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# Principals Staying in Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within

Mark A. Wilke, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2024

School principals are facing an increase in demand and challenges from district, state, and federal agencies for improvements both behaviorally and academically. Each year, more school principals exit their positions for other professions. The concentrated poverty school districts have been hit the hardest by this exodus.

The purpose of this basic qualitative study is to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when they are located near other districts with much lower poverty concentrations. The factors of interest are issues such as district leadership support for principals, compensation, climate and culture of the buildings, principal evaluation, mentoring support, professional development opportunities, and the impact of schools' socio-economic status.

This study was conducted using a semi-structured, open-ended interview protocol. During the interview process, 10 principals who had worked in a concentrated poverty school for a minimum of five years were interviewed. In addition, the principals came from a wide range of academic levels including elementary, middle, high, alternative, and virtual schools. In an effort to capture why these principals remained working in their respective schools when other professional opportunities became available, they were asked six questions. These questions focused on Locke's (1976) work on job satisfaction and four areas of professional growth: (1) School Leadership Aspirations, (2) Concentrated Poverty Leadership, (3) Managing Daily Challenges, and (4) Central Office Recommendations. Constant comparative data analysis resulted in seven major themes and eight subthemes. Upon reviewing the data, I took my

research one step further and categorized these themes and subthemes into three foundation themes: (1) Experiences as a School Leader, (2) Concentrated Poverty Challenges, and (3) Recommendations for Retention.

Prior to this study, most related research on school principal retention provided reasons why leaders left their respective school districts. Little to no research has focused on the reasons that school principals remain in their respective school districts. The purpose of this study is to provide descriptive reasons why school principals remain in concentrated poverty schools. It also provides suggestions for ways that central office administrators can retain school principals. Overall, school principals I interviewed for this study identified opportunities for professional growth, support from the superintendent, collaboration among other leaders, and proper resource allocation as guiding forces of retention. As a result of this study, the literature has expanded to include the results of why school principals remain within their positions.

The results of my research show that central office administrators should focus on providing support and guidance to school principals. The specific supports mentioned by school principals include mentoring opportunities, regular meetings, and emotional support.

# Principals Staying in Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within

by

Mark A. Wilke

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate College in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy Educational  
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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Levin et al. (2019) define the role of a school principal as one that is “essential for providing strong educational opportunities and improved outcomes for students” (p. 23). However, the principal turnover rate in the United States (U.S.) is high, surpassing even the rate of teacher turnover that has motivated so much policy attention and research, with about 18% of school principals moving jobs each year due to a variety of variables (Brendon et al., 2021). In 2021, the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) stated that there were over 124 principal positions that were vacant (MDE, 2021); of these vacancies, 53% were due to administrators leaving the profession for different careers (MISchool Data, 2021). Other data revealed that significant principal turnover often occurred in schools with high levels of poverty (Herring, 2019). However, not all principals leave high-poverty districts. Some choose to remain even when there are principal openings in other nearby districts with lower levels of poverty or when other career opportunities exist. Why, then, do some principals remain in high-poverty schools? This dissertation will examine why some principals remain within concentrated poverty schools when other opportunities, both within and outside education, arise throughout the state of Michigan.

### **Background**

The idea of the public-school principal serving as an instructional leader in the school setting, not just a manager, is a relatively new concept that arose in the early 1980s. Brookover and Lezotte’s (1982) work on educational leadership and the important role principals play in supporting teachers, and connections to student outcomes helped to lead this paradigm shift. Decades later, Parke and Thomas (2007) further emphasized that effective principals must be

encouragers, managers of conflict, and strong decision-makers within the school setting. Principals have a complex and demanding role, which requires them to interact with, manage, and support several key stakeholders within the school, including instructional support (paraprofessionals, teacher aides, instructional supports), custodial, transportation, and central office staff. The principal is also responsible for shaping, developing, and strengthening the instructional programming and resulting academic growth and achievement of the students within the school, regardless of variables that prohibit achievement, such as cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic status, parent support, and special needs (Hughes et al., 2015). Parents and families also have increased expectations and can create unique and specific challenges for principals. Finally, Hughes et al. (2015) stated that the demands and expectations of a district's board of education and central office administrators can place a large burden on principals. Attempting to find a balance is key to the survival, tenure, and longevity of any principal, especially those serving within concentrated poverty schools.

Indeed, school districts across the U.S. are experiencing an exodus of administrators from the profession and are finding it much more challenging to recruit, hire, and retain applicants (Doss et al., 2022). The districts most detrimentally affected by this trend were those with high concentrations of poverty. The concept and term often used in U.S. policy and scholarship refers to areas of “extreme” or “high” poverty, which is defined as areas with “40 percent of the tract population living below the federal poverty threshold” (Bartanen et al., 2021, p. 5). As a related term, Herring (2019) defines “concentrated poverty” as a spatial density of socioeconomic deprivation, while Gulosino et al. (2016) note concentrated poverty school districts are those that have at least 65% of their students qualifying as free-and-reduced-lunch students.

Such concentrated poverty school districts face a struggle to retain principals, which exacerbates the challenge of establishing a clear and consistent instructional climate and culture within the school setting (Tirozzi, 2001). Sass et al. (2011) found that some concentrated poverty school districts have a principal turnover rate of 52% or greater in a five-year span, while Herring's (2019) work found that the principal turnover rate had increased to 57% or greater in a five-year span. In comparison, the turnover for principals within their first five years in school districts not classified as concentrated poverty was 33% (Herring, 2019). Principal turnover is a problem, and not enough is known about those who decide to remain, especially those within concentrated poverty districts.

## **Problem Statement**

### **Practical and Research Problem**

School districts across the country are scrambling to fill key positions across their collective personnel, and concentrated poverty school districts are struggling to fill administrative vacancies (Hughes et. al, 2015), and retain principals (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). Some educators who leave concentrated poverty school districts point to larger class sizes, teacher retention concerns, and a lack of highly qualified personnel as reasons for their exit (Hunter & Rodriguez, 2021).

Due to a shrinking pool of qualified candidates, when a principalship is vacated, districts are often faced with hiring someone who is new or lacks experience (Pietsch et al., 2020). These less-experienced professionals often result in districts spending up to \$75,000 (MEMSPA, 2021) per principal on training. Beyond costs, Mascall and Leithwood (2010) examined the impact of school principal turnover on the climate and culture of buildings and found that there were negative consequences associated with principal turnover. Rodriguez and Hunter's (2021) work



on school principal retention also identified the negative impact school principal turnover had on schools and the cost that the turnover took on the staff and students of the building.

Despite the prevalence of principal turnover in concentrated-poverty school districts, there exists a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of principals in these settings; most research has focused primarily on why teachers, not principals, exit schools classified as having “concentrated-poverty” (Ripple et al., 2012). More needs to be known about the principals of these types of schools, especially those who choose to stay.

### **Studies that Address the Problem**

Sufficient current research exists that examines why principals are leaving the profession at an alarming rate. Principals’ decisions to stay or leave have been attributed to job satisfaction, which includes many key variables, such as climate and culture, central office administrative support, and compensation. For example, Dicke et al. (2020) concluded that job satisfaction was the leading cause of a principal’s staying or leaving. Similarly, Tekleselassie and Choi (2021) examined the factors of economic security, role enjoyment, and opportunities for school principals to contribute to school policies and found that the concentration of minority students, school level, school size, student-to-teacher ratio, and the school’s adequate yearly progress (how the state measures achievement within a school) greatly affected job satisfaction for school principals.

Job satisfaction through the lens of leadership support was also found to play a role in central office administrator turnover. O’Connor (2018) examined central office administrator turnover and workplace-related constructs and found that a lack of job satisfaction had a significant influence on the turnover of executive-level central office administrators in Texas school districts. While the study was aimed at central office administrators, it included school

principals within the sample population. Similarly, Shaw and Newton (2014) found a positive correlation between central office leadership and job satisfaction among school principals, and Corcoran (2017) found that school principals remained on average 35% longer in their position when they felt the support of central office leadership.

When reviewing the topic of compensation, school principals are no exception to desiring what they deem appropriate compensation. Zhang and Zeller (2016) examined the impact that compensation had on school principals leaving the profession and focused on school principals from lower levels of poverty school districts. The researchers found that compensation among school principals in concentrated poverty school districts was equal to or less than that among school principals in suburban or non-concentrated poverty districts. Mafora (2013) also examined the impact that higher compensation had when looking at the retention of school principals and found that principals in school districts where compensation was higher than central office administrators were not experiencing difficulty filling principal vacancies. Some research has revealed the impact of the political environment on principal turnover, especially as it relates to principal evaluations. Doss et al. (2021) looked at how the Obama administration's school initiative called "Race to the Top" required the creation of principal evaluation systems, as tied to student outcomes in schools. Doss et al. revealed that these performance assessments were stressful, especially given inadequate training and support for new and experienced principals. Donaldson et al. (2021) discussed the impact the political landscape had on the educational community and how it caused school principals to exit the profession. The researchers discussed how state and federal funds were often tied to performance on specific tests and measures and, as such, often led school principals to leave the profession. New principal evaluation measures have been developed within each state across the country,

and the National Policy Board of Educational Administration (2015) has attempted to normalize and standardize these measures. However, significant stress associated with these evaluation systems remains.

Adequate mentoring for both teachers and principals has been found to affect educator retention. Mentoring is not a new concept in the teaching profession; in fact, there has been a clear relationship between teacher mentorship and teacher success during the first three years of the profession. For example, Pogodzinski (2015) found that mentoring improved teacher effectiveness within a school and helped reduce principal turnover when instituted appropriately. Frels et al. (2013) also found that effective mentoring from principals was an important factor in relation to teacher attrition. In reference to principals being mentored, Hallem et al. (2012) examined how the mentoring of principals affected them during their first three years. The researchers found that trust building and legal support were the characteristics that new school principals identified as top priorities. Finally, Tillamn (2005) examined how mentoring of school principals within urban public schools affected their performance within the school setting and found that such mentoring helped principals become a catalyst of transformational leadership. Tillman's research also revealed that teaching, sponsoring, encouraging, counseling, and role modeling were all key characteristics of positive experiences when mentoring school principals.

Annual professional development is a requirement of many state departments of education. These sessions are provided in many forms; however, trauma-informed training has become a worthy topic within the field of public education in recent years, and a lack of such training can lead to turnover. Working in concentrated poverty schools can be stressful (Doss et al., 2022). Doney (2013) found that resilience was not an innate personality trait, but rather involved both internal and external processes resulting from positive adaptation to adversity.

Doney also found that school principals within concentrated poverty school districts needed to find emotional resilience when it came to trauma experienced by their students. The researcher found that professional development opportunities were critical for principals to grow in their craft and stay at the top of the current educational research (Gaikhorst et al., 2015). These two topics were intertwined to allow researchers the opportunity to see the impact that professional development had on job satisfaction (Freedman & Appleman, 2009).

The impact of a school's socioeconomic status presents researchers with a lens to better understand the various reasons why school principals leave their positions. Sinnema et al. (2014) examined the direct impact of leading a low SES school and the challenges it brought. However, the challenges of involving parents, decreasing the gap between high- and low-SES schools, and increasing attendance (Clark and Treigaardt, 2022) were all areas that leaders in low-SES schools must address. Hall et al. (2022) explored a variety of ways to increase these challenges through the eyes of current principals who were grappling with the Covid-19 pandemic. Researchers have also focused on principal retention and turnover rates, specifically within school districts located within the confines of the concentrated poverty classification. Tekleselassie and Choi (2021) explored the topic of mobility and exodus among school principals and identified several key variables within concentrated poverty schools including class sizes, support staff, parental involvement, teacher incentives, unionization, and other district-level policies.

All of these constructs were categorized within the variable of the climate and culture of a school district. Sebastian et al. (2018) looked at the work allocation that school administrators were assigned and found that principals, due to the high demands of serving in concentrated poverty schools, took on too many functions and responsibilities. When combined with their

personal and family commitments, the workload sometimes became overwhelming both physically and emotionally. Boyce and Bowers (2016) looked at school principals who left their districts or profession and found that individual-level factors, such as lower compensation and a lack of professional development opportunities, played a significant role. The researchers also found that district-level factors such as board policies, central office support, and mentoring opportunities affected school principal turnover in concentrated poverty school districts.

### **Deficiencies in the Studies**

While there is an abundance of research pertaining to the topic of school principals and turnover (e.g., Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Hallem et al., 2012; Doss et al., 2021; Shaw & Newton, 2014; O'Connor, 2018), there is a paucity of research on why school principals remain in leadership roles within concentrated poverty school districts. Concentrated poverty school districts are competing with more affluent districts for principal candidates, as the pool of high-quality administrators is decreasing in all fields of educational leadership (O'Connor, 2018).

When looking at the topic of principal retention, there is a need to examine the reasons principals remain in concentrated poverty schools when similar job opportunities exist in more affluent school districts. Variables influencing a school principal's decision to stay in a concentrated poverty school may include leadership support from both the central office and the district school board (Corcoran, 2017; O'Connor, 2018; Shaw & Newton, 2014), compensation levels (Mafora, 2013; Zhang & Zeller, 2016), building climate and culture (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Sebastian et al., 2018; Tekleselassie & Choi, 2021), principal evaluation (Donaldson et al., 2021; Doss et al., 2021), mentoring (Hallem et al., 2012; Pogodzinski, 2015; Tillamn, 2005), professional development (Doney, 2013; Freedman & Appleman, 2009; Gaikhorst et al., 2015), and the impact of socio-economic status (Clark & Triegaardt, 2022; Heystek & Emekako, 2020;

Marcos et al. (2022), Rahal et al. (2022); Sinnema et al. (2014). Most of these issues have been analyzed within the context of why school principals leave their schools and/or the profession; surprisingly, little research has been conducted to understand why school principals stay in very challenging roles.

### **Significance**

Central office administrators and superintendents are faced with the daunting task of training new principals and knowing the impact that effective principals have on a school's climate and culture. Overall, research is needed to better understand why principals remain in concentrated poverty schools, thus allowing district leadership to reinforce or augment these influencing forces. Such research can also provide a means for principal mentors to assist and counsel new principals serving in concentrated poverty schools.

### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with lower concentrations of poverty. Factors of interest are issues such as district leadership support for principals, compensation, climate and culture of the buildings, principal evaluation, mentoring support, professional development opportunities, and the impacts of schools' socio-economic status.

The overarching research question guiding this study is: What are the primary motivating reasons why principals remain within concentrated poverty school districts? My two specific research questions are as follows:

1. How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?

2. What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in concentrated poverty schools?

### **Conceptual Framework and Narrative**

The conceptual framework of this study is depicted in Figure 1. It was developed based on my previous research on job satisfaction and its importance in the development and retention of school principals within a concentrated poverty school district. Locke's (1976) understanding of the topic of job satisfaction was utilized with the development of this conceptual framework. When examining job satisfaction, Locke explained that emotions come into play within a person's work environment. Positive and negative emotions allow individuals the opportunity to identify their satisfaction ratings within the work environment to which they are accustomed. Individuals are able to experience both types of emotions when they relate to the work environment. Locke established the range of affect theory to allow individuals the ability to have different emotions for different aspects of their jobs. One example of this theory is that an individual enjoys the compensation level of the position; however, the clientele that they serve is not ideal. According to Locke, these specific types of emotions allow organizations to identify the overall job satisfaction of the individual.

When examining the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1, one can see key factors that previous research has revealed affect job satisfaction for school principals. These variables build upon the positive or negative emotions of school principals, generating the feeling of wanting to either remain in or exit the school district that is classified within concentrated poverty.

**Figure 1**

***Job Satisfaction Conceptual Framework (Wilke, 2023)***



The top box of the model identifies factors that may affect the job satisfaction of school principals within concentrated poverty school districts. This is the population I plan to include in my research. The top box shows the seven characteristics. The first is *leadership support*, which many school principals cite as an area that affects job satisfaction (Prietsch et al., 2020).

O'Connor (2018) examined how support from central office administration affected the job satisfaction of newly appointed school principals. The second issue is *compensation*, and many school districts are establishing salaries for the school principal, with variations occurring within different levels (Sebastian et al., 2018). Sebastian et al. (2018) explained that a competitive compensation scale allows school districts the opportunity to recruit and retain effective school principal candidates. The third issue in that column is *climate and culture*, which are clearly established prior to an employee starting a position and taking the helm of an individual school



(Bailes & Guthery, 2020). When examining climate and culture, urban school districts have a tougher time retaining effective leaders (Lochmiller & Chestnut, 2017). Lochmiller and Chestnut (2017) state when a new school principal takes over the helm of a building, he or she tends to establish new routines and procedures to clearly identify themselves from their predecessors. The final topic within the first column is the *impact of socioeconomic status* and the challenges that school leaders must face when leading. Rahal et al. (2022) examined the challenges that leaders within low-SES schools face daily, finding that student achievement is the largest hurdle they must overcome. Lack of parental involvement causes the school leader to be more creative in ways that increase support (Hall et al., 2021).

Moving to the second column within the top box of Figure 1, the fourth issue is that of principal *evaluation*, which is a new practice. Robertson-Kraft and Zhang (2018) noted that the emerging practice of principal evaluations can lead to them having either a positive or negative outlook on the job and school district. The fifth factor that research reveals impacts principals' job satisfaction is *mentoring*. Waterman and He (2011) discussed how mentoring of teachers and principals positively affects job satisfaction; however, the mentor must be a good match, and trust must occur within the relationship in order for success to occur. Finally, *professional development* has always been a key area of focus for teachers within the profession (Freedman & Applewood, 2009). However, the principal professional development opportunities reviewed are few. This, in turn, has caused many school principals to feel that growth is not occurring (MEMSPA, 2019). For example, the topic of trauma-informed training opportunities for school principals is an emerging need ever since the Covid pandemic occurred. Doney (2013) discussed how principals are not trained effectively by universities to handle all situations that arise daily. Without training, the emotional stress of the position negatively affects satisfaction.

All of these factors are linked to job satisfaction and how it relates to principals within concentrated poverty districts. Why do school principals remain within their schools when opportunities arise in more affluent districts? Using Locke's (1976) range of affect theory as a lens through which to examine and assess previous research will help me identify the key factors and the role they may play in the retention of school principals who have worked for at least five years in a concentrated poverty school district.

### **Methods and Procedure**

My research was conducted using a basic qualitative approach involving 10 school principals within three counties in the southwest corner of one Midwestern state. Each principal came from a school considered to have concentrated poverty but was also located close to other districts that are not. Data will be collected via interviews with each principal using a semi-structured protocol.

According to Creswell and Poth (2018), basic qualitative research design seeks to understand how people make sense of their lives and experiences. In addition, a basic qualitative study allows researchers to be flexible and open in their approach to research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Moreover, basic qualitative research is a typical approach for the social sciences and is appropriate here since the student researcher is "interested in understanding ... meaning' (p. 24). Using a qualitative approach allowed me to capture the rich descriptions and refinement viewpoint of leaders who remained within a concentrated poverty school district, especially given the potential opportunities to work within a nearby, more affluent school district.

## **Chapter One Summary**

Chapter 1 began with an overview of principal retention within concentrated poverty schools in Michigan. This led to the definition of principal retention and concentrated poverty in schools. Chapter 2 provides a critical review of the literature. Chapter 3 describes the methodology, including the research design, population sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, limitations, and delimitations. Chapter 4 provides the participant profiles. Chapter 5 analyzes data related to the research question. Chapter 6 presents the findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides an overview of the factors for principal retention in concentrated poverty schools using significant literature to review the following topics: leadership support from central office administration, compensation of school principals, climate and culture of school buildings, principal evaluation, mentoring opportunities, professional development for school principals, and the impacts of socio-economic status upon schools.

#### **Principal Retention in Concentrated Poverty Schools**

##### **Leadership Support from Central Office Administration**

Leadership support is critical for the retention of school principals in any school setting (Mafora, 2013). When identifying what is classified as leadership support, two main areas are utilized: superintendents and central office administrators. Central office administration can be classified as assistant superintendents, business managers, human resources departments, and other key figures who supervise the many facets of a school district (Corocorn, 2017). When looking at the direct impact that leadership support plays on the retention of school principals, I must first examine what role central office administrators and superintendents play in the daily lives of the school principal.

Job satisfaction is often referred to as the primary reason that school principals leave their positions within a school district (Corocorn, 2017). Locke's (1979) range of affect theory examined key concepts that underpin the framework that provided valuable insights into the relationship between job satisfaction and retention of employees. Key concepts of affective experiences, emotional balance, affective disposition, and job-related factors were examined within the theory. When looking at affective experiences, Locke described how positive and

negative emotions affected the work ethic of employees and the direct impact of job satisfaction. Central office leaders, including superintendents, are encouraged to examine the positive and negative emotions that exist within the work environment and make changes accordingly. Locke found that when examining training, rewards, working conditions, and relationships with coworkers, employers were able to find an increase in job commitment, loyalty, and overall satisfaction.

Superintendents are leaders of school districts and are critical for the day-to-day operations of a school district's function (Dickinson et al. 2017). The main difference between the role of superintendents and that of a school principal is the specific area of the school district they lead. School principals oversee the school they are assigned to, whereas the superintendent is responsible for the entire district. School principals are the foundation of a school, professionals who set the tone for how the school functions, and leaders who provide a clear system for the day-to-day operations of the school. Previous research ~~has~~ found these school leaders to be essential, but they also needed support from central office administrators, and this support may vary based on the type of school and the school level. Corcoran (2017) examined the impact of principal preparation programs and found that principals received more leadership support at the elementary level than at the middle school and high school levels. This study included 124 participants from 40 elementary schools and 318 participants from 28 middle schools. Similarly, Hughes et al. (2015) also examined the support central office administrators provided to principals in hard-to-staff schools. In their study, 80 principals were surveyed using the Administrator Support Survey that captured data in the areas of emotional, environmental, instructional, and technical support. One impactful finding was that earlier grade levels received greater support, causing a higher turnover rate at the middle and high school levels. Hughes et al.

also found that principals valued support when stress played a key role, such as when dealing with parent/student behaviors.

So, how do superintendents' factor into the research and the impact upon principal retention? Pijanowski et al. (2009) examined the perceptions of superintendents when addressing the topics of principal retention and the current shortage within the country. The researchers stated that the literature on principal retention and principal shortage was inconsistent with the factors that contributed to the successful recruitment and retention of today's school leaders. The researchers surveyed 197 superintendents on the topic of principal retention and principal shortage, and what factors affected today's leaders. The study found that central office leaders often underestimated the principal candidate applicant pool within their own school district, and compensation continued to be the primary method of attracting and retaining school principals. Finally, the results revealed that rural and concentrated poverty schools were at a distinct disadvantage compared to suburban schools when retaining principals. Pijanowski et al. also found that central office support, including superintendents, was one of the top factors that increased the likelihood of retaining high-quality school principals.

The effects of superintendents' moral leadership style on the retention of school principals within concentrated poverty school districts was the focus of the study performed by Easley (2006). Easley examined how traditional leadership methods, roles, and responsibilities were impacted when reviewing the retention of school principals in concentrated poverty districts. Easley surveyed 400 superintendents across the country with 110 respondents. The respondents came from a variety of demographic areas, such as suburban, urban, and rural. The findings of this study showed that 62% of the participants identified a traditional method of leadership, one in which the superintendent led through a top-down approach and its effect on

the retention of school principals within their school districts. In turn, when looking directly at concentrated poverty superintendents, 77% stated that an alternative method of leadership was essential in retaining school principals as well as meeting the needs of all stakeholders (staff, students, community members, and parents) within their districts. Superintendents constitute only one portion of the leadership support/guidance that school principals receive in their roles. When examining the impact of central office administration on the retention of school principals in concentrated poverty, Lochmiller and Chestnut (2017) studied the different ways in which central office administration prepared and supported turnaround leaders. The focus of their study was to look at high-need urban schools and the leaders of the buildings while designing a program for central office administrators to support and prepare leaders who they classified as turnaround leaders. These researchers created a principal preparation program with 87 participants and used semi-structured focus groups to collect the data. Lochmiller and Chestnut found three specific areas for central office administrators to focus on with aspiring principals to assist with retention: experience in a school setting, district structures and procedures, and the district's approved school improvement process.

When researching school principals who are at the beginning of their careers, Redding et al. (2019) looked at the impact that central office administrators' relationship had on new principals within their first three years. This study focused on the direct and indirect influences of central office administrators on principal turnover. Sixty-four principals in 11 districts across four states were included in the study and were divided into three cohorts based on when they began their work as an educator: 2007–2008 (cohort 1), 2008–2009 (cohort 2), or 2009–2010 (cohort 3). Redding et al. found that new principals with more supportive central office administrators were less likely to leave their schools.

The impact of central office support and its effects on principals who were non-salaried, but hourly, was reviewed by Dickson et al. (2002). To understand how to meet the demands of the position in an hourly capacity, the researchers wanted to identify key variables that affected the retention of school principals. The researchers examined 40 different school principals across 10 school districts. The school districts were in an array of urban, rural, and suburban settings. The principals had been in the hourly salaried role for a minimum of five consecutive school years. Of the 40 principals, 67% came from concentrated poverty school districts. Dickson et al. found that several variables affected the retention of school principals, but central office support was the main contributor. The support that school principals received from central office administrators allowed for job satisfaction to increase, which increased the retention of principals. Mafora (2013) also reviewed different ways that central office administrators helped to retain principals. In that study, the researcher noted that principals commented on workload amounts and the demands that central office administrators placed upon them as impacting their decisions to look elsewhere for other positions. The results showed that 74% of school leaders remained within their position when they received direct support from the central office administrators.

Finally, research shows that principals needed to feel comfortable going to their central office administrators with suggestions, recommendations, and frustration. Central office administrators needed to understand the school community they served, how to empower the staff they led, and how to be an effective leader within their districts. Shaw and Newton (2014) found three main areas of focus: the level of perceived servant leadership characteristics present in a school principal, the level of job satisfaction of administrative professionals within those schools, and the intended retention rate. Fifty schools classified by the United States Department



of Education as the largest in the country were invited to participate. Fifteen teachers participated, leading to a sample size of 1,092 teachers. Two sections of the survey focused on the general demographic information of each school and two inquiry-based questions that the researcher wanted to focus on to ascertain why school principals remained in the schools. Shaw and Newton found a significant positive correlation between school principals' perceptions of their level of servant leadership and job satisfaction. The comfort level of principals going to their central office administrators for support was also important.

Central office administrators, including the superintendent of the school district, have a direct impact on the retention of school principals (Shaw and Newton, 2014). However, other factors impact the decisions that school principals take when deciding whether to either remain or leave for another school district. Job satisfaction is another area of leadership support that central office leaders have examined to increase retention among school principals. Using Locke's (1979) range of affect theory and incorporating the principles within a variety of studies allowed researchers ways to increase retention. Locke discussed finding an emotional balance between positive and negative emotions. School district leaders must create strategies for emotional balance, which in turn increases job satisfaction. His research also examined how individual school principals' emotional disposition influenced the perception of job satisfaction within the schools they serve. When job satisfaction increased, leaders remained in their posts for a longer period.

### **Compensation Package**

Compensation among school principals is one of the top factors cited by professionals as to why they remain or leave their current district (Dickson et al. 2002). As the number of highly qualified candidates decreases, school districts are scrambling to outbid each other to secure

individuals for specialized positions (Tekleselassie and Choi, 2021). Accordingly, school districts are taking steps to make compensation packages more attractive to principal candidates. A direct link was found between the principals' satisfaction with their pay and turnover intentions. This is an area that school districts are looking at when posting for specific positions at the administrative level. Tekleselassie and Choi examined how several variables impacted the mobility and departure behaviors of administrators. The researchers found that school principals with lower compensation packages were more likely to leave the profession completely; this number increased for principals from urban and economically disadvantaged districts. Dickson et al. (2002) reviewed the school salary structures for school districts within rural Arkansas and found that a higher salary directly related to the retention of the principal. When looking at the specific influences of salary placed on attracting and retaining school leaders, Pijnaowski and Brady (2009) reviewed the salary trajectory of school principals as they progressed through their individual careers. The researchers noted that the issue of compensation did not support the retention of school principals. The topic of principal shortage and the correlation that compensation had with the retention of certain leaders allowed researchers to identify connections between school principals and ways to increase retention. The study also examined what type of financial compensation would attract and retain school leaders with experience, and identified key factors that limited the retention of school leaders after they stepped into the role of school leadership. These factors were the relationships among board, administration, and teachers; emotional aspects of the job; impact of administrative position on their personal lives; personal safety; and salary that was commensurate with responsibilities. When looking directly at concentrated poverty schools, the impact of raising principal salaries was statistically significant with the retention of leaders at all grade levels. The conclusion was that

compensation, principal retention, and safety conditions were directly related and often led to a greater increase in principal retention.

Compensation has been a topic in the field of education since the early 1970s (Locke, 1976). Locke's work on job satisfaction allowed employers the opportunity to find key ideals to increase positive emotions, as well as allowing finding a work home life balance. The range of affect theory examined the impact that compensation directly played on the job satisfaction of employees. School principals come from all types of demographics, and the compensation levels were examined by the work of Zhang and Zeller (2016), Mafora (2013), and Billger (2007). Zhang and Zeller examined the key variables of age, having children, ethnicity, gender, school level (that the principal worked in), marital status, and parent's occupation. Sixty principals were initially interviewed, and the principals were selected based upon meeting at least one of the following criteria: graduated from a regular principal education program, lateral entry through an outside agency not at the university level, and a program called NC lead – which was a statewide alternative program for people interested in enrolling in a program to become fully licensed administrators. Of the 60 interviewees, 41 were first-year principals, and the remaining 19 were second-year principals. Zhang and Zeller interviewed a mixture of principals from urban, rural, and suburban school districts in eastern North Carolina. The 22-question interview consisted of open-ended questions that asked principals a variety of questions based on the variables listed above; the other interview was a semi-structured protocol that provided simple true/false questions. Themes were developed to review the results, and the iterative testing process was utilized. Zhang and Zeller were able to identify details about the interview data and how it affected the retention status. They found that there was no clear pattern for the principals who left the profession; however, compensation was a key variable. Zhang and Zeller stated, "the

research on this issue has to be regarded as inconclusive” (p. 87). The mixed results showed that job satisfaction was not the predominant reason that school principals remained in their position. The researchers identified compensation as a leading factor among leaders for retention within their current school districts.

When examining the lower end of the compensation package that was offered to school principals, Mafora (2013) examined the effects of a lower compensation package on his community of over 200 school principals. Using baseline data of at least five years within concentrated poverty schools, Mafora interviewed each principal to gather data. Each principal was from a school district that was classified as concentrated poverty. Compensation was found to be the top factor that motivated candidates to remain within their prospective schools. Mafora found that three main themes emerged from the data regarding the retention of principals: (a) policy and procedures, (b) strategies, and (c) barriers. All three themes pointed to compensation as the main area cited by principals as influencing their decision to remain with the school. Billger (2007) stated that utilizing school principals as change agents through compensation was key, meaning that compensation motivated school leaders to implement change effectively in the schools they led. Meeting district- and state-mandated goals should be rewarded according to Billger. However, the role of central office administration was to clearly establish these goals in conjunction with school leaders.

When examining the topics of job satisfaction and compensation, educational researchers such as Tran (2017), Sebastian et al. (2018), and Sinnema et al. (2014) found correlations between the two concepts. Tran focused on high school principals in California and found a link between pay satisfaction and principal retention. This study examined whether a relationship existed between principals’ pay satisfaction and their turnover intentions. The researchers used a

survey approach and selected the Pay Survey Questionnaire (PSQ) to be administered to all high school principals in the state. Over 156 principals responded, and the researchers were able to use a structural equation model to analyze the survey results. Tran found a statistically significant relationship between pay dissatisfaction and principals' intention to leave their current positions.

When looking directly at concentrated poverty schools and the duties that vary within these schools, Sebastian et al. (2018) reviewed the impact of time allocation on a school principal as it compared to the regular duties of teachers and the compensation that accompanied these differences. The purpose of the study was to examine how school principals in urban settings distributed their time working on critical school functions, while looking at the compensation levels for urban school principals. Using contingency theory, this research looked at finding an optimal match between tasks that each principal completed on a daily basis with appropriate and competitive compensation. Specifically, the study looked at the domains of building operations, finances, community or parent relations, school district functions, student affairs, personnel issues, planning/goal setting, instructional leadership, and professional growth, and the role each played on the daily schedule of a school principal. This study was conducted in an urban school district with 50 school principals who utilized the end-of-day (EOD) logs collected during the 2005-2007 school years. A hierarchical linear model was used to analyze the data results and found a variation in principals' time allocation by time, school function, and school personnel. Sebastian et al. found that principals spent a variety of their days working within the building and with building colleagues, but also approximately one hour a day was used on the other domains. Regarding compensation, they found that principals in urban school districts fell within the same salary range as principals in non-urban settings, even though those

in urban areas worked more hours. The other key finding was that compensation was identified by 36% of school principals as one of the main reasons that they chose to remain within the school district.

According to Corcoran (2017), compensation was the primary reason that school principals working remained within a specific position. However, school districts were often victims of budget constraints and usually lose top candidates to larger school districts. Superintendents should ensure that they have an attractive compensation and benefits package to both attract and retain school leaders.

### **Climate and Culture of a School District**

The school climate and culture of a building may affect the retention of principals. For example, as the number of physical violence incidents increases within schools, districts are tirelessly working to find a manageable medium between creating a safe and positive learning environment and following all state and federal regulations. Geiger and Pivovrova (2016) stated, “principals attribute concentrated poverty schools to higher behavioral issues that with the lack of effective leadership is a main cause that they will not work within the school” (p. 24). Geiger and Pivovrova conducted a mixed-methods research project that examined principal retention and the effects of working conditions in schools. Thirty-seven school principals serving within concentrated poverty school districts in the state of Arizona were surveyed regarding working conditions. Geiger and Pivovrova found school principals in schools with lower levels of poverty had higher levels of satisfaction with their schools’ facilities and resources, and their family and community relations, compared to principals in high poverty schools.

The climate and culture of a school are classified as the environment within a school district, identified using demographics of student population, socio-economic status, and student

achievement within the setting (Fraser and Block, 2006). When reviewing the connection between the culture of a school building and the school principals' decision to remain in the leadership position, Fraser and Block found that 45% of principals in the state of New York would remain within the concentrated poverty schools in which they were hired if a proper behavioral system were established and implemented with fidelity. Fraser and Block conducted a qualitative research project on practices, attitudes, and self-efficacy issues within a Title I school in an urban setting. Looking at seven elementary schools within the New York City School System, they found that when the central office administration neglected a proper behavioral system, principal retention decreased from 45% to 40% over a span of five years.

Identifying key demographics and their impact on the climate and culture of a school building was the focus of Davis and Anderson (2021). They examined principal turnover and how certain demographics played a part in the resignation of principals. Davis and Anderson found that half of all first-time principals in the study turned over within two years. Most of the 1,113 principals who eventually stayed in leadership roles left the district where they first entered the principalship. When looking directly at the demographics related to the climate and culture of the school district, Davis and Anderson found that male principals were promoted to central office positions more frequently than female principals, which resulted in less turnover among female principals. On a related note, the researchers found that there was less turnover with elementary principals as compared to middle and high school principals, primarily due to the promotions of middle and high school principals. Secondary principals were promoted to a central office position at a rate 48% times higher than that of elementary or early childhood leaders. Davis and Anderson also found that principals in concentrated poverty urban school

settings left their positions at a greater rate than rural principals. This exodus created a problem for central office administrators as the experienced candidate pool continued to decrease.

For the topic of the climate and culture of a school district, effectiveness ratings are usually placed upon the final evaluations for both the principal and teachers. Fuller and Hollingworth (2014) conducted a literature review of three different approaches that dealt directly with the overarching theme of principal effectiveness. The qualitative research project found that there was no clear approach that could estimate principal effectiveness and what effect principals had on student test scores. Three different components of the framework were utilized within this research project: principal effectiveness was best measured with school effectiveness; principal effectiveness was best measured within school effectiveness; and principal effectiveness was best measured by school improvement in the same school setting. School and principal effectiveness collectively aligned with the United States Department of Education and raised achievement scores within schools across the country.

The state department of education looks at achievement scores as the main result of exemplary work within the school setting (Wong and Sunderman, 2007). Each education department annually reviews the performance of school districts; these reviews are conducted utilizing state assessments, graduation rates, enrollment trends, and financial components. A typical measurement conducted on the climate of a school building and the retention of leadership is seen through the lens of student engagement. Sass et al. (2011) studied principal stress and various support variables within the climate and culture of school districts. The authors examined 479 principals in three public school systems in the southwestern United States, with the majority of the principals (n=221) being at the elementary level. Data were collected on issues related to instructional strategies, classroom management, and student



engagement. The project's data revealed the importance of a supportive and stress-free environment that created a positive sense of job satisfaction, along with a strong sense of principal efficacy associated with student engagement. Both factors fostered a decrease in stress for school principals, thus leading to a corresponding increase in principal retention.

Finally, when reviewing student engagement, the topic of trauma comes to the forefront. School culture is classified by the level of trauma experienced by students and its impact on student achievement (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008). Principals need to understand where their students come from, what experiences they have, and what backgrounds they bring to the classroom setting, all of which can affect the culture of a given school. Doney (2013) posed two main research questions: How is resilience developed in novice secondary science teachers, and does resilience affect novice teacher retention? Using resilience theory and relational cultural theory, Doney found that resilience was not an innate personality trait but rather a process that was both internal and external, resulting from positive adaptation to adversity. Doney wanted to explore the resilience building process in novice principals to understand how and why some novice principals of concentrated poverty schools chose to remain in the profession, while others left. School districts spend a large amount of their Title II (professional development) funds on trauma-informed resilience training to ensure that all principals in their districts are up-to-date on the latest research, as it pertains to the needs of best leadership practices. Shim et al. (2022) stated that when looking at professional development requirements that were mandated at the state level, school districts were attempting to address the growing issue of student trauma by offering more training to principals on the topic.

## **Principal Evaluations**

Another variable impacting the job satisfaction of principals in schools with concentrated poverty is the process of evaluation, both for teachers and principals (Robertson-Kraft & Zhang, 2018). Versland's (2013) work focused on establishing principal evaluations and the efficacy they brought to the field of education. The evaluation of school leaders is a new trend in the field of education. Robertson-Kraft and Zhang focused on the impact of a new teacher evaluation system in a large school district in Texas, including the impact it had on principal retention. The researchers selected schools that were representative of the school district, looking at 34 schools involving 1,832 teachers. The focus of this study was to identify how educator retention was affected by the teacher evaluation system in Texas. While the researchers found no significant impact on principal retention, their data suggested that the principals' behaviors were influenced by the context in which they worked. The study revealed that many new principals struggled to implement the evaluation process successfully. Robertson-Kraft and Zhang recommended that school districts provide proper training to new principals to ensure that they fully understand the evaluation process, and that understanding the rubric and revisiting the key concepts annually will allow both principals and central office administrators the opportunities to grow.

When reviewing the impact of principal evaluations on the retention of school leaders, Ames (2013) investigated the process through the lens of teacher evaluations. The practices, attitudes, and self-efficacy surrounding teacher evaluation within a Title I school in an urban school setting were examined to determine the direct impact portrayed on leaders. Seven elementary schools, classified as concentrated poverty schools within the New York City School System, were examined. Ames found that principal retention increased when a clear evaluation system was put into place by both the school board and central office administration. However,

the increase in retention was also in part due to the knowledge and understanding of expectations that the evaluation system had on the improvement of teacher morale and instruction.

When looking at another school system that was classified as concentrated poverty, McConney et al. (2003) studied the effect of the evaluation process on the retention of school leaders in the Baltimore City Public School System (BCPSS). They established four key areas to examine: (a) recruitment policies and practices, (b) mentoring and other retention strategies, (c) professional development, and (d) performance evaluation. The results revealed that 47% of principals indicated that principal evaluation was an area of concern and needed to be revisited by the district leadership team. In some instances, principals responded that there was no district evaluation process for them, while for other principals, if it did exist, it relied too heavily on student achievement. School principals also indicated that if a clear principal evaluation system were established that examined all areas of the job, they would have a higher inclination to remain within the school system.

Another variable related to evaluations is the stress that teachers and principals feel based on the outcome of the evaluation process. In Michigan, school administrators are evaluated yearly on a wide variety of outcomes, with student growth accounting for 40% of the total evaluation score. School principals in Michigan spend an average of 46% daily on student affairs and 29% of their time on instruction (Moyer & Goldring, 2023). This statistic shows that principals have a critical role in the empowerment of teachers who are within their organization; however, there is very little time to address the needs of individual teachers.

If a school is unable to achieve certain milestones regarding student achievement, then a specific label by the state's department of education is placed upon them. A fair and balanced evaluation process for principals is key since effective principals contribute to the improvement

of teachers' professional development and the overall educational quality of their schools. However, when implemented suddenly or imposed by the state, principal evaluations can cause pressure, stress, fear, nervousness, and insecurity (Brinia et al. 2023). One strategy to counteract this stress is to provide principals with supportive relationships. Administrators require consistent feedback that allows them to grow professionally (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018). This growth can occur in many different forms; however, the most profound is through the usage of mentors.

### **Mentoring of Principals**

Mentoring is a concept that has been around since the early 1970s (Locke, 1976), but for principals, it is often overlooked. Research has revealed that the mentoring of new principals correlates with higher rates of retention. Tillman (2015) conducted a qualitative study on the implications for leadership practice in urban schools regarding the mentoring of new principals. The researchers focused on ways to investigate the mentoring experiences of first-year African American principals in an urban school and the superintendent's role in communicating expectations for teaching, learning, student achievement, and facilitating professional and personal competence. The researcher found that new principals identified key areas of instructional improvement and leadership support as the most impactful with regard to retention. Waterman and He (2011) conducted a meta-analysis of the impact of mentoring programs on the retention of new principals. Fourteen studies were examined, each involving a different district-based mentoring program. Each study utilized a different research approach, with five being quantitative, using data from the district and surveys. Seven studies used mixed-method approaches that examined quantitative data from districts and qualitative survey data from teachers. Finally, three studies were purely qualitative in design, using a survey and narrative

inquiry process. This study identified four major common mentoring program components: (a) mentor characteristics, (b) facilitative administrative structures, (c) frequency of support, and (d) professional development and training. Waterman and He used two main indicators to identify the impact of mentoring on school principal retention: school or district principal retention rates and teachers' self-reported intentionality to stay in the profession. They concluded that the studies were inconclusive, but they divided them into four key categories: those that statistically affirmed the connection between mentoring programs and retention, those that inferred a connection, those that disputed that connection, and those that had mixed findings about the way the two are connected. Waterman and He concluded that "37% of principals who participated in a district-run mentoring program are more likely to remain in the field of education after their first five years" (p. 32). The researchers noted that new principals entered the profession, not understanding district structures and systems. Mentors served as a critical support system for new principals. Waterman and He concluded that school boards and central office administrators played a critical role in creating positive mentoring programs for new principals.

Other research has looked at interactions between principals and their mentors as a means to improve novice principal effectiveness and reduce attrition. Pogodzinski (2013) identified the extent to which a school's administrative context was associated with the focus and frequency of interactions. Data were collected from 11 school districts in two Midwestern states, which included 10 principals who were in the first three years of the profession. The frequency of interactions between novice principals and mentors was used to design a conceptual framework for a better understanding of key factors. Pogodzinski (2013) examined this issue and concluded that when novice principals perceived positive superintendent-principal relations in their schools and reported that administrative duties did not interfere with their core work as principals, they

were more likely to interact with their mentors. Pogodzinski also found a statistically significant increase in principal retention when a positive relationship existed between central office administration and school principals.

Researchers have also reviewed the direct impacts of the mentorship of principals and its effect on the retention of school principals. Parylo et al. (2012) examined how principal mentoring dealt with the identification, socialization, development, and retention of school leaders. Their research examined how critical mentoring is for principal effectiveness and contributes to the retention of school leaders. Sixteen participants from four school systems in the state of Georgia were interviewed. Size, socioeconomic status, and location were the main factors in identifying the school systems that were examined. The principals in the study ranged in number of years in administration and their specific position. All principals in the study were mentored previously; some served as mentors to their assistant principals and teacher leaders. A series of four interviews focused on principal socialization, supervision, evaluation, professional development, and retention. The outcomes of the study found that mentoring increased principal retention, with five themes included in the process. The five themes are mentoring as recruitment, mentoring as socialization, mentoring as support, mentoring as professional development, and mentoring as reciprocal learning. All themes led to an increase in the retention of school principals within their respective districts.

Formative feedback is critical for leaders, and school principals are no exception. Newell (2016) viewed the topic of formative feedback from the principal's viewpoint by developing the understandings, experiences, and purpose of the feedback. Utilizing the purpose of this qualitative portion of the study was to describe the mentors' beliefs and practices of providing formative feedback to principals with the focus on professional growth and learning. Newell

utilized a survey of principals to meet quantitative requirements. The survey focused on the 12 qualities of formative feedback while using a semi-structured interview protocol that was developed to also identify the key characteristics of formative feedback and its purpose. Thirty-four principals and assistant principals in the state of Pennsylvania were surveyed during the 2013-2014 school year, and Newell found that six qualities were critical for the formative feedback to be informative to the principals: goal oriented, feeds forward, specific, comparative, constructive, and work focused.

Newell (2016) discussed how concentrated poverty school districts needed to provide not only proper professional development opportunities but also training to implement what they had learned in their classrooms. Principals needed to utilize outside agency support to ensure that each staff member fully grasped the individual needs of the students. In addition, principals who were mentored and supported through their own professional growth and self-efficacy showed an increased impact on instructional growth.

Mentoring models are utilized in the field of education as an impactful way to support and uplift professionals (Hallem et al., 2012). Impact and specific mentoring models were examined by Hallam et al. The researchers examined contrasting mentoring models and how they directly affected the retention of beginner principals. The two models focused on the interactions between mentors and school principals. This study focused on how mentoring characteristics and types of sources of support moderated the relationship between the mentoring model and the actual retention of beginning principals. A quantitative survey and qualitative case study design were used. Data were collected from 23 principals in two different school districts at the elementary level. The two school districts were from the same state, and the target population was principals who were in their first five years in the profession. The study had four

main research questions, with a focus on characteristics, sources of support, similarities/differences, and the relationship between the two distinct models. The authors discussed a conceptual framework that included the two main mentoring models of characteristics and support. The framework allowed Hallem et al. to find that an approachable personality and a trusting/caring relationship were key mentoring characteristics; however, the school districts noted differences among these specific characteristics. Hallem et al. found that in-school mentors and collaborative teams increased principal retention. The findings also described and explained the mentoring characteristics and different sources of support that benefited the mentoring experience and subsequent retention of beginning principals.

Frels et al. (2013) also studied the impact that mentoring models had on a variety of educational professionals including principals. The researchers focused on three different educational professionals for this study: mentors, mentees, and principals. The main purpose was to examine mentoring experiences specific to the grade span from the perspectives of principals, mentors, and mentees. The theoretical framework of Communities of Practice (COP) was utilized to study the participants and was divided into a 13-step process with three distinct stages: formulation, planning, and implementation. The population came from one large Texas school district, with a population of 998 mentees, 791 mentors, and 73 principals. Each subject group was given the same survey that focused on format, better matches, time, observations, mentor training, and support. Using an instrument called the Texas Beginner Educator Support System survey, Frels et al. found that there was no statistically significant difference among the three educational professional groups and their attitudes or feelings towards the mentor/mentee program within the school district. These principals were more likely to remain within their school district when a proper mentor was established between them.



## **Professional Development**

Previous research has revealed that professional development is an important way for school districts to support principals in multiple ways; however, school principals are not always included in such sessions. Each school district in the state of Michigan is required to provide 30 hours of professional development to all staff, with new teachers required to tally an additional 30 hours of professional development within their first three years as educators. Principals fall under these same requirements, but often need to look at outside agencies to meet the requirements, as school districts often do not have the financial means to support administrator professional development (Barth, 1986). According to the Michigan Department of Education (2023), Section 380.1527 of Michigan's Revised School Code requires school districts to provide five days of professional development to all teachers each year. These five days are in addition to the professional development provided to new teachers during their first three years of employment. The professional development requirements currently do not apply to school principals; however, they are often held responsible for the implementation and monitoring of the days.

Research has found that professional development opportunities are critical for principals to grow in their craft and stay at the top of the current research that pertains to education. Gaikhorst et al. (2015) examined the effectiveness of professional development programs aimed at equipping principals with the challenges that directly come with working in urban school districts. Using the independent variable of participating in a specific professional development program, 133 principals were involved, with 66 in the experimental group and exposed to the mastery program of professional development. Gaikhorst et al. found that principals of more

advantaged and disadvantaged schools were more positively influenced by the mastery program than those in mixed-school settings, thus leading to a higher retention percentage.

One example of the impact of professional development on school principals is the work of Brundrett et al. (2006). Brundrett et al. examined the ways that professional development could assist school districts at creating and retaining a strong pool of school principal candidates and retain current leaders. Through a qualitative, three-pronged approach, the researchers were able to examine the purpose of the study, which was to determine strategies for school leadership succession through the lens of professional development. Focus groups, questionnaire surveys, and semi-structured interviews were conducted to compare the narratives of the 15 school leaders. The leaders included principals, central office administrators, and superintendents. The outcomes of the study found that to build positive relationships and retain school leaders, professional development and development with the staff were critical. Several school leaders also cited that high-quality leadership development and student outcomes were correlated. Finally, Brundrett et al. identified a clear correlation between school leader retention and the creation of a professional development session.

Furthermore, Doss et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study on the relationship between the preservice training provided to principals and the effects on job performance for these future principals. The researchers classified preservice preparation as a professional development opportunity. In this research, 31 principal practices were developed utilizing the New Leaders Aspiring Principals program through a yearlong program. The research looked at standards, concepts, and competencies for principals and how they could intertwine them into a preservice program. Doss et al. found that most of the constructs have a positive and potentially large significant gain. In addition, adult/team leadership and cultural leadership standards

showed a statistically significant gain in the research goals. At the secondary level, principals were charged with the daunting task of creating and implementing meaningful professional development sessions that covered a wide variety of curricula. Findings suggested that fewer standards and factors were significantly related to placement outcomes, and standards had positive and potentially large point estimates, causing principal retention to increase when each construct was put into place.

Research has also found that principals stayed in their schools when they received professional development that helped improve student outcomes. Grisson and Harrison (2010) examined the professional development of administrators and its correlation with student achievement. This quantitative research project examined the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) to gain a better understanding of administrators' professional development and its direct impact on student achievement. Utilizing exploratory factor analysis, the correlation was that each teacher who participated fell within the effective or highly effective range. The researchers found that administrators who received little or no professional development opportunities were less effective in improving student achievement. Grisson and Harrison also found that principals remained within their schools when student achievement was a top priority, and students demonstrated academic improvement as a result.

When looking at schools that are classified as concentrated poverty, research reveals that it is imperative for districts to look at social emotion-related professional development opportunities for principals as well as their teachers. Freedman and Appleman (2009) examined the effectiveness of professional development programs aimed at equipping principals with the challenges that commonly occur when working in an urban school district. Twenty-six school principals within the state of California worked collaboratively with University of California-

Berkeley professors to establish a clear semi-structured interview protocol. Freedman and Appleman found that trauma was the primary factor that administrators struggled to understand as they entered the field. Thirty-eight percent of all students entering kindergarten had experienced some type of trauma previously. In reference to the professional development provided, principals' of the more advantaged and the disadvantaged schools were more positively influenced by the program than those in mixed school settings.

Enomoto (2012) examined the effects of professional development on rural school assistant principals. He studied how professional development allowed current school leaders to feel empowered and a sense of wanting to remain within the current school setting. Enomoto examined the lack of resources, professional development, and peer interaction among rural principals, and how it led to a lower retention rate in many areas. Using a year-long qualitative study, school district leadership delivered meaningful professional development on the topics of leadership support, mentoring, and problem-solving due to a lack of resources. Planning meetings occurred at the beginning of the school year, which allowed school leaders the opportunity to work collaboratively with principals to ensure that they were meeting their needs. Through 18 on-site administrator meetings, Enomoto was able to identify areas that were lacking and offered suggestions to school leaders on different professional development opportunities to increase retention. Five outcomes came from the study: content and knowledge and skill development of school leaders; application of school standards, supports, and systems; opportunities to network with peers and resource teacher leaders; conversations with other principals within their regions; and reflections on continuous learning by school leaders.

Finally, Martin and Clemensen (2022) examined the effects of professional development and whether it is directly related to the retention of principals. This study focused on one

university's efforts to support principals within the rural communities of Arkansas by providing relevant, low- or low-cost professional development opportunities. The University of Arkansas also wanted to establish a structure for school and district teams to network with others and collaborate with one another about best practices for school improvement. The researchers found barriers to meaningful professional development, such as school improvement restraints, superintendent agendas, and principal assumptions. "School administrators are telling us what they need to succeed. The challenge is, how do we remove the barriers of time and added responsibilities administrators face daily to provide them meaningful and actionable professional development" (p. 247). Focus groups were created to identify not only the issues but also to offer some key solutions that district leaders could implement in professional development sessions. Two main findings emerged from this study: collaboration and adaptation. Through collaboration, school principals felt empowered to build upon systems that they had already established within their school. Adaptation allowed school principals to meet the needs of all stakeholders, especially when new issues arose.

### **Socio-Economic Status Impacts**

According to the Michigan Department of Education (2020), each school district is provided guidelines to ensure that equity for all students is met through the classification of socio-economic status (SES). Each year, individual school districts and schools are analyzed through a multitude of identifiers to provide public information. The Michigan Department of Education (MDE) utilizes the MISchooldata platform to provide information on student enrollment, SES, graduation rates, attendance rates, and financial data for each school district. Parent portals are created for each school and provide information on the latest testing assessments, graduation rates, and other information. The teacher-to-student ratio, teacher

transiency, and test per-pupil expenditures are all ways to classify SES within a specific school (MIschooldata, 2023). When looking at specific classifications of SES, Browman et al. (2017) describes it as a way of describing schools and/or communities based on their education, income, and type of job. Socioeconomic status is usually household income defined as low, medium, and high. School districts in Michigan are classified into one of these levels on the MIschooldata platform. People with a lower socioeconomic status usually have less access to financial, educational, social, and health resources than those with a higher socioeconomic status. Consequently, they are more likely to be in poor health and have chronic health conditions and disabilities. Family socioeconomic status directly impacts a school's socio-economic status, thus affecting the retention of school principals as well.

The impact of a school's socioeconomic status can vary from district to district. Principal effectiveness, student achievement, and the school building's socio-economic status correlation were examined by Sinnema et al. (2014). The researchers examined how principal effectiveness directly aligned with the evaluation process of New Zealand's principals. The researchers also sought to understand the magnitude of how principals perceive principal effectiveness and how effectiveness was reflected within an evaluation system. The research included 135 school principals who participated in the educational leadership practices survey. The survey utilized the effectiveness scale of highly effective, effective, minimally effective, and ineffective as a guide. The researchers were able to identify the specific demographics of the principals that remained within their professional setting. Principals' age, time in the principal's role, and the socio-economic status of the school they led were reviewed within the demographic survey. In this study, school socio-economic status stood out as the main reason why school principals exited their post early (less than five years) within their career.

In turn, new principals who worked within lower SES schools were grappling with the immediate and urgent need for transformation to meet federal and state mandates (Bishop & Jackson, 2015). Clark and Triegaardt examined the impact that the Covid-19 global pandemic had on lower SES schools and retaining school principals. Technology accessibility was found to be the main issue that impacted lower SES schools. According to Clark and Triegaardt, this lack of technology hindered student achievement in lower SES schools. Using a lived experience approach to their study, the researchers were able to gain insights into the direct impact that Covid-19 had on the lower SES schools the principals led. The participants cited that school districts and university systems needed to better prepare future leaders to grapple with the direct impacts of Covid-19 to ensure the retention of principals.

Academic achievement and its direct impact on low-SES schools was the focus of the study by Heystek and Emekako (2020). Looking at the same processes that Sinnema et al. (2014) reviewed, the researchers sought to determine which motivational practices and engagement strategies school principals exhibited daily. This study was conducted at the beginning of the Covid-19 global pandemic. Through a focus group approach, the participants shared the impacts that leading a low-SES school had and how it directly related to student achievement. Viewing a specific path on how low-SES schools were able to make a direct improvement in achievement scores was the main focus. School labeling, lack of funding, and negative press were cited as the main impacts of leading a low-SES school on achievement. The school improvement process dictated the achievement process and the direct process in which school leaders were able to make changes.

Academic achievement was also the focus of Marcos et al.'s (2021) work on how California school principals viewed low-SES schools and learning. Rahal et al. (2022) also

examined the impacts of academic achievement and low-SES schools. Both studies looked at how to change principals' perceptions of the current global Covid-19 pandemic and its direct impact on their schools. Marcos et al. pointed out that equitable growth in student learning must occur across all groups. However, the pandemic hindered this growth as students within rural or low-SES schools lacked the resources to meet technological constraints. Rahal et al. (2022) further explained that the direct impact of the global pandemic would not be known for at least 10 years. Principal perceptions, as leaders of the building, are critical for student achievement in the post-pandemic era of education.

Perrigo et al. (2022) reviewed the direct impacts that parental involvement in low SES schools had on increasing student achievement scores. The researchers cited that there was a discrepancy between low- and high-SES schools. Parent involvement had a direct impact on the day-to-day operations of low-SES schools, and school leaders were often assigned the daunting task of creating ways to engage parents. This task directly impacted the day-to-day operations of the school building, causing more work for leaders. Perrigo et al. found that communication among the school, teachers, parents, and school leaders was lacking. In addition, the educational level of many parents within a low-SES school created difficulties for leaders to support the task of increasing parental support. Addi-Raccah (2021) also viewed that parental involvement within low-SES schools could take place through leadership roles within the school. School principals could tap into the resources provided by federal and state governments to assist with this process. However, Addi-Raccah agreed that this requires time and money. Both could be lacking within the public-school systems.

Finally, Gigliotti and Brookover (1975) examined the discrepancy between low and high SES schools in the United States. Though the research is antiquated, it provided school leaders



with the tools they needed to lead low- and high-SES schools. However, the research conducted by Hall et al. (2021) indicated that low SES schools struggled with maintaining leadership, staff, and more affluent families. Hall et al. found that the transient rate within low-SES schools directly impacted both staff retention and student achievement within the schools. How school leaders addressed these challenges, including improving attendance rates, created difficulties that leaders in low SES schools must overcome. Hall et al.'s findings indicated that utilizing teaching best practices, providing a safe environment, and creating relationships with students were the leading ways to increase attendance and maintain stability in the school setting.

Capp et al. (2022) continued the review on the discrepancy between high and low SES schools. However, building collegiality among school staff and leaders was the main focus. Leaders must include staff and other stakeholders when the decision-making process begins. This, in turn, allowed staff to feel vested in the school, promoting the retention of instructional staff in the school. Shabazian (2020) supported this claim that allowing teachers, support staff, and parents to have a say in school improvement would decrease the gap between high- and low-SES schools.

## **Chapter Two Summary**

Over 45% of principals leave their profession after just five years in the field, and when looking at principals of concentrated poverty schools, this percentage increases to 63% (Hughes et al., 2015). When reviewing the individual factors of leadership support, compensation, climate and culture of the school district, principal evaluation, principal mentoring, and professional development, I was able to identify the key literature that has already taken place regarding principal retention. Principals in such schools must lead staff, as well as work with all stakeholders who are demanding high achievement, lower suspension rates, and staff retention.

Principals' knowledge of the specific factors on why they leave the concentrated poverty setting is evident. However, no research has focused on why principals within concentrated poverty schools remain within their buildings, thus the need for my proposed study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The purpose of this study is to examine why principals remain in concentrated poverty school districts when opportunities exist in affluent nearby school districts. During this study, I conducted a robust analysis of how these principals perceived their district-level leadership support, compensation levels, the climate and culture of the buildings, principal evaluation, mentoring, and professional development opportunities, and how these factors impacted their decisions to stay in their current employment. My research questions focused on current principals' perceptions of their own reasons for remaining in concentrated poverty school districts.

This study examined the retention of principals in concentrated poverty districts within two regions, regions 4 and 5, within the state of Michigan. Region 4 (MEMSPA, 2023) consists of the Branch, Calhoun, Kalamazoo, and St. Joseph counties. Region 5 consists of Berrien, Cass, and VanBuren counties located in southwest Michigan. These districts fit the classification of concentrated poverty and operate with a free-and-reduced lunch percentage of 65% or higher. Specifically, those districts are in the following counties: Branch County (Union City Public Schools, Coldwater Public Schools, Homer Community Schools, Tekonsha Community Schools, and Athens Community Schools), Calhoun County (Battle Creek Public Schools, and Marshall Public Schools), Kalamazoo County (Kalamazoo Public Schools and Comstock Public Schools), and St. Joseph County (Three Rivers Community Schools, Mendon Public Schools, White Pigeon Community Schools, and Burr Oak Public Schools). When looking at region 5 the districts that are classified as concentrated poverty are: Berrien County (Niles Community School and Benton Harbor Area Schools), Cass County (Dowagiac Union Community Schools,

Cassopolis Public Schools, and Marcellus Public Schools), and VanBuren County (Bangor Public Schools, Bloomingdale Public Schools, Decatur Public Schools, and Hartford Public Schools).

#### **Region 4 School Districts**

Within Branch County the following schools are classified as concentrated poverty schools: Union City Elementary, Union City Middle School, Union City High School, Lakeland Elementary (Coldwater), Jefferson Elementary (Coldwater), Legg Middle School (Coldwater), Lillian Fletcher Elementary (Homer), Homer Middle School, Homer High School, East Leroy Elementary (Athens) and Athens Jr/Sr High School. When looking at Calhoun County, the following schools are classified as concentrated poverty schools in Battle Creek Public Schools: Kellogg Elementary, Dudley Elementary, LaMora Park Elementary, Valley View Elementary, Verona Elementary, Post-Franklin Elementary, Northwestern Middle School, Springfield Middle School, and Battle Creek Central High School. In Marshall Public Schools: Harrington Elementary School, Marshall Middle School, Marshall High School, and Marshall Opportunity High School.

Within Kalamazoo Public Schools, the following schools fit within this classification: Edison Academy, El Sol Elementary, Lincoln International Studies School, Milwood Elementary, Northeastern Elementary, Northglade Montessori, Phoenix High School, Spring Valley Center for Exploration, Washington Writers' Academy, Woods Lake Elementary and Woodward School for Technology and Research. When looking at Comstock Public Schools, Comstock Elementary, Comstock Compass High School, and Comstock Virtual Academy fit within the classification. Finally, in St. Joseph County the following schools are classified as concentrated poverty schools: Burr Oak Elementary, Burr Oak Middle School, Burr Oak High

School, Mendon Elementary, Mendon Middle/High School, Central Elementary (White Pigeon) and in Three Rivers Public Schools: Andrews Elementary, Ruth Hoppin Elementary, Norton Elementary, Park Elementary, Three Rivers Middle School, and Henry Barrows Education Center.

### **Region 5 School Districts**

Niles Community Schools has the following schools that fit the classification of concentrated poverty schools: Ballard Elementary, Howard-Ellis Elementary, Ring Lardner Middle School, Niles Cedar Lane Alternative High School, and Niles High School. Benton Harbor Area Schools have the following schools that fit within the concentrated poverty classification: Martin Luther King Jr. Elementary School, Fair Plain East Elementary School, Fair Plain Middle School, and Benton Harbor High School. Within Dowagiac Union Public Schools, the following schools fit the classification: Sister Lakes Elementary, Justas Gage Elementary, Dowagiac Middle School, and Union High School. Marcellus Community Schools have Marcellus Elementary, Marcellus Middle School, and Marcellus High School that fit the classification. Finally, in Cassopolis Public Schools: Sam Adams Elementary, Cassopolis Middle School, Ross Beatty High School, and Cassopolis Adult/Alternative Education Center all fit the classification.

When looking at VanBuren County the following schools fit the classification of concentrated poverty: Bangor Middle School, Bangor High School, Bangor Career Academy, Bangor Walnut Elementary, Bloomingdale Middle/High School, Pullman Elementary (Bloomingdale), Bloomingdale Elementary, Decatur Elementary, Decatur Middle/High School, Hartford High School, Redwood Elementary (Hartford), Hartford Middle School, and Hartford Alternative School).

This study contributes to the body of literature and provides insights into different ways in which central office administrators can work and retain school principals in concentrated poverty school districts.

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How do principals with at least five years of experience leading a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?
2. What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain as a leader in a concentrated poverty school?

### **Research Design and Rationale**

This study utilized a basic qualitative research design. Little is known about the experiences of school principals in concentrated poverty school districts and why they remain. A purposefully selected group of participants helped the researcher understand the problem and the research questions (Creswell, 2014). For this study, each participant had served in an administrative position for a minimum of five years in a school classified as having concentrated poverty. The participants were from a variety of elementary, middle school, high school, and alternative school settings. Participants were from school districts that were classified as concentrated poverty school districts, from Regions 4 and 5.

This qualitative, basic design study sought to understand the principal's choice to remain in a concentrated poverty school district when opportunities arise within nearby, more affluent school districts. A basic qualitative research design involves understanding the fundamentals of the qualitative research process and examining the views of individuals who are experiencing the same process (Gordan, 2018). According to Creswell (2014), the social constructivist approach is a framework within which researchers understand the reasons for certain outcomes. Creswell

also states that the social constructivist framework is an established reality that is interpreted at the individual human level; it is influenced by interactions with other individuals. I wanted to understand the multiple meanings that would be derived from this study and make sense of the viewpoint of the experiences of school principals. The multiple meanings that were derived allowed me to utilize a worldwide view to analyze the outcomes.

Creswell (2014) stated that epistemology aims to identify what counted as knowledge and how knowledge claims were justified. My study involved an in-depth interview process with at least 10 participants to gain a full understanding of their experiences. During the semi-structured interviews, the participants were asked a series of questions that allowed the researcher to understand the reasons why principals remained within the concentrated poverty school setting. When examining the population sample and the experiences of the participants who were represented within this study, a basic qualitative design was the best approach. This approach allowed me the ability to gain insights into why principals remained within concentrated poverty schools and what specific factors made the decision.

Finally, a reason that basic qualitative research design was most appropriate was that there was little known about the topic, and this allowed me to explore the topic of principal retention from a different perspective. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), a basic qualitative study allows participants to invoke feelings, make meaning, and share emotional expressions when recounting their experiences. A qualitative research study allows participants the opportunity to have a voice while providing room for the researcher's perspective on the examined topic. Qualitative research design is the most appropriate design for this study, as it provides a clear framework that allows exploration of the meaning of experiences of school

principals of concentrated poverty school districts and why they remain within their current position.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I have more than 20 years of experience in the education profession, with areas focused primarily on teaching, curriculum, and administration. My educational experiences have been at the elementary and middle school levels. All 20 years have been working within the concentrated poverty school setting. I have found that one of the most critical factors that plague the educational community is frequent change in leadership. In my teaching experience, which occurred over a span of 15 years, I had six different principals, each with their own unique leadership styles. I have worked under transactional, transformational, and laissez-faire leadership (Burns 1979). In my experience, when a new administrator takes the helm of a school, it requires a minimum of three years to establish a climate and culture conducive to their leadership style. These experiences have allowed me as a teacher to understand that creating a specific school culture cannot be established when a change in leadership occurs on a regular basis. As a researcher utilizing a qualitative research design, my goal was to provide a way to derive meaning from participants who are being studied (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The change of leadership played a role in the culture of the school, and it allowed me to view a variety of leadership styles, but also to see the direct impact that happens in the school setting. I also had the opportunity to work and collaborate with various principals across the state of Michigan. Each principal has a unique district, and many are classified as concentrated poverty school districts. Many principals look at the challenges they face within the profession, but also the district-specific challenges that await them. I planned to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the main reasons why principals remain in concentrated poverty schools. I also planned to watch out



for personal reasons why principals remain in their specific school. These are all factors that I investigated when interviewing each principal in my research project.

### **Population, Sample and/or Setting**

Creswell (2013) advocates between five and 25 participants for a true meaning and provides an outcome that usually correlates with a larger number of participants. The subject population for this study was purposefully selected with the goal of recruiting 10 principal participants from concentrated poverty school districts. The principals were representatives from all academic levels. I initially reached out to members of the Michigan Elementary Middle School Principals Association (MEMSPA) to begin my recruitment. I identified the school districts within Calhoun, Kalamazoo, Cass, Branch, VanBuren, and Berrien counties that fall within the classification of a concentrated poverty school district with affluent districts adjacent or reasonably near enough to present opportunities. Each county has several school districts that fall within the concentrated poverty classification.

I initially reviewed the principals from the school districts in these three counties. I recruited principals by initially emailing them to gain interest in the study (Appendix A). If more participants were required, individual invitations would be sent to principals who were not located within the two regions of the study. If more principals volunteer for the study, I examined the years of continuous service and give preferential selection to participants with five or more years of service in their current school. Interested participants will respond to a Google form (Appendix B) that provides simple demographics. Once each participant has agreed to participate in the study, they will sign the Human Subject Internal Review Board (HSIRB) consent form (Appendix C) to ensure the validity of the study.

## **Instrumentation and Data Collection**

### **Instrumentation**

The interview was one recorded 60-minute session in which the participants met in person or virtually with me, one-on-one. The process included a semi-structured interview of school principals' experiences of why they remained in their position within a concentrated poverty school district. These interviews provided participants with the opportunity to share insights and express their experiences during their tenure as school principals in a concentrated poverty school district. Each question within the semi-structured interview utilized an open-ended approach, which allowed the participants the opportunity to share their experiences in any way they would like. These questions were formed from my professional experiences and directly related to the study's research questions, focusing on why school principals in concentrated poverty school districts remain.

The interview was a six-question semi-structured interview protocol based on the model designed by Seidman (2006) (see Appendix D). The focus of the interview was to capture the participants' experiences during their tenure within the concentrated poverty school district at their respective schools. Each participant was asked to provide details of their personal experiences, and I was able to look for both negative and positive experiences about working in their respective concentrated poverty school districts. Probes were used to elicit deeper conversations to gain a better understanding of why school principals remain in their current position within a concentrated poverty school district. I determined what methods participants would recommend to central office administrators for the retention of school principals employed within concentrated poverty schools. In turn, participants could take the areas of focus to create a main recommendation for central office administration and school boards. The semi-

structured interview questions were piloted with a school principal who fit the category described within this research proposal.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Each interview was recorded using an audio recording device. I transcribed the interview verbatim, which allowed me the opportunity to review what was stated and ensure that each phrase or comment is clearly captured. The audio recordings were stored on a double-authorized protected computer, within a secured Google document and Google drive folder in my office, locked. These storing methods allowed for information backup to occur, ensuring confidentiality for the participants. All handwritten notes were destroyed upon completion of the project. Prior to each interview, the participants were emailed informed consent materials and agreement for the continuation of the interview process (Appendix C). At the beginning of each interview session, I provided a brief background on my professional journey and why I am doing this research. Upon completion of the semi-structured interview, participants were able to select a pseudonym to be used for data organization and discussion in the study. The master list of names and pseudonym names were destroyed upon completion of the project.

### **Institutional Review Board**

Prior to beginning the research study, I sought Human Subjects Internal Review Board (HSIRB) approval because the project involves human subjects who shared information about their experiences. As part of the approval process, each participant was presented with a consent form (Appendix C). The consent form details the rights of each participant and the basic details of the study. Consent was emailed to participants prior to the interviews, whether in person or virtually. The participants were given the opportunity to withdraw from the research project at

any point. The participants who shared their experiences and were identified as a vulnerable population with limited anticipated negative side effects.

### **Validity and Reliability**

Throughout each stage of this research project, from the development of collecting data procedures to the analysis of the data, I understood and recognized different methods that would enhance the validity of the study. Creswell (2013) stated that the validation of data is a process of striving to create accurate data and suggested using at least two of his eight validation strategies. With regard to ensuring the validity of the data set, I focused on whether the data is credible and whether the process for collecting and interpreting the data is transparent. When looking at the topic of reliability, I relied on Creswell's (2013) use of *rich, thick description*. This occurred during the data collection process and allowed me to understand the details of the experiences and how they related within the reasons why school principals remain.

Importantly, to ensure the validity and reliability of the research project, Merriam and Tisdale (2015) suggested keeping an audit trail. The audit trail helped explain decisions on how and why the collection and analysis process occurred. During the project, this occurred using handwritten or electronically typed memos throughout the various stages of research. This process allowed other researchers the opportunity to follow the research process. Finally, I was careful not to share my personal experiences with the participants. I did not want to influence the experiences that each participant selected to share. I utilized the member checking approach to ensure the validity of the interviews. Participants reviewed, edited, if needed, and confirmed the interviews for accuracy.

## **Data Analysis**

The ultimate goal of the data analysis process in a qualitative research design is to understand participants' experiences utilizing the interview process. Understanding and acknowledging my own biases is an important first step in data analysis; thus, I collected and interpreted the data using conclusions from the interview participants and their experiences. According to Creswell (2014), the data analysis process in a qualitative research design requires that the data be deconstructed and then reconstructed to make meaning of experiences by the participants. I utilized the following steps in the data analysis process:

1. Transcribe and organize data collected from interviews
2. Consolidate all transcribed data sets
3. Code all data
4. Generate descriptions from the coded data
5. Summarize the findings based upon descriptions
6. Make interpretations and report findings

## **Process**

The data analysis process began immediately while the interview process was ongoing, and once the participants reviewed, edited if needed, and confirmed each of their specific interview personal narratives for accuracy. A consolidation of all the interviews took place, so the coding process began. Upon completion of the interviews, and once each participant has confirmed the accuracy of the data, all participant information were de-identified. I listened (in-person) or watched (virtually) the recordings at least once more to ensure that each of my transcripts matched the information that was explained by each participant.

Upon completion of the rereading or listening to semi-structured interviews, the analysis process began. I reviewed the transcripts to see if any initial themes emerged from the data. The coding process uses the emergent process to interpret specific data. Creswell (2013) described the emergent process as a way to identify “significant statements” that emerge within the interviews. Initially, I looked for emerging points in the data through the statements or phrases that might be repeated or emphasized within the interview process.

Taking individual transcripts and color-coding each specific theme, I identified key categories or themes that emerge through a pattern of repeats. I focused on the coding scheme, forming themes, and identifying perspectives that may contradict each other (Creswell, 2013). The codes were developed through multiple listening of the recordings, along with a written narrative for each participant. I looked for words or sections that directly correlate with the research questions stated within the research project. Upon completion of the coding of the transcripts from the interviews, I emailed each participant a copy of their narratives. I encouraged each participant to provide feedback on the accuracy of the narrative and ensure that what I typed was stated by each participant.

The next phase of the data analysis process was to continue the coding process of each interview. I highlighted each section that seemed significant or directly answered the research questions that I am attempting to answer. I used a standard Google Doc to house both the transcripts and codes that I developed. However, as I developed themes from the codes, I used a more traditional approach of printing each of the codes and manually grouping them. This process allowed me the ability to change the groupings, as I see fit as it relates to each code. I utilized a Google Sheet document, stored on a secured computer drive, to back up the transcripts, codes, and themes that I created during the analysis process. I identified the specific

generalizations that the participants shared regarding working in a concentrated poverty school district, as well as what strategic initiatives were missing to retain principals in these schools. I rearranged, if necessary, not simply focus on the first combination of generalizations that emerge. Using Merriam and Tisdale's (2015) guidelines for identifying and generalizing data points, I ensured that I exhausted the data to construct as many themes as possible and that the data should be mutually exclusive. In addition, the generalizations should be sensitive to the data and conceptually congruent.

The next part of the data analysis process was to interpret the meaning of the collective data by conducting a cross-examination of the data and identifying the strength of the categories, themes, and subthemes. Considering the generalizations of the descriptions that were established, a summary was created that allowed interpretation. This permitted me to interpret and report the findings of the process.

### **Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of a study identifies credibility, conformability, transferability, and dependability as key terms (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). When examining each of the four areas of trustworthiness, Marshall and Rossman (2011) defined it as a goodness of qualitative research and how they relate to the ethical standards of the study. I used data triangulation in this research study. This allowed me to validate my conclusions and findings from the interviews. Initially, I asked two doctoral colleagues, who are also working on either a mixed-methods or qualitative study, to review my findings and the specific process that I used to reach them. I ensured transferability by showing that the conclusions are applicable to other contexts. I established transferability by utilizing a technique of thick descriptions from participants' experiences and the factors that made the decision easier. Dependability was established so that the findings were

consistent and, if needed, could be repeated by another researcher. I asked a peer colleague who had experience working with basic qualitative studies to examine both the process and product of my study. Finally, when establishing confirmability, I used reflexivity to maintain an attitude of being present in the context of knowledge construction at every step of the research process.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019) stated that it was inevitable that almost all research carries limitations and delimitations regarding: underlying theories, study design, replication potential, shortcomings in data collection and questionnaire design, insufficient subgroups or data for robust statistical analysis, narrow time span for data collection, lack of consideration for seasonal differences and missing data, causal relationships, measurement errors, study setting, population or sample, ethical parameters, data collection/analysis, result interpretations, and corresponding conclusions. (p. 155) Self-reporting is one limitation that can be identified within this study. There was no guarantee that the study participants would share personal information comfortably with the researcher. This may lead to missing data for the study participants.

Another limitation of this study was the approach that was utilized for recruitment of participants. When using two regions across Southwest Michigan, I needed to be prepared to use more concentrated school districts in other locations, if necessary. One limitation of this study that could directly impact the generalizability of the data results was the specific population and sample size that was established within a specific K-12 school district in the state of Michigan. Finally, the perceptions and experiences reported in this study may not be relevant in other states in the United States.



### Chapter Three Summary

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## CHAPTER IV

### PARTICIPANT PROFILES

This section presents the individual profiles of the participants in this study. The 10 semi-structured interviews with the principal participants were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data resulting from the interviews were color-coded and then analyzed for similarities and differences in four categories: School Leadership Aspirations, Concentrated Poverty Leadership, Managing Daily Challenges, and Central Office Recommendations. Care was taken to both drill down and look up as the data were explored. This chapter takes a vertical look at each participant and their interview responses.

The purpose of this study was to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with less concentrations of poverty. Factors of interest are issues such as district leadership support for principals, compensation, climate and culture of the buildings, principal evaluation, mentoring support, professional development opportunities and the impacts of the school's socio-economic status. Chapter Five explores a horizontal view of the themes that emerged across the data. The participants included principals from 10 different K-12 educational settings. There were six elementary school principals, one middle school principal, one high school principal, one K-12 virtual principal, and one alternative high school principal. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the self-identified data of the participants, including gender, current school level, educational background, region that they represent, and the number of years as the principal of their current schools. A unique number was assigned to each participant to protect their identities.

Table 1

## Self-Identified Data

Interview Participant	Gender	Educational Background	Region	Years as Principal at Current School	Current School Level
Interview #1	Male	B.S., M.A.	4	14	Alternative High School
Interview #2	Female	B.S., M.A.	4	5	K-12 Virtual
Interview #3	Female	B.S., M.A.	4	5	Elementary
Interview #4	Male	B.S., M.A.	5	20	High School
Interview #5	Male	B.S., M.A., EdD	5	5	Elementary
Interview #6	Male	B.S., M.A.,	4	10	Middle School
Interview #7	Female	B.S., M.A.,	5	5	Elementary
Interview #8	Female	B.S., M.A.,	5	15	Elementary
Interview #9	Female	B.S., M.A.,	5	15	Elementary
Interview #10	Female	B.S., M.A.,	5	13	Elementary

**Interview # 1**

Interview participant Principal #1 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 25 years. He has a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership. He has been a principal at his current alternative high school for 14 years and a classroom teacher for 11 years, and he is from a Region Four school. He has been a principal for the past 18 years, and has been at other schools in his current district. He has also led in the middle school setting.

**Interview #1: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #1 explained his reasoning for entering the field of school administration within the school district where he was already a teacher. He explained the reasons for entering this field:

I always had this fascination with what was happening school wide, so when you are a classroom teacher, you are confined to that classroom. I was always interested in what the principal was doing and what happened in my office today. So, I was always interested in, curious about what was happening in the big picture outside my four walls and that led me to pursue a career in administration.

When he was asked what led you to begin working in the concentrated poverty school that you are currently in, he stated:

Well, I was hired in this district in 2000, and I spent ten years as the middle school principal. Then, this position came open, and just felt that I needed a change in my career, not necessarily a change in school districts. This district has been good for me, but a change in the school setting has occurred. I was always curious about what was happening at the high school level. So, I transferred from middle school principal to alternative high school principal—which is now known as the alternative high school—and I have been here going on 14 years now.

Upon reviewing the daily and weekly routines of the school day and the major challenges that he faces within his position, he explained:

A typical week of a school administrator, at least if you are walking in my shoes, would probably be three or four formal meetings that are on your Google calendar. These meetings last anywhere from two, three, to four hours and can range from in-person to virtual. A typical week would be talking and discussing a

lot with students and staff at high school. Because we are small, we get to know everyone very well. I will say, like you, that you cannot be a student here and do not see me on a daily basis. The major challenges are with some behaviors throughout the course of the week and some student behaviors. The behaviors can be dealing with illegal, violent, or dangerous situations. However, these are typically very basic situations. But what keeps me going is the progress that I see in children. Definitely the progress that I see in students that end up graduating and moving on to do things in the community. All in all, I have been in education for a long time, but I still like kids. The day I can honestly say, you know what I am like, done working with children will be the day I retire? But I still like kids.

When examining the opportunity to work in another school district that is not classified as concentrated poverty and remain within his current setting, he shared his experiences that made him respond this way:

I think the answer to that is no, and so then what I would do with that. With this, I would entertain offers. I think it would make me feel good for one thing. That is not typical in schools nowadays, more so than before that you might get offers to another district because of the educator shortage but, um, I think I would stay. I guess loyalty means a lot to me. I work for a district, and they have treated me well, and I do feel a sense of loyalty. I like, I guess my two bosses, the superintendent and assistant superintendent, I will work for those two any day. And I am invested in my high school. Similarly, this program is drastically different from the scheduling standpoint to the graduation credit standpoint. Um, to walk in the halls on a day-to-day basis with no lunch. To go tutoring our

service day, Wednesdays. We have made so many changes that I am just invested in those changes. It would be difficult for me to walk away.

**Interview #1: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #1 initially had a hard time identifying recommendations that he would provide to central office administrators on ways that they could retain school principals; however, he explained:

That is a harder question to answer, I do think. A piece of an administrator staying is feeling supported by the central administration. That is a piece of it. And even this summer, you know, what if I do not show up today? The superintendent is not micromanaging me, like what did you do today? Go get your fucking job done, and I, you know, and that's all he cares. That's all, and so I would work for those two any day. OK.

The final question of the interview examined what other recommendations or aspects of the participants' journey he was willing to share at this time. He stated:

Well, I think I have. Ah boy, I do not know the word I am looking for, a desire to work with children who have not had it as fortunate as I have had. Um, you know, working with children in poverty. Working with children that have social and emotional needs. I guess all-in-all because I continue to come back and continue overall like my job; I like working with this population, huh. I have seen the change in this district because it has not always been. It is more affluent than what it is now is not so, but I like the at-risk population. Um, I will say, one thing that

has changed in my education in my years has been social media. That is the number one biggest change.

### **Interview # 2**

Interview participant Principal #2 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 23 years. She has both a Bachelor of Science degree in secondary education, with an emphasis on business administration, and a Master of Arts degree in educational leadership. She has been a principal at her current K-12 virtual school for five years, an assistant principal for 12 years, and a classroom teacher for 12 years and is from Region Four. She was an assistant principal for three years in the same school district prior to leading the virtual school.

**Interview #2: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #2 initially began the interview, focusing on her reasons for entering the field of school administration and the skills that led her to make those steps. She explained:

First of all, the ideal of becoming a principal was built upon. I love working with the children in the classroom, and I figured once I reached that peak, I'll know.

The CTE director administrator position came open when I was in another district, and our program had died. Drastically, it was a challenge for me to rebuild it and to make it grow. So, I love taking on that challenge to give students more opportunities to have different choices and to know about skilled trade positions as well as college. So, it was able to generate new programs and access to our students in a poverty school. From there, it was knowing how I could handle and manage students, being a people person, and kids, and parents, the

communication that was needed. So, that just pushed me even further and put me in as an assistant principal. And working with discipline, I had the lowest number of referrals—you would not just get kicked out. We were going to figure out a strategy so that you can work your way back into the classroom. I went out to teach my students' parents. I fought the board against the expulsion of a number of students. They did not even make me a part of the interview. When they wanted to do it, I walked in and said, excuse me, but this expulsion is because this kid did something to me. Let me speak. I showed them how it was not him to just do it. It was an accident, and we worked through it. We have talked through it. Still, to this day—week—we communicate. So, it's working with the kids. My reason for going into this position and even coming in here was just to open up avenues for kids to let them see that there are still people out there that care and want them to succeed.

As Principal #2 moved to her current school district, she began as an assistant principal within the high school. However, she made the move to her current position through a unique process:

The school district that I was at was being taken over by the state, and I had a meeting with one of the state representatives who told me that I would become the assistant principal, and I still had to hold the CTE director position with no additional pay. She told me that that would look good on my resume. I told her that I was already the assistant principal because I disciplined the juniors. She said, you just gotta to do it. I saw that the current school district had an opening, and I said, Lord, if it's meant for me to leave, I will get the position I got. To my surprise, it was more so I do as you say and you will succeed. Not do as I do.



Because you told me, I had the total time to myself. However, when it comes to me doing it, that's not gonna look good. You're an outsider. So what is chaos? This position was generated by two administrators. And I told the superintendent and the assistant superintendent, y' all gave me this position thing and I was going to fail. And I repeat that, and I continually repeat that. I said, when you sit up there and tell your whole district that I see that I exceeded y' all expectations. Word choices. Everything and I just took it on, and I like the idea of kids and reaching out to kids to try to motivate them. Many of them have one to two classes to finish to try to get them done to be a success in society. To be honest, this is what I tell them. Listen, you gotta go ahead and finish because I gotta make you productive. I want to get my social security and if you are not working.

Principal #2 went on to explain the daily routine of her unique school, as well as the major challenges and items that brought her joy within her school. She explained:

The challenges I face are getting my students—since I am virtual—to log in and adequate time, if they logged in during the daytime, when the teachers are available to assist them they would get the help that they need trying to keep them in a mental state to say even though it's virtual I am learning and getting my diploma or the younger kids that are referred to because of behavioral issues that shut down and feel they were treated unjustly. So, the biggest challenge is keeping kids motivated and letting parents know that if your child is not working. The joy is getting the calls all times of the day or night to say, Hey, Miss Principal #2 I completed this or I am checking in, I really like the program. So, it's knowing that it is a positive spin on what we are offering virtually. It's supposed to be 7:30

to 3:30, but for me, it's 24/7 because I may get a text message or a phone call all times of the day or night to say unlock something or this issue, so it's constant work Monday through Friday, even on the weekend. Just so that I can keep my students engaged. But it's motivating because I know that they are getting close to finishing. It's just working around the clock

When asked about why she remains in her current school setting and what experiences she has encountered that has her making the decision to remain in her position. She stated:

I am staying in the position that I am in because I implemented the program. I have grown the program, I know it like the back of my hand. I love the challenge of every year, recruiting as many children as I can, and getting as many children as I can to graduate or get back on track to return to public education. That's a two-part, part of me says no, because I want to continue to help the underprivileged. Let them know that they can still succeed. And I like the dynamics of unmotivated students. The other part that says, “yes”, is I have experience in the background, and I work very well with people, students, and all genders that I would like the challenge. To develop students into our world and understand the dynamics of less-privileged children. Therefore, the challenge is to take on this position. But at the same time, help them grow to get a better understanding of students and parents, people less privileged than they are.

**Interview #2: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #2 began to explain a variety of recommendations that she would make to central office administrators as to how they could retain school principals that work in concentrated poverty school districts. She explained:

Open communication. Supporting issues and concerns that we as principals bring to them. Coming up with a medium to show what we cannot do. It is only the way you want, but we understand your need. So, we are going to meet somewhere in the middle. So, that it's workable because when you do that, then you show me that I am valued. And although the law says this, we are going to resolve the matter by doing this. An example would be in a colleague's situation. Although being in the law says this superintendent, at any time I can say, I understand this is what the law says, but this is what I forbid. He has the right, and parents should know that if your child is acting up and doing this, this and this, even if we wanted to have them go virtual. Or be isolated from one teacher because of the special way kids behave. We should be able to set that up, so it does not have to be permanent for the children with one understanding that there are consequences. For their actions, if they misbehave, they have to go through this period. We could have set it up so that these kids have to do this for two to four weeks or six weeks, marking period, so that they can get back on track and understand this is a privilege. And just because you have these assessments does not mean you get to go and test me out and hit me, and they happen here.

For the final question of the interview, Principal #2 began to explain other parts of her journey in a concentrated poverty school district and why she remains in the leadership position she holds.

She explained:

So, I took 37 state findings in my old school district, and my desire to stay in my current district is for the kids. I have experienced discrimination. I don't know any more. Because I was an outsider and—if it was just a CTE program I do not work that way. My former principal at high school at that time when I worked with them said that I was lazy. She wanted to direct, and I would not conform to their way. Sometimes, I will let you get to me saying how well I did that, and...but I am too damn educated to let it get to me.

### **Interview # 3**

Interview participant Principal #3 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 27 years. She has a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership. She has been a principal at her current elementary school for 12 years, and a classroom teacher for 15 years, and is from Region Four. She has been a principal within the same school district at two different elementary schools.

**Interview #3: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #3's road to her stepping into the role of school administrator, as she was a teacher in the school that she was hired in as the principal. She stated:

Okay, my story is a little bit different, so I was an instructional coach, and we were interviewing principals, and we interviewed several people. We did not find

anybody that we loved, and after the interview process, several of the people on the team suggested to the superintendent at the time, why cannot [Principal #3] be the principal? And I was like, at that time, I did not have a master's in administration at that time, and I already had a master's. So, the superintendent asked me if I would be interested in trying it as an interim for a year. I also had young kids at the time, and so I went home and I talked to my husband, and we agreed that I tried it and I did it for a year. I enjoyed it, and so I went back and got my master's degree and that was how I became a principal.

When reviewing how Principal #3 began to look at her stepping into the current elementary school she leads, she discussed how the closing of many schools in the district led her to a role as the leader of one elementary school. She explained:

So, I was born and raised here, and in my second year of teaching, I was hired in my current district. So, I have just always pretty much stayed here. I also was here during a time when this district was very affluent and everybody wanted to come to school here. So, that's also a reason I do not know if this is a question, but that is why I do not leave? If there is ever an upswing, I want to be here on the upswing. Sometimes, I feel guilty of leaving the place that raised me and my children.

Principal #3 explains the typical day of an elementary principal in great detail. She outlined the daily steps she took to meet the needs of her students:

Thus, a typical day is coming. I try to get there before most people or staff. I try to go through phone calls. Make sure my list from the day before is—that I got through everything. If I did not, I put it back in order of what I should do for that

day. Then, as staff start to arrive, I try to go around and greet and say good morning to any staff, follow up with them. Make sure everything is ready to go that day. If it's winter, I am making sure the sidewalks are done. Just regular day-to-day things ensure that the school is ready to go. Then, after that, sometimes parent phone calls run in before school has even started. So, sometimes I am starting to take some of those. I do work hard to make sure I do not take any calls between the times that the buses are coming in and kids are coming in.

Principal #3 continues explaining her daily routine after the students are in the building. She explained:

So, I try to greet everybody off the buses and in the hallways. Then again, I am doing a lap through the school again. I am trying to make sure that everybody has their needs met. Teachers have their needs met or not met. I usually, at that time, I can get a pretty good gauge of what the day's gonna look like and especially in our schools—as you and I know—we have kids that come in with problems from the night before on the bus, and that's sometimes right away. I'm dealing with family situations, or situations from the bus, or kids that need food, or kids that need extra attention, and I also may be dealing with “don't have enough.” Guest teachers or those types of things, too. So, I am dealing with all of that and trying to take care of kids getting engaged. On how my day is gonna go.

Finally, Principal #3 discusses the daily routines of her position and the processes that she implemented to ensure that the school runs smoothly.

If I can, I try to go back to my office through phone calls. Take it all up with anything that comes off the bus. I may try to do some things in my office, maybe

related to emails, budgets, or that type of stuff. If I am lucky, I might get a good half an hour, but that's rare. I am also checking in with my behavior team during that time. We have Google Chats going during that time. So, I am watching those to see what kids are highflyers. And if some kids are on "my caseload," we say, because they just do better with me than some of the behavior team, so if any of those friends I have to go hang out with or deal with. I also give positive breaks. Then, pretty much lunch starts. Once lunch starts, I feel like I hate to say it, but downhill from there. I do not know what happens at lunch, but after lunch, things go crazy. Kids are eating lunch, and then there is a recess, and kids have a hard time. They do not know how to play with each other. So, I am dealing with lunch issues and recess issues and then I feel like I am back again to looking if we need to make any referrals, make any phone calls, do any restorative justice type things with kids, and that a lot of times will take me close to the end of the day.

When looking at the major challenges that Principal #3 faced on a daily basis, she explained the following:

So, I think the biggest challenges I face, our students, do not have their needs met before they come to school. Our parents do not have their needs met when they send kids to school. So, we are trying to do a lot of catch-up work. So, we are trying to parent, and we are trying to make up for lost time for things that probably, even as far back as to when they were in the womb, they were undernourished and malnourished. They did not get ready, so I feel like we are always playing catch up to things. They didn't get along. As far as our parents are concerned, I do feel like 90% of them are trying the best that they can, but their

best is different from a normal middle-class family. Therefore, these are the biggest challenges. I think that we face and that does lead to behavior, academics, and all of those things.

Principal #3 continues to explain the challenges that her position brings, however her focus switched to discussing constraints that are placed upon the students that she serves:

But we are facing things that should be taught at home. I even think about hunger; we measure hunger insecurity. So, if you and I are not fed, we are irritated. If we are getting our next meal, where would we get it from? Think about if you are five or six or 12 or 13 What does that look like to them? So I do not know what my biggest challenge is like; I have to get a raise in student achievement. Yeah, that is, a no given. How do you do that when you have this domino effect that I think for most of them started at birth or at home? I do not know how to get in there and change those things. I do believe in teaching who you get; as soon as they walk in the door, I just do not know how to change. The problems that are way before me, and trust me? I am the biggest advocate for that, that is my passion, but I just do not know how to get to the root of that, but I do know it's a major part of it. But by the time they get to us, we have lost so much already. So, what do we do or what does the community do? Or how do we help? All of this is on the phone. You and I cannot be responsible for the education of students. Have lost much before they even made it to us. If they want me to be, then I need to know how to fix that. I need more resources and tools.

When looking at the joys of working in a concentrated poverty school at the elementary level, Principal #3 explained:



Honestly, I honestly love my parents too; I do not know. I think I would be so bored If I was in an affluent school district, I do not know that that is for me the crazier, the harder? The better I find joy and helping kids, helping others, and helping families. If I can make one family or one kid happy. I feel like I have done my job that day. If you can make that sad, kid smile, or build that relationship, that to me is so much more important than being the highest kid on the end step like that. Or the kids when I go to summer school and they are as well. That brings me joy like that means we are making a difference.

Principal #3 was born and raised in the school district in which she was a principal. She explained why she was offered a job in another school district that is not classified as concentrated poverty. She stated:

I do not think that it would. I am always for the underdog; I do not know that I would feel like I would make a big enough impact. You cannot, and I know I am different. I like that. And I am not just about the test score; I am about the people and the kids. And I think that yeah, I feel like I would rather deal with child needs than parents' needs. I feel like maybe in affluent districts. It's more about meeting the needs of the parents than the kids, and I am more about wanting to help children break the cycle. I feel like I do not see that I would find it satisfying honestly.

**Interview #3: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #3 looks at recommendations for central office administrators from a different perspective, as someone who has worked in the same district for over 27 years. She explains:

I really believe strongly in a cohesive team, so that we are all working for the greater good, and for the same reason, so from the central office. I want to know, and I want people to be in the trenches and work as hard as we are. I want if we are all working, if all the principals are in the building every day, the central office needs to be working at the central office every day. The superintendent must have the same expectations for all administrators. You do not get special treatment, but you do not get, yeah, I guess I want to call this special treatment. In my recommendation to the superintendent and the assistant superintendent would be that they provide professional development to their team in the central office on how to be leaders.

Principal #3 wanted to share her journey and how special education played a part in her celebrations and frustrations. She explained:

Yeah, I think the last thing would probably be a problem with special education. You know how? There are problems with special education in our department in our school district. However, I do not know how to handle it. I do not know what other school districts do. This part as our kids get lower after the pandemic and we get more and more kids from poverty, we cannot continue to just certify them all in special education.

#### **Interview # 4**

Interview participant Principal #4 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 25 years. He has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership. He has been a principal at his current high school for five years, and a classroom teacher for five years and is from Region Five. He was also a principal at the

elementary, middle, and alternative high school levels in other concentrated poverty school districts.

**Interview #4: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #4 began his career as a high school business teacher in a different state. He decided that he wanted to take his talents and step into the role of the school principal. He stated:

I fell in a row accidentally when I was a teacher. I think it is because of my relationships with my students. Anytime our building principal would leave the building, he would get a sub and tell me. I need you to run a building. So, I just think one thing led to another. My first job I applied for. It was interesting. I was told that I had not had enough experience and how that goes and it's really, but the person you bring in is less experienced. I just kept persevering, and then I fell into my first principalship. There was also a position that opened. My principal at the time was the one doing all of the recruitment. When he was fighting with the central office was trying to go with someone else. They gave a strong reason for why? They shouldn't. hire me under the title of interim because we want to see how you do. And I ended up there for five years.

Principal #4 has been at his current school for over five years now; however, he was a principal in other schools for over 20 years. When asked what led him to work at his current school, he explained:

A couple of opportunities and options, I should say, at that time that I was looking, my old district was starting to have some financial struggles. So, my old

district was looking for a middle school principal. It was just really interesting because the school that was open was one of my former schools where I was a student, and so I had taken the job. It has been a challenging building, but I loved the opportunity to go back and just try to put my footprint in the sand for a minute.

When asked what a typical day in his role as a school principal is Principal #4 explained that building relationships and being visible were essential to building a positive culture. He stated:

First, in the morning, I always try to go in and check my email and voicemail. I want to see if there is anything urgent from the central office that I needed to attend in the last minute. Other than that, I was pretty much outside arriving in the morning. Meeting and greeting students either get dropped off or get off the bus. From there, I always made announcements even at the high school level because I always wanted to end on a positive note. After that, I just kind of stuck my head in the classroom. Spoke to everybody cafeteria, custodial, and others. My rounds made the right touch base with everyone, and then just kind of went in and started going through my to-do list, which never got completed because it was always something. Always something, and I will go through my daily routine. My to-do list trying to go in and observe lunchtime out. Every time the bell rings, I do not care what I was doing unless I was on my own at a meeting, anytime the bell rang, or if elementary passing time, I am in the hallway. I went through my day at the end of depending on what was going on. These are high schools and middle schools. If there's events, I mean I am attending the events other than that it feels like elementary kids are gone. I have done a lot in high school.

He explained his major challenges as they were also his joy:

I think the challenges were getting them sometimes to buy into the direction and vision that you are going. Especially if kind of veteran teachers they know used to doing things there and then you get someone who comes in as energetic and vibrant and an outside the box thinker. Then, you have those staff that are on the fence. whichever way the wind blows. So, try to do the same thing with them, and then you with them. New folks that are just like, hey, let us go. So, I think for me, it was just trying to really get them together as a unit. One of the ways I did that was with some of the teams and some of the buildings in which I worked.

Because all the schools I had were a hundred percent free and reduced lunch in high-poverty areas, failing and struggling. This was because we had additional dollars. I should not say savvy enough. I think I built relationships where I would talk to my staff about doing weekend retreats where they could bring their families. All rights, and then we would do our business. Whatever we need to work on, we would do it, whether strategic plan or whatever it was, we would work on that. But then I allowed them time to spend time with their families. I took care of it all, and I think that was a way where now I need your support. so, I really work. On, just trying to build. atmosphere of the community with my teachers. The other part was, the students I would find time to talk with and their parents talk with them. I really paint a picture of what the future is like. I need to talk with them, and I need to hear from them because sometimes as educators. Parents have a story; sometimes we do not hear because we are so focused on

what has happened. Let us try to get down to the root of what was going on and then try to improve.

Even though Principal #4 worked in concentrated poverty schools, his response to being offered a position in a more affluent school. He explained:

Yes, only if I felt and everyone felt that I was a good fit. I would try to look at data from the past three or five years and look at what they have done culturally. The type of culture in the building depends on the grade level. If it is middle school, really look at what they are doing? Prepare kids for high school. If it was a high school. I would look at what they are doing to get their kids ready for the next level? What are athletics? What types of clubs do they have? How is parental support? So, then I would try to find with my skill set that I have where I need to plug a hole. If they're doing some things good but they're struggling in some things I want to be strong because now, I want to help plug that hole because I would be thinking if you are really good at what you do. Let us find out what we are not doing well. So, we can do so we can be the best at what we can be. I do not just want to be good. I want to be great. Let us just put it like that.

**Interview #4: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #4 began to provide recommendations to the central office administration. He began looking at it through the lens of a principal who has worked in a concentrated poverty school for over 20 years. He explained:

This is always about money. So, I do not want to really respond with finances. What I want to respond to is finding someone who is passionate about building

relationships and changing and affecting lives. Then, fill them with the support and resources that you can provide and trust them. That they will get the job done and give time to do it. In time, I'm saying, three to five years because If you've got a school, that's struggling. It will take three to five years for you to start to see the results. However, yeah, so often they do not do what they want to see right away. I think sometimes that is the issue with districts. Schools that are struggling do not make progress because the turnover comes from people in the central office. not giving them the time to make that change.

Principal #4 began to share other insights into his professional journey of working in schools in concentrated poverty. He explained:

What I found about working in high poverty school districts is that kids really want to be successful. However, because of the barriers that they face outside of school, they struggle. Parents want their kids to learn. You can find the worst parent in the world, who does not even know how to be a parent. But I guarantee you that they want what is best for their kid. They do not know how so one of the things I focused on a lot, and you can really take this to the central office. See in this day and age because of covid I know and understand that the state in central office puts a lot of emphasis on academics. Okay, because that is what people look at you for. But if people do not stop putting a band-aid on the social-emotional part of everyday life all day. Not just 60 minutes, that was one of the things I was kind of outside the box, let us just put it like that. So, as much social emotion as I could, as much mental health support as I could really, parents help families, and I think, for me, that there's a lot of what helped me.

## **Interview # 5**

Interview participant Principal #5 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 22 years. He has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership. He has been a principal at his current elementary school for five years, and a classroom teacher for seven years and from Region Five. He served as an elementary principal in another private school district as well as in another state prior to entering his current placement.

**Interview #5: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #5's road to becoming a school principal was unconventional and something that he was not interested in doing. He began his career in another state at a private school. He explained:

Actually, I never wanted to be a principal. That was never in a car for me. But a mentor of mine felt that I was great at it. Therefore, we moved from Southern California to Michigan five years ago. But coming out of college, I did not even know. I was going to be a teacher, and then my mentor was the principal of a Christian junior high. He said, come to be a history teacher and baseball coach for me. So, I went and was the history teacher and a baseball coach, and I loved it. I never thought I would get into administration, and then my mentor, five years after I started teaching, was leaving to go to high school, and he said, you are the one, you are gonna replace me. So, I was 25 or 26 years old, maybe 27, and here I was a junior high principal. So I never really wanted to be a principal, but I found



though that it really does play in my strengths. Now that I have done it for 15 years and I can never imagine being back in a classroom and being kind of even though you have the most impact with kids, when you are in the classroom, it just does not mind my strengths and personality. So, I do enjoy being a principal. I say something funny all the time and cut me off Mark if you need me to. I am saying it too, but I really do think that people will expect principals to say for the kids, I am in this for little kids, but really my passion is working with the adults right before front of working with the kids because I feel like it's my job to make sure that I create the conditions for them to be as successful if they can be every day. For their kids. So, it's kind of a funny thing when I tell people that because I think are not you in for the kids? Yes, I meant it for the kids, but really is setting it up to be successful every day for the kids that come in and out of their classrooms.

When explaining his journey to become the principal of his current elementary school. Principal #5 stated:

In Southern California, my experience was at a private junior high school and then in an elementary school in the area, which was highly diverse. So, the elementary school that I ended up working for in California was 75% Hispanic. So, when we moved to Michigan, was it really just about where I could get a job when you were moving across the country? So, my wife was offered seven or eight jobs across West Michigan, she's an autism teacher. So, she got a job and we kind of wanted to be in a specific county, but it's just not where our jobs lined up. So, she got offered a job in another district as an ASD teacher, and then I took a job that was offered as an elementary principal. But then, one year after there was

an opening where we wanted to live, we opened up a job. After being there for one year, we were moving again and there were connections between my current superintendent and my old superintendent. On behalf of my colleagues, I reached out to him saying, Hey, you should hire this guy. So, I'd love to say I sought out my current district, but it's not how it happened for me, but I do love it here. We are 90 plus percent free and reduced lunch.

Principal #5 went into detail on his daily schedule, as well as the major challenges and joys that he experienced as an elementary principal. He stated:

It is probably not a lot different than yours. You show up with a plan of what you are going to do and then you do not end up doing any of that; you end up putting out fires all day. I think of it as it is people first, so we are always dealing with parent issues, student issues, and staff issues. Those are the first things I like to deal with, followed by systems issues. What is working and what is not working with our MTSS for behavior? What is working and not working for our drop-off and pick up? So, just figuring out all the system issues becomes secondary even though those have to be solid for you to be successful as a school, but you have to deal with the people's issues first. In the third part, I always like to talk about storytelling. I often think we do not, as principals and leaders, and schools and districts. We do not often do a good enough job of tooting our horn of the great things that we are doing. So, I would like to think of it in those three buckets: people, systems, and storytelling.

Principal #3 discussed the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on the school that he leads, and the profession in general. He stated:

I would say, coming out of Covid. I do not know if you were the principal there before, during and after Covid. But it's kind of a weird thing as a leader to have gone through Covid and now you are trying to be back to normal. But that is a hard thing to do. You got to have some really strong relationships, and you got to do many things. I do not want to explain, but a lot of things that we were very loose with. Now we are having to tighten back up, and you do not want people to think you are some flakes or jerks. Now that we are trying to get back to normal, I think that's been one of the challenges as a leader. Now you are out of it and we are trying to get back to what we were doing before, and so there's some negotiation there. Luckily, I have an amazing staff here and I think they see the big picture of where we have been and where we are headed, but I do see that as an issue for principals across the board, if they are still in their same building that they were at Covid because so much was different during Covid. It is hard to get some of that back. But really, the people and the kids bring me joy. I love to solve problems. I love to be the pragmatic one in the building, that just helps get things done, makes things efficient when we have great results that just a great way. So that gives me great joy, but even at my current elementary school, the task was different here in building systems, giving me joy. So, we built our MTSS behavior systems up and running, and right now we are focusing on our MTSS academic system this school year. So, those things bring me joy when those things go.

When asked if he was offered a job in a neighboring school district that was more affluent, would he take the position? He stated:

So, if it was just a lateral move but it was a more affluent school, necessarily be looking for that. However, if it was a more affluent school, it was an opportunity to grow professionally. As in a central office position or different responsibilities to me, it is the demographic that would not play a part in that. Therefore, It would be more about the opportunity to grow professionally and the opportunity to grow financially. So, I would not necessarily make a lateral move just to be at a more affluent school. I enjoyed being here for a few years.

**Interview #5: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #5 has worked in two different states, as well as in both the public and private sectors of administration. When asked what type of recommendations he would provide for central office administration on ways to retain principals. He explained:

I would say, make sure you're paying them for that information is at our fingertips? Now you can go on to any number of websites and see in my county who is making what and how much. So, I'd say, make sure you are paying them the best that you can. I would say, make sure you are offering opportunities for growth. In the district, getting to know the principal and maybe what their future plans are and what their desires are for the next one, three, or five years. So that way you have a plan, you end up losing people when you do not offer opportunities for them to grow. So, I'd say make sure they're paid. Make sure you have a growth plan for them and your mentors. So, if there is a principal that wants to go to the business office, make sure there is a mentor that can start bringing them along and showing them the ropes. Also, paying for their

organizational certificate or paying for their superintendent leadership academies.

Fee, or those types of things.

Principal #5 wanted to share his personal feelings towards the role of school principal within a concentrated poverty school district. He stated:

Yeah. That's a good question. You have to have tough skin to succeed in all schools. But I think when you are in high poverty, the school district. You have been able to tolerate a lot. Just this morning. So, just this morning, I am talking to a teacher about literally a student's dad that was killed. We were talking about preparing the students for the school year. I mean that can happen anywhere, but it seems like when you have high poverty, you often have more crime in a neighborhood, and you are just dealing with so many different variables. So, we were preparing to let the new teacher know what this worker needs to know. The student does not know that her dad was killed. She thinks it was some kind of accident talking about wanting to watch the news to see what is going on. So, you have to have things, and you gotta have a huge heart. You have to have a huge heart in any position, but I think that at a high-poverty school, you really need there's just things that you need to be able to do to go above and beyond to support kids.

### **Interview # 6**

Interview participant Principal #6 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 20 years. He has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in Educational Leadership. He was a principal at the school district's high school for two years and

middle school for eight years, and is from Region 4. He will serve as the district's alternative high school principal in the upcoming school year.

**Interview #6: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #6 began the interview by discussing his reasons for transitioning to school administration. He discussed the role of his family in his upbringing and making the transition. He stated:

I came from a family of educators, and so it was kind of a road map to what I was going to be because my aunt was the assistant superintendent and with three other aunts becoming teachers. My mom was the only one of all the sisters that was not in education. So, I kept the traditions going and became a teacher. But, at least I felt that I was holding myself back, and so I knew that one day I wanted to be a principal, so I could deal with all students. I usually stay in my own little world where students must come to me every day. That's why I became an educator basically because it was a family thing. Then, I felt on top of that I could actually do what I had; a lot of my jobs were working with youth in college. That is why, with the road, I was heading down to. I was in the classroom for about six years, and I have been a principal for 14.

Principal #6 explained how he became the principal of the middle school that he led for eight years. He stated:

I recently moved from middle school to our alternative education building. That was just more or less a superintendent decision. Nothing more than less. I was at high school for two years and at middle school for eight.

When examining what a typical day looked like for Principal #6, he discussed the details of his day, the major challenges, and the joy that his position brings. He explained:

Wow, my day is pretty filled first and foremost. My morning begins, and I am just making sure everybody's at work and the building is up to par to receive students. Once I go into that, I must create a morning message of communication. and then after that, pretty much either in meetings, observing teachers, or putting out fires that come up during the day. One that I did not expect or did not even foresee. My major challenges for me here, where I am at? Is it building teacher efficacy? I think my school district is changing. We are good for making technical changes. structures and stuff like that, but cultural changes are needed here. This would be the biggest need for us to make more cultural changes. What brings me joy is seeing the hard work coming to fruition and the end you see. We then went to my middle school position. It allowed me the opportunity to see kids first and follow them to high school. So, I got to see them develop and change over time. Some kids go from real struggling kids to real season-refined individuals. So, I had the opportunity to see their growth and development. It is kind of cool to get to the end, and we are all about higher education; we are all about having goals, even if it is not in college. Go about helping children reach their goals, and when you get to the end and you see a child is reaching their goals, it is no better film.

Principal #6 has worked in a high-poverty school district for 20 years. When asked if he would consider a job offer in a more affluent school district, he explained:

Funny enough, I have had plenty of job offers in other places that were probably less stressful and higher paying. It is funny; most people, most days always say, do not take the easy way out. That is not always the best way. And so, I do not know in the sense that I like challenges. That may be weird, and I think in high poverty, high needs areas, the problems are big. However, the amount of change is great. You can look at it in two ways: an opportunity to really make a big difference. I think it is more or less an opportunity to make a big impact in areas like this. Where is that for me? It is just a huge impact on kids, who have never been on the college campus and I do not know what they want to do with it. With all these issues, it is rewarding to help kids like that. Who has high needs. This is the biggest reward.

**Interview #6: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #6 has worked in the same school district for 20 years, during which time he has led both the middle and high school. When asked what type of recommendations he would provide, he stated:

I think that the biggest challenge that any organization will have, and it's not even schools, it's just organizations, is to focus on how your organizational culture, how you treat, and how you discipline? Honestly, successful corporations are filled with happy people because of the culture of the organization. People love to come to work and they will work their tail off because of the organizational



culture. I think that is the best way in the central office. They are the ones that help to establish that culture. For the organization. We can do it for the building, and our teachers can do it for their class. I can do it from my building overall, the organizational structure, and those national cultures. Is it very important, and how do you treat your staff? How do you develop your staff? Meaning also how you discipline your staff, who say sometimes, and support has to be even. So, I think that organizations that master the cultural part and they put technical structures that help support a positive culture. I think of course, we are not in the profession of money, but I do know that school districts that have this less turnover pay more.

Principal #6 wanted to share another statement pertaining to his journey on school principalship in concentrated poverty school districts. He stated:

The only thing I can say in high-poverty schools, and I think that in any school, but especially in high-poverty schools, the relationship is that you have with your students and your staff? Again, this is the most positive. And the most challenging aspect because in high turnover schools, it is hard to build relationships because kids always think that you are not gonna be there long enough to get to know their name. So, when you have consistency, and they can see it and you are actively trying to build relationships.

### **Interview # 7**

Interview participant Principal #7 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 20 years. She has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership. She has been the principal of the district's elementary school for five

years. She is from a Region 5 school and has been a principal for over 10 years in two different school districts.

**Interview #7: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #7 has been a principal for ten years in two different school districts, and when asked what led to step into the role of school principal, she explained:

That's a great question. First, I started out as a self-contained special education teacher. My first master's is library science. So, I came to my current district as a librarian there for a year, and then they went through a reconfiguration. They no longer needed professional librarians at the elementaries because they only had them in middle school. So then I went to be an intervention specialist and it really was the administrators that I worked with here in my district that made me be, like, maybe I could do that too. So, when I went to do my second master's, my brothers both were like, yeah, we wondered why you did the whole library science thing. You gotta be out there and helped the people. So, sorry, that was a very long answer for a short. The question really was looking at when I transferred the difference in the support of the administrators, the fact that they treated you like a professional, and they wanted to grow your skill set and help you help kids.

When looking at what led Principal #7 to become a school principal within the current school that she was leading, she stated:

I was asked to transfer from one elementary school to my current elementary school because of my special educational background. They, at that time, had two self-contained EI rooms, which was what I was doing in a previous life. So to go there to support, not only those classrooms, but the gen ed teachers, with understanding that they are no matter what class the kids are sitting in their gen ed kids. First, they just happen to have some special education and extra support.

This was the largest elementary school in the district. Last year, we had 535 kids. Principal #7 discussed what a typical day looked like for her, as well as the major challenges and joys she faced daily. She stated:

I would say that everything that is typical is that every day is exciting. That you cannot predict how the day is going to go. But if you look at the routines that we put forth, it's started by the welcoming teachers, then out to do traffic duty and welcome the kids in then, I liked to go to class and you just pop my head even for 10 seconds and say, a good morning to everyone. Check in on those who are getting signed late with gentle reminders to families of: Hey remember that we started at 8:30 and then any meetings that were on schedule and then got into classrooms or supporting students throughout the day. Of course, you got your lunch hour, bus time. Then, you chase kids out of the building and across the parking lots towards a five-lane highway. Yeah, yeah, had your runners and you checked which phase of the moon you are in each day and then whether the low-pressure system was coming through. So, you know which version of an issue to wear. I got to the point that I did not. We had a young man who champions our after-school program, ran out of the champions, and ran a mile down the road.

Trying to get to his grandmother before we finally caught up with him. My major challenge, I think a lot of, is for teachers to meet the needs of children. Getting families connected with the resources they need to be able to help their students and family to be as regulated as possible and then just helping those kiddos whom we seem to have a larger and larger number every year who come to school just regulated and really struggle. And thus impact not only their day but also the day of all 535 kids.

Principal # 7 changed her perception of concentrated poverty school districts when she was asked if she was offered a position in another district, would she accept it? She explained:

That's a tough question. I mean, I will admit several years ago, I conducted interviews around when we had a previous superintendent. He led a certain culture and environment, and I had the opportunity to move to a more affluent district but ended up declining it just because not that I need to be needed but the kids who truly get my heart or the kids that need my efforts the most. Or that I want to pour my blood sweat and literal tears into those kids who do not have everything handed to them? I mean, could I walk over to a neighboring district and get a job and learn about children who go to Spain on their summer vacation? Sure what I will likely be out of my mind to some degree. I guess I prefer to coach a parent rather than deal with a helicopter parent.

**Interview #7: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #7 worked in a variety of school districts and under various leaders. When asked what type of recommendations she would provide to central office leadership to retain principals in high-poverty schools. She stated:

I think, just making sure that, as administrators, we know that the central office has our back, we can call them about an issue or that if we need them here that they respond. That they continue to support us with finding creative funding sources so that it is not just everything dependent on title or 31a. Maintaining a high level of communication and collaboration. So, it's not feeling tapped down but it's actually feeling like our thoughts and our ideas are heard. Something that I do appreciate about our current superintendent is in previous regimes. Just supporting Us in whatever initiative we put forth to try and get kids in the seat because we cannot teach them anything without the resources.

When asked if there were any other items that principal #7 wanted to share about her journey into school principalship. She explained:

Personally, I would not go anywhere else because of that I think in those higher-poverty districts, you have teachers who really are doubled down and fully committed to the kids. I mean that's one of the things that I truly love and treasure about my current school district is with a hundred percent confidence. I could put any teacher in any building that I have been a part of up against anyone, from something that's more affluent, and they would teach them under the table because they have just that feeling in them that they find a way to reach every

child and help them succeed. I think in those higher poverty, there is no such thing as a throwaway child like some of my family members who teach in other districts. They have an IEP, they can go set them in the corner like they do not. I believe all yours are at heart. Always have kids' best interest in mind, but when you have got more kids that need you both academically and emotionally, it helps you to really see where we can get.

### **Interview # 8**

Interview participant Principal #8 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 30 years. She has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership, and is from Region 5. She has been an elementary school principal for the past 15 years. She has also been a teacher and instructional coach within the same district where she is the principal.

**Interview #8: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #8 began her career as an elementary teacher at her current school. When asked what led her to become a school principal, she expressed the following:

I wanted to become a school principal to have a greater impact. I loved what I was doing in my classroom. I have been implementing lifelong guidelines and life skills. That was a pretty miraculous change in the behavior of my students and the community that I developed, and other staff members commented on how positive it was. I wanted to take on another challenge, become an elementary principal, and then implement what I was doing in my classroom schoolwide.

Principal #8 explained that she had become a school principal in the current school that she was leading. She discussed how she made rapid changes from one role to another. She stated:

So, I was a classroom teacher for 15 years at the elementary level, a camp counselor. Before that, and in between summers, I was taking on many leadership positions. During my time as a classroom teacher, I went through a principal academy or leadership academy and then ran a summer school program. I was like the principal in charge of a summer program, and it was a very good experience. So, then I knew I wanted to become a principal. What I did was I interviewed and got the job of an instructional coach. In my district, and then serendipitously, a principal opening happened. Late August. So, I know you are not supposed to quickly jump from job to job. I had just got this instructional coach position, and I was in training for that. So, I told myself if I happen to run into the superintendent, I was gonna ask him for permission to interview, and you just do not run into a superintendent randomly. And that morning I walked into the board office and he was literally in the lobby area. I asked him his thoughts and told him I wanted to do this. He encouraged me to apply. So, I applied for an interview and got a job.

When explaining the typical day for herself, Principal #8 also went into detail on the major challenges and joys that she got from working in a concentrated poverty school district. She explained:

It starts at about 7:30 in the morning, and you wrap up last minute things that you could not do before you left the night before. And then when the staff started coming in, I would always walk the building to make sure I touched the base with

as many people as I could. When the day before the day started depending on the day I would either be in the parking directing traffic getting kids out of their cars, playing traffic cop, or if I had enough people out there, then it was me and other staff members. We would have their second touch-point greeting children as they walked in. Okay, so doing all of that morning greeting, touching the base, announcements, and then you go by what you need to do. What's the hottest thing that needs to happen on a calm day? It would be great to be able to sit down and get some paperwork done, but it would always involve being in and out of classrooms informally or formally observing classroom teachers supporting students dealing with parents. So hard to predict what you are going to do everything. What a principal has to do, and you are doing it in a prioritized way.

Principal #8 also expressed the challenges that she has encountered while she has become a school principal. She stated:

Major challenges would have been changing leadership at the district level and different initiatives. Having to juggle that. At times, there were challenges with resistance, staff are very union, heavy staff. Initiatives of, you are supposed to be an instructional leader, and you are doing your personal best to be that. But what I did not realize was that, I mean, I was an expert in my classroom. Best practices. I was on top of my game, and then you come and you are running a building, and you realize not everyone does the same thing. Finally, trying to get everything done in one day and, of course, extreme student behavior. It is a challenge coming out of the pandemic trying to get a new normalcy. That is a big challenge. What



brings me joy? Knowing or finding out when and then knowing that I have had a positive impact on my parents' lives and staff.

Finally, when asked if she would take a position in another school district that was not classified as a concentrated poverty school district, she stated:

No, I would not. I get emotional because our kids need us, and they need people who have the passion to work in Title I buildings. And I know that I have what it takes to do.

**Interview #8: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

As an educator who has worked in the school principal role for the past 15 school years, principal #8 provided recommendations to the central office on ways to retain leaders within concentrated poverty schools. She stated:

Having ways built in, that you're welcome, supported, and heard. By offering and knowing that you are in a safe place where you can call your boss and know that you can ask questions and not get in trouble. They offer training support to understand what a Title I budget is and how to work together like someone they would encourage. Collegiality, you work together. There was a time several years ago in the district when I first became a principal that we were told not to work with each other on our budgets, as they needed to be different and they better not be copied in the same way, and that was very isolating. So, just to know that we are a group and we are going to work together.

Finally, when asked if principal #8 had any other information that she would like to share about her journey to becoming a school principal. She explained:

I don't think so. You know that I do not care that I have three masters. Who cares your education is not going to be impactful in this role? You must have a mind, heart, and passion.

### **Interview # 9**

Interview participant Principal #9 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 34 years. She has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education and a Master of Arts in educational leadership and is from Region Five. She has been an elementary school principal for the past 13 years at the same school within the same school district. She began her career as a teacher within the Catholic school system in Region Five and wanted to grow within her profession.

**Interview #9: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

Principal #9 began her career within the Catholic school system as an elementary school teacher. She knew that she needed to return to school and decided to obtain her master's degree in both reading instruction and educational leadership. In 2001, she stepped into the role of the school principal. She stated:

So, I graduated with my elementary assertive certification, and I backed in there were not a whole lot of jobs. I graduated in 1979, and so I started a Catholic school, and I decided to get my master's because I wanted to learn more about reading, but they were offering master's and reading and learning disabilities. So, I took them together and then I took some time off. I hope this is not too much. I took some time, but you kind of have to sell the story. I took some time off about

18 months ago because I had a child. And at that time, I completed my master's and found this job for an early childhood special ed program of which I did not have their early childhood endorsement. So, I went back, and they hired me for temporary approval. I went back to school, and I was working in that program and the director at the time. I must recognize some leadership potential I had and encourage me to pursue that, maybe the lead teacher of the program, but also encourage me to pursue getting my ed. specialist. At the time, I was not sure what I would do with it and started. I got that through a local university, and it was interesting as I got to know the people in the program. I remember thinking to myself I am a little different from all these people. I am not afraid to talk to people. I was a little quieter, and now I am a little more reserved, and I thought I did not know. I have that skill, but my father was a principal, and I went with my dad. It's more like me, so I kept on with it, and then I was totally encouraged by that mentor. That encouraged me to take the classes and then, our special ed director, really kept telling me. He thought he saw that in me, and then it ended up with the superintendent. They all ended up in my office one day and said, hey we want you to become principal and they just kept at me and I felt like that their confidence in me led me in the direction.

Principal #9 began as the principal of a K-5 elementary school in her leadership journey.

However, the school district went through configuration, and with her extensive background in Early Childhood Special Education, she began leading a K-1 building. She explained:

So, I started out at an elementary school at the time that the principal left, in October. That is why they were kind of after me to do that and then the district

when about four or five years later went under this huge reconfiguration and my early childhood brought background, kind of led me to become the principal of the pre-K-one building of which I have the principal role. But this year, we are now reconfiguring again, and as of this year, I will be the principal of a pre-k-6 building. Yep. So, I am kind of excited. I have one of the things I loved about when I was a K-5, principal, it's different. I love children of all ages, but the fourth and fifth graders you really developed a more mature relationship with than you do the younger ones. So, I am looking forward to that again.

Principal #9 went into detail, explaining her daily and weekly routines. She also described the major challenges and joys that she experienced in her role as a school principal. She explained:

A typical day. Honestly, you probably know this. There is no typical day for the principal; I am very out in the building. So, I am always there, greeting the children, unloading children in the cars. At the end of that, I am in the lunchroom. I support behavior all day long, but I do have a really nice behavior team. So, I have had to do a little less of that being in classroom observations. Unfortunately, for me, we are a small district. So, I am also the person that does all the federal and state grants, and then I am the SCECH coordinator. So, I do sometimes get pulled into things that really are not in the principal's job. So, a lot of long hours, but my typical day is just, literally, being in classrooms being there to greet the support of the children forming relationships with them. Therefore, challenges, just juggling. Thus, the minutia stuff that is not really in the job. The paperwork, the things, the district puts on you and that, and what you really want to be doing is just being the leader for the buildings I think. Juggling to keep everyone happy,

making sure they have what they need. Particularly since we have been moving buildings, I kind of feel a little like olive oil. I am being pulled in many different directions, so probably just that and just never trust trying to find time to take care of yourself.

Principal #9 continued on discussing the daily routines that she commits to. However, she talks about the need for balance and joy in her position. She stated:

The balance I guess if I had to say it also, we are definitely a high poverty school district and the children coming to us, definitely have had a lot of trauma in their lives. So, just helping those students get what they need and dealing with the behaviors that they're demonstrating in a positive way. I am not a principal that's into sending children home and that can be a challenge because the staff sometimes want that, but I believe in restorative practices and helping the children learn from their mistakes and giving them lots of support because they have been through a lot. What brings me joy? I have been getting a lot of pressure from my family about retirement. And there's this one part that looks really good to me, just not having to be so busy and thinking so much, but I just love my job. I love the children. I love leading staff and hiring new staff. This year, it has become a huge one. So, I hired 12 teachers this year and about six of them, our brand new out of college and it is bringing me that is probably right now, what is bringing their enthusiasm, it's absolutely my happy spot right now. I am actually delaying my retirement a little. I just want the chance to work with them. I think I can do this. In my retirement, I want to work with young teachers. I love it.

Just like many school districts, Principal #9's district went through financial struggles about five years ago. This provided an interesting response to the question, if offered another job in a more affluent school district, would you take it? She explained:

So, we have been through some hard times in the school district financially. We had to go to the state MBE, and it was a very difficult time in the district.

Probably, I'd say about seven or eight years ago, and many of our principals left. I definitely thought seriously about this. It was late in my career, but I think I am just meant to be a principal and a high poverty school district. It's my calling. So, I am sure if I had done it early on in my career, I would have thought it was good to have that variety of experience. But when I first was hired back in 1987, it was not a high poverty school district. So, I feel like I did get that experience and then over the years, it's gone that way, but I feel like it's my calling. So, I think that's what's kept me from moving and then I have people I have worked with here for just years. I think it is the relationships that I have. I am a home kind of person, and this feels like home to me.

**Interview #9: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #9 has been in the field of education since 1979, working within the same school district. She has held many roles during her tenure, all within the realm of the elementary setting. When asked what types of recommendations she would have for central office administrators on ways to retain school principals, she stated:

The building leader knows what one needs to run a school. Even some of our central office staff members that used to work in schools are slowly losing touch

with what is going on in the school. Understanding that giving the teachers what they need is what is going to make them successful? For example, we obtained a new bond. And so a lot of renovations and the central office is becoming very out of touch with what educators need. For instance, I heard all these new teachers have no phones. They have no laptops, they have no Promethean boards, they have no chromebooks, and they keep saying they can just start with relationship building for the first six weeks. I think it is just getting out of touch with what you need to be a teacher and how important it is. Also, to value and appreciate principals. That's, I think my gift as a principal is that I realize that every staff member has a gift that they can give to the building. I empower everyone to use these gifts. And I just feel like the central office needs to do that. Even with the principals, we all just every now and then need someone to say WOW, you are doing a good job.

Principal #9 shared many experiences that she encountered during her tenure as a school principal. When asked what other comments she would like to state about the retention of school principals in concentrated poverty school districts, she explained:

I think that the most important thing, and I actually reiterate that with my staff all, the time is to not judge and to have a deep understanding of our families when they do not turn in homework, or they do not turn in paperwork, that you need to realize that their lives something might have happened. Having things that are much more important, like getting food on the table and things like that. I feel like in high-poverty school districts, you really have to work hard with the staff to understand and have compassion and empathy for the families and then develop

those relationships early on with them. So that when you do have to, maybe give them some bad information, they will be more accepting. Just getting to know them, understanding where they are coming from. Knowing that they are vulnerable to anything you say to them makes them feel like maybe they are not being a good parent and they all love their children, they all do. It's just, they do not always have the same resources that we had growing up, so that I guess would be it.

### **Interview # 10**

Interview participant Principal #10 has been in the K-12 educational setting for over 25 years. She has both a Bachelor of Science degree in elementary education, a Master of Arts in educational leadership, and a Masters in reading education. She has been an elementary school principal for the past 18 years in the same school in which she was a teacher. Her career began as a classroom teacher; however, with a break in her career to have her son, she stepped back into the role and eventually became the principal of the building.

**Interview #10: Research Question #1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principals in this type of school?**

When she entered the field of public education, she was placed within a group of veteran teachers who were go getters in their craft. The ambition that her fellow teachers displayed allowed her to grow quickly in her experiences. Principal #10 also had the opportunity to have a mentor who guided her through the process of obtaining her master's degree. She explained:

I worked with a school full of people who were leaders in making. And so, I had an acting principal who was on her path to becoming my future principal. My



building was a Title building, and it was literally a hallway. So, everyone in that building was always heavily invested in what is best for kids, but also in what we are going to do in our futures. So, when I was assigned my first teaching position, I had three days before the year started, and then I worked with this team will call them “Go Getters” and they were immediately like, okay, if you started your masters, and I said, I just started my job. So, by the end of my first school year, I enrolled in my master’s program. I will call it a group of mentors where they just kind of coached you, and when I started my program, I took the ed leadership route. Initially, I was looking at the curriculum in a school improvement piece; I do not know how much information you want. So, as I did my program, you are young. I was literally 23–24 and the counselor at Eastern said you are so young. They're going to eat you alive in leadership. So, we're gonna have you a hundred credit hour internship on top of your master's program. So, I did that, and I did that embedded in the school, and the interim principal then became a principal in another building, and I followed her with my grade level teammate.

Principal #10 discusses the transition that she took to enter the field of leadership. She explained:

So then, she became my mentoring coach and continued to progress from principal to district central office to assistant superintendencies things like that. So, I always had these role models and mentors who put kids first but also kept you on your path to keep rising up. When I finished my program, I told them to my counselor and point person from the university and that principal at the time, they were complimenting the good work that I had done and all that I had experienced. I said, teaching and making right decisions for kids and families and

teaching is inhaling and exhaling for me. At this point, I am going to continue my path as a strong teacher leader in the building, and I was doing community work in the district, and all of these things. I am going to let this develop as I hone leadership skills. So, I kind of pressed pause on going any further, but I also was 27 at the time. Then, I was married and had back-to-back children, and literally everything on the shelf and stayed home. When I returned, I came to a building where my son was already in the district. I kind of kept quiet about my skill set prior to my life as a mom, and as things unrolled in the district kept taking on buildings that were closed and increased in size. There was an opportunity for an assistant's principal position. And I make the decision to say, I need to see if this is so. As much as I love the classroom. I took verses applying for the open principal jobs in the district I applied for the AP job. Once I was awarded an AP job, I never looked back. I have always loved the role that you play as a guide in the leadership realm. The year after I was the AP, the principal job became vacant here, and this is my 13th year.

Principal #10 returned after giving birth to her children with a master's in educational leadership, two young children, and yearning to begin her career again. The route she took to get to her current school was as follows.

What led me to be in the school that I am now is because my son was five years old, already going to this school. When I was returning to teaching, in the district, and I am not sure about your district, but I am sure you are familiar with the words, seniority. Okay, so while I was at home, the building that I formerly worked at was closed, so I had enough seniority to make my choice of buildings. I

was looking at returning to teach with my peers, with whom I had formally taught, in a different building. So, I had a five-year-old at home praying dear Lord, please do not let my mommy put me in a latchkey, please let her come teach at my school. So, then I chose this school and I was a teacher here for eight years. So again, you build those community connections and make a life choice instead of diving right into the principalship to see what I liked or disliked as AP. The AP job has its own set of challenges because I had strong connections, and I had a reputation with the community already as a teacher, but you are also, then being elevated to be the one that the person you were here with in the teacher's launch. Now, I have to see you as the leader of the building. So, that was transformative and bumpy at times because at times there's a conflict of how do you really know more than I do? And then, the way that all played out was you go through the trials and challenges with them and, on the other hand, you have been the one that has led people through it and above it, to the next step. Thus, there are sometimes months and challenges to their bumps and challenges.

When describing a typical day for her as a principal, Principal #10 described the major challenges and joys that she experienced on a regular basis. However, she also talked about the relationships that she built with each of the families in her school, and how that made her successful. She explained:

I am going to start with what brings me? Joy is always their smile. However, what else brings me joy is that I do consider it a privilege and honor to hold this position because not everyone is walking in the door smiling. I am giving the opportunity to help that student and help that family. If help begins to take root, it

impacts someone's overall well-being toward the good for a lifetime, not just for a moment. Therefore, even during struggles, I find joy because we are privileged. We are inviting it to be a part of someone's life, and they are with us for their day. So, my joyful day starts as soon as you get in the door. First, you are making sure everything is staffed, before you get on campus, unless you are spending the night here, waking up. So, just making sure everything's covered and managed so that you are maintaining safety and being across the building. Then, as soon as you get here, you are listening to the ear or you are that calming presence, or you are that greeter and that person that the staff are connecting with. So, a great staff member and then arrival starts. So, you are listening to families as you are greeting the students. After arrival, I am doing a building walk through where you pop into every classroom. Again, you already have your list, and maybe you are able to see that kiddo, right away as they're bringing their breakfast out of the classroom. And so, you are making those natural connections that need to happen, and you are moving everything forward. And it's about connecting in and checking emails, phone calls with your secretary before, getting into that lunch, And again, in and out for the lunch and we have three here by the way, and all of those transitions, you are always weaving in that part, where you are checking on you are looking at learning in your classroom.

Principal #10 discusses the impact that societal issues have had on the students in her building.

She continued explaining:

Therefore, these pieces are also woven in again, the level of trauma and crisis that we were experiencing last year. Often led to just being in your office until the

child's family came. I am part of the dismissal as well present during dismissal.

When I camp in the middle of the day because here in our elementary school, we do not have APS anymore, so I was the AP, and then I became the principal without one. For, they made financial cuts that, as I went up, they were balancing budgets. So that's been interesting, too. So, you are doing all your discipline.

Whenever planning, I try to ensure that those calls were made before dismissal.

All the other parents call where they are reaching out to me with a concern or something like that. It happens where I end my day on campus, and it has taken to build the understanding with the community that if I cannot respond to you at 8:02, when you called it 801, it does not mean I am not hearing. This means that their priorities and once little people are on campus that is the number one. It took time for the community to be okay. That probably took about seven years of work because they want to call and they want to instant, or they want to pop it. If you are not going to call me, I am coming up. If you are not calling me, I am calling the central administration, and I am okay, the end results will be the same. I just want to ensure that I have the time to give you my full and undivided attention because it is my need at that moment. When few people are on campus, you have to be the priority, and so they tend to end up agreeing on that. Therefore, this takes a long time.

The major challenges that Principal #10 discussed, looked at the imbalance that she faces daily.

She explained:

My major challenge is always balancing everything. and. So over in my corner. I want to turn on the screen. Can I turn the screen? If you look in the corner

between the heart and the Mustang, you will see the rack card that we wrote ourselves from Memphis. Then, the stones that are next to it are. These are the stones that I have skipped with my kids across the Great Lakes and the beaches of the Great Lakes, and then you put them in your pocket because I am a science geek like that. And I pulled that card out and I dusted that off because I am encouraging all the teachers to create calming corners, calming spaces, and then teaching kids about how we calm ourselves down in the context of our room. What does that look like and part of our teaching and modeling? So, that they know when they're upset that is something they can do and you are not trying to force a kid to go to the calming corner when they're already heightened?

Principal #10 worked in the same school district for her entire career. When asked whether she was presented with a principal position in a more affluent school district, would she accept it? She explained:

Okay, I do not want to be judged by my response. We have a set of skills. Although it is more challenging at times from a human perspective, I do not know because there are other challenges that are going to happen in that district, I believe my skill set to support people of poverty is a skill set. That brings about results and that is where my strengths lie. So, if I had the opportunity to leave my school and go to the neighboring district, who does not have that challenge? I would have to have a strong incentive or personal reason for why I would do so. Otherwise, I would not do it.

**Interview #10: Research Question #2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain leaders in a concentrated poverty school?**

Principal #10 has been a mother, teacher, master's student, assistant principal, and principal during her educational career. She was asked what type of recommendations she would offer to central office administrators on ways to retain school principals in concentrated schools. She offered:

There must be proper supports in the buildings, which was one of the challenges last year. The district at the time did not have gen ed social workers, and both of my special ed social workers were out on leave. There was literally no one to support students in the struggling moment. Systemically, they had access to social workers. So, when I started as an AP and I was able to title a fun position and I had someone coming back into the field, or a certified counselor and at that time, I had 701 students, and it was manageable because those that were struggling could plug into the support that they needed. Therefore, there is a definite need for proper resources in high-poverty areas. The connection pieces. I cannot be an admin, and the person researching for the family who is experiencing homelessness, how to connect to the resources they need. Right. I also cannot necessarily be the person who is sitting on the phone and listening to what you need for 30 minutes. Then, there becomes that, they are different levels and stages for. Do you have resources and support for students? Do you have resources and support in the building? What pieces or tools are you using to gather that information for the need so that you are funding the right need? So, what are you systemically doing to keep monitoring and plugged in to determine how the

money should be used? However, how are you assigning that money to make sure you are addressing the need?

Finally, when asked what other information she would like to share pertaining to her educational journey in a concentrated poverty school district. Principal #10 shared:

I think I have shared a lot. I will tell you that my connection to MEMSPA and people like you and seeing me because the teaching from my mentors is invaluable, it is transformative. If you take what they have taught us and apply it in your PD sessions, with your staff, right. It is transformative; they fund things like that so that I can continue to be plugged into what I consider a lifeline.

#### **Chapter Four Summary**

Chapter Four presents ten participant profiles from my research. Each principal was selected utilizing purposeful sampling, providing that they each met the criteria of the research. Each participant participated in a semi-structured interview and answered six questions at a time and location, at their convenience. Chapter Five will explore the data and research findings from each participant.



## CHAPTER V

### RESULTS

This chapter presents the major themes generated from the 10 principal participant interviews. All ten interviews were conducted with principals who had worked in a concentrated poverty school for at least five years. Elementary, middle, high, alternative, and virtual principals are represented within this research. The study's conceptual framework and interview questions were closely aligned using Locke's (1976) definition of job satisfaction. The definition of job satisfaction was integrated with the seven "areas" from the research data. A constant comparison approach was used to analyze the data from the participants' transcribed responses. The semi-structured interview protocol allowed participants the opportunity to elaborate on their personal experiences, as they responded to each individual question that was asked.

#### **Presentation of Themes**

Locke's (1976) work on job satisfaction focused on the emotions that come into play within a person's work environment. His range of affect theory allows individuals the ability to have different emotions for different aspects of their jobs. I have aligned my findings into four broad areas: (a) School Leadership Aspirations, (b) Concentrated Poverty Leadership, (c) Managing Daily Challenges, and (d) Central Office Recommendations. These four areas directly align with the semi-structured interview questions as they pertain to the conceptual framework model presented earlier in this paper. Table 2 summarizes the major themes, where six or more participants offered data that matched each major theme, and the sub-themes, where three to five principals offered data.

Table 2

*Major Themes and Sub-themes*

Themes and Sub-Themes	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8	#9	#10
<b>A. School Leadership Aspirations</b>										
A1: Classroom Teacher Curiosity	X				X		X	X	X	X
<i>A1:1: Non-Traditional placement in administration</i>			X	X	X					
A2: Challenge of stepping into leadership role		X	X		X		X		X	X
<i>A2:2: Assistant Principal and Interim Principal</i>		X	X			X				X
<b>B. Concentrated Poverty Leadership</b>										
B1: Professional Growth Opportunities	X		X		X		X	X		X
B2: Promotion within School District		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
<i>B2:1: Involuntary Transfers</i>						X	X	X		
<b>C. Managing Daily Challenges</b>										
C1: Climate and Culture of Building	X		X	X	X		X			X
<i>C1:1: Student Behavior</i>	X		X		X			X		
C2: Demands of the Position	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X
<i>C2:1: Societal constraints for families</i>		X	X				X		X	
<b>D. Central Office Recommendations</b>										
D1: Leadership Support from Superintendent	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	
<i>D1:1: Growth Opportunities</i>						X	X			X
<i>D1:2: Resource Allocation</i>	X			X						X
<i>D1:3: Collaboration</i>				X				X	X	

## **School Leadership Aspirations**

Lacey (2003) defined school leadership aspirations as the level and type of position teachers ultimately hope to attain. Each principal described their specific background as pertaining to education. Many principals described how family was the main driving factor in entering the field; however, others described different routes to education.

**Major Theme A1: Classroom teachers' curiosity of administration.** During the semi-structured interview process, six school principals mentioned key data that identified their curiosity of becoming a school administrator when they were within their teaching career. Principal #1 discussed his fascination with what was happening in school. He discussed how when he was a classroom teacher, he was interested in what took place in the office daily. He discussed, "I was always interested in, curious about what was happening in the big picture outside my four walls, this led me to pursuing a career in administration."

Principal #5 never intended to enter the field of school administration, he claimed that it was not in the "cards for me." However, he discussed how he had a mentor who discussed the different roles that school leaders can play. He discussed how the role of the school leader played in his strengths:

I never really wanted to be a principal, but I found that it really did play into my strengths. I wanted to create a successful learning environment when I was teaching. I wondered if I could do so as a principal? My passion was to inspire me when I was a teacher. I wondered if I could do that as a principal?

He discussed the impact of his mentor in creating an interest in entering the leadership field. The children were the driving force for his passion for teaching; however, he wanted to have the

same passion for when he entered administration. He stated, “being in the classroom did not play to my strengths and my personality.”

Principal #7 entered the field of education with the experience of a self-contained special education teacher. She also had a master’s degree in library science. She discussed how she was placed as an intervention specialist during the reconfiguration process. She stated:

When I became an intervention specialist, I worked with some really strong and powerful administrators. I thought to myself that I could do it as well. So, I went back to school to get my second master’s in school administration. My family kept asking why I got my first master’s in library science. When I look back, it is kinda funny.

She discussed the impact that former principals had on the success she had in transitioning from teacher to school principal. She stated, “they treated me like a professional and wanted me to grow my skill set to help kids.”

Principal #8 began her career as an elementary school teacher and loved making a daily impact on her students. She was always curious about what a school principal does and the impact that the position can have on the school building. She stated:

I wanted to become a school principal to have a bigger impact. I loved what I was doing in my classroom, and I wanted another challenge.

Principal #9 began working in the Catholic school system in the late 1970s, and it was a different time in public education. She received her first master’s degree in reading instruction, with an emphasis on learning abilities. After taking time off to start a family, she returned to the education field as a teacher in the early childhood education program. She stepped into a small

director role and noticed that she had leadership skills and was nervous about taking the leap. However, she stated:

I was encouraged by the special education director and the superintendent who ended up in my office one day, and they said you need to become our next principal and that confidence grew. This led me into the direction of school leadership.

Principal #9 also came from a family of school educators and even a few school principals. She was exposed to the lifestyle, but was curious about the demands of the position. Eventually, along with support she took the step into position.

Principal #10 worked in a school that, as she described, was a group of “leaders in the making.” She had many colleagues who encouraged her to take the step into leadership, even though she was not entirely sure that was her desire. She was a young principal and often questioned by others about why she had taken the position. However, curiosity and working with “go getters” led her to enter the field.

***Sub-theme A1:1: Non-traditional placement in administration.*** Three principals noted that their placement in the role of administrator was non-traditional in nature. However, each principal shared the non-traditional steps taken by their respective school districts.

Principal #3 began her career as an elementary school teacher and then transitioned to an instructional coach in the same school district. Her non-traditional route was unique; she stated:

We were interviewing a principal in my building, and we interviewed several people. We did not find anyone that we loved, and after the interview process, several of the people on the team suggested to the superintendent at the time, why cannot Principal #3 be the principal? At that time, I did not have a master’s degree

in administration, so after one year as an interim principal, I went back and got my master's degree in administration.

She expressed how she was not even interested in the role of principal; however, she did like to support staff in a variety of ways.

Principal #4 began her career as a business teacher and was the “acting” principal when her leader came from the building. She initially did not want to step into the role; however, once an opening arose in her district, she was approached by the superintendent with his intent to place her in that position. Thus, without a traditional application and interview process, she became principal.

Principal #5 discussed that he was hand-selected by his principal at the time as his replacement. He stated:

Coming out of college, I did not even know that I was going to be a teacher, and then a mentor of mine was a principal of a Christian junior high school. He said come teach history for me, so I did. Five years after being a teacher, my mentor was leaving to go to the local high school, and he said, you are the one who is going to replace me. The next thing I knew I had was his replacement.

**Major Theme A2: Challenge of stepping into a leadership role.** Six principals wanted to grow within their professional careers and wanted to challenge themselves as they took steps in school administration. Principal #2 loved the challenge of providing more opportunities to the students she served as the career and technical education director. She stated, “My reason for going into this position and even coming to this district was the challenge of opening up avenues for kids and to let them see that there are still people out there that care and want them to succeed.”

Principal #3 was unsure if she wanted to enter the field of school administration; however, during her year as an interim principal, she loved the challenge that each day brought her. She explained, “I always knew that I loved working with people, however, the challenge of becoming a school principal was never something I wanted to take on.”

Principal #5 never wanted to be a school principal, he stated “the job played into my strengths as an educator, I could never imagine the impact that I have on the kids. I enjoy the challenge as it plays into my strengths and personality.” He has been a principal for 15 years and enjoys the challenge of “creating conditions in my school for all to be and feel successful every single day.”

Principal #7 started her career as a self-contained special education teacher and has a master’s degree in library science. She had no desire to enter the administrative field. She stated, “I went on to become an intervention specialist, and it really was the other administrators that I worked with that made me think, I could do that too. I loved the challenges that the position brings and how each day looks different.”

Principal #9 had support from her direct supervisors, as they saw potential in her to become a school leader. She was not sure; however, she stated:

I am not afraid to talk in front of people, and I have the skills to be a principal.

My father was a former principal who explained all the challenges that the job brought. I thought to myself, hey, I could do that!

Principal #10 explained that she wanted the opportunity to challenge herself as she became a school leader. She stated, “Initially I wanted the principal job, but then I decided that I wanted to continue my path as a strong teacher leader in the building and working with my

community.” She began as an assistant principal for one year prior to taking on the position of school principal in the same building.

***Sub-Theme A2:2: Assistant Principal and Interim Principal routes.*** Four school principals took the route of an assistant or interim principal prior to stepping into the role of the school principal. Principal #2 began her career as a business teacher and grew in her craft:

I was able to generate new programs and access our students in a poverty school.

From there, it was knowing how I could handle and manage students, being a person to kids and parents. That drive pushed me even further, and therefore, I was put in an assistant principal role working with discipline.

Principal #3 was a teacher and instructional coach prior to stepping into the role of the school principal. She explained:

The superintendent asked me if I would be interested in trying my position as an interim principal for one year. I had young children at the time, so I went home and talked with my husband and tried it for one year.

Principal #6 came from a family of educators, some of whom held administrative roles, and he kept the tradition going. He stated, “I became an educator, basically because it was a family thing. I felt I could make a difference and started out as an assistant principal for three years.” Principal #10 also started her administrative journey as an assistant principal. She stated, “As much as I love the classroom, I took opportunities to apply for open principal jobs and started with an AP job. Once I was awarded the AP job, I never looked back.”

### **Concentrated Poverty Leadership**

Quillian (2012) describes concentrated poverty as an area in which a high proportion of residents are poor. All principals worked in a concentrated poverty school and had been in the



school for a minimum of five years. All the principals described how they were placed in the current school they lead.

**Major Theme B1: Professional Growth Opportunities.** The first major theme that emerged from the principal interviews was the utilization of growth opportunities to become a school principal within a concentrated poverty school. Six principals shared their experiences with growth opportunities when transitioning to concentrated poverty schools. Principal #1 became a middle school principal initially within his district; however, he stated:

I was always curious about what was happening at the high school level. So, an opportunity came open for me to grow, and I transferred to the alternative high school principal position. This is where I have been for 14 years now.

Principal #3 discussed how she was born and raised in the same city where her elementary school is located. She discussed how she spent one year as an interim principal after stepping away from teaching. She explained, “I enjoyed the interim principal role and wanted to continue to grow, so I went back and got my master’s degree and that’s how I became a principal.” Principal #5 was initially a baseball coach and then a history teacher; he had no ambition to become a school principal. He relocated from California and stated:

When we moved to Michigan, it was time to find an administrative job, and where could that happen when moving across the country? I took a job as an elementary principal in a high-poverty area, as we are 90% free and reduced lunch.

Principal #7 began as an elementary teacher in special education. She was initially a librarian, as she had a master’s degree in library science. After her position was cut, she stated, “they didn’t need professional librarians at the elementary’s anymore, so I decided it was time to grow and step into an intervention specialist position.” During her role as an intervention

specialist, she got her second master's in school leadership and took her first administrative position. When asked about her placement within the current concentrated poverty school where she works, she stated the following:

I wanted to play an administrative role, so I was asked to move from one elementary school to my current school. Initially, it was because of my special education background, but this school is the largest elementary school in the district. This allowed me to lead and impact more staff and children daily.

Principal #8 had a unique opportunity as she enrolled in a leadership academy. She stated, "I was the principal of a summer program, and it was a very good experience, so I know that I wanted to become a principal." She started as an instructional coach in her district and wanted to grow up in her career. She explained:

I told myself if I saw the superintendent, I would ask him for his permission to interview for a principal job. That next morning, I walked into the board office, and he was there and encouraged me to apply. I interviewed for the position and got it!

Principal #10 explained that "I was looking to return to teaching and to teach with my peers that I formally taught with, so I returned to the same building as my son." After returning to work Principal #10 became an assistant principal in the same building. She stated "the AP job has its own set of challenges, but because I had strong connections and a positive reputation in the community, it was a smooth transition.

However, she remained an assistant principal for less than one year. She discussed how she became the principal in the school where she was a teacher and assistant principal. She explained:

I wanted to be elevated to the one position that was at the top; I finally saw myself as the leader of the building. First, I was a colleague and now I am the one that has to lead people through all the bumps and challenges of education.

**Major Theme B2: Promotion within the School District.** Seven principals received promotions within the school districts in which they were working. Each principal was either a teacher, instructional coach, or assistant principal. Principal #2 began as an assistant principal in another school district that struggled with financial issues. She was told, “I was going to be the assistant principal and the CTE director without additional pay.” She decided to take a different job from that of her current school district. She began as an assistant principal at high school and was promoted to the principal of the K-12 virtual academy. She explained “with two administrators in the high school and only one was needed, this position was generated for me.”

Principal #3 was a teacher in her current school district prior to stepping into the role of an instructional coach in a different building. She took the position of interim principal after, as she stated:

We interviewed the principals and several applicants. We did not find anybody that we loved and after the interview process ended, several people who were on the team suggested to the superintendent at that time, why can’t Principal #3 be our leader?

She was then promoted to full-time principal upon completion of the interim period. She explained “I tried it for a year, and I enjoyed it, so I went back and got my master’s degree and that is how I became the principal.”

Principal #4 began his educational career in one school district and then left for another district. However, he stated:

I was looking as if my old district was starting to have some financial struggles.

My old district was looking for a middle school principal. I moved from being a teacher in one district to returning to the same district years later as a principal.

Principal #6 discussed how he was a middle school principal in his district for eight years. He stated “I was moved from middle school principal to our alternative education high school principal position as a promotion. It was just more or less a superintendent decision, nothing more, and nothing less. Principal #7 shared a similar promotion from one elementary school to the largest elementary school in the district. She explained:

I was transferred from one elementary school to my current elementary school because of my special educational background.

She explained that she was “brought in there to support, not only the self-contained classrooms, but also the general education teachers and the understanding that they are all our kids.”

Principal #8 held many leadership positions before becoming a school principal. She explained “I knew I wanted to become a principal, so what I did was to interview for and get a job as an instructional coach.” However, she stepped into the role of school principal after she stated, “I asked my superintendent for permission to apply for a principal position, he gave me his blessing and I got the job!”

Principal #9 experienced a reconfiguration of the school buildings in her school district. She began as an elementary special education teacher; however, as she stated:

I started as an elementary teacher, but my principal left in October. They were kind of after me to be a principal of the preK-1 building, which I did for five years. However, after a huge reconfiguration, I was promoted to lead the district’s largest building, which was a preK-6 building.

***Sub-Theme B2:1: Involuntary Transfers.*** Three school principals stated that they were involuntarily transferred to the building where they currently lead. Principal #6 led the district's high school for two years before being placed in the same district middle school. However, after eight years, he states, "I was recently moved from middle school to our alternative education building. That was it, nothing more and nothing less."

Principal #7 has a special educational background and began her career in leadership as a principal in elementary school. After three years of leading one elementary school in the district, she stated:

I was told that I was being transferred from one elementary school to my current elementary school because of my special educational background. At that time, the building had two self-contained EI rooms and that was what I was doing in a previous life, so I was moved.

Principal #8 had been a classroom teacher for 15 years at the elementary level. She was also a camp counselor before being a school administrator. She stated, I knew that I wanted to become a principal," so she started her journey in leadership as an instructional coach. However, prior to taking the role of an instructional coach, she was sought out to be the principal. She explained:

My superintendent encouraged me to apply for this position, stating that I was their top choice and that he would place me there. So, I went through the process and was immediately placed at my current building.

### **Managing Daily Challenges**

Locke (1976), who defines job satisfaction as "a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences" (p. 1304), describes the daily

challenges that leaders face. The principals transitioned to their leadership roles and faced the challenges of this position.

**Major Theme C1: Climate and Culture of the Building.** Six school principals discussed the impacts that the climate and culture of their buildings created for them. These principals discussed different ways in which they managed the challenge. Principal #1 works in an alternative education high school and explains “the major challenges are with some behaviors throughout the course of the week. The behaviors can be dealing with illegal, violent, or even dangerous situations.” He continued to explain “these situations are very basic situations and do not happen daily.”

Principal #3 shares her experiences with the challenges, climate, and culture of the building she leads. She stated:

I know we have kids that come in with problems from the night before on the bus, and that is something I have to deal with right away. I am dealing with family situations or situations from the bus or kids that need for or kids that need extra attention. I am trying to take care of the children getting engaged.

She continues to explain how “some kids are on my caseload, we say, because they just do better with me then some of the behavior team.” Principal #3 deals with lunch and recess issues daily as she attempts to establish a clear positive climate and culture of the building.

Principal #4 discussed his daily routine and the practices he utilized to establish a positive climate and culture of the building. He stated:

I was pretty much outside meeting and greeting students, either getting dropped off or getting off the bus. From there, I always made announcements, even at the high school level, because I always wanted to end on a positive note. I make my

rounds and speak to everyone, including the cafeteria, custodial, and instructional staff.

He discussed how he was outside on recess duty and in the hallways every passing time at all levels that he led. He explained, “Anytime the bell rang, or if elementary passing time, I’m in the hallway.”

When he arrives at work, Principal #5 has a plan for what he plans to accomplish for the day. He stated, “you show up with a plan of what you’re going to do and then you don’t end up doing any of that, you end up putting out fires all day long.” He discussed the systems that he established in his building. He stated, “Just figuring out all the system issues becomes secondary, even though those have to be solid for you to be successful as a school, but you have to deal with people’s issues first.”

He discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the climate and culture of his building. He explained:

It is kind of a weird thing as a leader to have gone through Covid, and now you are trying to be back normal. But that is a hard thing to do. You got to have some really strong relationships and you got to do a lot of things.

He discussed the need to “tighten up” without looking like either a flake or jerk.

Principal #7 discussed the welcoming of teachers and students as part of the daily routine in her building. She explained, “I start by welcoming teachers, then out to do traffic duty and welcome the kids. I then like to go to every class just to pop my head in even for 10 seconds and say good morning to everyone.” In her elementary school she explained the impact that weather played on her school setting and how “checking which phase of the moon you are in each day and whether the low-pressure system was coming through.”

Principal #10 explained the impact of her position within the school setting. She stated, “I do consider it a privilege and honor to hold this position because not everyone is walking in the door smiling. I am giving the opportunity to help that student and that family.” She continued to explain the daily routines of a school principal and how her “joyful day starts as soon as you get to the door.” She discussed how she would “enter each classroom listening to families and greeting students.” She explained the impact of this positivity on the climate and culture of the building. She stated, “the joy in their smiles is my top privilege.”

***Sub-Theme C1:1: Student behavior.*** Four school principals discussed the impact of student behavior on the daily challenges of being a school leader. Principal #1 discussed “the major challenges are with some behaviors throughout the course of the week. The behaviors can be illegal, violent, or even dangerous in situations.” He went on to discuss that the “situations are very basic, but time consuming.”

Principal #3 discussed how she checked in with her behavior team on a daily basis while utilizing technology as her means of communication. She stated:

I am watching Google chats to see what kids are highflyers, and if some kids are on my caseload, we say, because they just do better with me than some of the behavior time. So, if any of those friends need support, I have to go hang out with or deal with. I love to give positive breaks.

She continued to discuss how working with students after lunch/recess time is a major challenge when dealing with student behavior.

Principal #5 worked in a concentrated poverty elementary school in region 5 and discussed the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on his school and the students it served. He explained:



It's kind of a weird thing as a leader to have gone through Covid and now you are trying to be back to normal. It is a hard thing to do, you have to have some really strong relationships, and you have to do a lot of things.

He continued to explain how "we are now having to tighten back up on behavior." Principal #5 discusses how he ends up "putting out fires all day" instead of accomplishing the daily tasks that he needs to complete as a principal.

Principal #8 examined the daily challenges that administrators must deal with. She also discussed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on her student population. She explained:

Of course, extreme student behavior. It is a challenge coming out of the pandemic trying to get a new normalcy that is a big challenge.

**Major Theme C2: Demands of the Position.** Being a school leader brings about many challenges. Nine school principals discussed the impact of the position and the challenges they must overcome on a daily basis. Principal #1 discussed the impact of meetings on his daily schedule. He stated:

A typical week of a school administrator, at least if you are walking in my shoes, would probably be three or four formal meetings that are on your Google calendar. These meetings last anywhere for two, three, or four hours and can range from in-person to virtual meetings.

He continued on to discuss the impact of student behavior and states "the behaviors can be dealing with illegal, violent, or dangerous situations."

Principal #2 worked as the principal of a K-12 virtual school. This brought a different demand to her position. She discussed the challenge of completing the work. She explained:

The challenge I face is getting my students since I am virtual to log in within adequate time. If they logged in during the daytime, when the teachers were available to assist them, they would get the help that they needed.

She also discussed the daily hours that a normal school principal puts in and how, since she was running a virtual program, it was different. She explains:

It's supposed to be 7:30-3:30, but for me, it's 24/7 because I may get a text message or a phone call at all times of the day or night to say unlock something.

The issue is constant, and I work Monday through Friday, even on the weekend.

Principal #3 discussed the situations that families face and how they impacted the school that she was leading. She said, "I'm dealing with family situations or situations from the bus, kids need food or kids need extra attention and I don't have enough." She continued on to discuss how her students "do not have their needs met before they come to school, and we are trying to do a lot of catch up work." Also, she stated "we are trying to parent, and we are trying to make up for lost time for things."

Principal #5 talked about the impact that parent, student, and staff issues had on the demands of his position. He discussed the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on his staff and the demand to return to "normalcy." He stated:

A lot of things we were very loose with, and now we have to tighten back up and you do not want people to think you are some flake or jerk. Now that we are trying to get back to normal, and I think it has been a challenge as a leader.

Principal #6 discussed the changes that his school district was currently undergoing and the extra demands that it brought to his position. He discussed "we are good for making technical and structural changes, stuff like that. However, cultural changes are needed, which is our

biggest challenge. He continued to talk about how his daily routine was led, but about the demands of his position. He explained:

I put out a morning message of communication, after which it is meetings, observing teachers, or putting out fires that come up on a daily basis.

Similarly, Principal #7 worked in a school with 535 kids and she explained that “a major demand of the job is getting families connected with resources they need to be able to help their students and family to be as regulated as possible.” She continued to say, “you can’t predict how the day is going to go.” Principal #8 also discussed the issue of having to juggle all the tasks that being a school principal brings. She explained:

Having to juggle all the tasks, but also challenging leadership at the district level and the new initiatives that it brings.

Principal #9 also discussed the daunting task of juggling all the demands of the position: “The challenge is juggling. Thus, the minutia stuff that is not really in the job. The paperwork, the things the district puts on you, and that you do not want to do. You just want to be the best leader.”

She continued by discussing the following:

I am being pulled in many different directions, so probably just that and just never trust trying to find time to take care of yourself. Find that balance!

Principal #10 discussed the major challenges of balancing everything, she discusses “my major challenge is balancing everything and taking time for yourself.”

***Sub-Theme C2:1 Societal constraints for families.*** As part of the daily challenges of being a school principal in a concentrated poverty school, four principals’ discussed the constraints that families within their school face and the challenges that they brought.

Principal #2 is the leader of a virtual school and talked about the societal constraints that impact her program. She explained:

It is 24/7 for me because I may get a text message or a phone call at all times during the day or night to unlock something. Lack of technology and Internet access causes huge problems for my program.

Similarly, principal #3 shared how she had “kids that come in with problems from the night before and on the bus right before school starts” or “kids that need food or need extra attention.” She explained that one of the major challenges that her students face was societal constraints on families. She explained:

I think the biggest challenge I face is our students not meeting their needs before coming to school. In addition, our parents are not having their needs met when they send their children to school. We are trying to do a lot of catch-up work, so we are trying to parent and make up for lost times.

She also explained the impact of societal constraints on the parents she served: “As far as our parents are, I do feel like 90% of them are trying the best they can, but their best is way different from a normal middle-class family.”

Principal #7 discussed how a major challenge she faced was meeting the needs of the children in her school. She stated, “A major challenge is meeting the needs of children. In addition, getting families connected with the resources they need to be able to help their students and families be as regulated as possible.”

Principal #9 also discussed how the staff she leads, as well as herself, struggled with the challenge of meeting the needs of the students that they served. She explained:

The balance I guess, if I had to say it also, we are definitely a high-poverty school district, and the children coming to us definitely have a lot of trauma in their lives. So, just helping those students get what they need and dealing with the behaviors they are demonstrating in a positive way.

### **Central Office Recommendations**

The Wallace Foundation (2023) identified key principles that assist central office administration in allowing school principals to deepen their understanding of best practices. Each of the school principals who participated in the semi-structured interview discussed recommendations that they would provide to central office administration. These recommendations were aimed at retaining school leaders in concentrated poverty schools.

**Major Theme D1: Leadership Support from the Superintendent.** When asked what was one recommendation that each school principal would provide to central office administrators, eight participants cited leadership support from the superintendent at the top recommendation. Principal #1 stated “a piece of an administrator staying is feeling supported by central administration, the superintendent is not micromanaging me.” Principal #2 agreed with the support of the superintendent. She explained:

Supporting issues and concerns that we as principals bring to them, coming up with a medium to show what we cannot do. I want to show that I am valued by my leader.

Principal #2 continued to explain “we need to meet in the middle on issues, it is not simply his/her way on all topics.”

Principal #3 shared her insights on how she believed that the leadership team in her district needs to operate as a “cohesive team, so that we are all working for the greater good and

the same reason as the central office.” She continued on explaining that “the superintendent needs to have the same expectations for all administrators, no one should receive special treatment.”

Principal #4 began discussing the impact that finances play on the retention process, but quickly diverged from that topic stating, “It is always about money, so I don’t want to really respond with finances.” He continued to explain:

I want to respond by finding someone who is passionate about building relationships and changing/infecting my life. Then, fill them with the support and resources that you can provide them with and then trust them. It begins with the superintendent!”

Similarly, Principal #6 shared a unique approach to receiving support from the superintendent. He explained:

I think that the biggest challenge that any organization will have is to focus on how its organizational culture looks. How do you, as a leader, treat and how do you discipline the staff?

He continued on with stating “people love to come to work and they will work their tail off because of the organizational culture that is created by the superintendent.”

Principal #7 also cited that support from the superintendent was critical for retaining school leaders in concentrated poverty schools. She stated, “I think, just making sure that as administrators, we know that the central office has our backs, we can call them about an issue or that if we need them here that they respond.” She continued to explain “we just want support as administrators on whatever initiative we put forth to try and get kids in the seat, because we can’t teach them anything without the resources.”

Principal #8 shared similar comments with the other interviewed school leaders. She stated:

Having ways built in that you feel welcomed, supported, and heard. Also, by offering and knowing that you are in a safe place where you can call your boss and know that you can ask questions and not get in trouble.

She continued “we just want to know that we are a group and that we are going to work together.”

Principal #9 shared her recommendations with central office administrators on ways to retain school leaders. She began by explaining “central office staff members that used to work in schools are slowly losing touch with what is on in the school.” However, she stated, “In addition, it is important to value and appreciate the principals and then utilize their gifts.” She explained that “principals, just every now and then need someone to say wow, you are doing a great job.”

***Sub-Theme D1:1: Growth Opportunities.*** When examining other recommendations that school principals would provide central office leaders with ways to retain principals in concentrated poverty schools. Three school principals cited professional growth opportunities as avenues to retain leaders. Principal #5 began his recommendations by talking about compensation; however, quickly switched to growth opportunities for school leaders. He explained “I would say, make sure you’re offering opportunities for growth.” He continued with his recommendation “getting to know the principal and maybe what their future plans are, what their desires are for the next one, three, or five years. This way if you have a plan, you will end up losing people you don’t offer opportunities for them to grow.”

Similarly, Principal #6 explained that “organizations need to focus on organizational culture.” He discussed that it is “very important on how you treat your staff, make sure you offer

them opportunities to grow.” He discussed the need to establish and master “the cultural component of your organization and to put technical structures in place that help support a positive culture.”

Principal #9 shared a recommendation to the central office administration of: “I feel like in high-poverty school districts, you really have to work hard with staff to understand and have compassion and empathy for the families you work with. However, also ensure that you offer opportunities for each person to grow both financially and professionally.”

***Sub-Theme D1:2: Resource Allocation.*** The participants provided recommendations to central office administrators on ways to retain school principals. Three school principals in concentrated poverty districts cited resource allocation as a key variable for retaining leaders. Principal #1 shared that when working with children in poverty, they have children who have social and emotional needs. You need to have the right resources to ensure the ability to meet their needs.”

Principal #4 stated that “kids in high-poverty schools really want to be successful. But because of the barriers that they face outside of school, they struggle.” He continued, “You need to find someone who is passionate about building relationships and changing lives. Then, fill them with the support and resources that you can provide. He also discussed the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic had on his school and how he needed “...as much social emotional resources as I could, as much mental health support as I could really find to help parents and families.

Principal #10 discussed the personnel resources that central office administrators could provide to school principals in concentrated poverty school districts. She stated:



There had to be proper support in the building. There was no one to support students who were struggling at the moment; systemically, social workers needed to be accessed and utilized in schools.

She continued on explaining “in high poverty areas there is a definite need for having the proper resources.” Also, “what are you systemically doing to keep monitoring and keep plugging in to make the determination for how the money should be used that you are allocated?”

***Sub-Theme D1:3: Collaboration with Administrators.*** Three school principals shared that collaboration with other school administrators was a recommendation that they would provide to central office leaders on ways to retain principals. Principal #3 worked in the same school district for 27 years or 13 years as a school principal. She explained her recommendation to the central office leaders. She explained:

I strongly believe in a cohesive team so that we are all working for the greater good and for the same reason from the central office. I want to know that if all school principals are in the building every day, the central office needs to work in the central office every day.

She continued “my recommendation to the superintendent and the assistant superintendent would be that they provide professional development to their team in the central office on how to be leaders and collaborate with others.”

Principal #7 discussed “keeping the level of communication and collaboration high.” She continued on “So that it is not a feeling top down, but it’s actually feeling like our thoughts and our ideas are heard.” Similarly, Principal #8 shared the past experiences of her recommendation to work collaboratively. She explained:

Collegiality, you working together. There was a time several years ago in the district when I first became a principal; we were told to not work with each other on our budgets as they needed to be different and they better not be copied in the same way, and that was very isolating. So, just to know that we are a group and we are going to work together.

### **Chapter Five Summary**

This chapter outlined seven major themes and eight sub-themes that emerged from the transcripts of ten school principal participants, who described their experiences working in a concentrated poverty school, and their recommendations to central office administrators on ways to retain school leaders. Themes were developed to create a model for retaining school principals within the four areas of school leadership aspirations, concentrated poverty leadership, managing daily challenges, and central office recommendations.

In Chapter Six, I discuss the findings of this study, how they relate to my research questions and conceptual framework, and offer recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER VI

### DISCUSSION

This chapter synthesizes the analysis of my study utilizing a close examination of the themes and sub-themes resulting from the data as they relate to my conceptual framework and research questions. Connections to previous research, as well as implications for future studies are also included in this chapter.

#### **Analysis/Discussion of Major Results**

This study sought to describe the experiences of 10 participants in schools classified as having concentrated poverty, as defined by Gulosino et al. (2016). Gulosino et al. stated that concentrated poverty school districts were those that had at least 65% of their students qualifying as free-and-reduced-lunch students. Sass et al. (2011) found that some concentrated poverty school districts had a principal turnover rate of 52% or greater in a five-year span, while Herring's (2019) work found that the principal turnover rate had increased to 57% or greater in a five-year span. In comparison, the turnover for principals within their first five years in school districts that were not classified as concentrated poverty was 33% (Herring, 2019). It is important to note that this study aimed to identify experiences that led school principals to work in concentrated poverty school districts. This study also aimed to provide recommendations to central office administrators on ways to retain school principals. This study did not focus on why school principals left concentrated poverty schools for more affluent schools.

In an effort to capture the experiences and recommendations of these 10 school principals, they were each asked six questions about four areas of school leadership: (1) school leadership aspirations, (2) concentrated poverty leadership, (3) managing daily challenges, and (4) central office recommendations. Each of the questions was framed so that each response

would provide descriptions of what these school principals did within each area of school leadership. For each of the school leadership areas, they were asked to address Locke's (1976) understanding of the topic of job satisfaction: emotions come into play within a person's work environment, positive and negative emotions allowed individuals the opportunity to identify the satisfaction rating within the work environment to which they were accustomed, and what steps they took into leadership. One final question was asked to provide recommendations to central office administrators on ways to retain school principals working in concentrated poverty areas. All 10 school principals shared their responses openly and freely regarding the questions they were asked. School principals were also given the opportunity to review and revise the transcripts after the interviews were used for data.

Prior to this study, most related research was on why school principals exited high-poverty school districts. The focus of this dissertation, why principals remain within schools of concentrated poverty, had not been researched by scholars and therefore added to the literature. The value of my findings is the descriptive richness of the experiences that school leaders share as to why they became a school leader and a school principal in a concentrated poverty school. The value is also in the recommendations that school principals provide directly to central office administrators regarding ways to retain school leaders. My conceptual framework (see Chapter One) showed the range of affect theory, as it impacts seven areas of school leadership. Locke's (1976) range of affect theory focuses on job satisfaction and its implications for the retention of leaders in an organization.

Utilizing the conceptual framework and data derived from these ten school principals. Seven major themes and eight sub-themes emerged (as detailed in Chapter Five). I categorized these themes and subthemes one step further in my analysis. Three foundational themes were

identified: (1) experiences as school leaders, (2) concentrated poverty challenges, and (3) recommendations for retention (see Table 2).

Table 2 discusses the results of my study. The overarching research question for my study focused on the primary motivating reasons why principals remained within concentrated poverty school districts. My first research question focused on how principals with at least five years of experience leading a concentrated poverty school described their experiences as principals in this type of school. My second research question focused on what school principals offer for why they remain leaders in concentrated poverty schools.

Table 3  
*Categorization of Themes*

Themes and Sub-Themes
<b>Foundation Theme I. Experiences as a School Leader</b>
A1: Classroom Teacher Curiosity <i>A1:1: Non-Traditional Placement in Administration</i> <i>A2:2: Assistant Principal and Interim Principal</i> B1: Professional Growth Opportunities B2: Promotion within School District <i>D1:1: Growth Opportunities</i>
<b>Foundation Theme II. Concentrated Poverty Challenges</b>
A2: Challenge of Stepping into Leadership Role <i>B2:1: Involuntary Transfers</i> C1: Climate and Culture of Building <i>C1:1: Student Behavior</i> <i>C2:1: Societal Constraints for families</i>
<b>Foundation Theme III. Recommendations for Retention</b>
C2: Demands of the Position D1: Leadership Support from Superintendent <i>D1:2: Resource Allocation</i> <i>D1:3: Collaboration</i>

To better understand the story of how these 10 school principals in concentrated poverty school districts, each participant shared their experiences of what led them to lead the school they currently work in and what type of recommendations they have for central office administrators. I have decided to combine my two research questions to create a full picture of what experiences school principals in concentrated poverty school districts shared and what recommendations they provided to leaders. I use three foundational themes: (1) experiences as a school leader, (2) concentrated poverty challenges, and (3) recommendations for retention as a guide for my analysis.

### **Experiences as a School Leader**

A major theme within this first foundation was teacher curiosity upon entering the field of administration (Theme A1). An example of this was that the principals in my study were sharing curiosities about what took place outside the four walls of their classrooms. This is supported by Hinkle's (2022) research on school principals' creation of a system of curiosity and the impacts it has on teachers entering the field of education. Principals in my study discussed non-traditional approaches to entering the field of school leadership (Sub-Theme, A1.1). As part of the recruitment process, school leaders are increasingly using non-traditional approaches to recruit top quality candidates to the position of school administrator. Winter et al. (2002) stated "The effort to recruit qualified principals to lead America's public schools is increasingly problematic due to nationwide shrinkage in the applicant pool vacancies, thus causing school districts to use a non-traditional approach to recruit" (p. 1). A major outcome of this study when reviewing the data was the experience of each participant and the path they took to become a school principal. An example of this was that each participant held some sort of leadership role prior to stepping into the position. The leadership roles ranged from instructional coaches,

teacher leaders, assistant principals, to interim principals (Sub-Theme A2.2). “A vital part of this new definition of leadership is its relationship to learning, because it determines how teachers will participate in the work of leadership and enter the field of principalship” (Feeney, 2009).

A second major theme was the principal’s repeated use of the phrase “growth opportunities” as a reason for taking the next step in their professional careers (Theme B1). Many spoke of mentors or colleagues who supported their ambitions and the growth opportunities that the participants wanted to take. This is supported by Waterman and He (2011), who identified key characteristics of support that mentors/colleagues can provide for growth opportunities. They found that the frequency of support, training, structures, and characteristics were key variables in the success of support for teachers. Clearly (2022) stated “The work of a skilled mentor, one who provides ongoing support and guidance as well as institutional and cultural knowledge, can reverberate for decades.” Allowing mentors/colleagues the opportunity to support teachers allowed principals to grow professionally (Sub-Theme D1.1).

A third major theme under the first foundational area addresses school principals being promoted within the school districts in which they work (Theme B2). Tołwińska (2021) believed that school districts needed to look within the limits of their own districts to promote school leadership roles. Teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and assistant principals were typically looked at as staff to receive promotion to leadership roles.

### **Concentrated Poverty Challenges**

Principals were involuntarily transferred into leadership roles (Sub-Theme B2.1), especially when looking at concentrated poverty schools. “Despite claims that school districts need flexibility in school principal assignment to allocate leaders more equitably across schools

and improve district performance, the power to involuntarily transfer school administrators across schools remains hotly contested” (Grissom et al., 2014).

As noted in Chapter Two by Fraser and Block (2006), the climate and culture of a school was classified as the environment within a school district, identified using demographics of student population, socio-economic status, and student achievement within the setting. The principals shared the challenges of working in a concentrated poverty school and how these challenges directly affected the climate and culture of the building (Theme C1). Principals discussed the need to understand the culture that enters their buildings on a regular basis, as well as the need to be fully staffed with resources. Similarly, principals also described student behavior (Sub-Theme, C1:1) as a constraint in creating a positive climate and culture in the building. Principals discussed how they put out fires all day, had severe behavioral needs, and struggled with behavioral issues within their building.

The final major theme in this foundation area was the challenge of stepping into a leadership role (Theme A2) from the classroom position. Herron’s (2005) work on challenges that education leaders face daily and the complexity of the position was also referenced by school principals. Principals often spoke of “why” they wanted to lead a concentrated poverty school, many also spoke of the unknowns prior to entering the profession. Other principals discussed the “need” to enter the field of leadership within concentrated poverty.

All principals discussed the societal constraints that families were facing and their effects on learning environments (Sub-Theme C2:1). The principals cited the lack of food, doubled up situations, improper home life, or improper living conditions.



## **Recommendations for Retention**

Guthry et al. (2022) noted “hiring principals is among central office administrators’ most critical work but what remains uncertain is the relationship between a superintendent’s tenure in a school district and the rate at which they hire principals who will stay” (p. 6). The first major theme that falls within the final foundation discussed the demands of the position (Theme C2). Principals cited the daily demands of the position and the stress it caused. Superintendents can notice these demands and provide support and guidance when issues become prevalent daily. One principal explained the impact that a superintendent can have on the climate and culture of the district and, in turn, provide support when the demands of the job cause stress.

The second major theme within this final foundation was leadership support from the superintendent (Theme D1). McCarthy (2011) defined the role of a superintendent as “the agent [s] responsible for setting the overarching educational agenda for their students and providing leadership for the entire district” (p.16). All the principals in this study discussed the importance of support from the superintendent they served. Each principal explained that they wanted assurance that the superintendent “has their backs” and will “provide support at all times.” Principals also discussed resource allocation (Sub-Theme D1:2) and how support from the superintendent could come from providing the resources needed to provide guidance for their buildings. Each principal explained how the superintendent was the leader of the district and provided key services to the administrators that they led. Finally, principals explained the importance of collaboration among leaders (Sub-Theme D1:3). Cinotti et al. (2022) referenced the importance of administrator collaboration and aligning work to ensure a smooth transition among school buildings. principles within this study pointed out the need for superintendents and central office administrators to provide support and guidance within this realm.

Overall, the findings of my study showed that school principal retention within concentrated poverty schools directly correlated with guidance and support from central office administrators. These results confirm prior research on principal retention of school principals in any capacity (Boyce & Bowers, 2016; Clark & Triegaardt, 2022; Corcoran, 2017; Doss et al., 2021; Gaikhorst et al., 2015; Zhang & Zeller, 2016). My study found three foundational themes practiced appropriately by school principals who lead concentrated poverty schools. Each principal began their journey as a school leader in some type of capacity and then worked their way to leading and remaining within a concentrated poverty school.

### **Recommendations**

The findings of my study generate suggestions for future central office administrators in K-12 education. The findings of my research support Locke's (1976) work on job satisfaction, utilizing the range of affect theory.

#### **Recommendations for Leaders**

My findings confirm what previous research has stated about the retention of school principals in concentrated poverty schools. One source of retention was cited as leadership support of school principals from the superintendent; Mafora (2013) stated that "leadership support is critical for the retention of school principals in any type of school setting" (p. 7). In this study, each principal discussed a role model, mentor, or colleague, that provides support and guidance upon entering the field of school administration. Therefore, my first recommendation would be for school districts that are classified as concentrated poverty to establish a program called Building Capacity for Growth Opportunities to begin building school leaders from within. With the decrease in professionals entering the field of education, recruiting and retaining school leaders will continue to be a challenge. The creation of a leadership academy will allow school

districts to invest and train leaders in the specific ways of their own districts, as well as retain teacher leaders who would like to take the step into administration.

Another source of retention for school principals within concentrated poverty school districts is the opportunity to provide mentors. Waterman and He's (2011) work on mentoring school leaders provided a framework and components that school districts can follow. I recommend that teacher leaders interested in stepping into the role of school leader be provided with a mentor principal. This mentor principal provides guidance, support, and understanding of what the role entails. Teacher leaders want regularly to meet with and work with mentor principals throughout the school year. This will allow teacher leaders a better understanding of the demands of the position.

Mentoring opportunities also take place with principals within the first three years in their position. Principals need to be provided with a mentor through either a third-party organization (MEMSPA, MASSP, etc.) or another veteran leader within the district. Superintendents may step into the role of mentor, however, often school principals will be cautious on sharing struggles, concerns, or questions with their boss. Each mentor would be required to meet with their mentee monthly to ensure that they are providing accurate support. Also, mentors will need to develop a clear process that they must follow to provide job related information that pertains to the administrative role.

The final recommendation directly correlates with the recommendations that the school principals stated in their semi-structured interviews. Dickinson et al. 's (2017) work on the roles and responsibilities of district leaders directly aligns with the comments that each school principal seeks. I recommend that the superintendent within a concentrated poverty school district meet with each principal monthly. Oftentimes, this is a requirement for evaluation

purposes; however, it is rarely followed through. During the monthly meetings, superintendents listened to the needs of school principals and offered guidance and support.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies could extend the research questions within this study to provide a quantitative approach to develop a process of retaining school principals in concentrated poverty school districts. Future studies could focus on the retention of school principals who lead more affluent schools. This study primarily focused on school principals who worked within concentrated poverty districts. Future studies could examine school principals who work solely in rural school districts and the retention techniques utilized. Future studies could also examine the ways that Universities or Colleges can assist with the retention of school principals through the courses that they offer within their programs. Finally, future studies could look at the impact on students within a concentrated poverty school had when a school principal exited the position.

While it was not directly stated by any of the school principals, compensation has been the main topic of previous research. Future research could examine the impact of compensation on the retention of school principals. With teacher and administrator shortages becoming more prevalent across the country, the direct impact that compensation has on retention could be reviewed. Other research should focus on the impact of mentoring opportunities on school principals. As stated earlier in this study, principals are not required to have an official mentor when they begin. Future research would examine the impact of mentors on school principals and the direct correlation with retention.

Owen (1984) describes three criteria noted in relational discourse within a theme, (1) repetition, (2) redundancy, and (3) forcefulness. For this study, repetition was utilized in identifying themes in Table 2 of my study. When considering the steps that school principals

took to become administrators, future research could use the process of repetition and identify key variables on how central office administrators could identify teacher leaders that could step into the school principal role. In addition, this study did not focus on the gender, race, or building level of the participants. Future research should focus on identifying themes of different genders and races. Researchers can examine which genders and races remain within their positions and do not leave for other opportunities.

Finally, future research would focus directly on building levels for school principals. This study did not focus on one individual building level; all were represented including a K-12 virtual principal. Each building level was represented within this study; one level was not the primary focus. Future research should utilize Wilke's (2023) job satisfaction conceptual framework by forming questions on these research recommendations.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

My paper closely analyzed school principals that lead schools within concentrated poverty school districts. The semi-structured interviews provided the personal experiences of each participant and the journey they took to become a school principal. The findings of this qualitative study take a viewpoint on principals' shared experiences, thus providing a different perspective than that of a quantitative study on principal retention. This study might be missing numerical results; the type of qualitative study has increased the literature on the retention of school principals in concentrated poverty school districts.

Overall, I found that school principals in concentrated poverty focused on building a positive climate and culture within their schools. In addition, they focused on the support of their superintendent and central office administration. As part of the experiences that were shared, the school principals all stated that leading a concentrated poverty school begins with love and

passion for education and the students they served. With this love and passion, they are able to provide a high-quality experience to some of the most vulnerable students in our country.

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**Appendix A**  
**Email Recruitment Script**



## Email Recruitment Script

Subject: Dissertation Research Study (Invitation)

Dear: <Potential Participant>:

My name is Mark Wilke, and I am a doctoral student at Western Michigan University. I am writing to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study titled “ *Principals Staying within Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within.*”

The purpose of this dissertation research study is to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with lower concentrations of poverty.

This study will use in-person, one-on-one, or web-based video conferencing (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom) as the primary method of facilitating data collection. All interviews will be recorded using an audio recording device to ensure that only the audio portion of the interview is captured. Interviews will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

Please let me know if you are interested in participating in this study, and then we can schedule a time to review the consent form. If you agree, continue with the interview as a mutually agreeable time. Also, please complete the Google form for me to gain an idea of your background.

If you have further questions, please feel free to contact me. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Mark Wilke, Doctoral Student

Educational Leadership - K-12 Leadership Program

Western Michigan University

(269) 998-3410 (cell)

m0wilke@wmich.edu

**Appendix B**  
**Google Form to Principal**

## **School Principal's in Concentrated Poverty School Districts**

Please Fill out this google form to participate within the research study entitled “ *Principals Staying within Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within.*”

The purpose of this dissertation research study is to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with lower concentrations of poverty.

### Question 1:

First Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 2:

Last Name: \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 3:

School District you are currently employed:

\_\_\_\_\_

### Question 4:

Grade Level that you currently are principal of (please check one):

Pre-K \_\_\_

Elementary \_\_\_

Middle \_\_\_

High \_\_\_

Alternative\_\_\_

Virtual \_\_\_\_\_

### Question 5:

How many years have you been within your current position?

\_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix C**  
**HSIRB Approval Letter**

**Western Michigan University**

**Educational Leadership: K-12 Leadership**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Brett Geier

**Student Investigator:** Mark Wilke

**Title of Study:** Principals Staying within Concentrated Poverty School

Districts: Voices from Within

You are invited to participate in this research project titled "*Principals Staying within Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within* "

**STUDY SUMMARY:** This consent form is part of an informed consent process for a research study and it will provide information that will help you decide whether you want to take part in this study. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. The purpose of the research is to: The purpose of this study is to examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with lower concentrations of poverty and will serve as Mark Wilke's dissertation, for the requirements of the Doctor of Philosophy. If you take part in the research, you will be asked to describe your experiences as a school principal in a concentrated poverty school district. Your time in the study will take approximately 45-60 minutes. There are no anticipated risks or costs to you for taking part in the study. There are also no direct benefits to you for participating in this study; however, your participation will possibly contribute to our knowledge of the experiences that school principals have in concentrated poverty schools and why they remain. Your alternative to participating in the research study is not to participate.

The following information in this consent form will provide more detail about the research study. Please ask any questions if you need more clarification and to assist you in deciding if you wish

to participate in the research study. You are not giving up any of your legal rights by agreeing to take part in this research or by signing this consent form. After all of your questions have been answered and the consent document reviewed, if you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to sign this consent form.

**What are we trying to find out in this study?**

The research will examine why some principals within concentrated poverty school districts remain in their positions, especially when such districts are located near other districts with lower concentrations of poverty

**Who can participate in this study?**

School Principals who have worked in a concentrated poverty school district for at least five years can participate in this research study.

**Where will this study take place?**

This research study will use in-person or web-based video conferencing (e.g., Google Meet, Zoom) as the primary method of facilitating data collection. Interviews will be conducted in an environment that is free of distractions and other interruptions.

**What is the time commitment for participating in this study?**

Only one interview session will be necessary. The interview session will last approximately 45-60 minutes.

**What will you be asked to do if you choose to participate in this study?**

Participants in this research study will give you the opportunity to share your experiences about the reasons why you remain working in a concentrated poverty school district. Since there is a lack of research as to why principals remain working in concentrated poverty school districts.

**What information is being measured during the study?**

The investigators listed on this form will have access to the information gathered during this study. All transcribed data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, which will only be accessible by the investigators listed on this form. The identities of the individuals who participated in the study will not be disclosed since pseudonyms will replace actual names.

**What are the risks of participating in this study and how will these risks be minimized?**

There are no anticipated risks to you if you choose to participate in this research study. Your name will be replaced with a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality and privacy.

**What will happen to my information or biospecimens collected for this research project after the study is over?**

The information collected about you for this research will not be used by or distributed to investigators for other research.

**Are there any costs associated with participating in this study?**

There are no costs associated with participating in this study.

**Is there any compensation for participating in this study?**

There is no compensation provided for the participants in this study.

**Who will have access to the information collected during this study?**

The investigators listed on this form will have access to information gathered during this study. All transcribed data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet which will only be accessible by the investigators listed on this form. The identities of the individuals who participated in the study will not be disclosed since pseudonyms will replace actual names.

**What if you want to stop participating in this study?**



You can choose to stop participating in the study at any time for any reason. You will not suffer any prejudice or penalty by your decision to stop your participation. You will experience NO consequences either academically or personally if you choose to withdraw from this study. The investigator can also decide to stop your participation in the study without your consent. Should you have any questions prior to or during the study, you can contact Brett Geier at Western Michigan University at 269-387-3490, [brett.geier@wmich.edu](mailto:brett.geier@wmich.edu), Mark Wilke at Western Michigan University at 269-998-3410, or [m0wilke@wmich.edu](mailto:m0wilke@wmich.edu). You may also contact the Chair, Institutional Review Board at 269-387-8293, or the Vice President for Research and Innovation at 269-387-8298 if questions arise during the course of the study. This consent document has been approved for use for one year by the Western Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB), as indicated by the stamped date and signature of the board chair in the lower right corner. Do not participate in this study if the stamped date is older than one year.

-----  
**I have read this informed consent document. The risks and benefits have been explained to me. I agree to take part in this study**

**Please Print Your Name**

---

**Participant's signature**

---

**Date**

WESTERN MICHIGAN UNIVERSITY

W

Date: August 14, 2023

To: Brett Geier, Principal Investigator

[Co-PI], Co-Principal Investigator

9/26/23, 2:18 PM

IRB-2023-227 - Initial: Expedited Approval Letter\_Chair - Mark A Wilke - Outlook

IRB-2023-227 - Initial: Expedited Approval Letter\_Chair do-not-

reply@cayuse.com <do-not-reply@cayuse.com>

Mon 8/14/2023 1 1:13 AM

To: Brett A Geier <brett.geier@wmich.edu>; Mark A Wilke <mark.wilke@wmich.edu>

Attention: This email is from outside Western Michigan University. Use caution when opening links and attachments.



Human Subjects Institutional Review Board

Date: August 14, 2023

To: Brett Geier, Principal Investigator

[Co-PI], Co-Principal Investigator

Re: Initial - IRB-2023-227

Principals Staying within Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project titled "Principals Staying within

Concentrated Poverty School Districts: Voices from Within "I" has been reviewed by the Western

Michigan University Institutional Review Board (WMU IRB) and approved under the Expedited 7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. (NOTE: Some research in this category may be exempt from the HHS regulations for the protection of 45 CFR 46.101 human subjects. and (b)(3). This listing refers only to research that is not exempt.)

The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application. Please note: This research may only be conducted exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes to this project (e.g., add an investigator, increase the number of subjects beyond the number stated in your application, etc.). Failure to obtain approval for changes will result in a protocol deviation.

In addition, if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the IRB or the Associate Director Research Compliance for consultation.

about:blank 1/2 9/26/23, 2:18 PM IRB-2023-227 - Initial: Expedited Approval Letter\_Chair - Mark A Wilke - Outlook

Stamped Consent Document(s) location - Study  
Details/ Submissions/initial/Attachments

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Sincerely,



Amy  
Naugle,  
Ph.D., Chair  
WMU IRB

For a study to remain open after one year, a Post Approval Monitoring report (please use the continuing review submission form) is required on or prior to (no more than

30 days) August 13, 2024 and each year thereafter until closing of the study. When this study closes, complete a Closure Submission.

Note: All research data must be kept in a secure location on the WMU campus for at least three

(3) years after the study closes.

**Appendix D**  
**Principal Interview Protocol**

## **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol**

Thank you again for consenting to participate in this study. I would like to record this interview so that the study can be as accurate as possible. You may request that the recorder be turned off at any point during the interview and that the researcher take handwritten notes instead. You will have the opportunity to review your recorded interviews/notes, edit them, and confirm their accuracy. This portion of the interview will take approximately 60 minutes to complete.

Researchers process:

Introduction

Turn on recorder

Explanation of study

Questions or concerns before we begin

Research Questions:

**RQ1: How do principals with at least five years of experience leading within a concentrated poverty school describe their experiences serving as principal in this type of school?**

1. Let's start with you sharing what led you to become a school principal?
2. Now, please tell me what led you to work within your current school?
3. Can you tell me about a typical day or week serving as a principal in your school? What are the major challenges you face? What brings you joy on a regular basis?
4. Now, let us turn to why you are staying in your current school? If you were offered a job in another school district that is not classified as concentrated poverty, would you take it? What experiences have you encountered that made you respond in that way?

Probes: Have you had experiences with a lack of leadership support? What PD opportunities have you had? Does compensation or the climate and culture of the district play a part in your decision process?

**RQ2: What reasons do such principals offer for why they remain as a leader in a concentrated poverty school?**

5. As you reflect on your professional journey, what recommendations would you provide to the central office administration on ways that they can retain school principals in concentrated poverty school districts?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to tell me about your journey into school principalship that finds you working within a concentrated poverty school that has not been discussed that you would be willing to share at this time?