EFFECTS OF PRINCIPAL LEADERSHIP
ON TEACHER RETENTION DECISIONS

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Abstract

Research shows that teachers have a larger impact on student success than any other in-school influence (SCORE, 2016). School districts have found an increasing problem recruiting and retaining effective teachers in recent years. In addition to staffing problems, student achievement can also be affected by high rates of teacher attrition. For this reason, it is imperative that leaders examine the factors they can control to help retain effective teachers in their building. This study sought to identify leadership factors that influenced teachers’ decisions to remain in their current schools. Data were collected via individual, semi-structured interviews with five principals and five teachers who work for them. Through these interviews and a teacher focus group, participants identified collaborative relationships between teachers and administrators, transparent communication, and teacher autonomy as factors that positively influence a teacher’s decision to remain in their school. Findings also showed that principals who implement effective mentor programs and provide leadership opportunities for teachers tend to have faculty who report higher job satisfaction and who are more likely to return. The intended outcome of this study is to provide principals with information and ideas to increase teacher retention rates in their schools.
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Table of Contents

First Section

Dissertation Approval.................................................................ii
Abstract.....................................................................................iii
Copyright statement.................................................................iv
Acknowledgements.................................................................v
Table of Contents......................................................................vi
List of Tables, Figures, and Illustrations...................................ix

Chapter One:

Introduction................................................................................1
Background..................................................................................1
Research Problem.......................................................................3
Purpose of the Study.................................................................4
Rational for the Study...............................................................4
Theoretical Framework............................................................5
Research Questions....................................................................6
Limitations and Delimitations....................................................6
Researcher Positionality Statement..............................................6
Definition of Terms.....................................................................7

Chapter Two: Review of Literature............................................8

Overview of Teacher Retention and Attrition...........................8
History of Teacher Retention......................................................9
Factors Influencing Teacher Retention.......................................10
What Teachers Need From Their Principals..........................................................18
The Changing Role of the Principal.................................................................24
Mentoring and Induction Programs.................................................................28
Leadership Styles............................................................................................31
Leader-Follower Theory..................................................................................35
Conceptual Framework: Phenomenography..................................................37
Summary.........................................................................................................38

Chapter Three: Methodology..........................................................................40
Description of the Specific Research Approach..........................................40
Description of Study Participants and Setting..............................................42
Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis...........................................43
Ethical Considerations....................................................................................48
Summary.........................................................................................................49

Chapter Four: Findings..................................................................................50
Selection of Participants..................................................................................50
Participant Demographics............................................................................51
Data Analysis...................................................................................................53
Principal Interview Results............................................................................56
Teacher Interview Results..............................................................................59
Summary.........................................................................................................64

Chapter Five: Findings, Implications, and Considerations.............................65
Research Question One: Findings.................................................................65
Research Question One: Implications...........................................................70
List of Tables, Figures, and Illustrations

Figure 4.1: Principal Participant Years of Administrative Experience.................................52
Figure 4.2: Teacher Participant Years of Educational Experience........................................53
Figure 4.3: Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 1.................................54
Figure 4.4: Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 2.................................55
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

According to the State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE), teachers are the most important contributors to a child’s academic success (SCORE, 2011). However, teachers are as unique as the students they serve. The needs of teachers are often overlooked as the focus remains on the students, particularly in populations where the majority of students are living in poverty and are coming to school without basic physiological and safety needs being met at home. Consequently, teacher attrition is on the rise in public education, and some schools even report a higher turnover rate for their teachers than for students (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2007). The increasing rate of teacher shortage has put on policymakers and school district administrators a sense of urgency to find out the reasons teachers are leaving. Incentives have been put into place to encourage teachers to stay, such as monetary incentives related to mortgages or student loans, and more seamless certification processes. Although these factors are undoubtedly appealing to teachers, there is no evidence that any one of these has been able to address the main factors contributing to whether or not a teacher stays in the classroom (Johnson and Birkeland, 2003). While teachers report a wide range of reasons for leaving the classroom such as familial obligations, salary, increasing accountability, and student behavior issues, much of the recent research regarding teacher retention has been focused on the influence of school leaders. In a 2003 study, over 26% of teachers who left the profession indicated they did so as a result of feeling unsupported or unsatisfied with administration (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). Administrative support is cited as the top reason teachers identify for staying in or leaving their position (Poldosky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Principals,
like teachers and students, are unique and differ in their areas of strength and weakness. Their leadership styles and the programs they put in place to support teachers can have a great effect on the job satisfaction of their instructional leaders.

Over 40% of new teachers leave the profession entirely within the first five years (National Education Association, 2007). Teaching consistently maintains a higher turnover rate than other occupations (Ingersoll and Smith, 2003). Principals and school administrators have an opportunity to retain effective teachers by taking steps to ensure teachers feel supported and able to implement best practices in the classroom. Recent research within the state of Tennessee indicates that effective principals are both more likely to retain their best teachers and less likely to retain their lower-performing teachers, a pattern that is referred to as “strategic retention” (Grissom & Bartanen, 2018). In contrast, studies show that teachers who receive the lowest classroom observation scores leave schools at higher rates under an effective principal than an ineffective one (Grissom, 2018). Any teacher who has been through administrative changes in their school can attest to the impact one administrator can have on the climate and culture of the entire school. A 2017 Learning Policy Institute research study showed that 25% of teachers disagree that their administrator encourages and acknowledges staff, runs a school well, and communicates a clear vision. Recent years have seen an increase in administrative support programs for teachers, which have garnered positive feedback from teachers involved (Ingersoll and Kralik, 2004). Principals who play a proactive role in the development of their teachers through mentorships and other similar programs are able to recruit and retain teachers at a higher rate than their counterparts who choose a more hands-off method to leadership. Teachers who view their administrators as pillars
of support and encouragement rather than authoritarian supervisors in place to ensure teachers are following orders are more likely to report overall job satisfaction. This can greatly influence a teacher’s decision to stay in the classroom.

**Research Problem**

Teacher retention is an important and relevant issue. District leaders must prioritize the retention of effective teachers. Studies are predicting a dramatic increase in the demand for new teachers in elementary and secondary schools (Ingersoll, 2004). Districts are already fighting an uphill battle with finding good teachers as data shows fewer college students are entering teacher preparatory programs (SCORE, 2016). This makes the issue of teacher turnover even more crucial. Districts must focus on retaining the effective teachers they hire. The high rate of teacher turnover is costly to districts and puts students at risk of not receiving the consistent and supportive learning experiences they deserve (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Concerns about teacher turnover have led to a surge in research about effective ways to retain teachers. Studies have shown that monetary incentives are not enough to retain teachers. Because there is more to a teaching career than salary and compensation, administrators need to shift their focus to support and working conditions that will contribute to overall job satisfaction (Hanushek, Kain, and Rivkin, 2004).

Decisions made by principals can directly affect how a teacher feels about their job, which can contribute to their decision to stay or leave. Effective principals create strong school culture, set a mission, hire, and retain effective teachers (SCORE, 2018). All of these things contribute to student success. Some key factors related to teacher retention include opportunities for collaboration, input on decision-making, school
culture, and administrative support (SCORE, 2011). All of these are areas where a principal plays a central role. If we are to keep effective teachers—particularly in the most high-need school environments—we must give those teachers the help and support they need. Teachers are more likely to stay if they work under administrators who are supportive and trustworthy (Ragatz, 2014).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study is to attempt to identify the primary aspects of administrative leadership that correlate to teachers’ decisions to stay or leave their position. Much of the research surrounding teacher retention has focused on a wide variety of factors and influences. Previous studies have identified that principals do have an opportunity to impact the job satisfaction level of teachers. This study is designed to narrow the focus to how administrators and their organizational leadership affect retention.

**Rationale for the Study**

Although districts recognize that teachers are not being retained at rates they have been in the past, many of the efforts to keep effective teachers have come up short. In addition to monetary incentives, attention needs to be paid to job satisfaction. The growing research surrounding principal impact on school climate, culture, and teacher and student success has shown that administrators have a huge opportunity to contribute to a teacher’s decision to stay. This research study seeks to better understand specific ways that principals can increase teacher retention rates by improving teacher job satisfaction within their school.
Theoretical Framework

Organizational theory is the study of formal social organizations and the patterns and structures that define the interrelationship with the environment in which they exist (Britton, 2016). Studies based in Organizational theory seek to understand, predict and explain (Bush, 2015). This study seeks to understand how various leadership styles and decisions impact teacher retention. While there are many reasons a teacher may decide to leave the classroom, this study narrows the focus to factors related to principal leadership. Organizational theory is an appropriate grounding theory for this study because it deals heavily in culture with relevant concepts of leadership, decision-making, team building, motivation, and job satisfaction woven throughout. These concepts are aligned to the goal of maximizing efficiency and productivity within an organization (Lumen Learning, 2018).

This study examines the human behavior and decisions that drive motivations and impact individual career decisions. Human needs theory, as outlined in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, focuses on human influences within an organization as a way of understanding motivation. Employees have needs they expect to be fulfilled in the workplace. Maslow outlines his hierarchy in 5 tiers: first physiological needs, followed by safety need, then belongingness and love needs, rising to esteem needs, and culminating with self-actualization needs (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Pay, benefits, and other financial aspects are important, but effective principals know that they must provide more than these to motivate their teachers. The researcher predicted that the most relevant details and patterns unearthed during the research would fall within the tiers of belongingness and love, esteem, and self-actualization.
Research Questions

1. What administrative factors contribute to teachers’ decisions to stay in their schools?

2. What support methods can administrators implement to retain effective teachers?

Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

The data collected for this study are limited to one school district in Middle Tennessee, which may make the findings difficult to generalize to a larger population. The schools involved are primarily Title I schools with the majority of students receiving free or reduced meals based on household income. Teachers in schools located in high-poverty neighborhoods often experience different types of job-related stress than teachers in affluent schools, so a limitation of the study could be its application to teachers in affluent school environments. A delimitation of this study was the teacher participant criteria. Participants were promised anonymity for their participation in the study, which may have encouraged more honest and detailed responses to interview questions.

Researcher Positionality Statement

The researcher is entering her twelfth year of teaching in the elementary school setting. She has taught four grade levels in five different schools across different states as she traveled with the U.S. Air Force. In that time, the researcher has worked for seven different principals. These experiences have shown her how impactful a principal is on overall job satisfaction, and how big of a consideration administrators are when teachers are deciding whether or not to return. As a mentor teacher, the researcher has seen and heard how first-year and early-career teachers are affected by administration, often in a
more impactful way than veteran teachers. Both positive and negative experiences with administration have led to the interest in the study.

The researcher is currently employed with a district that has experienced the strain of a teacher shortage that seems to only be getting worse with each school year. Many open positions have gone unfilled, and class sizes are increasing as teachers absorb students from other classes that have no teacher. Teachers looking for career advancement have been kept in the classroom because central office staff struggled to replace any teacher who leaves. Seeing the need for higher rates of teacher retention and how these challenges directly affect students has led the researcher to be interested in this topic. The researcher’s role in this study will be to analyze responses from teacher and principal interviews and surveys, and identify patterns and trends that may be useful to administrators as they make future decisions.

**Definition of Terms**

*Teacher retention* refers to teachers returning to their same position (Lochmiller, Sugimoto, & Muller, 2016)

*Teacher attrition* refers to the phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001)

*Leadership style* refers to how administrators describe their leadership responsibilities as facilitators of a school (Learning Policy Institute, 2017)

*Administrative support* refers to the teacher-principal relationship in terms of informal and formal interactions pertaining to the areas not limited to instructional improvement, feedback, discourse, reflection, and growth, (Methner, 2013)
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter examines the research related to teacher factors that contribute to teacher retention, particularly the administrative connection. The review is divided into several sections including:

- Overview of Teacher Retention and Attrition
- History of Teacher Retention
- Factors Influencing Teacher Retention
- What Teachers Need from Their Principals
- The Changing Role of the Principal
- Mentoring Programs
- Leadership Styles
- Leader-Follower Theory
- Conceptual Framework

**Overview of Teacher Retention and Attrition**

Teacher retention refers to teachers returning to their position for a new school year (Lochmiller, Sugimoto, & Muller, 2016). District and school administrators place importance on the impact of teacher retention, as it affects student performance and can be cost-effective for the district. Much of the previous research surrounding teacher retention and attrition has focused on school characteristics/demographics and on personal characteristics of teachers who leave or stay (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005). Recently researchers have shifted to examining more specific factors related to teacher career decisions. Some of these factors include salary, working conditions, and administrative support. One study found that teachers who had a positive
perception of school leadership and school climate were more likely to stay than teachers who did not (Ladd, 2010).

Teacher attrition refers to the phenomenon of teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Attrition among classroom teachers is a growing problem in the United States. Approximately half a million teachers leave their schools each year (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, & Wyckoff, 2009). The educational field has seen a high number of career teachers entering retirement, but those numbers are far less than the number of teachers leaving their classrooms within the first five years. Attrition accounts for nearly 90% of the need for new teachers (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Teacher attrition is costly to districts, as they have to recruit and train new teachers, and turnover is shown to be detrimental to the academic success of students (Buchanan, et al., 2013). Teacher attrition is an important issue that needs active and effective solutions to combat the negative effects on students.

**History of Teacher Retention**

Although much attention is being focused on teacher retention and attrition today, it is not a new issue. Research on the importance of teacher retention can be found dating back to the 1970s. Some of the early issues with teacher retention can be traced back to the idea that teaching was originally designed as a temporary job for women before they had children, or for men before they moved up into administrative roles (Ingersoll, 2001). Many teachers entered the profession with a temporary mindset and never planned to stay in the classroom until retirement. 40% of teachers who pursue undergraduate degrees in teaching never even enter a classroom (Riggs, 2013).
Retention rates vary among school demographics. Urban schools experience the highest turnover rates, with about half of urban school teachers leaving within the first five years (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). Teacher attrition rates have been steadily increasing since the late 1980s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016). Although rural and urban schools experience more turnover than suburban schools, problems with teacher retention are not limited to high-needs schools. In Tennessee annual teacher turnover averages 6 percent (Curran & Goldrick, 2002).

Although education is losing a high number of teachers to retirement, the number of retirees is smaller than the number of teachers leaving the profession for other reasons (Ingersoll, 2001). Attention must be paid to the fact that many new teachers are not staying in teaching long enough to retire. Young teachers under 30 and with less than 5 years of experience leave the profession at elevated rates (National Council on Teacher Quality, 2004).

**Factors Influencing Teacher Retention**

Teachers in the United States leave their positions at higher rates than teachers in any other country (Westervelt & Lonsdorf, 2016). While there are numerous reasons any person could make the decision to leave their job, a 2016 Learning Policy Institute study cites 6 major factors that push teachers out of their classrooms: inadequate preparation, challenging working conditions, lack of administrative supports, dissatisfaction with compensation, better career opportunities, and personal reasons (including pregnancy and family changes). For the purposes of this portion of the literature review, “personal reasons” will not be examined, as it is a broad topic that can include many factors unrelated to the school setting.
**Inadequate Teacher Preparation**

Teacher preparation programs have come under scrutiny in recent years as schools and districts attempt to uncover why new teachers are quick to leave the profession. Beginning teachers with little or no preparation are $2 \frac{1}{2}$ times more likely to leave the classroom after one year compared to their well-prepared peers (Learning Policy Institute, 2016). Many teacher preparation programs are looking to lower this statistic by providing pre-service teachers with more time in the classroom during student teaching. However, the content of what teachers are learning also needs to match up with current trends and educational issues. For example, many teacher education programs only offer one course about students with disabilities to their general education teachers (Mader, 2017). This small amount of learning may leave new teachers feeling unprepared to work with students with special learning needs. In a 2013 evaluation of teacher preparation programs, the National Council of Teacher Quality found that only 1 in 15 programs provide teachers with “solid preparation”, and three out of four programs fail to insist that students meet modest standards in order to remain in the program. Research indicates that student achievement is significantly higher if they are taught by a teacher who was fully prepared upon entry to the classroom, had high scores on teacher licensing tests, and graduated from a competitive teacher preparation program (Clotfelter, Ladd, & Vigdor, 2007). Many teacher preparation programs are not preparing their students in how to manage a classroom, and are not placing them with high-quality teachers for their student teaching experience (Kelly, 2013). Having poor classroom management can
directly influence teacher response to another factor contributing to teacher attrition: challenging working conditions.

**Challenging Working Conditions**

School leadership is the most consistently relevant measure of working conditions, and teacher perceptions of their working conditions are highly predictive of their intent to stay or leave (Ladd, 2010). Teachers who view their working environment in a negative way are more likely to leave than teachers who associate their school with positivity. Teacher surveys indicate that teachers are discouraged to stay in the classroom by excessive workloads, disruptive student behavior, poor leadership, and lack of supportive responses to the challenges facing them (Stover, 2017). Teachers also need adequate resources in order to teach effectively, and lack of these resources can leave teachers feeling unsupported. Administrators have a strong impact on these working conditions, and a responsibility to ensure that teachers have the best possible working conditions to be successful and for their students to be successful.

Classroom management is an important part of teaching and can be challenging for teachers in high-needs schools or teachers who have not been adequately prepared. Beginning teachers are particularly vulnerable because they are more likely to be assigned low-performing students, often accompanied by disruptive behaviors (Krasnoff, 2014). New teachers with little or no classroom management skills can easily become overwhelmed with these behavior situations and can feel defeated and inadequate. Teachers who are unsure how to manage a classroom will become frustrated with student behaviors, and may eventually come to resent their students (Whitaker, 2003). These feelings may lead to teachers feeling disconnected to their school and eager to find a
place where they can distance themselves from extreme behavior issues. When there are clear policies and procedures in place to help teachers manage student behavior, teachers are more likely to feel confident and effective in their practice (Ye, 2016). Principals can help support teachers in need of strengthening their classroom management by pairing them with a strong mentor, suggesting professional development, and having a supportive dialogue with teachers to better understand their challenges.

Collaboration is an essential part of developing a positive working culture. A study conducted by the Alliance for Excellent Education showed that teachers are more likely to stay in schools where they view their colleagues as partners and conditions are suited for them to be effective in improving student success (Haynes, 2014). While teaching used to be considered an isolated profession where each teacher closed their door and tended to their own class, collaboration has now become imperative to success in the classroom (Kelchtermans, 2006). Teachers must work together in order to learn and improve their practice. Being able to connect with other teachers, share ideas, work together to solve problems, and lean on others for support can improve a teacher’s perception of their working conditions. The implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) has no doubt enhanced the collaborative environment. Teachers who effectively participate in PLCs seek new methods and reflect on the results together (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). School administrators can support collaborative efforts by protecting planning and PLC times, and looking for opportunities to create effective teams/committees for school-related tasks.

Teacher workload is another element of challenging working conditions. Teacher workload refers to the time available to teachers for planning, providing instruction, and
eliminating obstacles in order to maximize instruction during the school day (Ladd, 2011). Time is one of the most important commodities for teachers, and time constraints are becoming more challenging each year. Many teachers report having very little time for planning and collaborating, and the time allotted for this is often taken up by paperwork, parent phone calls, or other organizational duties unrelated to instruction (Ingersoll, 2003). This leaves teachers to plan, look at data, and collaborate outside of their contract time, often taking away valuable time from their families and increasing their work-related stress level. A 2017 study found that 93% of teachers reported feeling high levels of work-related stress (Herman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2017). Teachers who feel overwhelmed and unable to catch up may begin to look for work environments with fewer time constraints.

In order to do their job effectively, teachers need to have access to high-quality materials, including appropriate curriculum and resources. Research shows that one of the best ways to improve student engagement and learning is to give teachers high-quality instructional materials and the support they need to use the resources effectively (Chiefs for Change, 2017). Many states have undergone several changes in their standards over the past decade, which means some materials no longer align with what students should be learning. Tennessee students and teachers endured the extreme shift to the more rigorous Common Core State Standards before implementing new Tennessee Academic Standards in 2017. These shifts left many districts without a properly aligned curriculum. Students attending schools with more adequate resources score an average of 17 points higher on standardized tests than students in schools with fewer resources (Schneider, 2003). A 2016 RAND Corporation report found that many teachers are left to
mix-and-match formal and informal curriculum, teacher-created lessons, and online lessons found on sources such as Teachers Pay Teachers, EngageNY, Pinterest, and Google (Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). Varying resources like this makes it nearly impossible to determine whether the overall instruction is properly aligned to the state standards. For beginning and even some veteran teachers, the need to create their own curriculum without the proper training and education can be a daunting task. Administrators should advocate for their teachers to have all the materials they need to do their job effectively. School leaders who support their teachers with appropriate instructional resources, teaching materials, and professional learning opportunities report lower rates of teacher retention (Learning Policy Institute, 2017). Principals can make materials and resources a priority in their budgeting each year and can be active supporters by looking for ways to connect with stakeholders to fill gaps in materials that they cannot provide for their teachers.

**Lack of Administrative Supports**

There is a common phrase that “people do not leave jobs, they leave leaders.” Teaching can be a stressful occupation, and feeling supported by an administrator can greatly contribute to teacher job satisfaction. Since retention rates are higher for new teachers, it is important to look at how administrative support can help them to be successful. Whether teachers are new the profession or just to the building, they must be put in the best position to succeed in order to encourage them to return the next year (Kafele, 2015). A 2010 study conducted by Scholastic and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation asked teachers to talk about the factors that affect retention. The researchers found that supportive leadership was the top-ranked item in determining whether or not
teachers stayed in their positions. Teachers who plan to remain in their classroom are twice as likely to agree that they work in a trusting environment for supportive leaders (Hirsch, Sioberg, & Germuth, 2010). Principals who are approachable and encouraging have the opportunity to create solid relationships that benefit retention, particularly with teachers in the first few years of their career. Research shows that new teachers return at higher rates to schools where their administrators are open to questions, discussing problems, and who provide them with guidance, assistance, and solutions (Public Education Network, 2003). Teachers are faced with many challenges including student behaviors, standardized testing pressures, and sometimes-difficult parent relationships. Highly effective principals understand how to be role models and effectively interact with teachers in order to help them develop their instructional practice (Whitaker, 2003). Teachers need support to feel successful. It is important for school leaders to build supportive relationships with their teachers.

**Dissatisfaction with Compensation**

Beginning teachers earn approximately 20% less than beginning college graduates in other fields (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016). Although most teachers enter the profession driven by passion and not monetary greed, teachers are normal working citizens who have living costs and families to take care of. Often times college graduates are also leaving university with student loan debt, and some districts now require a Masters degree for their teachers, adding to the cost of higher education. Many teachers cite years-long salary freezes, increasing health insurance costs, rising payroll taxes, concerns about government pension plans, and the need to work a second or third job as reasons for leaving the profession altogether (Calfas, 2018). According to a
2017 study by Vox, teachers pay approximately $1,500 more than other state employees toward their insurance premiums (Chang, 2018). Recently publicized teacher strikes in the United States have brought needed attention to the poor funding conditions in some states. In 39 states, the average classroom teacher earned less in 2016 than they did in 2010 (Sykes, 2018). Some states, such as Arizona, Oklahoma, and West Virginia have seen teacher pay fall at least $200 per year since 2015 (National Education Association, 2017). Teachers also pay out-of-pocket for much of their classroom supplies. On average, a classroom teacher spends $500 per year on supplies, and an estimated 1 in 10 teachers spend $1000 or more (White, 2016). These financial stressors can be overwhelming, especially for beginning teachers entering their first classroom job.

**Better Career Opportunities**

According to a 2016 study conducted by the Learning Policy Institute, over 25% of teachers who leave the profession say they do so in order to pursue career opportunities outside the classroom. With the discrepancies in compensation and high levels of stress, it is no surprise that teachers can be pulled away from their classrooms by the prospect of a job with less burnout and higher wages. Eight percent of teachers who leave enter another profession outside the educational field entirely (Startz, 2016). Often teachers are not leaving for more money, but for less occupational stress. A study of teachers in Georgia found that only 1% left for higher-paying jobs (Scafidi, Sjoquist, & Stinebrickner, 20016). This type of career movement is indicative that teachers are experiencing enough workplace stress that a pay decrease with more job satisfaction is more desirable than remaining in their current job placement.
What Teachers Need from Their Principals

“There are no good schools without good principals. And where you have good principals, great teachers come, they stay, they work hard, and they grow.”

—Arne Duncan

Teachers are more likely to remain in the classroom if they feel supported by their administrators. Two important components of school leadership that play a role in a teacher’s decision to stay in the classroom are administrator support and leadership styles (Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2016). There are many ways an administrator can show support to their teachers and staff. Some of these supports include providing teachers with appropriate instructional materials, offering professional learning opportunities, open communication channels, emotional support, input in decision-making, and budgets that prioritize instruction. Schools with supportive environments tend to have higher rates of teacher retention and maximize teacher and student learning opportunities (Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016). Teachers who experience administrative support including higher levels of autonomy and influence in the decision-making process are more likely to stay regardless of personal characteristics or school demographics (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). Principals have an increasingly powerful position to increase these important elements contributing to teacher retention, and the research regarding what teachers need from their leaders is relevant and applicable to every school environment.

Autonomy

Autonomy refers to thinking for oneself in complex situations in which judgment is more important than routine (Naylor, 2011). This is critical in the classroom setting...
where teachers are often faced with unpredictable human interaction. As teachers are subject to increasing accountability measures, the issue of autonomy has gained the attention of researchers in recent years. In a 2017 Learning Policy Institute study, 14% of teachers surveyed cited lack of autonomy as one of their reasons for leaving the classroom. Teacher autonomy has been reduced over the past several years as power has shifted to district and government positions. While the subject of autonomy is a current trending topic, it has always been a constraint for many teachers. Some researchers believe that, because teaching is a predominately female field, limited autonomy may have been seen as necessary in past systems where (generally) males supervised and controlled women teachers (Pitt & Phelan, 2008). Although this patriarchal social construct is largely outdated, top-down supervision models limiting teacher autonomy still exist in many schools. Limiting their control can make teachers feel that they are not trusted to do their jobs effectively. Reduced trust, no matter whether it is real or perceived, can lead to an increase in job dissatisfaction.

Administrators should use the authority they have to afford teachers autonomy in as many situations as possible. This will contribute to teachers feeling that they are treated as professionals in their own classrooms. Ingersoll (2003) noted that teachers are entrusted with the training of the next generation, but not given much control over key decisions in their work. Recent research shows that increased teacher autonomy can be beneficial to both teachers and students. Schools in which teachers have more control over key school-wide and classroom decisions have fewer problems with student behaviors, show more collaboration and cooperation among teachers and administrators,
have a more committed and engaged teaching staff and do a better job of retaining their teachers (Ingersoll, 2007).

**Opportunities for Growth**

Professional development is essential to effective teaching. Educational stakeholders are always looking for ways to improve schools and raise student achievement, and it is important that teachers are given the opportunities to improve their practice. Many teachers pursue advanced degrees during their tenure in the classroom, but this often adds an extra layer of stress and obligation to their already exhausting workload. While many districts require a number of professional development hours to be completed each year, district and school leaders have a responsibility to provide teachers with relevant opportunities for professional growth. Talking to teachers about their growth needs and areas they want to focus on will help to prevent professional development from being another box to check on a teacher’s long list of obligations.

Professional growth opportunities can refer to formal trainings, conferences, or workshops, but it can also take place in a more informal setting such as peer observations, collaborative work with colleagues, or independent reading (Mizell, 2010). Effective teachers will often seek out professional growth opportunities on their own without being required to do so. New teachers are likely to do the same as they come to the classroom eager to do their best and with the energy level to take on more than some of their veteran counterparts. Teachers understand that professional development impacts students and student learning increases when educators engaged in growth opportunities specifically focused on addressing student learning challenges.
There are many ways that districts and schools can create effective professional development for teachers. Principals can facilitate relevant and meaningful growth experiences without having to look outside their building. Part of a principal's job is to help teachers grow professionally, either by offering them direct suggestions or providing them with rich professional development opportunities (Kafele, 2015). Taking advantage of strong and skilled teachers is only one way to implement effective professional development. A 2017 Learning Policy Institute study looked outlined steps that leaders can take to ensure effective professional growth opportunities. These steps include:

- Adopt standards for professional development
- Evaluate and redesign the use of time and school schedules to increase opportunities for collaboration
- Conduct regular needs assessments from teachers
- Identify and develop expert teachers as mentors and coaches
- Integrate professional learning into school improvement initiatives
- Provide technology-facilitated opportunities for professional learning and coaching
- Provide flexible funding for continuing education units

Well-designed and effectively implemented professional growth and development should be a priority for school leaders. These experiences will help teachers gain the knowledge they need to educate their students and will help them to avoid the feeling of being burdened by a constantly changing system in which they have zero support. In addition to applying new knowledge to classroom practices, professional growth should also bridge
to more leadership opportunities for teachers (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, & Gardner, 2017). Expert teachers and coaches are valuable resources within a school building, and teachers should have opportunities to transition into these expert roles as they learn and grow their practice through professional development directly related to their instructional goals.

**Input in the Decision-Making Process**

The majority of teachers are deeply invested in their students, which makes them important contributors to the overall wellbeing of the school. When teachers are given the opportunity to be involved in school decisions and collaborate with leaders, school climate is improved. Giving teachers a platform to use their voice contributes to student achievement, better work environments, and reduces teacher turnover (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Principals can also benefit from giving teachers a role in decision-making, as it can provide them with an opportunity to delegate when possible. School leaders are under pressure from districts, government, parents, and community stakeholders. If they can step back and identify teachers who are eager to contribute, it can lessen their load. Effective leaders draw out people’s talents so that everyone is bettering themselves and the work they do (Bradberry, 2018). Whitaker (2007) says that principals should delegate whatever tasks another can do well. While that isn’t always easy or possible, it provides a great opportunity for teachers to step into more leadership roles and have their voices heard. It can also show teachers that their input is valuable and that they are an important contributor to the school mission.

Schools with high levels of teacher voice also have lower levels of teacher attrition (Kahlenberg & Potter, 2014). Ingersoll (2003) found that schools, where teachers
are active decision-makers in social and instructional areas, are able to retain their teachers at higher rates. Schools with low teacher control had a turnover rate of 19% compared to 4% in schools with high teacher control. Teachers want to work in an environment where they feel like their ideas and their input matter. Principals who give teachers more chances to be involved in school decisions will strengthen their bond with staff and, as a result, gain trust from their teachers.

**Administrative Support**

Some research suggests that elements of principal leadership can matter more than other factors, including teacher workload, when it comes to decisions to stay or leave schools (Starnes, 2018). Administrative support can take many forms depending on the individual needs of the teacher and the leadership style of the principal. Teachers look to their principals for support with difficult student behavioral issues, tense conversations with parents, need for more or better materials and resources, improvement in instructional practices, and personnel issues. A recent study of teachers in New York City public schools indicated that schools with effective administrative support retained teachers at 89%, while schools with low support retained teachers at 71%.

Feeling supported by leaders can lead to increased intrinsic motivation in teachers. Those who are more intrinsically motivated are more satisfied with their work and more likely to stay (O’Reilly, 2014). Perhaps the best way for principals to support their teachers is to first take a listening position and seek to understand what teachers need. Leaders must possess empathy that enables them to understand where people are coming from, and thus how to relate to them (Fullan, 2011). These types of supports align with a servant leadership role, which will be addressed later in the review.
A 2007 publication titled *How Effective Principals Can Encourage Their Teachers* used teacher survey data to identify five principal behaviors that both new and veteran teachers feel are important. They are: (a) respects and values teachers as professionals, (b) supports teachers in matters of student discipline, (c) has an open-door policy, (d) is fair, honest, and trustworthy, and (e) supports teachers with parents. Teachers identified behaviors such as giving them attention and eye contact when discussing important matters, supporting teacher classroom decisions with parents, acknowledging teacher effort with personal notes or in staff meetings, doing quick class pop-ins just to "say hi" and not formally observe, asking teachers "what can I do for you" instead of giving directives, and providing extra support for teachers dealing with students with particularly difficult behaviors. These are simple supports that administrators can offer in any school environment.

**The Changing Role of the Principal**

"Without a competent caring individual in the principal's position, the task of school reform is very difficult. Reform can be initiated from outside the school or stimulated from within. But in the end, it is the principal who implements and sustains the changes through the inevitable roller coaster of euphoria and setbacks." Gerstner, Semerad, Doyle, & Johnston (1994)

Education research shows that most school variables, considered separately, have at most small effects on learning. The real payoff comes when individual variables combine to reach critical mass. Creating the conditions under which that can occur is the
job of the principal. (Wallace Foundation, 2011) While the role of a principal may look
different in various school settings, there is a consistent and recent trend to pull
administrators out of the office and involve them in the instructional process. Particularly
in Tennessee, the recent shift to higher standards and more accountability for teachers
and principals has contributed to a change in the everyday responsibilities of school
administrators.

School leaders have a complex and intricate job balancing the needs of students,
parents, community partners, and school staff. Administrators are tasked with providing
students with the safest and most effective environment for learning, which can be a
complicated job. Principals must communicate effectively with various school
stakeholders in order to coordinate activities, offer professional development, relay
important information from the central office to building level staff, take advantage of
community resources, assist teachers and staff when needed, implement standardized
testing, and involve faculty and staff in school decisions/policy making. Although
education is a dynamic and constantly changing field, the qualities that make an effective
educational leader remain the same over time. Along with knowledge of effective
practices and seemingly endless educational laws, administrators must also possess the
ability to create and cultivate positive relationships with all school stakeholders. Resolute
leaders do not work single-handedly; rather, they must spawn focus and determination by
motivating employees toward a common goal (Fullan, 2011).

A 2013 study by the National Association of Secondary School Principals and
National Association of Elementary School Principals found that a principal’s job is
complex and multidimensional, and their effectiveness depends on how well they are able
to allocate time to different responsibilities. The traditional model of a principal included a primary focus on logistics, budgetary concerns, enforcing school rules, applying directives from the state, and addressing discipline issues. Principals primarily remained in the office, only making their way to classrooms in the event of a formal observation. Administrators were often thought of as managers of the school who were more interested in wielding power and enforcing rules than the concerns of teaching and learning (Alvoid & Black Jr, 2014). Research on effective schools in the 1970s and 1980s put principals at the head of school improvement efforts but in a more management-style role with no dynamic collaboration with teachers (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). There was an obvious separation between principal and teacher roles and responsibilities, with little overlap.

In a 2011 survey, 70% of principals reported that their professional responsibilities are much different than they were just five years prior (Alvoid & Black Jr, 2014). These changes are no doubt due to the shift in focus to instructional practice, higher standards for students, and more accountability for teachers and administrators. The setup of a principal as simply a building manager has evolved into a model where administrators are active instructional leaders, team builders, coaches, and agents of change within their school. Most principals report that these new challenges have not taken the place of their old roles, but added on to their jobs as building managers and disciplinarians.

Principals are taking on new and diverse responsibilities in their schools (SCORE, 2018). How a principal spends their time and what decisions they make for the school directly affects each teacher, and subsequently, each student in the building. School
administrators are becoming more involved in the day-to-day instructional practices, which will only benefit student success and teacher-principal relationships. As teacher evaluations become more detailed, it is important for principals to not only have knowledge of effective practices but of the standards and scope of the grade levels and subjects being taught in their schools. Joining teachers during the data team process and PLC meetings is one effective way for principals to learn and for teachers to view the principal as a learner seeking to better their practice, much like teachers. Research supports the inclusion of principals in the professional learning community setup, although there are varied interpretations of what role the principal should take in these collaborative environments (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). It is likely that the most effective way for a principal to be involved in these collaborations is to participate as an equal stakeholder, take more of a listening perspective than a telling perspective, and find ways to facilitate deep conversations about best practices when possible.

Developing school climate is another focus of recent principal reform. As the leader of the school, an administrator has great power over the school climate and culture among teachers, staff, and students. Understanding the factors of school climate will help administrators to provide stability, foster certainty, solidify order and predictability, and create meaning in the organization (Owens & Valesky, 2014). Creating and maintaining positive relationships is key to laying the groundwork for a positive and supportive climate. Highly effective principals demonstrate a strong ability to build relationships among their faculty (Gray & Streshly, 2008). In his 2011 book Change Leader: Learning to do What Matters Most, Michael Fullan outlines key points to change-savvy leadership, as described by Harold and Fedor, 2008. They include:
• Careful entry into the new setting
• Listening and learning from those who have been there longer
• Engaging in fact-finding and joint problem solving
• Carefully (rather than rashly) diagnosing the situation
• Forthrightly addressing people’s concerns
• Being enthusiastic, genuine, and sincere in all circumstances
• Obtaining buy-in for what needs fixing
• Developing a credible plan for making the fix

In order for principals to be effective, they have to establish buy-in with their staff. If an administrator wants the teachers to believe in the vision and mission of the school, they have to have relationships built on trust and respect. Leaders who understand this do not pretend to be something they are not, because they don’t have to. They have substance, and they share it with the people who surround them (Bradberry, 2018). An effective school climate can only develop when all stakeholders in the school put their trust in one another and have confidence that their leader is making the best decisions for them and their students.

**Mentoring and Induction Programs**

Research surrounding teacher mentoring and induction programs has attracted attention as principals and district leaders look for ways to retain and grow effective teachers. The theory behind these programs is that teaching is complex work and that a teacher preparation program is rarely sufficient to provide all the skills and knowledge necessary for successful teaching (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). A significant portion of
these skills can only be acquired once teachers are in the classroom. The importance of mentoring programs to help new teachers successfully transition to the classroom and remain in teaching is being recognized, and these programs are being implemented and improved in many districts. As of 2002, more than 30 states had mentoring/induction programs in place for new teachers. New teacher mentor programs offer support for teachers in many ways. Many programs give teachers access to staff development workshops, professional development opportunities specific to their subject or grade level, and collaboration opportunities with more experienced professionals. These programs also offer teachers a chance to form relationships with other teachers based on openness and honesty, which can give new teachers a much-needed outlet for stress relief and camaraderie.

Although studies show that induction and mentoring programs can be successful in increasing retention rates, the specifics of these programs remain largely dependent upon principal or district discretion. A 2011 study by Ingersoll and Strong determined that, while the overall objective is to give new teachers a guide, the content of the programs varies in duration and intensity. In a study of 15 mentoring programs, researchers found that some programs consisted of only a single meeting between mentor and mentee at the beginning of the school year, while others were set up to involve frequent meetings over 2-3 years. Programs also vary as to how they select mentors, how they match mentors to new teachers, what trainings they give to mentors, and how/if they compensate mentors.

Studies show that mentoring programs not only increase teacher retention rates, but also help to improve teacher quality through influencing teacher practices, increasing
teacher job satisfaction, and promoting strong professional relationships with colleagues (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). Teachers and principals understand the importance of building relationships with their students, and the same principles can be applied to building relationships among staff. Mentoring and induction programs can provide these opportunities. Because these programs are low cost to the district, school administrators are in a position to implement them at the building level. However, simply setting up the program and requiring new teachers to participate is not enough to ensure effectiveness. School leaders must recognize that no matter what programs they introduce, the most important work of these programs should be to improve the quality of the people in their schools (Whitaker, 2003). Principals must ensure that the mentors involved are the strongest teachers in the building, both instructionally and in their leadership qualities. Forcing veteran teachers to participate will not yield effective results.

Administrators should remain active in the induction or mentoring program. This will show teachers that their principals support their professional growth and want them to succeed. Involvement on the part of principals should include collecting data when possible and working toward increasing the effectiveness of the program for both new teachers and their mentors. There is evidence to suggest that strong programs even provide professional growth opportunities for veteran teachers who serve as mentors, strengthening both parties involved (Curran & Goldrick, 2002). The focus of these programs should remain on increasing student achievement through best practices. Some evidence suggests that student achievement rates in reading and math are higher among teachers who receive more hours of mentoring (Fletcher & Strong, 2009).
Leadership Styles

Principal leadership style can also play a role in the overall job satisfaction of teachers. Several studies have found that principal leadership style is associated with teachers’ decisions to leave the classroom. Principals who do not view themselves as traditional, omnipotent, ‘top-down’ administrators have been associated with low teacher attrition rates (Starnes, 2018). Teachers have been guided away from the authoritarian style of classroom management, with many now favoring more democratic, coaching, and even servant leadership to ensure their students feel heard and valued (Wraga, 1998). Similarly, principals have so much control over the culture of their building that they must value that power and work to create a shared vision with the staff. The role of principals is changing, shifting from building managers to serving as instructional leaders who develop teachers and develop student-focused culture (SCORE, 2018). The method by which a school administrator chooses to lead their school will have a great impact on the successes or failures of the students and staff. It is important that a leader carefully chooses their leadership style, and makes decisions that align with the nature of that style. An effective change leader deliberately activates, enables, and mobilizes those under their leadership, cultivating an environment of human and moral purpose (Fullan, 2011). The importance of principal leadership style cannot be overstated. Leaders must understand their goals before choosing a leadership style. The leadership style a principal uses will have a direct impact on the success of the school or company they lead.

Democratic Leadership

A democratic leader is one who works to ensure that employees have ample opportunities to add their input into the decision making process (Brinn, 2014). This type
of leadership is based on mutual respect between the leader and their staff (Gill, 2016). A democratic leader will work to empower their employees by delegating responsibilities and making sure that everyone feels that their voice is heard and that they are an important part of the team. Effective democratic leaders understood the importance of not giving one person too much power.

**Servant Leadership**

Servant leadership has gained a large following in the educational community in recent years. A servant leader gives priority to the needs of his or her group and promotes their wellbeing (Brinn, 2014). The servant leader focuses primarily on the growth of others and the community of which they belong (Greenleaf, 1970). This type of leader may share or shun power, working to help others develop and perform as highly as possible. Servant leaders are often born with the feeling that they want to serve and help others. Servant leadership may be the most naturally-based leadership style. Administrators who lead with servant leadership often feel their job is to make sacrifices for the greater good of the school.

**Authoritarian Leadership**

An authoritarian leader can be described as one who leads with total power (Brinn, 2014). This type of leader may also be linked with dictatorship. Under this type of leadership, there is no allowance for employee input. The leader makes all decisions by themselves. A military installation would operate under an authoritarian leader. Although this can be oppressive for employees, there are times when an authoritarian style can be beneficial, such as high-pressure/urgent situations (Brinn, 2014). Historical leaders who have used an authoritarian style have been able to lead thousands by their own individual
rules and decisions and without the input of those who follow them. An authoritarian leadership style is likely to be a style with followers reporting high levels of unhappiness or feelings of value. This type of leadership follows the pattern of the person in power making all decisions without employee input. Leaders keep critical information to themselves and make decisions based on that information without explanation to their followers (Brinn, 2014). The leader keeps a close eye on workers and strictly enforces the rules. In this type of leadership, employees are expected to follow the rules without questioning their purpose or fairness. This is contradictory to much of the educational research around effective school leadership, which supports the idea that a shared mission and vision is essential for teacher and student success. Resolute leaders do not work single-handedly; rather, they must spawn focus and determination by motivating employees toward a common goal (Fullan, 2011).

**Coaching Leadership**

A coaching leader is one who takes the time to find out about the personal and professional goals of a person (Goleman, 2017). This type of leader asks questions like “what do you want for your life?” and "what do you want from this job?" This kind of leader can be very effective in a field such as education because teachers often feel underappreciated and aren't always supported when trying to advance their careers. Coaching leaders are receptive to new ideas and supportive and encouraging to employees who want to advance their careers. Some principals may have a hard time being active supporters when the teachers want to move out of the classroom into administrative or other roles. This is due to the desire to keep effective teachers in the classroom.
**Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leaders focus on gaining compliance from followers by giving or withholding rewards and benefits. These leaders value order and structure (Spahr, 2016). They expect their followers to conform to the existing structures of their organizations. The transactional leadership style operates under the guidelines that leaders will offer something to the employees in exchange for a needed service in return.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership can be defined as a leadership approach that causes a change in individuals and social systems. Transformational leaders focus on how they can create positive and valuable change in their followers (Burns, 2003). Transformational leaders are typically energetic, vocal, and charismatic. These traits serve an important roll in the effectiveness of a transformational leader. In this type of system, leaders emphasize employee empowerment and encourage collaboration across curricular areas or departments (Foster, 2010). Historical transformational leaders such as Walt Disney and Martin Luther King Jr. had visions that transcended generations and are still alive and relevant today. Transformational leadership can be difficult to maintain when faced with the logistical and organizational tasks of running a school. However, leaders can inspire change within their staff through transformational leadership qualities.

Although there is no one leadership style that works for every principal and every school, there are clear benefits to certain styles over others. Teaching is a collaborative profession by nature, and teachers will most likely benefit from a leader who encourages thoughtful problem-solving, builds a platform for constructive dialogue, and values and
models professional growth. Effective administrators provide a stable, predictable, and supportive foundation for their teachers (NASSP & NAESP, 2013).

**Leader-Follower Theory**

Leader-follower theory refers to an idea that, at any one time, leaders can assume follower roles, and followers can assume leadership roles (Gilbert & Matviuk, 2008). The theory implies that 2 or more people are working together to achieve a common goal. The leader-follower theory goes against traditional authoritative leadership styles and can be challenging for those used to working in a more top-down hierarchy of leadership (Foster, 2010). The shifts in education that continue to place a focus on student-centered policies and improvements make schools an appropriate work environment to implement this theory of leadership.

The promotion of leader-follower theory should not minimize the importance of having defined roles for administrators and teachers. Rather, it should encourage more collaboration in addition to the traditional roles. The idea behind this type of collaboration is that each person brings a unique viewpoint to the organization. There are important aspects to both followership and leadership that, when working together, offer a broader lens for collaboration and problem-solving. Similarities can be drawn between servant leadership and the leader-follower construct due to the nature of serving the organization within both models, and both can often be found in an educational setting.

Leader-follower is in stark contrast with the Great Man theory, which operates under the assumption that great leaders are born and not made. Leader-follower theory challenges this mindset because it relies on a reciprocal and interdependent relationship (Foster, 2010).
Followership is a crucial part of leader-follower theory. Effective followership nurtures the idea that followers possess a vital role within an organization (Gilbert & Matviuk, 2008). Effective followership also does not assume that certain characteristics are only worth of leaders, and therefore adopts the belief that characteristics attributed to leaders can also be attributed to followers. Some of these characteristics include integrity, charisma, vision, and the ability to initiate change. Vision is a particularly important quality to have in a school setting, as teachers are being subjected to constant change and must rely on their ability to keep the vision of the school in mind.

In order for the leader-follower structure to be successful, leaders must look honestly at the current structure of their organization and ask what they are doing to support their followers and the greater mission. Leaders must also be willing to change the way they communicate and interact with subordinates (Foster, 2010). These changes on behalf of the leader are non-negotiable, and the leader-follower structure will not work without compliance from the leader. Often times these changes take time and involve a great deal of open communication with all stakeholders.

Research on this type of leadership suggests that transformation and reform occur when both leaders and followers raise each other to higher levels of motivation and values. In the field of education teachers are constantly striving for improvement, and seeing their leaders actively seeking the same professional growth can be very motivating and encouraging. There is evidence that this type of leadership can contribute to greater teacher retention rates in schools. Research has shown that organizations that employ the leader-follower methodology yield individuals who desire investment in their jobs and in the organization as a whole (Foster, 2010).
Conceptual Framework: Phenomenography

Phenomenography offers the researcher a chance to gain knowledge from the perspective of others (Berglund, n.d.). Used as a qualitative research framework, phenomenography refers to the study of the different ways in which people experience, perceive, apprehend, understand, and conceptualize aspects of the world around us (Marton, 1994). The goal of phenomenographic study is for the researcher to gain insight into the subject’s perception of reality, rather than the reality itself (Starnes, 2018).

Marton described the role of the phenomenographer as to discover and classify people’s conceptions of reality in the same way a botanist might discover and classify new species of plants. Phenomenographic data is collected primarily in an interview format and then coded to identify patterns and commonalities in responses. This may require several attempts at soring and resorting data in order to find the most appropriate categories (Akerland, 2005).

The earliest studies to be classified as phenomenography were published in 1975 by Ference Marton and his colleagues in Sweden. Marton characterized this research approach as people being able to explain their mental processes while carrying out an experimental task (Richardson, 1999). Some have argued that phenomenography is no different than phenomenology; however, qualitative researchers believe that phenomenography gives better insight into perceptions of experiences, while phenomenology leads to a better understanding of the experience itself. This type of qualitative research allows for some flexibility in the interview process. If the researcher has questions about a subject’s response, they can ask for more detail or clarification. The
Summary

Teacher retention continues to be a relevant topic in the field of education. New teachers within the first 5 years of their career are more likely to leave the classroom completely than veteran teachers. There are many factors that contribute to teacher retention decisions, and school administrators are in a position to have a range of impact on almost all of these factors. With an increased research focus on principal leadership, now is the time for school leaders to focus their attention on what effective teachers need in order to feel adequately supported to stay in the classroom.

The literature discussed in this review shows that school administrators have many opportunities to increase the overall job satisfaction of their teachers, which will hopefully promote higher retention rates. Leaders must be willing to examine their practices and reflect on ways to improve the working conditions in their building. Leadership is complex and multifaceted, and the role of the modern principal looks very different than it did years ago. In Tennessee, there has been a marked improvement in both student achievement and teacher instructional practice over the past 10 years. This is no doubt due to the increased focus on teacher and principal roles and accountability. Tennessee has been fortunate to have leaders who stepped up and acknowledged their practices that need to change and have been active participants in the education reform process. The 2017 Tennessee Educator Survey conducted by the Tennessee Education Research Alliance (TERA) showed that administrators have placed a priority on establishing a supportive school culture and building instructional capacity among
educators. Research shows that these priorities will, in time, create an environment where teachers are dedicated to their school and continue to return to the classroom.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This study is designed to identify facets of principal leadership that contribute to a teacher’s decision to stay in a school. Data were collected through in-person interviews with principals and teachers who had stayed with these principals for at least three years. While many studies focus on the issue of teacher retention, this study looks at reasons teachers attribute to their decision to stay rather than leave. This chapter examines the research approach, data collection methods, how data were analyzed, and the population used for data.

Research Questions

For the purposes of this study, data were collected to allow the researcher to answer these questions:

1. What administrative factors contribute to teachers’ decisions to stay in their schools?
2. What support methods can administrators implement to retain effective teachers?

Description of the Specific Research Approach

This study is framed around organizational theory and human needs theory and uses a qualitative research design to gather data that explains the perceptions of the participants. Structured, open-ended, in-person interviews were utilized to gather data to be analyzed. The specific research approach used in this qualitative study is phenomenography. Phenomenographic research is designed to analyze perceptions of experiences rather than the experiences themselves (Richardson, 1999). For the purposes of this study, the participants discussed their perceptions of experiences with principal leadership that operated as encouraging factors when deciding to stay in the classroom.
Phenomenography was an appropriate choice for this research because the in-person interviews allowed the interviewer to gain insight into the experiences and perceptions of participants as they discussed the topic.

With permission from the district central office (see Appendix A), the researcher used interviews from a sampling of principals and teachers. Individual interviews served as one source of data collection for this study. Interviews were favored over survey responses so that the interviewer could get as much detail as possible from responses, and ask for elaboration or follow-up questions when needed. Open-ended questions provided the best opportunity for the researcher to gather as much information as possible about the organizational structure of the schools and support systems in place. Other sources of data included information from the district-level new teacher mentor program and a focus group of teacher participants that took place after individual interviews.

Interview questions were designed around the framework of organizational and human needs theories. Principal participant questions focused primarily on support structures in place for teachers as well as the development of school culture. Teacher participant questions focused on supports received from their administrators, level of input in the decision-making process, and school culture. These questions align with the focus of organizational theory in education as well as human needs theory as outlined in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. Both theories highlight the importance of employee needs and experiences as they contribute to overall job satisfaction and retention decisions. The organization of a school can directly affect needs-based motivations. The researcher designed the interview questions to gather data that would show how these systems and experiences were connected.
A qualitative descriptive design was appropriate to apply to this study because it allows data to be collected and analyzed prior to forming a hypothesis. The qualitative descriptive design is a comprehensive summarization of experiences by a person or groups of people (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). This approach provided more flexibility for the researcher because there are no pre-selected variables or commitment to any specific view of the targeted phenomena (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). The goal was to obtain as much data as possible to identify patterns, trends, and relationships between them.

**Description of Study Participants and Setting**

The setting for this study is a small, diverse school district in Middle Tennessee. Although the number of schools in the district is small (12), the district serves over 8,000 students and is located in a fast-growing area of the state and one of the top 25 fastest-growing cities in America (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). All of the district’s 12 schools serve a PreK-6th grade population. The demographics can be described as both suburban and urban, depending on the school. There are 8 urban schools receiving Title I funding, 3 schools that are considered suburban, and 1 application-only school that admits students based on test scores and serves gifted/high-achieving students from all across the city.

For this study, the researcher chose five school principals who have been in their position at their current school for more than five years. All administrators were informed of the purpose of the study, the research focus questions, and were told that the district central office had approved their participation (see Appendix B). The principals were also asked for the names of one or two teachers who had been under their leadership for at
least three years. The researcher encouraged principals not to name teachers with whom they have any personal friendships outside of school or teachers who are near retirement age. The reason for excluding teachers near retirement is that many teachers stay simply so that they can finish out their years and retire. This study looked for teachers who are still in the stage of their career where a transfer or change in school or district would be feasible. Since teacher attrition is highest in the early half of a teaching career, administrators were told that the ideal teacher for this part of the study would have anywhere from 5-15 years of experience.

Using the responses from the principals, the researcher chose five teachers to interview for the teacher portion of the study. The participants were selected based on the criteria that they have worked under their principal for a minimum of three years, were not near retirement age, and did not have a personal friendship with their principal outside of school. The chosen teachers were contacted, and the study explained to them, then individual interviews were arranged (see Appendix C).

**Data Collection Procedures and Data Analysis**

After obtaining permission from the Carson-Newman University Institutional Review Board (IRB), data were collected through structured, open-ended, individual interviews with five principals and five teachers who had taught with them over multiple years (see Appendix D). Participants were chosen for this study based on the amount of time spent in their current role and their willingness to participate in the study. In addition to holding their leadership position long-term, consideration was given to each administrator chosen based on their good standing and reputation within the school district and high rate of retention for effective teachers. After receiving IRB and central
office permission, emails were sent to principals explaining the study. Questions were answered on an as-needed basis. Interview times and locations were scheduled with each principal. Interviews were scheduled to take place after school hours and at the individual school for each administrator. Participants were interviewed independently from each other, and no information was shared across groups of participants. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Teachers for the study were chosen based on a recommendation from the participating principals. Prior to offering recommendations, principals were asked to consider teachers who met the following qualifications: classroom experience of 5-15 years with, teachers working under the principal’s leadership for at least three years, willingness to provide candid perspectives on the research topic, and a professional relationship with their administrator that did not extend into their personal lives. After contacting these teachers via email to explain the study and share IRB, central office, and principal permission, interview times and locations were scheduled with each teacher.

All interviews for this study were recorded and transcribed prior to the coding process. The transcription process allowed the researcher to protect the integrity of the responses and provided the specific vocabulary and language used during coding. The researcher predicted that the responses from each group of participants would show patterns in factors influencing teacher retention. For example, the researcher expected to hear principals discuss the ways that they offer support to their teachers. It was also predicted that responses from the teacher participants would support the responses from the principal participants. The researcher expected to hear teachers elaborate on factors that correlated with their principal’s responses. The researcher also predicted the majority
of participant responses would fall primarily within the Belongingness and Love, Esteem, and Self-Actualization tiers of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.

Introduced by Jonathan Smith in the mid-1990s, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) has become an increasingly popular approach to qualitative data analysis. Phenomenological analysis involves using the data collected from interviews to understand how participants perceive specific events or conditions in their lives. IPA is designed to provide a detailed analysis of how an individual experiences a phenomenon from a certain perspective, in a certain context, and is concerned with the way people attach meaning to their experiences (Smith, Flower, & Larkin, 2009). IPA is a researcher-centered method of analysis, and much of the observations made during analysis could be the result of researcher interpretation (Willig, 2008). The goal of IPA is to allow researchers to identify intersecting phenomena among groups of participants and make cautious, general claims about the particular focus group (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The interviews in this study were structured and involved a pre-set list of questions that focused on elements of principal leadership and their contribution to teacher retention decisions. This model of data collection allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to probe for as much detail as possible in order to gain better insight into the perceptions and experiences of principals and teachers involved in the study. The method of data collection aligned with the conceptual framework of the study because it allowed participants to give insight into their personal experiences with leadership and how those experiences shaped their decision to remain in the classroom. Phenomenographic research seeks to uncover underlying meanings and attitudes toward experiences. The assumption was that similar experiences held different meanings to each
individual, and the researcher used data to identify how teachers prioritized these experiences when making important career decisions.

**Mentor Program Artifacts**

The researcher was able to obtain official documentation about the district-level mentorship program in place within the school district. These artifacts included: a schedule of monthly meetings for new teachers with the planned discussion topics, written description of the program and its purpose, outlined expectations for mentors, outlined expectations for mentees, and monthly checklists for teacher partners to review together. The data obtained from these artifacts provided an insight into one element of the organization of each school, as well as a point of comparison to research regarding proven successful mentorship programs. The data were also used to help the researcher design purposeful questions for principal and teacher interviews. Although the district provides the outlined requirements for the mentorship program, the researcher expected the implementation of the program to vary between schools. Mentorship programs offer opportunities for new teachers to develop a sense of belonging and establish a support system within their school. These programs also provide an opportunity for veteran teachers to impact the culture of the school and share knowledge with others. These opportunities can directly impact teacher motivation, an important aspect of Maslow’s human needs theory. The researcher utilized the information from the artifacts to look for connections between the official program outline and information gathered in interviews regarding the effectiveness of mentor programs.
**Member Checks and Focus Group**

In order to establish a solid understanding of participant responses, the researcher engaged in member checks throughout the study. During interviews, the researcher would ask for clarification or repeat answers back to participants in order to better understand the responses. The confidential nature of the interviews allowed an open-ended amount of time for the participants to express their thoughts and for the researcher to probe for clarification when needed. The researcher incorporated summarizing and restating as part of the regular interview practice in order to ensure there were no misconceptions regarding participant responses.

After all interviews were completed the researcher invited teacher participants to take part in a focus group. Contact was made via email with each teacher participant and the date and time were agreed upon. The purpose of this group was to ensure understanding of the interview responses and offer a chance for the participants to provide clarity or extended responses to the topics discussed. The focus group also provided a safe and confidential environment for the participants to discuss topics with each other and build on each other’s responses. This was a unique opportunity they did not have during the individual interviews.

The information provided during the focus group allowed the researcher to better identify patterns in experiences and perceptions of experiences across schools. The phenomenographic research design made assumptions that the researcher would find similar trends in participant responses. Assembling a focus group after individual interviews allowed the researcher to collect more clarifying data for the coding process.
Peer Debriefing

The researcher was able to utilize professional relationships with others not directly involved in the study. These professionals agreed to review elements of the study in order to protect the validity and integrity of the research. Items reviewed by peers include transcripts, section drafts, and the final report.

Coding

After all interviews were conducted and transcribed, the researcher engaged in an open coding process in order to identify patterns and relationships within the data. The purpose of data coding is to grasp an understanding of the meaning of data provided by the participants (Bradford, 2018). Open coding allowed for the categorization of data based on common elements. The researcher looked for similar words and phrasing across interviews and used an axial coding method to determine relationships among these commonalities. Categories were formed based on similar ideas and explanations from interviews. After coding initial interviews, data from the teacher focus group were analyzed in a similar method and coded based on existing categories. New categories were added as trends and patterns emerged in the transcriptions. Phenomenographic analysis prioritizes meaning and structure when coding data (Bowden & Green, 2005). The researcher examined questions one at a time across all participant interviews in order to look at commonalities, rather than going through individual interview transcripts in their entirety.

Ethical Considerations

This study began with an application to and approval from the Carson-Newman University Institutional Review Board (IRB). The researcher also obtained approval from
the district Director of Schools to reach out to principals and use their responses as data for the study. The chosen principals were contacted to gain their permission to participate in the study.

Confidentiality played an important role in the study from start to finish. Names of the school district, specific schools, principals, and teachers were all concealed for the duration of the study and in publication. Offering a promise of confidentiality opened up a larger window for honesty and transparency through responses with principals and teachers. All participants signed an informed consent document prior to each interview. Participants understood that they were offering responses voluntarily, and agreed for their interviews to be audio recorded for the purposes of transcription and coding analysis.

**Summary**

This qualitative study attempted to identify factors of principal leadership that contributes to teachers’ decisions to return to their classrooms. Appropriate consent was given by the university IRB, district leaders, and principal and teacher participants. Structured, open-ended interviews were used to collect data, which provided opportunities for the researcher to ensure a clear understanding of responses by asking for elaboration and clarification when necessary. Interview questions were written with organizational and human needs theories in mind. All interviews were recorded and transcribed for data analysis. After all interviews had been subscribed, interview data were coded and analyzed to identify relationships, patterns, and trends in the responses.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to identify elements of principal leadership that impact a teacher’s decision to remain in his/her position at his/her school. In order to identify these factors, the researcher gathered data from various sources, including principal interviews, teacher interviews, a teacher focus group, and artifacts from a teacher mentorship program. The interviews consisted of open-ended questions with a semi-structured format that allowed for clarification and more detailed responses. Five principals and five teachers participated in the individual interviews, with teachers also participating in a focus group following completion of individual interviews. Questions for the interviews were done in two sections. Principals first answered four background questions about their qualifications and experience levels. They were then asked eight questions that focused on their specific efforts to retain effective teachers. The interviews lasted an average of 35 minutes. Teacher interviews were structured in a similar manner with teachers also answering four background questions and nine questions focused on their perceptions of leadership efforts in their school. The researcher used the teacher interview responses to design questions for the focus group in order to gain clarification and a more detailed understanding of teacher perception related to principal leadership. The focus group included five teachers and lasted approximately one hour.

Selection of Participants

Five principal participants were selected and interviewed for this study. All principals selected for the study have been in their current position at their current school for a minimum of five years. At the end of their interviews, principal participants were asked to recommend 1-2 teachers for participation in the study. The criteria for the
teacher participants included: working for their principal a minimum of three years, maintaining a professional relationship with their principal that did not extend to a personal level, high effectiveness levels based on principal observations, and principal opinion of a teacher’s overall performance and contribution to student and school success.

Research Questions

The researcher collected and examined data related to principal and teacher perceptions connected to the primary research questions:

1. What administrative factors contribute to teachers’ decisions to remain in their school?

2. What support methods can administrators implement to retain effective teachers?

Participant Demographics

The principal participants had a combined 108 years in education, ranging from 11-38 years of individual experience and an average of 21.6 years. The participants had a range of 6-26 years in administration, with an average of 12.8 years and a combined 64 years of administrative experience. They averaged 8.2 years in their current schools, with a low of five years and a high of 14 years. The principal participants hired an average of 70.4% of their current teaching staff.
The teacher participants had a combined 59 years of experience in education, with a range of 4-18 years and an average of 11.8 years. The teachers had a range of 4-16 years in their current district with a combined 52 years and an average of 10.4 years. They averaged 6.4 years working for their current principal with a range of 4-14 years and a combined 32 years. Of the teacher participants, one was hired by their current principal and four were not.
Data Analysis

The researcher utilized a semi-structured interview approach with nine questions for principals and 10 questions for teachers focused on leadership and the organization and structure of their current school environment. All interview questions were designed to help answer the research questions posed in this study. The interviewer recorded and transcribed all interviews for coding. The coding process involved open-coding to determine if there were patterns of meaning in the interview data, followed by grouping into broader categories, and subsequently into selective codes to represent themes within the participant responses.
Figure 4.3: Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 1.
Figure 4.4: Data Sorted in Levels of Coding for Research Question 2.

Raw data

"I go to them and tell them how happy I am that they are here."

"I use words to encourage them to be brave and to support their risks."

"I give a lot of praise. Teachers say it makes them want to do better because what they do is recognized."

"I implement their feedback and show that I am listening to them and I want to be the best I can be for them as well."

"I tell them let's work together. And when they come to me with a need, I look for ways to make that happen for them."

"When they come to me with new ideas, I say ok let's try it, and I guide them if I have experience."

"My door is open- if you have an issue, come talk to me about it."

"My teachers have great ideas- I want to know what they're thinking. I tell them we have to work together for our kids."

"I make sure to tell them I can't do this alone. I do what I do as best as I can, and I expect them to use their strengths for synergy."

Open Coding

Positive feedback
Encourage risk-taking
Motivational speech
Words of affirmation

Axial Coding

Positive verbal support

Selective Coding

Use listening skills
Encourage teamwork
Support ideas
Model a growth mindset

Collaboration between teachers and administrators

Principal's show support to their teachers by collaborating with them rather than directing them, communicating openly with them, and giving positive verbal support.

Open-door
Sharing ideas
Working together for common goals

Open communication
Principal Interview Results

Leadership

Principals were asked to describe their leadership style and identify what they believed to be their primary role as a school leader. Four principals identified their primary role as that of an instructional leader, and one indicated that her primary role was to provide safety for those in the school building. Many principals mentioned that narrowing their job description to one role was unrealistic because their job is multifaceted. The researcher allowed principals to identify roles they believed were of equal importance to them. Three principals said that creating a community was a crucial role that administrators should embrace.

When asked to describe their leadership style, all five principals indicated that they utilized a collaborative approach and attempted to lead with a shared leadership format. Principal A described his teachers as “thinking partners” and said decisions are rarely made without consulting teacher leaders within the building. Three principals said they strive to be servant leaders. Two principals mentioned transparency and growth mindset. One principal described the importance of leading by example, stating that “I want to learn what the teachers are learning so that I know what the students are learning. I think by leading by example and by being in the trenches with the teachers they know that you’re there and that you will help lead them wherever they need to go.”

Organization and Structure

Principal participants were asked to discuss the shared beliefs among their faculty/staff. Three participants identified the mentality that all students can succeed as a primary shared belief in their building. Principal A said, “They know that we are about students. We are going to work hard and serve our students first, every day.” Three
principals said their staff prioritizes student autonomy. Principal C discussed the shift in ownership of learning moving from teachers to students in her building and how much the teachers have embraced the focus of student autonomy. Three principals also mentioned collaboration. Two administrators identified equity for students, and one said that professionalism in dress and language ranked high in his building.

The researcher asked principals to discuss specific steps they implement to ensure that teachers feel supported by administration. Four teachers identified both collaboration and open communication as strategies they attempt to provide for their teachers. Two principals expanded the discussion of communication by detailing how they support teachers with difficult parents. Both principals described similar processes where they give the teacher respect by instructing parents to speak to the teacher before speaking with the principal. Both principals also said they show respect for teachers by never agreeing to a meeting with an upset parent without the teacher present. They also said they would support teachers with difficult parents whenever needed and remediate teacher missteps privately and not in front of parents. Principal C said that her first priority when parents are upset with teachers is to make sure to avoid any situation where a parent verbally or physically attacks a teacher.

Three principals discussed using verbal praise as a way of showing appreciation to staff. Principal B said it was important to her to tell the teachers in her building that she needs their strengths to make the school the most effective it can be, and that she cannot be a successful leader without them. One principal mentioned providing a safe environment, and another said he encourages his staff to practice self-care.

Retention
Administrators were asked to discuss their perceptions of teacher retention in their individual schools. All five principals indicated that they believed they were doing a good job of retaining effective teachers and did not have any concerns. Two participants said that at times they have experienced teachers retire, three said they have had teachers leave because of spouse’s jobs, and two said they have released teachers from their contracts at the end of the school year. Principal E said that she has had two teachers apply for lateral transfers to different schools, but when offered other positions, both turned them down in favor of staying in their school.

When asked to discuss the reasons that contribute to teachers choosing to remain in their schools, principal responses primarily focused upon environment. Two principals said their teachers stay because their school has a positive culture. Two others described their culture as a family environment. One principal said she believes supportive administration contributed to higher teacher retention rates. Principal D remarked, “They just tend to get here and stay. I think we make them feel good about being here. We really believe that if there is an issue, that stays here with our family just like your own, and we work together like families do.”

The researcher asked principals what they thought their systems could do to assist them in retaining effective teachers. Three administrators said that providing needed resources and curriculum could help teachers feel supported and less overwhelmed. Three administrators also said that it is important for a school district to provide a clear vision and goals. One principal said her district could address some inequalities within the schools regarding class sizes and resources, and another discussed the need to provide
opportunities to grow teacher leaders and move teachers forward as they look to advance their careers.

To conclude the interview, principals were asked to provide advice to new administrators looking to improve their teacher retention rates. The most common response was to prioritize relationships, as three principals suggested. Principal C said, “Invest in getting to know your teachers. Know their goals. Know what expectations they have for themselves. This will let you know how you can support them and if their vision aligns with yours.” Two principals also mentioned each of the following: prioritize culture, build teacher leaders, practice good communication, and build a culture of transparency. One principal discussed ensuring every teacher has a mentor within the building.

Teacher Interview Results

Leadership

Five teacher participants were asked three leadership-focused questions for this study. First, they were asked to identify what they perceived as the primary role of the principal. All five participants indicated that providing guidance to teachers was the primary responsibility of their school leader. Three also identified being an instructional leader as an important part of the principal’s job. Teacher B stated, “The managerial aspect is automatic, but principals also need to be very knowledgeable when it comes to the priorities, ideas, philosophies, and policies behind education so that they can lead effectively.” One teacher each mentioned safety, creating a vision, and being an operational manager as priorities for school leaders.
The teachers were asked how they would describe their principal’s leadership style. Three participants said their principal practiced shared leadership with a focus on collaboration. Teacher A said, “Our principal trusts us and allows us to do what we need to do. He talks to us about big decisions and listens because he respects us as professionals.” Three teachers also described their principal as someone who establishes high expectations for his/her staff. Two teachers described their principal’s leadership style as positive and encouraging. Two participants indicated that their principal leads by example. One participant said that her principal exhibited a coaching style of leadership.

Teachers were asked to identify what qualities they believe are important for a principal to possess. The most common responses were that a principal should be trustworthy and approachable, with three teachers naming these traits as most important. Two teachers discussed principals needing to be strong communicators, collaborative, and possessing instructional knowledge. Teacher C said it was important that her principal be positive and encouraging. Teacher D said her principal’s most impactful quality is his humility, saying, “He will do for you before he will ask you to do for him. It’s all about everyone else’s needs and never about him or his success.”

**Organization and Structure**

Teacher participants were asked to discuss the shared beliefs among the staff in their building. All five teachers said that their staff believes that student needs should be prioritized before everything else. Teacher B remarked, “Everything we do always comes back to the same thing: is this what’s best for kids?” Three teachers said their staff believes in the importance of a supportive family environment, and three indicated that their staff believe in the importance of continuous learning for teachers and students.
When asked about the specific efforts their principals make to ensure they feel supported, four teachers identified the open-door communication policy their school leaders have implemented. Three participants detailed the verbal praise they receive from their principals. Three discussed their principal’s visibility in the building and in their PLC meetings. Two teachers said their principals support them with parent issues, and one teacher discussed random acts of kindness that her principal utilizes. Building on administrative supports, teachers were asked about how their principals show appreciation for their work. All five participants said their principals show appreciation through verbal praise, and four discussed random acts of kindness.

Teachers were asked to discuss the opportunities in place for them to provide input and contribute to the decision-making process. Four teachers indicated that their principal made effective use of the faculty leadership team and asking for feedback from staff. Teacher B elaborated on her principal’s system, explaining, “She utilizes small committees and kind of divides priorities among them. I think that helps because it provides smaller groups for people to be heard instead of everyone shouting their voices at once.” Three teachers said their principals were skilled at effectively delegating tasks to teachers when appropriate. Two teachers said that their principal’s open-door policy made them feel comfortable offering input even when not specifically asked.

Retention

Teacher participants were asked to name some of the most important factors that led to their decision to remain in their current school. All five teachers said that the administrative support they experience is a direct contributor to their decision to remain at their school. Teacher D compared her current school experience with a previous one,
saying, “I did one year at a different school. The reason I came back here was because of leadership. I feel loved, I feel important, I feel needed, and they make me feel like I have purpose here.” Two teachers said that the positive environment keeps them in their buildings, and two indicated that the level of teacher autonomy was a factor. Teacher E stated, “I feel like we have a lot of teacher independence here, and he lets us run our classrooms the way we need to for our kids.” One teacher mentioned satisfaction with the leadership opportunities available to teachers in the building. All teachers were asked to rate the certainty of their decision to remain in their current school on a scale of 1-10, with 1 being very uncertain and 10 being as certain as possible. These ratings had a mean of 9.2 with a range of 2.

Mentor Programs

The use and effectiveness of mentor programs was discussed during the teacher participant individual interviews and again in a teacher focus group. During individual interviews, teachers were asked if they had participated in any mentorship programs during their teaching career. They were asked to describe their role and indicate how beneficial they believed the programs had been for them. Three teachers said they had participated as a mentee and found the program to be of little or no benefit. Two teachers said they had participated as a mentor and found the program to be of little or no benefit. One teacher participated as a mentee and found the program beneficial. One participated as a mentor and found the program beneficial. One teacher had no participation in a mentor program in either role.

Mentor programs were discussed in more detail during the teacher focus group. The teachers were asked what they believed the district or individual schools could do to
develop an effective mentorship program for teachers early in their career, and whether they thought it would improve teacher retention. All five teachers discussed the importance of careful consideration when pairing a mentor and mentee together, taking personalities and goals into account. Teacher D stated, “I think sometimes principals just pick veteran teachers and assign them. But you may be going through a period where you can’t take care of somebody else because you have a lot going on, so just because you have a lot of experience doesn’t mean you’ll be a good mentor.”

Relationships were a popular theme in the teacher focus group when discussing the effectiveness of mentor programs. Teacher A said, “I feel like mentorship is something that is hard to put down on paper. Like, you can assign a mentor to me, but until I develop a relationship with that person, they are probably not who I’m going to go to.” One teacher mentioned that having scheduled time set aside for mentorship meetings was essential, and that principals should work to protect that time the same way they do instructional time. “It’s easy for us to drown in the day-to-day and forget to check in with each other. That can be so harmful for early or first-year teachers,” remarked Teacher B. Teachers also agreed that this type of planning would keep mentor programs from being solely an obligation and instead an important part of faculty relationships.

Preparing teachers to be effective mentors was also discussed. Teacher D said it is important to train teachers on how to be a good mentor and what those skills should entail in their relationships with their mentees. Memories from their own mentor experiences prompted the teacher participants to discuss placing an emphasis on building communication skills and how to discuss difficult topics with new teachers. Teacher E said mentors should be taught how to communicate with their mentee based on the needs
of their mentee, providing the example that some teachers feel overwhelmed when told several things at once, and would rather come with questions on their own time. Others feel too intimidated to ask questions and would benefit from a more direct approach from their mentor.

**Summary**

The principal and teacher participants in this study used their experiences to identify what they perceived were the most important leadership factors impacting teacher retention decisions. The study was designed to examine patterns and trends in participant responses in order to highlight the essential leadership aspects that directly contribute to a teacher’s decision to remain in his/her school. The coding process established leadership, organization and structure, and retention as the main categories of data gathered through individual interviews. A teacher focus group allowed for elaboration on these subjects, with an emphasis on structure of mentor programs. The data have been analyzed and conclusions and implications will be discussed in Chapter Five.
CHAPTER 5:
FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND CONSIDERATIONS

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to identify teacher perceptions of school leaders that contributed to their decision to remain in their schools. The design of the study consisted of semi-structured individual interviews with five principals and five teachers in the same district, with teachers also participating in a focus group after individual interviews. The researcher’s interest in this study stemmed from her perception of teacher retention in her own district, as well as extensive research focused on reasons teachers are choosing to leave the profession, but lack of research focused on reasons teachers choose to stay.

Research Questions

This research was conducted in order to answer the following question:

1. What administrative factors contribute to teachers’ decisions to remain in their schools?

Findings

The following is a summary of the patterns identified through individual principal and teacher interviews that pertained to the research question. The researcher used five current principals and five current teachers in the interview process. Written consent was obtained from all participants. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded. The researcher used an open-coding process that led to the formation of axial codes and eventually selective codes to identify themes within the data.
**Teacher Autonomy**

Teacher participants identified teacher autonomy as a factor in their decision to stay in their schools. Through the semi-structured interviews and the focus group, teachers detailed how much they appreciate their principals giving them freedom and trust to do their jobs the way they see fit as professionals. Teacher C mentioned that she appreciated that her principal does not micromanage the teachers and allows them to make the instructional decisions they believe are best for students. Linda Darling-Hammond, president of The Learning Policy Institute said, “Working conditions are even more important for keeping people in once they’ve made the choice to teach” (Westervelt and Lonsdorf, 2016). Many teachers noted that, with the high-stakes accountability placed on them from test scores and evaluations, having a principal who gives them autonomy made it easier for them to return to their classrooms year after year. Teachers believe they are important contributors to the overall success of the school when they are allowed to use their expertise in their daily practice. Micromanagement is a quick way to destroy the morale of a faculty, and when administrators trust the judgment of the teachers, they will feel supported, respected, and valued (Steele and Whitaker, 2019).

**Communication**

Open communication was discussed in-depth during interviews with both principals and teachers. Teachers said that they appreciated their principal sharing reasons behind decision-making, as well as being approachable. Principals noted making open communication a priority with their staff, with Principal B stating, “I want to understand the reason for decisions being made so that I can explain the reasons to my teachers. I don’t want to be a leader who dictates decisions top-down. There are those
mandates that come from central office, obviously, but I need to be able to talk with my
teachers about why those decisions are being made.” Teachers are working in a time of
high accountability and many believe they have no control over most elements of their
job. While principals are often used as a vessel to carry decisions from central office to
the classroom, teachers in this research study made it evident that they felt higher levels
of support when their principal established a culture of transparency that helped them to
feel comfortable discussing and questioning decisions that impact their daily work life.
Having this transparent communication model allows a solid foundation of trust to build
between administrators and teachers. This foundation is one of the most crucial elements
of a school’s culture (Steele and Whitaker, 2019). While administrators may make
decisions that teachers do not agree with, if they have a trusting relationship, it will be
less likely to cause permanent damage to the climate of the school.

In addition to communication regarding decision-making, teachers discussed how
they like to believe that they can go to their administrators with problems or personal
issues and feel heard. This demonstrates the importance of open communication to
building individual relationships with teachers. Principal A indicated that he encouraged
teachers to practice self-care and to always put their own families first because, as he put
it, “the job will always be here. There will always be work that needs to be done.”

Teachers are often seen as selfless mercenaries (O’Reilly, 2014), and it can be easy for
others to forget that they are human beings with personal lives, issues, and
responsibilities outside of the school day. Principals who encourage work/life balance
and boundaries tend to have happier teachers, according to data collected in this study.
Collaboration

Principal participants in this study emphasized a focus on collaborating with their teachers, and teacher participants echoed those statements and noted their appreciation of the collaborative efforts within their buildings. The role of the principal is shifting, with more focus being placed on principals as instructional leaders and learners rather than managers of the school building (SCORE, 2018). Principals discussed different methods of collaboration with teachers, ranging from forming leadership teams, delegating tasks to teacher committees, and working with teachers to support ideas for new programs or clubs. Teacher C stated, “Any type of program that I’ve wanted to start, she has let me. She has never said no to any idea, and she offers to help me whenever she can.”

In addition to supportive collaboration, principals allow teachers to contribute to decisions that impact their daily life at work. Principal C said, “I try not to make decisions without at least running it past my leadership team. When it comes to schedule changes or testing order - things that will impact them more than me - I let them make the decisions. It’s a little thing for me but a big thing for them.” Teachers appreciate having the opportunity to offer input on decisions, and principals who allow that to happen are more likely to have higher levels of contentment among their staff.

Teachers were asked about opportunities available for them to contribute to the decision-making process. All participants indicated that they believed their voices were important to their administrators and they had some type of avenue to contribute, whether through a committee or frequent consultation by their principal. Many principals discussed making leadership opportunities available for teachers who want these opportunities. Teachers’ statements mirrored this when they discussed feeling that their
principals allow them to grow as educators and future leaders. It was evident through interviews that principal participants valued the input and considerations of their teachers and recognized that they needed the strengths of all stakeholders to make the school as successful as possible. Effective leaders realize that the quality of their work with their staff can affect their connection to each member of the staff and have an impact, positive or negative, on the culture and success of the entire school (Casas, 2017).

**Leadership Style**

Principal leadership style patterns were evident in both teacher and administrator data. Certain leadership styles were mentioned consistently, while some were not mentioned at all. It was difficult for principals to classify their leadership style, and many detailed the type of leader they strive to be. This displayed a growth mindset and a conscious effort to be the best type of leader they can be for their teachers. Administrators described their leadership styles as coaching, collaborative, servant-based, empowering, leading by example, and transparent. These descriptions demonstrate a desire to support teachers and staff and promote a culture of honesty and shared leadership. Principal E said, “I want consensus with my staff, and buy-in. I think it’s important that we are all working together. I try to make sure everyone hears the same thing so we can make decisions with the same information.”

Teachers described their principals’ leadership styles as servant leadership, leading by example, positive, high expectations, shared leadership, coaching, and non-micromanaging. They favorably discussed how their principals have encouraged and supported them, making them better teachers and motivating them to keep learning and growing. The theme of modeling and leading by example was evident in both groups’
responses. Teacher B commented, “She adjusts her practice according to what is working and not working. She doesn’t draw a solid line in the sand and you follow it no matter what. She is right in here learning alongside everyone, and she’s not afraid to tell you that she is still getting her principal legs underneath her.” The most effective school leaders are perceived as honest, forward-looking, inspirational, and competent (Gorton, Alston, and Snowden, 2007). The perceptions of principal leadership among teacher and administrator participants in this study aligned with these qualities; therefore, it should be expected that the principal participants are effective leaders based on this data.

**Implications**

There are several administrative factors that contribute to a teacher’s decision to remain in their schools. Principal leadership style can influence this decision, with teachers preferring to work for positive leaders who want to collaborate with them and are not afraid to show that they are also learning as they grow professionally. School administrators can use this research to reflect on their leadership qualities and look for ways to foster collaborative discussion and decision-making with teachers. Teachers appreciate principals who are visible within the school building. This hands-on form of leadership assures teachers that their principals are connected to the daily happenings in the hallways, classrooms, and all areas of the school. Principals in this study who discussed making themselves visible within their schools also described their leadership styles as coaching, servant-leader, and leading by example. These are leadership styles that focus on supporting teachers, rather than managing them. Principals who practice supportive leadership styles will likely have more teachers returning each year.
Good communication is crucial for teachers. They need to view their principals as approachable and honest. When administrators are good communicators and are able to be transparent with teachers regarding the management of the school, it promotes positive relationships between teachers and principals. When teachers and principals can communicate openly and effectively, students will benefit. Teachers in this study discussed their principals treating them as human beings who work hard, have families to care for, and sometimes make mistakes. Principals can use the findings of this study to reflect on how they communicate with their teachers. It is necessary to have focus in the workplace, but simple greetings and inquiries about someone’s day, family, or activities outside of school can play a large part in building effective communication. Teachers appreciate a principal who is approachable if they have a personal need, or regarding a student or parent. Principals who build open and honest communication with their teachers are also more likely to preserve positive relationships when discussing difficult issues.

Teachers also benefit greatly from principals who afford them autonomy in their practice. Teachers work hard to build autonomous learners who accept accountability for their learning and growth within their classrooms. Principals can make the same type of effort to give teachers autonomy within their school buildings. Teachers are educated and trained professionals who have extensive knowledge of instruction. They are energetic and highly motivated to provide high-quality learning experiences for students, and full of creative ideas to make the most of their instructional time. Principals can build relationships with teachers by trusting them and offering them the independence to run their classroom to meet the needs of their students. Teachers appreciate being respected
and not micromanaged as they work to provide the most successful learning environment possible for children.

**Research Questions**

This research was conducted in order to answer the following question:

2. What support methods can administrators implement to retain effective teachers?

**Findings**

**Instructional Support**

Principals and teachers in this study both discussed the support administrators provide to teachers when they are present and active participants in Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These PLC times are crucial times for teaching teams to meet together and scrutinize data from assessment to uncover patterns and identify student needs. When principals are present in these meetings, it allows them to be connected to student learning in a way they would otherwise not be. Teachers discussed how important it is to them that their leaders understand the standards and the expectations that they have for their students. Teacher B detailed a personal experience with having several administrators in a short amount of time, saying that it was obvious which administrators took the time to learn the standards and understand the instructional path. “Principals need to know about the changing conceptions of curriculum, educational philosophies and beliefs, curricular sources, and evaluation and improvement” (Jenkins, 2009).

In addition to being invested learners, principals can support instruction by working to provide the resources teachers need. Several principals in this study discussed their efforts to find funds for needed curriculum and materials. If school funds are not available, principals can support teachers by connecting them with community partners or
other resources that teachers may not be aware of. These supports do not go unnoticed by teachers, and those who feel supported in their instruction are more likely to feel valued in their school.

**Mentor Programs**

Mentorship was discussed frequently throughout this study. The responses about mentor program participation and its effectiveness varied among teacher participants. All participants were aware of the district mentor program for new teachers, but not all had participated. Some teachers had participated in mentor programs as a mentor or mentee, or had served in both roles. Mentoring is a broad process that ranges from a simple check-in buddy system to an intentional, structured, and procedural support system (Alexander and Alexander, 2019). While few of the teacher participants experienced significant benefits from their mentorship experience, all agreed that an effective mentor program can influence a teacher’s decision to remain in the classroom. One teacher participant recounted feeling ready to leave education altogether after her second year in the classroom until a veteran teacher noticed her frustration and took steps to help her. She believed if she had been offered a mentor her first year, she would not have felt alone and lost during those crucial initial years.

Principals and teachers in this study agreed that simply placing new teachers in a mentor program does not guarantee a successful experience. One important component of mentorship is selecting the right mentors for new teachers. Simply assigning mentors based on years of experience can be problematic because teaching and mentoring are two different jobs with different knowledge bases and skill sets (Educator Effectiveness, 2018). Principals should consider other qualifications, such as desire to mentor, time to
commit to the mentee and program, specific instructional strengths, coaching skills, interpersonal relationships, personality characteristics, work habits, and general professional attitude. The program will only be as effective as its mentors, so these choices are important.

Participants in the focus group discussed their different experiences with mentors from school to school. A more structured and outlined approach with similar expectations may improve the effectiveness of these programs. In addition, training for mentors in the district where this research was conducted is currently not as focused as possible. Without proper training and coaching, mentorship can be perceived as another item on a teacher’s caseload, and the interactions can lack high-quality conversations and consistency (Educator Effectiveness, 2018). Principals can improve these programs through careful consideration of mentors, intentional training, and implementing a specific plan to respond to the needs of both mentees and mentors.

**Words and Actions**

Words of affirmation and random acts of kindness were two themes that emerged often throughout this research study. Both principals and teachers spoke about the efforts leaders make to verbalize their appreciation and support for the teachers in their buildings. Principal participants recognize the importance of letting their teachers know that the work they do is important and appreciated, and teachers remember these moments with their administrators. Teacher A remarked, “You know he’s appreciative by the way he talks to you and the way he treats you. He never puts you down, he is always trying to build you up.” Each teacher participant spoke of the verbal praise and support they receive from their principals, which shows how impactful and effective these
interactions can be. Teacher B said, “She’s a very big words of affirmation person. She goes out of her way to say how valuable you are. At the end of an observation she will give a hug and some kind of reaffirming statement about the good job you’re doing.” Leaders must be willing to describe and communicate in a positive way their own feelings and appreciation while modeling honesty and vulnerability (Casas, 2017). Using words to show appreciation is an inexpensive and impactful way to make teachers believe they are an important and irreplaceable part of the school. Teachers who feel this type of value are more likely to invest in their school by returning each year.

In addition to verbal praise, teachers and principals also discussed small acts of kindness. These simple acts, such as a day to wear jeans to school, providing food for teachers, and leaving encouraging notes and candy in staff mailboxes were all strategies teachers said their principals implemented to let them know they are appreciated. Principals remarked that these uplifting gestures positively impact morale in their buildings. Teacher D commented, “He does little things for us, like giving us a jeans day or providing breakfast when we return from a break. It’s sporadic, but I think it’s more meaningful that way.” A principal’s effort to motivate and invigorate teachers can have a profound effect on school climate and morale (Gray and Streshly, 2008). This study demonstrated that acts of kindness are an effective way to demonstrate appreciation and value to teachers.

**Theoretical Framework**

The results of this research study show that teacher retention decisions can be influenced by needs met within Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory. Responses from principals in this study identified safety needs as a priority, as well as needs within the
Belongingness and Love tiers. Principals realize that teachers need to feel safe before they can have their needs met in other areas. Teacher responses focused priorities mostly within the areas of belongingness and love needs, esteem needs, and self-actualization. Organizational theory and Maslow’s theory coexist within an educational environment. Principals who involve teachers in the decision-making process create an environment of collaboration and transparency that provides leadership opportunities for teachers and connects them to the organization of the school. Teachers who are “kept in the dark” about operational issues, plans, and goals of the organization will feel like an outsider (Tanner, 2019). This can lead teachers to feel that they are replaceable and not an integral part of the school, which can weaken their desire to remain in their building.

**Implications**

There are several ways principals can implement support systems at their schools in order to retain effective teachers. Administrators should work to ensure their teachers have the instructional resources and materials they need to feel equipped to be successful teachers for their students. Teachers appreciate and connect with principals who make efforts to support instruction by remaining knowledgeable about standards and curriculum so they can support teachers with data and remediation/enrichment. Principals should model a growth-mindset and make sure they are attending professional development and training to remain updated on new standards and shifts in educational priorities. All teachers in this study discussed appreciation for their principals participating in their PLC meetings. Rather than simply being in attendance, principals should be active participants in the rich discussions about student performance, data, and needs.
Some principals use their leadership teams as resources when making spending decisions regarding instructional materials. This strategy helps principals make informed decisions and also provides teachers a chance to collaborate with principals. Teachers appreciate knowing their principal wants to support their instruction, and giving them an opportunity to express the needs of their students will ensure that the best possible materials and resources are purchased.

Mentorships, particularly for new teachers, can have a profound effect and help to make them feel supported. Principals should implement these programs intentionally and with careful consideration to choosing mentors and protecting time for mentors and mentees to meet and work together. If conducted successfully, these programs can build relationships between new and veteran teachers and make teachers feel supported by administration and fellow teachers. The schools and district utilized in this study have procedures in place for new teacher mentor programs. Teacher mentors are given artifacts to help guide monthly meetings with their mentees, as well as a checklist to keep track of topics discussed. Principals can increase the effectiveness of these programs by protecting blocks of time during the school day to allow mentors and mentees to meet together, rather than asking them to meet during off-contract time. Teachers indicated that before or after-school meetings often tend to be rushed due to other obligations. The district-level new teacher mentor program is designed based on specific and intentional topics for each meeting, which is beneficial to teachers because it allows them to focus on specific areas of instruction. Teachers are given the topics ahead of time to allow them to prepare for the evening with questions and/or reading about the topic, if desired. All new teachers to the district, regardless of experience level, participate in the district-wide
program. New teachers in their first year out of college often have different needs than teachers with 10 or more years of experience who are new to a district. While this program is no doubt beneficial to all teachers involved, consideration should be made to possibly dividing the group during certain sessions based on needs and experience. This could contribute to teachers receiving the maximum level of meaningful discussion and learning.

Principals have jobs that often require them to perform many tasks at once. It should not be forgotten that they are the face and the voice of the school, and teachers look to them for acknowledgement and encouragement. Administrators can help recognize the good work their teachers do by offering verbal praise and recognition, as well as small acts of kindness. These can contribute to a teacher’s feeling of worth in the building. Participants in this study discussed unexpected treats, kind notes, verbal praise, “shout-outs” in emails, and lunch during professional development days as small ways their principals show appreciation for them. One principal acknowledged that celebrations is an area where he could improve. It is easy for principals to get overwhelmed with the managerial and organizational work of leading a school. Teachers also get overwhelmed with their classroom responsibilities. Although easier said than done, it benefits all involved to take a moment to recognize the difficult and important work happening daily in the school. Principals know how important teachers are to the success of the school, and the principals in this study repeated that belief many times in their interviews. School leaders should use these findings to remind themselves that teachers do not enter this field for validation and recognition, but even small steps in that area can do wonders for improving morale. Teachers who believe that they are valued and recognized, even with
small gestures or words, will believe they are an important part of the school community and will be more likely to remain in their school.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

This study utilized principals and teachers from elementary schools. Considerations should be made to replicate the study in secondary education environments. The research focused on administrative factors that contributed to teacher retention decisions. Because retention is such an important and timely issue, further research should be considered to identify factors beyond administration that can influence these decisions.

Mentorship programs are worthy of more specific and focused research. Teacher participants in this study were passionate about mentorship programs as a result of their experiences with these programs, both positive and negative. Recent research surrounding mentorship programs provides insight into the value of these programs when planned, organized, and implemented effectively. Further research in this area should focus on qualities that make these programs successful, possibly with an emphasis on the selection of mentors and pairings of mentors and mentees.

This study does not include longitudinal data to determine how long administrative factors can positively influence teacher retention, particularly with increased accountability and high-stakes testing being imposed upon teachers each year. Future studies could examine the weight of principal leadership as it compares to the changing educational environment. It would also be beneficial for future researchers to examine the research regarding teacher attrition as it relates to principal leadership. This
would allow researchers to compare data between this study and attrition studies to look for patterns and overlap in participant responses.

**Summary**

The findings of this study provided insight into perceptions of principal efforts to retain effective teachers. These findings may provide school leaders with new ideas and perspectives they can use to implement effective supports within their buildings. It is the sincere hope of the researcher that these findings will be useful to administrators as they seek ways to build culture, form relationships, and offer supports to their teachers.
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APPENDIX A

District Permission for Study
October 29, 2018

Dr. Linda A. Gilbert
Director of Schools
Murfreesboro City Schools

RE: Permission to conduct research study

Dear Dr. Gilbert:

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study within Murfreesboro City Schools. I am currently enrolled in the Educational Leadership and Administration program at Carson-Newman University, and am in the process of writing Doctoral Dissertation. The study is entitled Effects of Principal Leadership on Teacher Retention Decisions.

I hope that the district administration will allow me to interview five principals and five teachers for this research. One of my goals for this study is to highlight the effective practices that our principals have in place to help teachers as they return to the classroom each year. This study is different from other studies that place a focus on teacher attrition. My research will highlight the importance of our school leaders and what they are doing to support the teachers in their buildings.

If approval is granted, I will conduct individual interviews with each principal in their building after school hours. The interview process should take no longer than 45 minutes. Principals will also be asked to recommend a teacher on their staff to participate in the teacher interviews and a focus group. These teachers will be selected based on years of experience working under their current principal and maintaining a positive professional relationship with the principal that does not extend to a personal relationship outside of school. Teacher participants will also be interviewed individually outside school hours. Once all interviews are conducted, teachers will gather for a focus group to provide clarity and detail to their interview responses. No costs will be incurred by either MCS or the individual participants.

All information regarding the participants will remain anonymous. I will maintain anonymity by removing all identifiable information from the description of the participants. No individual schools will be identifiable through demographic breakdown or other descriptions. Throughout the research process the only people who will have access to my notes and documents will be myself and my dissertation committee members through the university.

Your approval to conduct this study is vital to my research and will be greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions or concerns that you may have about my research. You may contact me at alex.juneau@cityschools.net or by phone at (865) 776-5647. You may also contact my dissertation chair, Dr. Steve A. Davidson at sdavidson@cn.edu.
If you agree, kindly sign and return this signed form in the addressed envelope via the school mail service.

Sincerely,

Alexandra Juneau, Carson-Newman University

Cc: Dr. Steve A. Davidson, dissertation chair

Approved by:

_______________________________  ______________________
Printed name                     Signature
APPENDIX B

Principal Informed Consent Letter
Dear [Principal’s name],

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Carson-Newman University pursuing an Ed.D in Educational Leadership with Administrative licensure. I am conducting a qualitative research study entitled Effects of Principal Leadership on Teacher Retention Decisions. I believe this is an important and relevant study given the current teacher shortage problems across the state and across the country. One of my goals for this study is to highlight the effective practices that principals have in place to encourage teachers to return to the classroom each year. My research will highlight the importance of our school leaders and what you are doing to support the teachers in your building. The findings will support the knowledge base for future research on teacher retention. As an educator at [school name], I am excited to shine a light on great administrative practices in our district.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your voluntary participation would include one in-person recorded interview that will likely take no more than 30 minutes of your time. I will also ask you to recommend a teacher in your building who you believe would add a valuable perspective to the study. All participant information will be anonymous, and no identifiable information will be included in the study. I will be the only person with access to interview data. When the study is complete, you will be provided a copy of the final publication.

[Principal’s name] has approved my study and granted permission for principals and teachers to participate in the research. Principal participation in this study is essential and greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You can contact me at [phone number], or via email at [email address].

Thank you in advance for allowing me to learn from your valuable leadership experience. Your signature on this form will confirm that you, having read and understood the information presented, decide to participate and contribute to this study. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Alex Juneau, Ed.S

_______________________________
Signature of participant

_______________________________
Date
APPENDIX C

Teacher Informed Consent Letter
Dear [Teacher’s name],

I am currently a doctoral candidate at Carson-Newman University pursuing an Ed.D in Educational Leadership with Administrative licensure. I am conducting a qualitative research study entitled Effects of Principal Leadership on Teacher Retention Decisions. I believe this is an important and relevant study given the current teacher shortage problems across the state and across the country. One of my goals for this study is to highlight the effective practices that [MCS] principals have in place to support teachers in their decision to return to the classroom each year. The findings will support the knowledge base for future research on teacher retention. As a teacher at [John Pittard Elementary], I am deeply concerned about teacher shortage and hopeful that this research will be beneficial in the effort to recruit and retain effective educators.

Your principal is a participant in my study and has recommended you as a valuable perspective. I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Your voluntary participation would include one in-person recorded interview that will likely take no more than 30 minutes of your time. There will also be a teacher focus group after interviews. I assure you that participant information will be anonymous, and no identifiable information will be included in the study. I will be the only person with access to interview data. When the study is complete, you will be provided a copy of the final publication.

[Dr. Gilbert] has approved my study and granted permission for [MCS] principals and teachers to participate in the research. Teacher participation in this study is essential and greatly appreciated. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about the study. You can contact me at [865] 776-5647, or via email at alex.juneau@cityschools.net.

Thank you in advance for allowing me to learn from your valuable experience. Your signature on this form will confirm that you, having read and understood the information presented, decide to participate and contribute to this study. I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,

Alex Juneau, Ed.S

_______________________________  __________________________
Signature of participant            Date
APPENDIX D

Interview Questions
Overarching Research Questions

What administrative factors contribute to teachers’ decisions to remain in their school?
What support methods can administrators implement to retain effective teachers?

Principal Interview Questions

Background Questions
1. How many years have you been in the field of education?
2. How many years have you been a principal?
3. How many years have you been a principal at this school?
4. How many teachers currently working here did you hire?

Study-based Questions
1. What do you see as the primary role of the principal?
2. How would you describe your leadership style?
3. Tell me about the shared beliefs among your faculty/staff.
4. What are your overall perceptions regarding teacher retention in this school?
5. What steps do you take to ensure your teachers feel supported by administration?
6. Tell me about specific efforts you make to retain effective teachers.
7. What do you think are the main reasons teachers choose to remain at this school?
8. What could the system do to assist you in retaining effective teachers?
9. What advice would you give new principals trying to improve teacher retention?
Teacher Interview Questions

Background Questions

1. How many years have you been in education?
2. How many years have you been teaching in this district?
3. How many years have you been teaching under [principal’s name]?
4. Did [principal] hire you?

Study-based Questions

1. What do you see as the primary role of the principal?
2. How would you describe your principal’s leadership style?
3. What leadership qualities are most important for a principal to possess?
4. Tell me about the shared beliefs among the teachers in your building.
5. What specific efforts does your principal make that help you to feel supported?
6. Have you participated in any mentorship programs in your school? If so, please describe your role. How beneficial were these programs?
7. What are the most important factors that have influenced your decision to remain at this school?
8. How does your principal show appreciation for the work you do?
9. What opportunities are in place for you to provide input and contribute to the decision-making process?
10. On a scale of 1-10, how certain are you that your school is where you want to be?