school as a high-poverty school. Our school is a school and we have needs just like a low-poverty school . . . I would much rather deal with the issues and the problems and the challenges and opportunities that come from a high-poverty school than a low-poverty school. They have their own set of challenges, but my career has led me in a path where I’m more comfortable working with challenges with low-income high poverty, high ESOL. They’re the ones I enjoy. (Carl)

Professional learning opportunities. Principals described several professional learning opportunities they believed contribute to their long tenures, the ninth theme. The principals listed curriculum development for themselves and teachers, networking, their own professional development training, and reading as important activities. Many of the principals felt the urgency to provide their faculty professional learning opportunities.

Curriculum development. Several participants noted that increasing instructional capacity of teachers is an important job. Caroline reported, "Really working with teachers on their craft. Just being part of the curriculum . . . people are really held accountable for how they teach and what they teach." Sally also reported that learning best practices in classroom instruction is important:

> The professional developments that have to do with classroom instruction are vital for me to know what's going on . . . it's everything. Research-based practices have really made the difference in our school. Knowing what a good program is, knowing what a good best practice is, knowing good pedagogy, and knowing really how kids learn is everything.

Networking with peers is a way to learn new techniques and for principals to verify that what they are doing is right. Four principals provided insight into how they appreciate their opportunities to network through mentoring and conferences.

> You meet some people from across the state. You get some networking from people outside of your district, which I think is important. You can see how different districts are doing things which can help you think differently, or it helps you . . . appreciate what you have a little bit more sometimes. (Carl)

> Networking, learning from other principals. One thing our superintendent encouraged us

> to do this year is to have another principal mentor us. Somebody you're going to observe and see how things are done and learn from each other. I think that's important, outside of our district, as well as inside. (Will)

Mark uses data to improve curriculum: One thing you have to understand is that one size doesn't fit all. You've got to use data to inform what you're doing. You've got to use the data to decide what changes you need to make. If you're not willing to monitor and adjust your strategies, [instruction] doesn't work. George absolutely loved going every summer to SCASA (The South Carolina Association for School Administrators). SCASA is a weeklong opportunity for administrators from all over the state to participate in professional development activities. You got to interact for an entire week with assistant principals, principals, superintendents, district-level personnel and that was just a wonderful experience. Every year I always look forward to going to SCASA. (George)

> I've been to two Title I conferences with the state and those have been very good with networking and talking with others and seeing what a unique opportunity I have here because it's not similar to some of the experiences that others have had. (Dorothy)

Principals of high-poverty schools have unique challenges and need specialized professional development that includes problem-based authentic learning activities that are rooted in their realities (Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espionoza, 2017). Dorothy described unique training opportunities to assist her in leading high-poverty schools:

> The poverty workshops have been inspiring to me . . . the compassion training . . . did a poverty walk . . . it helps put in perspective what you're thinking and where you're at in life and just gives you an idea of what's going on in other people's lives. When you have a diverse population and a low socioeconomic grouping, there are many things that come

> in your path that you have to be very aware of and understand how to deal with them so that you're not offensive or you're not gonna hurt yourself or you're not gonna get in harm's way with them as well.

Three principals reported their leadership training classes were of particular importance to them. Sally reported that she "just finished a leadership academy that the district offered 2 years ago." Tim stated, "Any classes I took in regards to leadership and the relationship piece I think is probably the most important." Sylvia attended a leadership academy and state training. She reported, "As far as growing as a leader, I think those early programs like the potential administrator's academy and also what the state offered us were probably the most powerful for my success at the beginning." Caroline reported the executive leadership training was important to her:

> I went to the Center for Executive Leadership. We capitalized on our strengths and talked about where we could improve on our weaknesses and that made a profound impact on me . . . all the staff development sessions about relating to people and coaching them and learning how to talk to them and how to help them become problem solvers. I feel like those have been the most significant.

Reading. Formal professional development is important. However, several principals indicated that learning did not stop after they attended classes. Tim, Carl, and Sylvia reported they also read professional books and articles. Tim stated, "I love John Gordon or John Maxwell books. Those are my two favorite reads and anything they write I like. John Gordon is basic to understand because it's so down to earth. John Maxwell is all about the relationships." Carl reported, "I'm a big believer in reading professional research and journals and books and they had a lot of good resources that came out of there. That was probably the best development I

had."

Constant learner. Other aspects of becoming the best principal a high-poverty school can have are through experience and sharing in the professional development of their teachers. Leaders themselves must be continually learning, the tenth theme. Caroline reported that, "I'm not done professionally growing." Sylvia stated, "I feel like I'm a constant learner. I am constantly talking to other principals with similar populations, with similar issues. I don't have all the answers." Will stated he has to grow alongside his teachers and students:

> I continue my education. I try to stay abreast in reading—I read a lot of leadership books but also books on working with schools in poverty, finding time for that professional development. Riding down the road I put a book on tape and utilize the time I have to try to keep up with the new and different things, best practices out there. I don't know of any certain strategy other than understanding that I, too, have to grow and learn along with my students. Our vision actually is learning and growing together. We have to understand that it's our responsibility to learn and grow as well as our kids and it keeps us, again, learning best practices, always not afraid to change, trying something new.

Sally participates in the professional development of her teachers:

> I am involved right now in these impact teams that we're looking at with our TLTs. I sit through many, many, many of our TLTs and I just met with the instructional staff a few minutes ago because we meet every week and talk about how we are using Nicole Vagel's Design in 5 strategies, what are we doing with learning continuums. Whenever we go through any kind of staff development, I'm there with them. I don't leave the room. I make sure I'm growing with them.

Several principals reported that experience can be a good teacher. Michelle reported, "I

think it's just a culmination of lots of learning experiences that I have strung together." Mark stated, "Just being in the trenches I've learned a lot." Will finds new challenges every year:

> Every year is different. I really feel like every year is a change, the principalship, especially the way things have changed with accountability and testing; it seems like we're playing by different rules of the game every year and kind of having to learn a new system. So, it keeps you fresh, so it keeps you out of that rut.

Document Analysis

Further data was collected from online documents which revealed information about tenure and teacher retention among other data. Table 3 contains a comparison of the participants' tenure, the rate of teacher retention range, the teacher retention average, and the participants' comments pertaining to teacher retention. The longest principal tenures resulted in the highest teacher retention rates. The data verified the interviews and verified that long-term principalships result in positives for teacher retention, which ultimately results in positives for the students and community.

Table 3

Teacher Retention Rates

		Teacher retention from 2013 to 2018		
Name	Tenure	Rate of teacher retention (range)	Rate of teacher retention (average)	Comments from principals during interview
Carl	2002–2019	90–84	90.2	I think they understand that and I try to keep a lot of the minutia off them. If I can take care of it, I will. It's now making a difference for teachers, trying to grow people where they want to be. I try to empower my people.
Caroline	2007–2019	90–94	91.2	
Mark	2009–2019	70–95	81.3	
Sally	2012–2019	87–91	89.3	
Tim	2013–2019	81–85	82.5	
Will	2010–2019	77–89	81.2	
Michelle	2007–2019	80–92	85.7	
Sylvia	2004–2019	81–92	87.8	[The teachers] stick with me. I don't have a big turnover. I have the most amazing staff.

Table four contains the percentage of students who exceeded or met the state and district averages from 2016–2018. Table four consists of a comparison with the participants' tenure, average percentage points of standardized testing above or below the state average, average percentage points of standardized testing above or below district average, and the participants' comments relating to performance and best practices. Sally stated, "Research-based practices have really made the difference in our school." Sally's school has the highest math and English gains above the state average from 2016-2018. Sally's school also had the highest math gains district wide from 2016-2018. The data confirms her comments. Although gains in student achievement temporarily slow whenever a new principal arrives, the impact is felt more at the high-poverty, low-achieving schools (Seashore-Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). The churn in principals of high-poverty schools negatively impacts standardized test scores. A rule of thumb is that a principal should be in place five to seven years to have a beneficial impact on a school (Wallace Foundation, 2013). The study's data diverges from the literature in that the longest tenure did not consistently correlate with higher standardized test scores. Carl had the longest tenure, which correlates with his school obtaining the highest English gains district wide from 2016-2018. Carl's school failed to make the highest gains in district or statewide math and statewide English standardized tests from 2016-2018, which diverges from the literature.

Table 4

Achievement at Principals' Schools

		Average % points above or below state average from 2016 to 2018*		Average % points above or below district average from 2016 to 2018		
Principal	Tenure	English	Math	English	Math	Comments from principals during interview
Sally	2012–2019	+7.0	+17.0	+1.0	+10.7	Research-based practices have really made the difference in our school. Knowing what a good program is, knowing what a good best practice is, knowing good pedagogy, and knowing really how kids learn is everything
Michelle	2007–2019	0.0	+13.0	-2.3	+7.7	We have composed a great faculty around here and they are of the same mind. We do what we need to do for [the] children
Carl	2002–2019	-2.3	-1.0	+5.7	+7.0	
Caroline	2007–2019	-4.3	+4.7	-6.3	+0.7	Really working with teachers on their craft. Just being part of the curriculum . . . People are really held accountable for how they teach and what they teach
Will	2010–2019	-1.7	+5.7	-4.0	+0.3	
Sylvia	2004–2019	-10.0	-2.7	-2.0	+5.3	Our population becomes more and more challenging, yet we are maintaining good student performance
Tim	2013–2019	-2.3	+0.3	-8.3	-7.0	You have to hire good people. Your first couple of years is always difficult because you haven't hired any of those people. You inherit what is there before you. Once you start hiring people, there's some strategies that you bring on, and things start to develop around you
Mark	2009–2019	-27.7	-21.0	-20.7	-12.3	

*2016 marked the inaugural administration of the SC Ready assessments.

Research Question Responses

Sub-Question 1. What character traits contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?

Character traits played a significant role in motivating the participants toward longevity and this was evident in several themes: *treat all with respect, loving children and education,* and *having excellent leadership skills*. Statements such as, "You've got to be able to relate to the children and don't think yourself higher and mightier than they are" (Tim) and "I strongly believe that you have to care about each other, you have to treat each other with respect" (Mark), exemplify *treating all with respect*. The principals reported the significance in expecting everyone at the school to treat each other with respect. The principals continuously exemplified this by instilling confidence in their students through encouraging words. Caroline made sure her teachers treat all children equally and are just in their dealings with them. The principals reported that the students needed to know that no one was better than they were. Carl stated, "Everyone wants the same thing for their children." They want the best education possible."

George expressed the theme of *loving the children and education* as, "I believe all students can learn. I don't care where they're from. I don't care what they've been through." Mark stated, "I believe in the children. I believe they can succeed, and I believe they need to be cared for; they need to be loved." Sally reported the importance of students not being defined by their circumstances and the principal has the responsibility to make this clear to the students.

Reflection, acknowledging one's weaknesses, possessing great character, practicing empathy, listening, and having high expectations exemplify the theme of having *excellent leadership skills*. The principals reported that they do not have all the answers and through reflection their weaknesses can be made stronger. Caroline stated, "I know that I am not all

powerful and that I make mistakes." The principals possessed great character and drive to help their students, faculty, and community. George reported he developed a self-drive that helped him to reach his goals. They expect the same from their faculty and students. The principals reported the significance of practicing empathy, but not letting their experiences deter from their responsibilities in the classroom. The principals were sensitive to the poverty of their students, but they did not lower their classroom expectations. Sally stated, "It is important to understand and have empathy for the students' lives." On some occasions, faculty needed a listening ear and the principals learned the significance of not speaking, but just listening. The study's findings of treating all with respect, loving the children and education, and exemplifying excellent leadership skills were significant to each participant's longevity as principals of high-poverty schools.

Sub-Question 2. What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools?

As high-poverty school principals continue in their long-term principalships, personal attitudes, interests, experiences, and expectations influence their perceptions of job satisfaction (Robbins, Judge, Millet, & Boyle, 2013). The themes and categories used to answer this research sub-question were based on comments made by the participants that define their motivations, attitudes, and experiences. The participants' comments are delineated by themes of what their job means to them, why they stay, how they create and develop teams, and how they take care of their teachers, create community, and manage perceptions about themselves and their schools. The principals reported having a *passion* for educating children of high-poverty communities and expressed that their profession was a *mission* to serve their students. Joseph stated. "I believe the Lord has placed me here for such a time as this." Joseph was very fervent

in his calling to serve long term as principal in a high-poverty school. Principals expressed their *desire to stay*: "The children trusted us and they really were comfortable" (Lucy) and "It's my baby and I'm not done with it. I haven't raised it yet. We're getting close but I'm not there yet" (Caroline). The principals reported having a desire to stay and to see the results of their efforts.

Other principals illustrated how they *build and develop teams.* Carl stated, "I try to empower my people . . . trust them so much when they come to me, we can just let them run with it and let it go." Some principals also illustrated how they *take care of their teachers.* George described how principals should "be supportive of teachers. Find ways to lighten their load." By *creating community*, principals create positive relationships that help them remain as principals in high-poverty schools. Michelle stated, "I love the people I work with. We have composed a great faculty around here and they are of the same mind. We do what we need to do for children and for their families." The principals took measures to take care of all their staff because each employee plays a role in helping educate their students. This would create community among all of the staff.

Participants' self-perceptions also meant that they *managed perceptions* to thrive in high-poverty schools. Paul stated, "You are your own person. You portray an image whether you realize it or not. How that image is perceived is very important in how you are received." Marked reported, "I can achieve anything. I have to model that, I have to believe it. I have to help children believe that they can achieve anything." The principals' perceptions set the tone for the school and community. The study's factors of the job being a mission, the desire to stay, creating and developing teams, taking care of your teachers, creating community, and managing perceptions all contributed to the participants' longevity as principals of high-poverty schools.

Sub-Question 3. What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools?

Participants reported several types of continuing education and other less formal, but important, methods of learning. Specific examples of *professional development* the participants reported are curriculum development, networking, and coursework. Curriculum development aides the principals and teachers in staying abreast with the most up to date teaching methods and practices. Sally reported that learning the best practices holds people accountable for and how they teach. Caroline stated, "Really working with teachers on their craft. Just being part of the curriculum." Mark uses data to improve curriculum and to monitor and adjust teaching practices. Principals found networking contributed to their professional development. Carl reported, "You get some networking from people outside of your district and you can see how different districts are doing things, which can help you think differently." Will reported, "You are able to learn from each other." Dorothy reported, "You are able to share experiences."

Principals also found *constant learning* significant. Sally participates in the professional development of her teachers. Will stated, "We have to understand that it's our responsibility to learn and grow as well as our kids and it keeps us, again, learning best practices, always not afraid to change, trying something new." The participants reported an example of being a constant learner was reading. Will stated, "I continue my education. I try to stay abreast in reading." Will reported, "I read a lot of leadership books." Effective principals provide high-quality professional development for all staff (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). Professional development and being a constant learner contributed to the participants' longevity in high-poverty schools.

The central research question "What lived experiences of principals serving in high-poverty school districts contribute to them remaining in their current positions for more than five years?" contribute to each sub-question. Character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities that contribute to the persistence of principals serving in high-poverty schools all are formed within lived experiences. These lived experiences provide intrinsic motivation and inspired the principals to remain long-term.

Summary

This chapter contained a rich description of the 13 participants and how the themes were developed from the data. The results were reported by theme and by research questions. Two tables were used to compare principal tenure, academic growth, rate of teacher retention, and long-term principal comments. The results from one-on-one interviews and the focus group interviews have similar individual comments pertaining to the following 10 themes: treating all with respect; loving children and education; being a good leader; the job is a mission, calling, passion; creating and developing teams; taking care of your teachers; creating community; managing perceptions; professional development; and being a constant learner. The principals' comments provided insight into their lived experiences as longstanding principals of high-poverty schools. A discussion of the findings and implications of the study are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to understand the contributing factors that motivated longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. By exploring these factors, the researcher attempted to fill a gap in the research related to improving the retention of principals in high-poverty schools. This chapter contains a summary of the study's findings and a discussion of the findings in relation to similar studies. The researcher also addresses theoretical, empirical, and practical implications, describes delimitations and limitations that affected the study, and provides recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The principals of high-poverty schools related experiences that helped to answer each research sub-question by describing how their character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities explain their long tenures. Research sub-question 1 themes relate to the significant character traits that contributed to the longevity of high-poverty school principals. The principals reported that above all else students must experience respect from the teachers and administrators. This respect can be kindness, having a genuine concern about students, and giving second chances if a student makes a mistake. Loving the children and education was paramount to each principals' longevity. George stated, "Principals must have a genuine love for the students and their learning." Each principal reported knowing that all children can learn and that students are not defined by their circumstances. The principals reported that if you truly love the children then you educate them for life success.

Another character trait reported that leads to principal longevity in high-poverty schools was having excellent leadership skills. These leadership skills include acknowledging your weaknesses and trying to work on improving them. The principals reported the need for good character by possessing a necessary drive to help them lead high-poverty schools. Practicing empathy and listening were also reported by the principals. Some principals reported having an open-door policy and truly listening and showing empathy to their students' families and faculty concerns. Maintaining high expectations was also expressed by the principals who remained long-term in high-poverty schools.

Research sub-question two themes related to the self-perceptions that contributed to principals' longevity. These themes included the job being a mission, having the desire to stay, developing teams, creating community, and finishing the job. Each principal felt a higher calling and passion to serve and expressed it as being a mission similar to a ministry. Many reported the desire to stay and see the fruition of their work. They were determined to finish the job. Some principals noted the evidence of success from having generations of the same families come through their school and developing these genuine long-lasting relationships with them. The principals reported how important teams are to their success in high-poverty schools. Paul expressed, "All members of the staff including the cafeteria personnel should be a part of the school team." Each play a vital role in the student's success.

Creating community in school and in the surrounding neighborhood is also needed to remain long term at a high-poverty school. Dorothy and Caroline agreed that you must be a part of the community in order to have certain needs met. If the funds were not readily available through the school, several principals discussed that maintaining strong community relationships resulted in needed resources.

Research sub-question three discusses the most noteworthy experiences that contributed to the professional learning of long-term high-poverty school principals. These experiences included professional development and being a constant learner. These professional learning opportunities were also categorized into networking, taking courses, reading, and participating in curriculum development. The principals noted attending the yearly South Carolina Association for School Administrators (SCASA) professional development. During SCASA, South Carolina principals are able to meet with other administrators across the state to network and learn from others by sharing insights from their schools. The principals discussed the importance of staying abreast of the latest teaching methods through reading, coursework and curriculum development. Principals of high-poverty schools have unique challenges and needs (Sutcher, Podolsky, & Espionoza, 2017). To meet these challenges the principals and faculty participated in poverty workshops to give them perspective of the life of someone living in poverty. Sylvia stated, "I feel like I'm a constant learner." Long term high-poverty school principals constantly learn and read the newest research to help their students, faculty, and communities succeed. The participants' tenure as principals in high-poverty schools ranged from 5 years to almost 30 years of experience.

Discussion

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to understand the contributing factors that motivated longstanding elementary and secondary school principals in three high-poverty South Carolina public school districts to remain in their positions. The average tenure of a principal in a high-poverty school is three to five years. I reveal through the results of the study the factors that contribute to principals remaining more than 5 years. Children attending high-poverty schools are unlikely to achieve as well as their peers in wealthier school districts

(Brewer & Klar, 2014). The challenges of poverty can seem insurmountable. After meeting these principals, I know that the power of outstanding long-term school leadership can make the seemingly insurmountable conquerable. In the following section, I will discuss how the study's findings regarding which character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities helped principals persist in reference to the literature, theories, and other studies. I will also discuss how the study's findings confirm previous research, extend previous research, diverge from previous studies, and add new contributions to research conducted on the factors that contribute to the retention of principals in high-poverty schools.

Theoretical Framework

Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. The Herzberg motivation-hygiene theory details two types of factors that contribute to an individual's cause to work—motivators and hygiene. Motivators provide positive satisfaction, while hygiene factors are maintenance factors that do not cause dissatisfaction until they are absent and thus do not provide positive satisfaction or lead to intrinsic rewards (Smith & Shields, 2013). The literature offers little research on the relationship between Herzberg's theory and longstanding principals of high-poverty schools. Only two motivator factors—challenging work and meaningful work—were significant in motivating educators to become longstanding principals in high-poverty schools.

Motivators provide positive satisfaction. Motivators have been found to be the most powerful for long-term change in attitudes and performance (Smith & Shields, 2013). The participants' responses indicated their experiences as long-term principals of high-poverty schools deepened because they found their work challenging and meaningful. Although principalship positions of highly affluent students can have challenges, principals at high-poverty schools are presented with more than average day-to-day challenges. Dorothy stated:

> Sometimes you get really tired but like I said, you surround yourself with good people that encourage you and help you understand that tomorrow is a new day, it's gonna be okay, and you've done the best you can do and you've done right by these children each day, that you can lay your head down and it's gonna be okay and the Lord will take care of the rest.

According to the participants, meaningful work connects with others, helps others, and contributes to something beyond yourself. Meaningful work includes more stress, effort, and struggle than happy lives. Caroline stated, **"**You have to want to be a part of that community;" "I think one of the key things that we do is build community partnerships and in doing that needs are met;" and "You have to do a lot of work with your different organizations within your community." Several principals reported that they stay in the principalship of a high-poverty school because they want to make a difference in the lives of the students. Carl reported, "I want our kids to have equal footing with [highly affluent schools]. So, until we get there I don't want to leave yet."

The hygiene factors are those that bring dissatisfaction when they are removed, but do not provide intrinsic rewards (Smith & Shields, 2013). The hygiene factor of this study would be the salary because it does not provide intrinsic rewards and would not cause dissatisfaction until removed. Paul stated, "I did not take the job of principal for the pay." The results of the current study confirm the research on Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory. Also, a need for further research and development on the relationship between Herzberg's theory and longstanding principals of high-poverty schools exists.

Maslow's theory. In Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs, people are motivated for a variety of reasons; some needs are more basic than others are. The participants of this study

were motivated by love for the children and community and self-actualization, knowing their potential to help their students achieve future goals. George reported that principals "must have a genuine love for students and their learning." Mark stated, "I can achieve anything. I have to model that, I have to believe it. I have to help children believe that they can achieve anything." This study's findings confirm this theory because the principals were motivated to persist by character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities.

Self-determination theory (SDT). SDT assumes that all people have three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competency, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 1991). Central to the self-determination theory is the difference between intrinsically motivated people and extrinsically motivated people. Those who are intrinsically motivated to act have more interest, excitement, and confidence, resulting in higher performance, persistence, and creativity (Deci & Ryan, 1991), heightened vitality (Nix, Ryan, Manly, & Deci, 1999), and higher self-esteem (Deci & Ryan, 1995). Long-term principals of high-poverty schools defy the odds daily by being intrinsically motivated to persist in schools that have additional challenges. Retention requires sustained efforts by tenacious leaders (School Leaders Network, 2014). Carl stated, "They [high-income schools] have their own set of challenges, but my career has led me in a path where I'm more comfortable working with challenges with low-income high poverty, high ESOL. They're the ones I enjoy." Many of the participants were intrinsically motivated to teach in high-poverty schools and believed it was a mission or a calling for their lives. The study's findings confirm this theory because the principals were intrinsically motivated to persist in high-poverty schools.

***Basic needs theory*.** One of the six mini-theories basic to SDT is the basic needs theory, which refers to challenges fueling intrinsic motivation. Principals of high-poverty schools face

daily challenges unique to these schools. These challenges provide intrinsic motivation for the principals to stay steadfast and remain in their position. Those principals who remain long-term in high-poverty schools have additional challenges in their leadership roles (Rousmaniere, 2013). The principals who remain believe intrinsically that the challenges can be overcome and are worth enduring for the students. One participant stated, "I can achieve anything. I have to model that, I have to believe it. I have to help children believe that they can achieve anything." The study's findings confirm this theory because long-term principals of high-poverty schools are intrinsically motivated.

Goals content theory. The fifth SDT mini-theory, goals content theory, differentiates between intrinsic and extrinsic goals. Extrinsic goals are defined as driven by ego (wealth and reputation), while intrinsic goals favor self-actualization, community, and relationships (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic goals lead many principals. One participant stated, "You don't go into education to become rich." Dorothy described how she created relationships with her staff and the community:

> I do a lot of handwritten cards and phone calls, text messages . . . to just help them know I'm here for them and if there's a need, I'll be ready to do whatever it is in order to make it happen.

The study's findings both confirm and diverge from the theory because the participants were intrinsically motivated, but they were not extrinsically motivated. Further research and development are needed.

Relationship motivation theory. The sixth SDT mini-theory, relationship motivation theory, focuses on the need to be connected with others. When the needs of autonomy and competence are met, personal growth will occur (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Deci and Ryan (2014)

further asserted that people need to experience autonomy and competence within the relationship for the relationship to thrive. Caroline stated, "You have to want to be a part of that community." Dorothy agreed, saying, "I think one of the key things that we do is build community partnerships and in doing that needs are met." The study's findings confirm the research because the participants expressed the significance of building relationships within the school and community.

SD mini-theories not applicable to the participants' experiences. The first mini-theory, cognitive orientation theory, refers to controlling external events that pressure people to think, feel, or behave a certain way undermining intrinsic behavior. The participants believed that the intrinsic behavior and goals led to their behaviors, so the participants' experiences do not support the cognitive orientation theory. The second mini-theory, organismic integration theory, refers to different degrees of extrinsic motivators leading to behaviors. The third mini-theory, causality orientation theory, refers to a person being influenced by rewards of others and ego-involvement. Wealth and extrinsic factors have a high value in causality orientation theory. The second and third SD mini-theories refer to extrinsic motivators leading to behaviors rather than intrinsic behaviors leading to specific goals. These SD mini-theories are not applicable because they apply to extrinsic motivators and the study focused on the participants being intrinsically motivated.

Empirical Literature

Empirical literature is based on experience, observation, and original research. This current study extends previous research because it emphasizes professional development concerning poverty for administrators and teachers. As school districts emphasize professional development, principals are more likely to persist in high-poverty schools. Research on why

principals leave high-poverty schools exists, but this study adds research concerning the factors that contribute to longevity of principals in high-poverty schools.

Character traits. What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools? A common theme from past qualitative studies that emerged in the current study was the love of children and education. This study confirmed the previous research on the importance of loving the children. George stated, principals "must have a genuine love for students and their learning." A participant in Sapienza's (2013) study also reported how she loved teaching children, "The best part of the day is the time that I make to be in the classroom . . . Just seeing the kids; whether it's a 5-minute visit or being in the room, that's the real part of the job for me" (p. 65). In a study of the relationship between effective school research and principals of high-performing, low socioeconomic status (SES) schools, Suber (2012) contended that school principals demonstrate success through close physical and psychological involvement with classroom instruction and student learning. Mark stated how he wanted his teachers to teach the students as if they were teaching their own children. The role students take as a factor in principal longevity added to the qualitative literature on why principals persist in high-poverty schools. The role of students as an intrinsically rewarding aspect in longstanding principals' choice to persist also supported Herzberg's motivation theory.

Being a good leader was another common theme found in both the current study and previous literature. Paul stated, "A lot of it has to do with leadership. They [principals] have to buy into it and ownership has to come." This theme was similar to a comment made by a participant in Sapienza's (2013) study, "You also need to have vision and you need to be moving your teachers towards that in order to be moving kids towards higher levels of understanding" (pp. 66–67). Suber (2012) reported that characteristics common to leaders of effective schools

regardless of the students' SES included "(a) alignment of instruction, (b) supervision of teacher behavior and student achievement, (c) professional development, and (d) a positive school culture" (p. 2). Suber also asserted that long term leaders of effective schools generally exemplify transformational leadership. Each study emphasized the significance of leadership and its effectiveness in a school community. This study's findings confirm previous research.

Self-perceptions. What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools? Long-term principals create community by building lasting relationships with teachers, students, and families that generate trust and loyalty. Tim stated, "Year after year it gets easier each year because they know that you took care of my brother and my sister so now you're gonna take care of me." Long-term principals can instill values within their own school that penetrate the mindset of generations of students, helping them to understand the difference that education can make. A participant in Sapienza's (2013) study also discussed creating community, "You have to know the constituent groups and their role. You have to know your community" (p. 70).

Having a passion for the principalship was a theme found in both the current study and in previous research. Principals in the current study reported that being a principal was more than a job—it was a mission or a calling. A participant in a previous study stated, "I'm very, very passionate about what I do" (Sapienza, 2013, p. 68). Sapienza (2013) and the current study found that self-perceptions are important in creating an effective school community. The study's findings confirm previous research.

Professional learning opportunities. What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools? Principals' beliefs about professional development emerged in the current study and previous literature. A

participant in Sapienza's (2013) study stated, "What I believe is crucial. . . is internal professional development. There's professional development…internally for our principals, because much like teachers need to learn and grow, so do principals" (pp. 71–72). Sally stated, "Learning best practices in classroom instruction is important." An effective leader at a high-poverty, high-performance school is one who knows how (a) to use varied styles of leadership to help students succeed; (b) is focused on high expectations; and (c) fosters a safe, orderly, and collaborative climate conducive to learning (Parrett & Budge, 2012). Dorothy stated, "The poverty workshops have been inspiring to me because it helps put in perspective what you're thinking and gives you an idea of what's going on in other people's lives." The study confirms and adds to the previous research about poverty workshops.

Implications

Researchers and administrators can use the results to understand what motivates principals to serve high-poverty schools. The implications of this study are supported by the themes that emerged from the data. This section contains the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of the study. I will also discuss recommendations based on implications for individual stakeholders.

Theoretical Implications

This study helped clarify how Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory applies to the factors that contribute to the longevity of high-poverty schools principals, particularly in an aspect of the theory-challenging work. Those who are involved in high-poverty education must understand the importance of challenging work. Challenging work (motivator) contributes to positive satisfaction but is derived from intrinsic conditions (Smith & Shields, 2013). Those who persist in high-poverty schools have additional stressors as leaders (Rousmaniere, 2013). These

additional stressors are motivators that contribute to principals persisting. In this study, the participants demonstrated a strong work ethic and understood the importance of making a difference in the lives of their students by identifying intrinsic goals to overcome the additional stressors. These goals relate to school community and contribute to self-perceptions, a character trait that can lead to long-term principalship.

According to basic needs theory, people innately look for challenges in their environment that fuel their intrinsic motivation and satisfy their basic psychological needs. The principalship of a high-poverty school entails daily challenges that more affluent schools do not experience. Many participants in my study referred to the challenging work, but they also indicated the intrinsic motivation and rewards of witnessing the success of students who may lack comforts at home. Michelle stated, “We do what we need to do for children and for their families.”

According to goals content theory, people are intrinsically motivated. Goals content theory applies to the long-term principalship of high-poverty schools because the participants are intrinsically motivated to remain and make a difference in the lives of their students and community. Retired principal Joseph and current principal Dorothy called their principalships a mission. Tim posited that, “They probably remain in their principalship because they love what they’re doing. I think you have to have a passion for children.”

According to the relationship motivation theory, people need to be connected with others and when autonomy and personal needs are met growth will occur (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Relationships with the students, community, and teachers all play a significant role in contributing to a long-term principalship of a high-poverty school. Dorothy stated, “I remain in this principalship because of the families, the community.” Michelle reported, “I love the people I work with. We have composed a great faculty around here and they are of the same mind.

According to Maslow's (1970) theory of hierarchy of needs, people are motivated for a variety of reasons. The experiences of the participants of this study identified with intrinsic motivators rather than extrinsic motivators. Sylvia described why she believed principals stay at high-poverty schools, "I can tell you exactly why. You have to have heart. You have to know that you're making a difference and you have to see that you're making a difference."

Empirical Implications

The researcher used the interviews, focus group, and school data to understand factors that contributed to the reasons the principals had tenures greater than 5 years in high-poverty schools. Empirical implications are motivations or actions not directly observed but suggested by the themes that emerged from the data. In this section, the empirical implications of the study are delineated by the principals' character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities.

Character traits. What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools? A factor that supports principal longevity is respect. Mark stated, "No matter who comes in that building, create an atmosphere where they feel welcomed, invited, and excited about being in the building." When the principal sets the standard and when each employee feels as if his or her role is significant, then positive changes in the school take place. Mark reported, "Folks have to feel like they are playing a role in what's going on in the school. They have to feel like, 'I have ownership in what's going on here.' That's how I relate to people." As long-term principals encourage staff, students, and parents to have ownership in the success of the school, the school atmosphere becomes more positive.

Another factor that contributes to long-term principalships in high-poverty schools is good leadership. Principals set examples for their students, teachers, and communities. The

participants believed in the significance of learning and growing just as their students learn and grow. Will stated, "I, too, have to grow and learn along with my students…it's our responsibility to learn and grow as well as our kids and it keeps us, again, learning best practices, always not afraid to change, trying something new." Hallinger (as cited in Brewer & Klar, 2014) stated, "Effective leadership for learning is adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions of the school over time" (p. 425). District trainings and graduate classes should encourage leadership that relates to diverse cultures from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. This would encourage principals and teachers to feel more apt to create welcoming atmospheres for families of diverse backgrounds.

Self-perceptions. What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools? A factor that supports principal longevity in high-poverty schools is creating community with colleagues, students, and families by building relationships. Carl stated, "Very rarely will I wear a suit jacket or a sports coat. I want them to know I'm approachable. I live in this community, so basically, they're my people, I'm their people, and we're one in the same." Dorothy reported how poverty workshops were inspiring to her, "The compassion training . . . did a poverty walk . . . it gives you an idea of what's going on in other people's lives." Future principals who want to dedicate their lives to high-poverty communities can make a difference in the lives of their students by creating poverty workshops for themselves and their faculty. These poverty workshops are grounded in research and help to correct any inaccurate perceptions of poverty. District training and graduate courses could use these findings to promote relationship building with families of different cultures and lower socioeconomic status.

Professional learning opportunities. What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools? A factor that

supports long-term principalship in high-poverty schools is that principals are constantly learning. Will stated, “I, too, have to grow and learn along with my students. It’s our responsibility to learn and grow as well as our kids and it keeps us, again, learning best practices, always not afraid to change, trying something new.” An effective principal provides high-quality professional development for all staff (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). The principal’s example will transfer to the teachers, students, and families as well. When school districts provide professional development tailored to the needs of high-poverty principals, schools will make positive strides.

Practical Implications

The meanings constructed from the data collected during the study can help researchers understand ways to retain principals in high-poverty schools. This section contains a discussion of the practical implications related to principalship in high-poverty schools. The practical implications are related to the principals’ character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities.

Character traits. What character traits help principals remain as leaders of high-poverty schools? The character traits included treating all with respect, loving the children and community, good leadership, having high expectations, listening, and practicing empathy. For principals to remain at high-poverty schools these intrinsic character traits must be present. Great leadership should be a priority. Paul, when asked what character traits make a long-term principal, reported, “A lot of it has to do with leadership. A lot of it has to do with the style they bring in there.” Great leadership begins with the superintendent. Superintendents who have high-poverty schools in their districts are responsible for hiring effective principals who possess those necessary character traits or providing the support needed for them to gain these character

traits. This support could entail building great leadership skills, listening skills, and having high expectations. Beginning principals need support and cultivation as they adjust to their roles and responsibilities. Veteran principals of high-poverty schools could provide this character trait support to beginning principals.

Self-perceptions. What self-perceptions contribute to principals' longevity in high-poverty schools? Long-term principals of high-poverty schools believe that their job is a mission, a calling, or a passion. To create that passion, superintendents can create mentoring systems for high-poverty school principals to support novice principals in high-poverty schools in their new roles. More experienced principals in high-poverty schools can share the journey of their principalships and more importantly the intrinsic rewards and successes that have fueled their motivation to persist. An important recommendation would be to remind novice principals of high-poverty schools of their mission during difficult times and proactively provide support and encouragement at all times.

Professional learning opportunities. What professional learning opportunities contribute to principals' long-term principalships of high-poverty schools? Constant professional development can help motivate principals of high-poverty schools to persist. Will stated, "Professional developments . . . [in] classroom instruction are vital. Research-based practices have really made the difference in our school. Knowing what a good best practice is, knowing good pedagogy, and knowing really how kids learn is everything." For them to serve increasingly diverse students, staff, and communities, principals need to be culturally aware and responsive; they need to develop the beliefs and capabilities to lead all stakeholders effectively and positively (Gao & Mager, 2011). Universities establishing exemplary preparation programs that cultivate principals who feel prepared and who demonstrate competency in those practices

associated with strong leadership that can create schools where all students, including the economically, racially, and ethnically diverse ones, can be successful is becoming imperative (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

To promote the success of high-poverty schools, districts must provide their principals and staff the best professional development. University schools of education and school districts must seek principals who are intrinsically motivated to serve those in poverty. To support those principals, more problem-based authentic learning activities, compassion training, and poverty workshops must be provided to them. For principals to persist at high-poverty schools, they must understand the challenges faced by the communities they serve.

Recommendations to Stakeholders

Districts. Several recommendations can be made based on the implications. Hallinger (as cited in Brewer & Klar, 2014) stated, "Effective leadership for learning is adaptive and responsive to the changing conditions of the school over time" (p. 425). District trainings could encourage leadership that relates to diverse cultures from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Superintendents who have high-poverty schools in their districts are responsible for hiring effective principals who possess those necessary character traits to remain long term. Districts can provide training to superintendents of high-poverty schools to enable them to hire effective principals to lead these schools. Districts can also provide beginning principals of high-poverty schools with needed support and cultivation as they adjust to their roles and responsibilities. Districts can also create mentoring systems for veteran high-poverty school principals to support novice principals in high-poverty schools in their new roles. Districts can provide professional development to support all principals of high-poverty schools with more problem-based authentic learning activities, compassion training, and poverty workshops.

Principals must understand the challenges faced by the communities they serve. Districts can conduct research on specific school districts with high principal retention and high standardized testing scores to examine how the superintendents of those schools inspire longevity in their high-poverty school principals and the tools the principals use to acquire above average test scores. The superintendent and other district leaders may have specific strategies to motivate high-poverty school principals to persist and gain above-average test scores. This study would be helpful for superintendents of high-poverty schools to understand what they can do to promote principal longevity and above-average test scores in their high-poverty schools. The data confirms that those principals who possess character traits of treating all with respect, loving the children and community, good leadership, having high expectations, listening, and practicing empathy are more likely to sustain long term principalships in high-poverty schools. The data also confirms that principals with more support in professional development are more likely to persist.

Administrators. Future principals who want to serve in high-poverty schools should organize professional development (poverty workshops) for their faculty. An effective principal provides high-quality professional development for all staff (Sebastian & Allensworth, 2012). These poverty workshops are grounded in research and can help to clear up any misconceptions about poverty.

Policy makers. Policy makers could delegate funding to enable additional research into factors that contribute to high-poverty schools. Policies could be developed to encourage the need for more studies on longevity of principals in high-poverty schools. Policies could be implemented to reward best practices along with longevity of high-poverty school principals.

Delimitations and Limitations

Delimitations are purposeful choices the researcher makes to restrict the boundaries of the study. The main delimiting parameter that was set for this study was to include participants with at least five years of experience as a principal of a high-poverty school. The delimiting factor of including participants with at least five years of experience was significant because many school principals do not persist more than five years in high-poverty schools. The purpose of this study was to understand the factors that contribute to the retention of principals in high-poverty schools; therefore, selecting only participants with five or more years of experience as principals of high-poverty schools was necessary. Most of the past research on long-term principalship was performed on middle-income public schools (Sapienza, 2013). Focusing on the perspective of high-poverty school principals was significant for getting their specific views on factors that lead to long-term principalship (Reardon, Greenberg, Kalogrides, Shores, & Valentino, 2013). High-poverty schools should have principals who are stable and commit long-term to ensure that the students, faculty, and community will trust in their leadership.

A second delimitation was to select principals of schools with diverse student populations and to find principals from diverse backgrounds. I wanted to focus on the views of black and white and male and female principals who served in diverse schools. Many school districts in South Carolina have diverse populations.

Limitations are potential weaknesses of the study that cannot be controlled. One limitation was the number of participants I could recruit for this study. I was able to recruit 13 participants from school districts in northwestern South Carolina. The population in this region of the state consists mainly of Caucasian and African Americans, and the participants reflected that dynamic. No Hispanic or Asian principals were working in the school districts included in

my study; therefore, my findings may not generalize to all principals of high-poverty schools in the United States. Cultural differences among the different high-poverty school principals could also play a role in remaining long-term, and this could offer an interesting point of view.

Recommendations for Future Research

Schools with the highest concentration of low socioeconomic students and overall low student academic performance have higher rates of administrative turnover than schools in more stable neighborhoods (Reames et al., 2013). In many states, the average tenure for a new principal is approximately three years (Fuller, 2012). Increasing the amount of literature regarding long-term high-poverty school principals would be advantageous, because so few studies on this specific sector of principals exists (Sapienza, 2013). Another recommendation is to conduct a survey of the faculty of graduate schools of education and their graduates to determine if what is being taught is what is needed to be effective principals of high-poverty schools. Research conducted in university graduate schools of education would give a deeper understanding of what and how aspiring principals are learning. Understanding the gaps in their education as perceived by principals could help graduate schools of education make their offerings more relevant for aspiring principals. A final recommendation is to extend this study to other areas in the United States to examine the experiences of other high-poverty school principals. This study occurred in the southeastern United States. Additional research should look at the three categories in the current study (character traits, self-perceptions, and professional learning opportunities) by grade level (elementary, middle, and high school) to determine if differences exist in how the principals describe their job.

Summary

I am inspired by the experiences of the participants leading high-poverty schools. This study revealed to me the significance of reaching out to future principals, sharing necessary skills and strategies, and describing the intrinsic rewards of being the principal of a high-poverty school. Effective long-term principals in high-poverty schools provide stability to their schools and to the communities they serve. Trust will grow amongst the families of the district and necessary changes with the students can be made. The stability provided by an effective long-term principal can lead to improved test scores and positive outcomes for the students the schools served. Words about great leadership resonate clearly, "You need a commitment which is long-term and a commitment to leadership, because that's the only way you build excellence" (Premji, 2011).

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Social/Political Forces That Affected Schools

Social/Political Forces that Impacted Schools 1950s – 1970s

Time Period	Social/Political Force	Impact on Schools
1954	U. S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education*	Separate educational facilities were ruled inherently unequal.
1955	*Brown II*	The Supreme Court provided a plan for dismantling the dual system of education in the South.
1958	After the launch into space of the *Sputnik* satellite, the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) was passed.	Federal funding provided for science and technology education and other topics that would contribute to the nation's military and economic power.
1958	FBI director J. Edgar Hoover identified a rebellious youth culture as a "menace"	More aggressive discipline policies were implemented in schools and discipline procedures were assigned to administrators.
Early 1960s	Legal authorization of public-sector unions	By the end of the 1970s, the majority of teachers belonged to collective bargaining units, complicating relationships between teachers and principals.
1965	Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESEA)	Federal funding was provided to schools for enrichment programs for poor children (Title I)
1966	The *Equality of Educational Opportunity Report* (commonly known as the Coleman Report) was published	The report challenged concepts that funding, teacher preparation, curriculum development or educator professionalization had an impact on students more than background and socioeconomic status.
1968/1974	Bilingual Education Act was passed, followed by the 1974 Supreme Court decision *Lau v. Nichols*	Schools were required to provide assistance for children with limited English proficiency.
1969	Supreme Court decision *Tinker v. Des Moines*	The decision supported constitutional rights to freedom of speech and expression for students and teachers.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	Schools were responsible for the education of children with disabilities.
1960s – 1970s	Civil Rights Initiatives	Racial integration of schools, support of minority cultures and achieving equity led to tensions, with school principals in the middle of the conflict.

Source: Rousmaniere, 2013, pp. 89-110.

Appendix B: The National Education Goals 2000

The National Education Goals stated that by the year 2000,

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn.
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%.
3. All students will leave grades levels 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, history, and geography, and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy.
4. United States' students will be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement.
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.
6. Every school in the United States will be free of drugs, violence, and the unauthorized presence of firearms and alcohol and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning.
7. The nation's teaching force will have access to programs for the continued improvement of their professional skills and the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to instruct and prepare all American students for the next century.
8. Every school will promote partnerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. (p. 1)

Appendix C: Permission to Conduct Study Letter

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to seek consent to perform a research study using participants from your school. I am a graduate student in the Doctor of Education Program at Liberty University, in Virginia, and I am completing my dissertation. The study is entitled *Factors that Contribute to the Retention of Longstanding Principals in High-Poverty School Districts: A Multiple Case Study*.

I hope that the school administration will allow me to recruit one to two individuals to interview. No costs will be incurred by either your school or the individual participants. I will appreciate your permission to perform this research. I will email or call next week to respond to any concerns. Please email any concerns: Rgraham43@liberty.edu

If you decide to participate, sign below and return this form to the email address Rgraham43@liberty.edu.

Alternately, kindly submit a signed letter of permission on your institution's letterhead acknowledging your consent and permission for me to conduct this study at your institution.

Sincerely,

Approved by:

Appendix D: Liberty University IRB Approval Letter

August 10, 2018

IRB Approval 3374.081018: Factors that Contribute to the Retention of Principals in High- Poverty School Districts: A Multiple Case Study

Dear

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.
Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):
6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.
Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.
Sincerely,

G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
The Graduate School

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Appendix E: Participant Recruitment Email

Greetings from Rosalyn Graham, a Liberty University doctoral student. I am conducting a multiple case study of the factors that contribute to the retention of principals in high-poverty school districts. Your participation in the study is requested. You were selected because you have three years or more of experience as principal of a high-poverty school. Please consider agreeing to participate in the study.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked interview questions regarding the reasons that have contributed to your tenacity as the lead administrator in the following two areas:

1. What professional learning opportunities (professional development coursework) contribute to a principal's long-term principalship of high-poverty schools?
2. What character traits help principals develop tenacity as leaders of high-poverty schools?

The interviews will be conducted via phone or in person at your convenience. Pseudonyms will be used instead of actual names. I will conduct the interviews. The utmost professionalism will be exhibited during the interview.

If you have any questions prior to agreeing to the interview, please contact me.

Respectfully,

rgraham43@liberty.edu

Appendix F: Participant Consent/Assent Form

Project Title: Factors that Contribute to the Retention of Principals in High-Poverty School Districts: A Multiple Case Study

Principal Investigator:

College: Liberty University

Academic Department: College of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of the factors that contribute to the retention of principals in high-poverty schools. You were selected as a possible participant because of your experience as a principal of a high-poverty school. I request that you examine this form and ask any concerns you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

This study is being conducted by Rosalyn Graham, doctoral student at Liberty University.
Background Information:
The purpose of this study is to determine what leadership characteristics are essential in leading a high-poverty school.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in an interview that addresses the following topics:

1. Characteristics of the leader's managing of the day-to-day operations of the organization
2. Characteristics of the leader addressing his or her responsibility as the instructional program leader

The interview will be recorded via a smartphone app for the researcher to recall the responses to the various questions to look for emerging themes. It is anticipated that you will only be interviewed once. You will have an opportunity to examine your responses to ensure that your answers to the questions accurately depict your intent.

Uncertainties and Advantages of Being in the Study: The study has minimal risk: The risks of the study are no more than the participant would encounter in everyday life.
The benefit to participation is the contribution to the educational realm concerning the longevity of leadership in high-poverty schools. Liberty University will not take on any responsibility for illness or financial reimbursement for your participation. This does not waive any of your legal rights nor release any claim you might have based on negligence.

Compensation: You will not receive compensation for your participation.

Confidentiality: I will only have access to your records and they will be securely stored away. Your identity will be concealed for all publications. The data from the interview will be stored in a password protected file for the 3-year period required by law. The files will only be seen by me and will be kept on a computer that also is password protected. Data collected from the interviews is only expected to be used for the purpose of completing the dissertation. The interviews will happen in person, through email, or over the telephone and will be conducted off campus. Your actual name will not be used. Pseudonyms will be used for participant names as

well as the name of the site of the study. The recordings will be used for education purposes and will then be destroyed. The audio files will be deleted by third-party software that deletes files several times to ensure that it is practically impossible to recover said files.

Observational data collected will also use pseudonyms. Identifiable information will not be used in the study. The information gathered from observations will be kept in a password protected Word© document on a laptop with another password. After the appropriate time (3 years), the files will be deleted using software that makes recovery of the file almost impossible.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Involvement in this study is optional. If you contribute to this study, you have the option to withdraw at any time or not answer any specific questions.

The researcher conducting this study is Rosalyn Graham. Questions can be referred to Rosalyn at 864-384-2269 or rgraham43@liberty.edu. You can also contact her faculty advisor, Dr. Frank Bailey, at fsbailey@liberty.edu

If you would like to contact someone other than Rosalyn Graham or Frank Bailey please refer to the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd, Suite 1837, Lynchburg, VA 24502 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent: I comprehend the above information and agree to participate in this study.

_____ Please check the blank stating that you understand and agree that the interview will be audio recorded for researcher recall purposes only.

Signature_____Date _____

Signature of Investigator_____Date _____