ABSTRACT

Stress and Burnout of Secondary Principals in a Rural School District in South-Central
Texas: A Case Study

Chanda Bloch, Ed.D.

Mentor: Bradley Carpenter, Ph.D.

Principals play an integral role in promoting the overall success of a school.

Principal turnover is an increasing problem across the United States, which has created a

principal shortage. Turnover of effective school principals can disrupt school progress

and have an undesirable impact on rates of teacher retention and student achievement.

The purpose of this study was to explore secondary principals' perspectives regarding

their level of stress and burnout, identify the causes of their stress, and investigate

principals' suggestions regarding which stressors may be alleviated. This study was also

an examination of the impact of six contextual work areas on principals' perceived level

of stress and burnout. Knowledge about the causes and possible solutions of stress and

burnout in secondary principals is needed to retain quality school leaders who stay in the

profession longer than a few years. The researcher concentrated on a convenience sample

of three secondary principals and their spouses in a rural mid-size town in a South-

Central Texas school district. The researcher used a qualitative multicase approach to

explore the real-life experiences of the participants. Data collection methods included a

preinterview, one-on-one interviews, and journal entries. Five final themes emerged from the qualitative study. These included: a) workload, b) community, c) reward, d) fairness, and e) leading during a pandemic. Findings revealed in this research may be used to advise school districts on how to prevent stress and burnout in the principalship and how to better support principals. Also, findings may be used to inform principal preparation programs to better prepare future principals on ways to handle the stress and burnout associated with the principalship.

Stress and Burnout of Secondary School Principals in a Rural School District in South-Central
Texas: A Case Study

by

Chanda Bloch, B.A., M.Ed.

A Dissertation

Approved by the Department of Educational Leadership

_____

Jeffrey Petersen, Ph.D., Chairperson

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
Baylor University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
of
Doctor of Education

Approved by the Dissertation Committee

_____

Bradley W. Carpenter, Ph.D., Chairperson

_____

John Eckert, Ed.D.

_____

Don Hastings, Ed.D.

_____

Tony L. Talbert, Ed.D.

_____

John E. Wilson, Ph.D.

Accepted by the Graduate School
May 2021

_____

J. Larry Lyon, Ph.D., Dean

Page bearing signatures is kept on file in the Graduate School.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation is a result of support from so many individuals. First and foremost, I would like to thank my chair, Bradley Carpenter, Ph.D., for his inspiration, wisdom, and guidance throughout this process. Secondly, I would like to thank John E. Wilson, Ph.D. for his support and encouragement throughout the Baylor program. I will be forever grateful for all that you both have done for me and for always believing in me.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance of my dissertation committee, which included John Eckert, Ed.D., Don Hastings, Ed.D., and Tony Talbert, Ed.D.—thank you for supporting me every step of the way. Additional gratitude is extended to all of the participants of this study, who made this research possible. Also, this would not have been possible without the kind words of academic and professional guidance from Hector Esquivel, Ed.D., and I am thankful for your support throughout this journey.

I would like to recognize the members of Cohort 2 of the Baylor doctorate in K–12 educational leadership, lovingly known as *The Devine Nine*. To Amanda, Amy, Barbara, Chris, Cristy, Natasha, Stephanie F., and Stephanie Z.—I will always appreciate our time together and the memories that were made. Additional recognition goes out to Amy Sharp and Amanda Flentge for your unfaltering support and commitment during the dissertation writing phase of our journey—we made it! Also, I would like to recognize Amy Sharp and Cristy Castnares for always being my Baylor roommates and supporting me throughout this journey—we will always be the blonde, brunette, and the redhead.

Finally, none of this would have been possible without my family and friends. I would like to thank every single person who encouraged me along the way with a kind

DEDICATION

To my children, Garrett and Mylee.

I hope this work serves as a reminder that you can do anything you set your mind to do in

life. Dream big and never stop until all of your dreams have come true. I love you more!

To my mom and sister, Pam and Christy.

Thank you for being by my side during this journey and always supporting me and

encouraging me to keep going even when I wanted to stop.

This accomplishment is all of ours

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Background of the Study

Principals play a substantial role in the success of a school. A body of research has grown over the last several decades establishing principals have a significant influence on student achievement (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Branch et al., 2013; Day et al., 2016; Eberts & Stone, 1988; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Seashore Louis et al., 2010; Supovitz et al., 2010). Although this influence is often indirect, principals are thought to be the second most influential factor in terms of student achievement, following only behind the teacher (Hallinger & Heck, 1996; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008; Leithwood & Azah, 2017). Furthermore, these effects are even higher among high-needs schools with large numbers of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Principals have substantial effects across all schools, but their influence is considerably more significant in schools with historically disadvantaged populations (Eberts & Stone, 1988; Fuller & Young, 2009; Miller, 2013). As Leithwood et al. (2004) reported, "Indeed, there are virtually no documented instances of a troubled school being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader" (p. 5). The principal has the power and influence to make a school successful, ultimately impacting teachers and students.

Previously, the ability to effectively manage the school building was the leading role of the principal. Nevertheless, today's principals are faced with more challenges, which can sometimes become overwhelming. As a result, public schools across the nation are restructuring in response to these challenges and pressures that include readily

1

available school performance data, rigorous state assessments, and the growing popularity of public school alternatives, such as charter schools and, in some states, vouchers. These new demands weigh mainly on the school principal, creating the need for additional preparation and training and, in some cases, a withdrawal from the profession. Some researchers have found that principals are now retiring younger and younger because they feel the job is not doable (Usdan et al., 2000). Understanding the significant impact principals have on campuses highlights that principal retention has become a considerable concern for districts across the United States.

Background of the Problem

A 2017 national survey of school principals showed approximately 18% of principals had left their position of the year before (Goldring & Taie, 2018). In schools serving populations living in high-levels of poverty, the turnover rate was 21% (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Sudden or frequent turnover of effective school principals can disrupt school progress, which often leads to higher teacher turnover and lower student achievement (Levin & Bradley, 2019). Frequent turnover in principals makes it difficult for a campus to meet state and federal demands, retain teachers, and create and sustain a school climate focused on students' success and well-being.

Alvoid and Black (2014) reported that 20% of new principals leave the job after only two years, and the national average of principals' tenure in their schools was four years as of 2016–2017 (National Association of Secondary School principals [NASSP], 2017). Turnover in low-performing schools across the country has seen an even more significant increase over the last two decades. Béteille et al. (2012) found that the average tenure for principals serving in low-income schools is only about three years.

Furthermore, research has shown one in five principals leave their school after just one year due to job demands (Burkhauser et al., 2012). Harris Interactive Inc. conducted a survey for the MetLife Foundation in 2013 to determine their perceptions of on-the-job demands and changing roles of principals. The study revealed nearly one-quarter of U.S. principals leave their schools each year due to enormous job demands (MetLife Foundation, 2013). Fuller and Young (2009) reported that almost half of all new principals hired in the profession quit within their first three years. This frequent turnover creates instability on campuses that can have adverse effects. Accordingly, keeping principals in place for several years has a positive effect on student outcomes (Hull, 2012). School improvement is a difficult thing to accomplish. Research has shown that principals need at least five years on campus to put a vision in place, improve instruction, and implement policies and practices that will positively affect a school's performance (Hull, 2012). Principal longevity and continuity affect student achievement and overall school improvement (Babo & Postma, 2017; Fullan, 1991). Schools that do not retain principals will always struggle and will have difficulty implementing meaningful change.

For Texas, principal attrition is an ever-increasing problem. According to Davis (2020), who looked at principal turnover in Texas, 33% of new principals assigned to schools in urban districts left the Texas public school system after five years. Davis (2020) also discovered that of more than 1,100 Texas principals who entered the profession between the 2008–2009 and 2010–2011 academic years, 30% were no longer in the same school (Davis, 2020). Furthermore, 10% of these principals left the state's public K–12 system altogether in the first year, and by the second year, there were only half of the principals remaining in their original schools (Davis, 2020). This study

showed a problem with principal attrition in Texas, especially in the first few years of the job. DeMatthews (2020) found principals in rural districts left at a higher rate than those in other districts. He discovered one rural school district in East Texas taken over by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) due to poor academic performance and had seen three principals in 5 years (DeMatthews, 2020). The campus principal's frequent turnover directly correlated to the decline of the academic success in that district. Fuller and Young's (2009) research of principal retention in Texas spanned from 1996–2008. Their findings showed:

> Secondary principals have a higher turnover than elementary principals. Principal retention is primarily influenced by student's achievement outcomes, and the larger the percentage of economically disadvantaged students on campus resulted in a decreased rate of principal tenure (p.2)

This study showed a problem in Texas with principal retention, especially in hard-to-staff school districts with high poverty levels and low student achievement.

In the site district, Rural City School District, the secondary school principal turnover rate was 67% for the 2019–2020 school year. The only secondary school principal that would not be new to the campus was the high school principal. The other two campuses were under new leadership for the 2020–2021 school year. Both middle school campuses had hired new principals every year for the last several years. As a result, there had been no consistency in leadership, a decline in positive campus climate, a high teacher turnover rate, and reduced student achievement scores.

All districts in Texas must address the growing rate of principal turnover. On average, districts spend $75,000 to prepare, hire, and place a principal into one position (Davis, 2020). Financial impact, student achievement, campus morale, and teacher retention rates are all affected when a principal leaves a campus. Research has shown

teacher turnover increases, and reading and math scores decline when a principal is demoted or leaves their post (Davis, 2020). The principal's association with teacher retention makes principal longevity one of the most significant means of ensuring teachers stay on campus (Baker et al., 2007; Levy et al., 2007). It is vital districts learn ways to support, train, and retrain campus principals to stabilize campuses and promote academic growth. Principal retention is essential to Texas and U.S. school districts because of the impact a principal has on teacher retention and learning outcomes.

Turnover Factors

To better understand and prevent principal turnover, researchers have examined why principals leave (DeMatthews, 2020; Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019) to find ways to support them better. Although the research was inconclusive, some of the past studies indicated principals leave for five main reasons: inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, low salaries, lack of control to make campus decisions, and ineffective accountability policies (DeMatthews, 2020; Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Current research showed a relationship between leadership roles in education and stress (Harms et al., 2016). Today, school principals endure enormous stress as they face accountability pressures imposed by local, state, and national mandates and new expectations for supervision and evaluation (Wells, 2013; West et al., 2014). Today, principals face many challenges related to the expansive responsibility of educating all students under their care, and the stress can take a toll (Sogunro, 2012). According to Wells (2013), principals leave the profession because they are overwhelmed with their job duties and feel they cannot keep up with their responsibilities. Principal burnout is a

problem in the educational sector and sometimes has extreme consequences that lead to turnover.

Statement of the Problem

Although this research was nested under the umbrella of principal turnover, the specific problem of practice addressed was that principals are stressed and burned out, often leaving the profession. Chronic stress and burnout are factors that affect campus principals, and this impact is felt on K–12 campuses in both public and private school systems (Andreyko, 2010; Beausartet et al., 2016; Boyland, 2011; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). Though studies have examined burnout and stress-related to campus principals, results have been somewhat ambiguous. Further study was needed to determine the most significant stress and burnout sources for secondary school principals in rural South-Central Texas school districts. Most of the research conducted on the role of campus principals has focused on the impact of stress and burnout in large urban districts. Other studies addressed stress and burnout as they pertained to principals, but this was done in other parts of the United States and the world. Therefore, ambiguity and conflicting research existed regarding the primary causes of stress and burnout for secondary school principals. With additional research and information, it may be possible to identify problems and address related retention issues. A greater understanding of the factors that most significantly contribute to stress and burnout of secondary school principals in South-Central Texas may help district supervisors alleviate stress and prevent burnout. Therefore, this qualitative research study was designed to investigate the perspectives of secondary school principals in rural South-Central Texas regarding potential issues related to stress and burnout.

Purpose of the Study

There was a gap in principal turnover research due to continuous exposure to stress and burnout. Most of the current research focused on teacher retention, with very little research addressing principal retention (Fuller & Young, 2009). The overall campus setup can lead to burnout spreading and affecting the larger workgroup, which can have adverse and lasting effects (Bakker, LeBlanc, et al., 2005; Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2012). The lack of research on principal turnover due to stress and burnout led the researcher to seek a better understanding of what areas of support could alleviate any stressors that may arise. Examining principal stress and burnout was necessary because of its impact principal turnover can have on a school (Beausaert et al., 2016).

This qualitative single-embedded case study was an exploration of secondary school principals' perspectives regarding their level of stress and burnout, the causes of their stress, and how stress could be alleviated. This study also examined the impact of six contextual work areas on principals' perceived stress and burnout levels. Knowledge about the causes and possible solutions of stress and burnout in secondary school principals was needed to help school districts retain quality school leaders who stay in the profession longer than a few years.

Significance of the Study

Understanding secondary school principals' perspectives related to stress and burnout in rural South-Central Texas schools was critical to the district's overall success. The findings from this case study allowed for recommendations to be made to the school district, which had struggled with turnover and inconsistency at the secondary level more than at the elementary level. This impact had been felt by the teachers, students, and

community. The results of this case study will help the superintendent understand what the secondary school principals in the district might need to be successful, and it will also show what can be done to support them. The study of stress secondary school principals' work-life was vital because of the negative economic and academic impacts on schools and communities that result from the ongoing recruitment, training, and development of new administrators (DeMatthews, 2020; Leithwood et al., 2004).

The study also highlighted the societal and practical significance of school leadership at the secondary level and principal retention in schools. The study results contributed to the field of school leadership and may be used to design better principal training programs that prepare new and existing school administrators to better deal with job stressors. Also, better managing the demands of a principal position can increase teacher retention, lead to a more positive campus climate, and increase students' educational outcomes.

Overview of Research Design

This study used a qualitative research method. This method was chosen because the researcher wanted to understand how the participants saw their world (Ashworth, 2015). Qualitative research centers on developing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on detailed data from subjective experiences and perceptions of individuals willing to share their stories (McMillan, 2012). A qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed the researcher to explore secondary principles' perceptions of work-life stress and burnout at the research site. The researcher understood the case by collecting and integrating many forms of qualitative data, ranging from semistructured interviews to artifacts (i.e., documents). The nature of collecting rich data requires a

narrower focus on a population, and the specific events described first-hand. This kind of in-depth exploration allows the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the entire context of the study.

A multi-case study design was chosen for this study because of the workable nature of educational research, where the lines often blur phenomena and context (Yin, 2014). Case study allows a researcher to focus on processes, meaning, and understanding that cannot easily be identified using numerical data (Merriam, 1998). Researchers in a case study focus on participants' lived experiences through a continuous process of slowly uncovering the participants' unique perspectives (Tracy, 2013). The single-embedded design refers to an embedded case study within a larger case (Yin, 2014). The larger case in this study was the school district, and the principals from each campus made up the smaller cases to be analyzed.

A conceptual framework structured this study through a particular set of lenses. The conceptual framework was created by Maslach and Leiter (1997), who chose to address job fit by creating a model focused on the congruence between the person and six domains of their job environment. In this model, workers can see if there is a level of match or mismatch for each domain that might lead to stress and burnout. Maslach and Leiter's six work-life domains are workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The Areas of Work-life Survey measures multiple job stressors that contribute to burnout and can provide useful diagnostic information to organizations interested in burnout interventions (Leiter & Maslach, 2000). In this study the principals' current stress levels were ascertained by examining the principals' perceptions related to the six work-life areas in the workplace to see if there was an imbalance or mismatch.

Research Questions

Two primary research questions and one sub-question guided this research.

RQ1. How do secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated with serving as the campus leader?

- How do challenges with balancing work and home life contribute to principals' perceptions of the stressors related to acting as campus leaders?

RQ2. How do secondary school principals seek to address the stressors of school leadership?

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions were used during this research.

- *Burnout* refers to "an extreme form of job-related stress" (Combs et al., 2009, p. 10), which manifests itself in multiple ways and is characterized by a host of mental, physical, and emotional symptoms.
- *Stress level* was defined by the researcher for the purposes of this study as having three tiers.
    - A low level of stress was determined to be stress that was perceived as insignificant and easily endurable over an unspecified period of time.
    - A moderate level of stress was defined as significant to a degree that it is endurable with effort over an unspecified period of time.
    - A chronic level of stress was defined as very significant and at a level that cannot or will not be endured over an unspecified period of time.

Summary

Chapter One provided an overview of the study. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature related to the principal's role, the impact of the principal on their school, and stress and burnout as they related to the job of the school principal and the six organizational areas of the workplace. The methodology used in the study is outlined in Chapter Three, and Chapter Four includes an analysis of the data and the research. Chapter Five provides a summary, conclusions, and recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Stress is a feeling people encounter when they are overloaded and struggling to cope with demands (Felman, 2017). Stress in the workplace can be costly because it affects individual well-being and affects the organization's performance (Quast, 2011; Sesemann, 2019). Stress management researchers have previously provided ways to cope with stress and strategies for individuals or groups who may be experiencing stress (Ginsberg, 2008; Marshall, 2008; Murphy, 2011). Though stress management has been studied, little focus has been placed on the stress and burnout of campus principals.

Chronic stress and burnout are factors that affect campus principals, and the impact is felt in the climate and overall morale on K–12 campuses (Andreyko, 2010; Beausart et al., 2016; Boyland, 2011; Stephenson & Bauer, 2010). With increased educational accountability for educators across the United States, school principals' job-related stress should be examined in greater detail, particularly for secondary school principals. The demands on a school principals' time increase with the school's level because after school and evening activities and the number of students on campus increases with students age (Good, 2008). The higher demands and expectations placed on secondary school principals can lead to stress and burnout, a psychological syndrome that results from a sustained response to chronic job stressors (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Although burnout has been studied since the 1970s, limited research was focused on burnout as it related to principals serving at secondary school campuses. At the time of this study, no research existed on secondary school principal stress and burnout in South-

Central Texas. Differences in accountability, demographics, and role expectations could produce changed data related to burnout and work-related stress across regions.

This multi-case study was an exploration of how the work-related stress and burnout of secondary school principals in a rural mid-size town in South-Central Texas affected their career longevity. This study was designed to understand secondary school principals' perceptions regarding their level of stress and burnout, identify causes for the stress, and investigate principals' suggestions by which stress might be alleviated. Identifying the causes of secondary school principals' perceptions of work-related stress and burnout may lead current and future administrators, central office personnel, and higher education institutions to provide strategies and resources intended to enhance principals' longevity.

This chapter includes a review of literature related to principal burnout and stress, focusing first on the importance of principals in public schools and how principals are integral to school success (Combs et al., 2009; Stephenson & Baur, 2010). Next, the researcher examined the shifting role of U.S. principals over the past several decades and the importance of the principalship. Then the researcher probed the literature to determine why principals leave the profession and what factors lead to principal turnover. Next, the researcher looked at how stress and burnout are examined in teachers and also in the principalship. Lastly, the researcher reviewed the theoretical framework, based on Maslach and Leiter's (1996) theory of the six areas of work life. The final part of this chapter includes in-depth explanations of how burnout and stress can affect various areas of an individual's work life. Maslach and Leiter (1996) served as the lens through which

job-related stress and burnout impact secondary school principals and their career longevity.

Shifting Roles of Principals

The principal position has evolved from an administrator and managerial role to one of the instructional leaders (Kaplan & Owings, 2015). In this era of high-stakes accountability, the instructional leader's primary responsibility is to guide campus staff in creating systems where all children learn and become successful (Stronge et al., 2008). The principal must also guarantee a shared vision for student achievement is created and supported by the staff and other members of the school community.

Beck and Murphy (1992) studied the principalship for over 70 years. They organized their findings into themes to show how the role of the principal has evolved. Beck and Murphy (1992) noted how events in the United States and world helped shape administration theories. In the first few years of the 20th century, principals were viewed as principal teachers. By the 1920s, historians suggested the principal was more of a scientific manager. In the 1930s, religious imagery disappeared from administrative literature and information about the role of the principal. During the 1940s and 1950s, principals were thought of as leaders of democratic schools, where all citizens could receive an education (Beck & Murphy, 1992). In the 1960s, principals were being called on to promote excellence in every classroom. Then, in the 1970s, school principals were expected to lead the way in fixing a host of nonacademic problems related to societal issues. Research showed that the 1980s held the principal as the instructional leader, and then the 1990s put them into the role of the facilitator (Beck & Murphy, 1992). This

14

progression illustrates the principal's role has changed over time to include increasing amounts of responsibility.

In the 21st century, principals must address an ever-increasing set of responsibilities that are so numerous they can be overwhelming. School principals are responsible for managing the school, organizing and guiding teaching, creating a network with external partners, and communicating with parents (Engels et al., 2008; Simken et al., 2010). Furthermore, school principals are in charge of finances, discipline, and personnel and are also responsible for all other school issues. Finally, school principals must work with education officials, connect with other supporting services beyond the school itself, and take the lead when implementing transformational initiatives on the campus (Engels et al. 2008; Friedman 2002; Simken et al., 2010). In addition, the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) placed higher demands on accountability on districts and campuses. The related statutes imposed increased responsibilities and more significant pressures on campus principals to meet adequate yearly progress through achievement levels on state performance standards. Since the passage of NCLB, the government raised expectations and pressure to prove student achievement yet again when they implemented the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in December 2015 (TEA, 2018). ESSA increased achievement expectations for districts across Texas and the United States.

 Due to the increased demands of federal and state accountability policies, principals are now expected to develop into more effective instructional leaders. McEwan (2003) recommended the following:

> [a] Establish, implement, and achieve academic standards; [b] Be an instructional resource for your staff; [c] Create a school culture and climate conducive to

learning; [d] Communicate the vision and mission of your school; [e] Set high expectations for your staff and yourself; [f] Develop teacher leaders; and [g] Develop and maintain positive relationships with students, faculty, and parents. (p. 15)

These are just a few of the skills needed to be successful as a principal. For over 30 years, America's educational system has tried with little success to improve student academic achievement in K–12 public schools (Agam & Priagula, 2005). Due to the NCLB (2002) and the ESSA (2015), federal, state, and local accountability mandates have increased. NCLB and ESSA sparked the "high-stakes accountability" movement that has pushed school leadership to the forefront of the nation's educational agenda. In an era of education reform and accountability, there became more strenuous expectations for effective school leaders. The principal position is perhaps the most demanding in the field of education (Buck, 2003). It has also evolved, and the focus on instructional leadership has shifted from primarily one of management supervision to one of shared leadership (Lambert, 2003; Marzano et al., 2005; Senge, 2000). The principal's role has shifted and changed to now be the campus instructional leader and not just a school manager. Tirozzi (2001) stated, "the principals of tomorrow's schools must be instructional leaders who possess the skills, capacities, and commitment to lead the accountability parade, not to follow it" (p.438). School principals now find themselves in the public spotlight, being held accountable for campus performance. Under these conditions and stressors, the traditional roles of school principals as managers seem less relevant.

Being an instructional leader is not enough to address the crises of today's public schools. Now principals must focus on 21st-century skills and students' abilities to navigate and succeed in a technologically advanced and competitive global market

(Boyland, 2011). The increased demands have created a need for leaders who can transform from an instructional leader into a transformational leader. Transformational leaders tend to focus on inspiring others to "commit to a shared vision and goals for an organization or unit, challenging them to be innovative problem solvers, and developing followers' leadership capacity via coaching, mentoring, and provision of both challenge and support" (Bass & Riggio, 2006, p. 4).

Educational administration scholars recognized the importance of transformational leadership theory to the present-day challenges encountered by principals. The theory was quickly adjusted in education and is seen as an ideal model for school leadership (Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood, 1994). Since the early 1990s, Leithwood et al. (1999) supported the adoption of transformational leadership behaviors in school management; in their works, they showed the benefits of these behaviors, which align with more effective school leadership (Leithwood et al., 1999; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Leaders found the shift from transactional towards transformational to be the natural course of the last several decades.

The principal role is still evolving as schools encounter new challenges and demands. Those who are principals realize their job has changed dramatically over the past several decades to one that is now tasked with preparing students to succeed in a digital and global environment. This task requires them to be the leader in all things on campus instead of just focusing on one aspect of the job. The focus now for a principal is to support teachers so that instruction can help students.

Impact of a Campus Principal

A school system is a cooperative organization. School management is a collective effort where every individual must participate in the school's growth and development under an effective leader' guidance and supervision. Marzano (2003) stated: "The role of leadership in a school that is successful is the result of a strong principal which relates to the teacher, and the students" (p.7). Research has shown that school leaders are the second most important influence on student outcomes, following closely behind the teacher (Day et al., 2008; Leithwood & Day, 2008; Young et al., 2007). The role of a principal is the most critical position on campus. This section outlines of the overall impact a principal has on student achievement, school culture, and teacher retention.

School climate, culture, leadership capacity, and teacher retention are necessary factors to address when attempting to provide an excellent educational opportunity for all students (Klocko & Wells, 2015). The actions and systems put into place by school principals are imperative to achieving and sustaining greatness on a campus, making the school principal the key component to the success of any campus. It is vital to have stability in the principal position instead of frequent turnover, which harms the school's health and personnel (Branch et al., 2013). Research showed that a school principal can impact thousands of students in a single school year (Schmidt-Davis & Bottoms, 2011). Ultimately, the principal is the campus leader that shapes the school's vision and culture. A principal has an impact on numerous campus issues. The most significant effects are increasing student achievement, creating a positive culture, and retaining teachers. These

three issues combine to shape a campus, and if any of these three issues are left unaddressed, a campus may falter.

Student Achievement

A principal's positive or negative impact on a campus ultimately impacts student outcomes. For decades, education researchers have noted the importance of a campus principal (Clifford & Ross, 2012; Elmore, 2000). Fullan (2001) stated: "A school administrator is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by the school community" (p. 50). Also, it has been found that principals who consistently communicate high expectations and their actions and philosophies also promote academic success. This mindset will often have a positive effect on student achievement (Nettles & Herrington, 2007). A school's academic emphasis can be affected by the actions of the school principal. Researcher's Branch et al. (2013) focused on the importance of a principal on student outcomes. Their study reaffirmed past research that a principal has a significant impact on student achievement. They determined that a successful principal can raise a student's performance between 2 and 7 months in a single year (Branch et al., 2013). Leaders must be able to articulate and guide campus instruction for a positive impact to be made. For this to occur, a principal must develop a campus mission and vision that shapes the campus culture.

A leader must also have set values, a defined vision, and experiences that are aligned. Creating a vision and mission is one of the most fundamental and essential things that a principal can do as a leader (Branch et al., 2013). The vision and values

created by a principal help to shape management behaviors and how they ultimately lead. Organizational improvement is central to school leadership (Branch et al., 2013). Many researchers discovered principals influence student learning indirectly by creating a school mission and vision that provides an instructional focus for teachers. An instructional focus for teachers helps establish an environment that facilitates student learning (Gaziel, 2007; Ross & Gray, 2006).

Research showed a definite connection when examining principals' effectiveness and time on the job (Swearingen, 2014). The Colorado Department of Education piloted an educator evaluation system in the 2011–2012 and 2012–2013 school years. Swearingen (2014) found that principals were more productive with more experience on the job. This finding of principal tenure was the same for teachers that became more effective with experience, and research has shown this occurs mostly in the first three years (Clark et al., 2009).

Furthermore, no matter how effective a principal was at his or her previous school, it takes about five years to impact and improve instructional practices and student outcomes after transferring to a new school (Louis et al., 2010). Effective principals make significant improvements during their first few years; however, their effectiveness increases over time. A principal's tenure largely impacts student achievement on campus (Babo & Fostma, 2017). The lowest-performing schools in Texas had the highest principal turnover (Fuller & Young, 2009). It is essential to have a principal on campus for at least five years to have positive outcomes, especially in lower-performing schools. (Hull, 2012). School improvement takes time, and principals must be on a campus for a

minimum of five years to put a vision in place, improve instruction, and implement policies that affect a school's performance in a positive way (Hull, 2012).

Over the last thirty years, research has shown the school principal accounts for almost 25% of the total effect on student achievement by leading school improvement initiatives and creating a solid foundation for student learning (Clifford & Ross, 2012; Marzano et al., 2005). Research demonstrated the role principals play in creating an environment that promotes school improvement, developing a foundation for student learning, and increasing student achievement (Clifford & Ross, 2012). Leithwood et al. (2004) reported on how leadership supports learning, explaining (a) principals influence student achievement and (b) principals apply their most considerable influence in schools that show they have the greatest need.

The Wallace Foundation researched school leadership and emphasized: "A particularly noteworthy finding is the empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement" (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 3). Louis et al. (2010) agreed with this and drew from findings of a research project that spanned six years:

> In developing a starting point for this 6-year study, that leadership is second only to classroom instruction as an influence on student learning. After six additional years of research, we are even more confident about this claim. To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of talented leadership. Why is leadership crucial? One explanation is that leaders can unleash latent capacities in organizations. (p. 9)

Research has repeatedly shown the campus principal matters, so they cannot just be a warm body. The importance of a campus principal means that districts must find ways to recruit and retain talented and charismatic leaders.

A dynamic and effective principal must have a strong vision and carry out the vision to impact student achievement. The Wallace Foundation (2011) identified five

critical functions of principal leadership that affect student achievement: (a) shape a vision of academic success for all, (b) create a hospitable climate, (c) promote leadership in others, (d) improve instruction, and (e) manage people and data. Each of these functions alone will not impact student achievement, but they help to shape a school.

Culture

Teachers, students, and parents turn to principals to provide a school culture based on values, beliefs, and traditions that support student excellence in academics, discipline, and safety (Cotton, 2003; Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013; Marzano et al., 2005). The school principal's responsibility is to create and sustain a positive school culture that allows for collaboration, risk-taking, and trust (Daly, 2009; Fullan, 2009; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012).

A school principal brings experiences and practices woven with their own beliefs and values regarding the best way to promote a positive school culture. Research indicated a direct connection between the principal's leadership practices and school culture (Elmore, 2000; Sergiovanni, 2005); the principal's practices and school culture must be aligned and represent the teacher's vision to be successful. A school principal can significantly impact students' educational results by working with teachers on instructional strategies and addressing student behavior, especially when creating a positive school culture that emphasizes equity and equality for students, teachers, and parents (Coelli & Green, 2012). An ineffective school principal may negatively impact the school culture and student results (Lewis et al., 2016; Marzano, 2003; Wills, 2016).

The demand that principals transform a school culture is a challenge that requires them to be accessible, genuine, and able to promote a culture of transparency (Dye & Garman, 2006). The principal should be a robust role model who sets goals and promotes

a positive school culture by building relationships on the campus and with the community (Senge, 1990). School principals are the source of a school's vision and are the gatekeepers of the school's culture (DePorter & Reardon, 2013). Principals can promote a positive school environment if they focus on retaining and recruiting quality teachers because they have an incredible effect on the health of school culture.

The New Teacher Project (2013) conducted a case study focused on 2,100 schools located in diverse urban areas in the United States. There were approximately 90,000 teachers involved in this case study. In the results, the researchers discovered a theme of support. To expand on the research, data surfaced on how important it was for principals to promote a positive school culture that encouraged and motivated teachers to stay in the teaching profession. The data revealed that teachers felt valued when principals provided feedback and support relating to their classroom instruction. Lastly, teachers felt invested in their careers when principals supported their professional development in leadership roles. Although the study aimed to investigate if school culture contributed to teacher retention, it revealed the principal had a significant impact in promoting a culture of support characterized by available opportunities, creativity, collaboration, and high expectations for professional development.

Furthermore, other evidence indicated specific dimensions of principal involvement and awareness may have a more significant effect on school culture. For example, principals create a positive school culture by being cognizant of specific teacher behaviors, values, and assumptions (Leithwood et al., 1999). The choices a principal makes can affect everyone on the campus, specifically teachers who have the most significant impact on student outcomes (Burkhauser, 2017; Cannata et al., 2017; Kraft et

al., 2016; Sebastian & Allensworth 2012). As principals become cognizant of their staff needs and wants, they can influence morale by modeling desired behaviors, values, and expectations (Rhodes et al., 2004; Wills, 2016). Specifically, Glover (2007) claimed the principal influences a school environment's culture by acknowledging teachers' opinions with genuine care and embracing the value teachers bring to school culture. The culture created on campus helps retain teachers, who are the most important people on campus behind the students (Glover, 2007). A leader must learn how to maintain and recruit the most talented teachers to increase student outcomes.

Teacher Retention

Teachers have the most influence concerning student outcomes on campus (Leithwood et al., 2004; Louis et al., 2010). Teacher retention is an ongoing problem in public education across the country (Sparks, 2018). It can be an even more significant problem in hard-to-staff schools (Sutcher et al., 2016). Ingersoll and Merrill (2012) found a 46% increase in teachers leaving the profession across the country. A teacher shortage in the United States has serious consequences. The largest problem a lack of qualified teachers will have on education is the overall ability of students to learn (Darling-Hammond 1999; Ladd & Sorensen 2016). Uncertainty in a school's teacher workforce negatively affects student achievement and diminishes teacher effectiveness (Kraft & Papay, 2014; Ronfeldt et al., 2013; Sorensen and Ladd, 2018). Also, high teacher turnover consumes economic resources that could be better used elsewhere in a district. Filling a teacher vacancy costs a district $21,000 on national average (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond 2017; Learning Policy Institute [LPI], 2017). The estimated total annual cost of turnover is around $7.3 billion per year (Carrol, 2007). Every year,

districts budget thousands of dollars to retrain new staff to take over unfilled teacher positions. A study conducted in Broward County School district estimated it cost the district around $12,000 to replace each teacher that left (Walington et al., 2010). High teacher turnover also costs school districts across the country over $2 billion each year to recruit, hire, and train replacement teachers (Callahan, 2016).

The relationship between teacher retention and principal support is among the most significant factors in whether a teacher stays on a campus (LPI, 2017). According to Darling-Hammond (2003), keeping good teachers should be one of the most critical concerns for any school leader. Teachers often identify the quality of administrative support as more relevant to their decision than salaries (LPI, 2017). Principals have an essential role in teacher retention because they can provide support in a variety of areas. School principals reinforce the school culture by providing guidance and support to teachers (Hughes et al., 2014). Researchers have also found new teachers view principals as critical figures who can provide help and advice during the first year of teaching (Varrati et al., 2009). Teachers have identified the importance of school culture, relationships, collaboration time, and decision-making input as important areas principals can leverage to keep a teacher on campus (LPI, 2017). This study helped identify school culture, relationships, collaboration time, and being part of the decision-making process as ways in which a principal influences teachers and the overall campus.

There was a strong correlation between job satisfaction and teacher turnover in the literature. Billingsley and Cross (1992) found job satisfaction and intent to stay in the field related to "greater leadership support, more work involvement, and lower levels of role conflict and stress" (p. 465). LPI (2013) found improvements in school leadership

25

were strongly related to teacher turnover reductions. Current data showed that teacher turnover rates reached nearly 25% among teachers who strongly disagreed that their administrator encouraged and acknowledged staff, communicated a clear vision and generally ran a school well (Kraft et al., 2016). This number was more than double the attrition rate of teachers who felt their administrators were supportive, created a clear vision, and provided leadership (Sutcher et al., 2016).

Turnover of Principals

Due to the principalship's increasing demands, there is now a shortage of qualified principals (Clifford & Chiang, 2016; Doyle & Locke, 2014). Many principals spend a significant amount of time on a school campus. Often, a principal can spend 12 to 14 hr. per day trying to meet the needs of those who depend on them for leadership and guidance (Cunningham, 2000). According to Marzano et al. (2005), it has been widely established that the impact of the principal's leadership is vital to the educational effectiveness of the school.

As the pressures grow for schools to be held accountable for achieving high standards, principals have found their role expectations have grown to include many responsibilities. The continued pressure of accountability in Texas and the United States adds additional layers to the already full plates of principals across the country. Lashway (2000) argued:

> Accountability is not just another task added to the already formidable list of the principal's responsibilities. It requires new roles and new forms of leadership carried out under careful public scrutiny while simultaneously trying to keep day-to-day management on an even keel. (Lashway, 2000, p. 13)

There was a time when a principal was expected to serve as the building manager and the campus disciplinarian. That role has given way to the principal needing to be an inspirational leader, an instructional coach to new and veteran teachers, a person with a vision who can implement change and a great team leader who can bring adults together in professional learning (Levin et al., 2019). The increased expectations and additional roles on the campus have led the principal to focus on a more extensive range of professional demands putting a higher load on individual principals' work plates (Wallace Foundation, 2000). The increased workload and new job demands have led many principals to decide to leave their roles (Wallace Foundation, 2012). Alvoid and Black (2014) reported that 20% of new principals leave the job after only two years. Indeed, principals' national average tenure in their schools was four years from 2016–2017 (NASSP, 2017).

Principal turnover is a significant issue across the country. A 2017 national survey of school principals revealed approximately 18% of principals had left their position of the year prior (NASSP, 2018). In schools serving populations living in concentrated poverty, the turnover rate was 21% (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Sudden or frequent turnover of effective school principals can disrupt school progress, leading to higher teacher turnover and lower student achievement (Levin & Bradley, 2019). To understand why principal turnover is increasing and what practices might slow the trend, the NASSP and the LPI partnered to conduct a yearlong study of principal turnover.

The first phase of the research from NASSP (2016–2017) identified five primary reasons principals leave their jobs: inadequate preparation and professional development, poor working conditions, insufficient salaries, lack of decision-making authority, and

ineffective accountability policies. In the second phase of the study, LPI collected information from expert focus groups. The focus groups included 17 participants with diverse backgrounds representing 15 states and serving in schools with poverty levels ranging from 4% to 78% (Levin et al., 2019). The LPI focus groups were conducted to explore the same five aspects of principals' jobs identified in Phase 1.

Levin et al. (2019) also identified several strategies that could give principals the supports they said they needed to succeed and remain in their schools: high-quality professional learning opportunities; support from strong administrative teams with adequate school-level resources; competitive salaries, appropriate decision-making authority within the school context; and evaluations characterized by timely, formative feedback. Several principals in the focus groups spoke of the lack of available resources to serve their students and teachers on campus. They reported times when it was a struggle and could be time-consuming to get the needed resources for a campus. Also, principals make and guide numerous decisions and guide processes to ensure success in the organization they manage. Levin et al. reported principals in the focus group felt personally responsible for their campus, but many were frustrated with the constraints on their ability to make decisions. Many principals in the focus group felt their district's evaluation system was more of just a compliance piece and did not measure growth, instructional leadership.

Principals have agreed that compensation is not commensurate with school leaders' time, effort, and skills. During the Levin et al. (2019) study, all of the focus group participants reported that principal salaries were inadequate given the expectations of the role. The focus group participants said dissatisfaction with pay was worsened

because, in some contexts, principals' salaries could be less than salaries of experienced teachers, despite principals' additional responsibilities and time commitments (Levin et al., 2019). Low pay affects the number of applicants because teachers can make more money with less responsibility and the summer off. Overall, research has shown that the three biggest reasons principals leave are: time constraints, compensation, and feeling isolated in the position (Levin et al., 2019).

Principal turnover is a growing problem in the United States. By the year 2022, the demand for campus principals will grow by 6% (NASSP, 2018), and there is a growing shortage of qualified leaders willing to take on the principalship. The demands placed on a principal add to the lack of skilled leaders. Research has shown time constraints, demands placed on the principal, inadequate compensation, and isolation are reasons principals leave their position. Districts must figure out how to support principals because they impact all parts of campus, ultimately shaping student success.

Time Constraints

Principals' work conditions can impact their sense of well-being and interfere with their ability to accomplish their goals. In their recent study, Pollock et al. (2019) determined that school leaders struggle with increased job demands, longer hours, and workloads. The authors examined principals and vice-principals in Ontario and found five ways that roles are changing: longer hours, increased work pace, fewer resources, increased day-to-day expectations and workload, and additional work responsibilities. They also determined that when these five factors are present daily and there is no downtime during which leaders can catch up or recover from daily work stress, then

"work intensification" occurs. This work intensification impacts principals' overall well-being, staff and students' performance, and principal recruitment and retention.

Valentine et al. (2002) conducted a research study in coordination with the Middle-Level Leadership Center to examine middle-level leaders and their school programs. Middle-level school principals reported that 48% of them worked more than 60 hr. per week. The principals were asked to rank nine responsibilities in order of the amount of time spent on the task. A rank of 1 indicated the highest amount of time, and a 9 indicated the least amount of time. The study found most of the principals' time was spent on school management, personnel, and student activities. The least time was spent on the professional development of teachers and self. The researchers noted principals perceived time, mandates, and money as the major roadblocks to accomplishing their job.

In another study, the Alternative School Administration Study 92005) looked at administrative time in 2003–2004. Baseline data was collected in November 2003 from 21 Kentucky schools, and then follow-up collections were conducted in November 2004, which focused on three pilot schools. The collected data showed that principals spent 66% of their time on managerial tasks and only 29% on instructional tasks. This study showed that principals in Kentucky were still spending too much time on tasks that were not the principal's primary focus.

In another study, Schiff (2001) surveyed high school principals and found they reported they did not have enough time to get their job done despite working too many hours. The average amount of hours they reported working in a week was 62.2 hr. Not having enough time or having to work too much is a consistent complaint from secondary school principals.

Principals have to build relationships with students and families to engage them as essential partners within the school (Garbacz et al., 2017). However, some principals felt that addressing the expectations of parents adds stress to the job. Principals in the focus group conducted by Levin et al. (2019) said their many obligations could require a substantial time commitment, impacting the balance of their home and work life and limiting what they could accomplish. For many principals, balancing home and work is a struggle and often requires personal and family sacrifices. School leaders also said they struggled to find enough time for their role as instructional leaders on campus (Levin et al., 2019). In 2002, Dr. Archer documented that the NASSP survey of middle school principals revealed 50% of respondents worked 60 hr. or more each week as compared with just 12% in 1965 (as cited in Sergiovanni et al., 2004). Principals who participated in the study felt curriculum and instruction were priorities, but they reported having to spend most of their time on tasks having little to do with student learning or teacher support.

Isolation

The principal's role is often characterized as "the loneliest position in K–12 education" (Maxwell, 2015, p. 12). Principals generally enter the profession as teachers, and they become accustomed to working with a collaborative team that helps support them and helps them grow throughout the year. A principal is no longer a teacher who is part of a group or one of many; they are often the only one in the building without job-like peers. When an individual accepts a principal role, it separates them from teachers (Maxwell, 2015). Novice principals are significantly impacted, contributing to their stress and a sense of loneliness (Spillane & Lee, 2014). Without the support of supervisors and

31

colleagues, the principalship can feel even more demanding than it already is. Dussault and Thibodeau (1997) discovered that principals' professional isolation negatively correlated to work performance. In their study of school principals and the relationship between professional isolation and work performance they recommended a change in principals' working conditions to alleviate isolation. In another study of novice principals, Boerema (2011) found that nearly every principal in the study felt lonely in the principal position, which was more prevalent in smaller districts where there was a limited number of campuses.

Howard and Mallory (2008) concluded that isolation is a variable that works in concert with the stress created by principal job expectations in role ambiguity, role overload, and role conflict. Other researchers examined isolation as a variable that impacts the quality of the work experience, such as burnout (Dussault & Thibodeau, 1997). A study conducted by Izgar (2009) showed a mathematical relationship between measures of principal loneliness and depression. Izgar extended the literature by testing whether isolation mediates the relationship between critical predictors and an outcome reflecting the quality of work-life, namely burnout. Principals who experience lower isolation levels also tend to be less likely to suffer from burnout (Friedman, 2002; Tomac & Tomac, 2008), and less burnout on the job means a principal will perform more effectively (Tomac & Tomac, 2008).

Donaldson (2006) observed that principals are sometimes isolated from student learning and teachers' work because of transactional demands. Principals are frequently inundated with managerial tasks and problems. This problem may be more prevalent for new principals who spend excessive time learning the administrative ropes.

Isolation is a feeling that is difficult to overcome. A principal is a lone leader in a building who often has no one with which to collaborate. This feeling of isolation can overwhelm some leaders, causing them to leave the campus for a more collaborative position or leave education altogether. Districts need to figure out how to provide ways for principals to interact and work alongside one another to alleviate the feeling of being alone. This will prevent great leaders from moving to another position and create stability on campus.

Fatigue and Burnout

Since the 1970s, attention has been paid to the precursors and complications of stress and burnout. The precursors of stress and burnout are categorized as both individually and contextually related variables (Beausaert et al., 2016). Complications of burnout include reduced productivity and working efficacy, absenteeism, illness, and a decline in relationships outside of work (Van Dick & Wagner, 2001). Burnout is defined by many as a state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion that takes time to develop because of demanding work conditions (Evers et al., 2005). Maslach and Jackson (1985) defined burnout as "a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do 'people work' of some kind" (p. 837).

The result of emotional exhaustion is a lack of energy and a detached attitude towards the job and colleagues. A person can also experience reduced personal accomplishment, which means the person has decreased feelings of accomplishment and competence. This, in turn, may result in a person developing a cynical attitude towards their colleagues, work, or their performance (Fernet et al., 2012).

Burnout begins with prolonged exposure to areas in a job that an individual interprets as stressful (Maslach et al., 2001). Certain professions are more susceptible to burnout, and when there is burnout, the impact for these individuals is unpleasant for them and those they are in contact with (Chang, 2013). Examples of professions commonly included in burnout research are helping fields such as medicine, social work, and education.

<center>*Teachers and Burnout*</center>

Teachers have seen increased performance pressure regarding student success and the quality of increasingly rigorous classroom instruction. These demands have resulted in perceived stress and burnout by teachers. For instance, in the Netherlands, burnout is higher in the educational profession than in other helping and business professions (Evers et al., 2001). In the United Kingdom, teacher stress levels are thought to be the highest of all professions (Philips & Sen, 2011). Job stress in teachers has been identified as unpleasant emotions such as tension, anxiety, anger, and depression (Kyriacou, 1987).

Burnout among elementary teachers is widespread, and burnout symptoms for teachers are of greater impact than those seen in other professions that have been sampled for research (Dicke et al., 2015). McCarthy et al. (2014) showed that 51% of teachers revealed they experienced repeated, high levels of stress during the school year. Teachers often experience burnout because they are responsible for helping children, many of whom have complicated lives and require much educational and emotional support from their teachers to thrive and be successful.

Several researchers have examined the effects of burnout on teachers. Cenkseven-Onder and Sari (2009) studied the influence of higher burnout scores and school life

<center>34</center>

ratings on subjective well-being. Their study included 93 teachers working in Turkey. Measures used in the study included: The Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985), the Positive and Negative Affective Schedule (Watson et al., 1988), the Quality of School Life Scale (Sarie, 2007), and the Teacher Burnout Scale (Zager, 1986). The Teacher Burnout Scale differs from the Maslach's Burnout Inventory and includes four subscales that include coping with job-related stress, career satisfaction, perceived administrative support, and attitudes towards students (Cenkseven-Onder & Sari, 2009). Cenkseven-Onder & Sari (2009) found that teacher well-being was anticipated by their ability to cope with job-related stress, status, and curriculum.

Furthermore, they found coping with job-related stress predicted 5% of the variance in life satisfaction and 26% variance in negative affect (p. 7). This study helped explain some of the interconnected concepts prompted by teachers' diverse and complicated demands. Although stress and burnout resulting from teaching have harmful effects on teachers psychologically and physically, they may also damage their ability to complete their teaching duties. Teachers experiencing burnout may be less effective teachers, and their lessened effort and attitude about their profession can lead to students receiving a worse education in the classroom (Chang, 2013). Burnout impacts the teacher's competence and the students they teach.

Bakker et al. (2005) considered the transmission of burnout among teachers within schools. They explained that regardless of workloads, burnout levels tend to group together, supporting the theory that burnout spreads among colleagues. They offered that teachers had higher scores on the three main components of burnout (i.e., emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment) when they spent more

significant amounts of time communicating with peers about work issues. Secondly, they argued that teachers who were prone to emotional toxicity would have higher burnout indicators. Lastly, the authors asserted teachers who are prone to emotional contagion and discuss challenging students with their colleagues would be more likely to have higher burnout indicators.

Teachers are the backbone of campus and help determine the school's overall success, but they are experiencing higher levels of stress and burnout due to high demands more now than ever before. The federal and state accountability system has contributed to the increased levels of burnout felt by teachers. Teachers are also on the frontline dealing with students who need more than educational support from teachers. Teachers are caring individuals who support students emotionally, and this can result in increased burnout.

Principals and Burnout

Philips and Sen (2011) stated: "If good leadership is at the heart of every good school, then a leader who is both mentally and physically unwell could have a potentially disastrous impact on the well-being of a school and those within it" (p. 180). Although school principals are similar to teachers working in the same high-demand environment, they deal with entirely different responsibilities and tasks. Hence, research results on stress and burnout in teachers cannot be easily compared to principals. The overall well-being of principals and teachers' impact on school leadership is an essential factor in overall school development, teacher well-being, and student performance (Bakker et al., 2005; Pas et al., 2012; Van der Merwe & Parsotam, 2012). Previous studies have shown that principals experience high levels of on-the-job stress, and if the stress is prolonged, it

will result in burnout. Principals' work stress and burnout arise from various aspects of the school context (Grayson & Alvarez, 2008). Continuous school reform may also add to the occupational well-being of those working in school leadership.

Earlier research has examined strategies that principals can use to cope with the kind of work stress that often leads to burnout. These strategies have been shown to help alleviate or lessen burnout. These studies have only focused on principals' working conditions; however, little is known about self-regulation strategies (e.g., putting effort into changing the work environment so work-related stress can be avoided or diminished). Research has indicated that school leaders are under more stress in Western countries than in other professions (Queen & Schumacher, 2006). In the U.S., the National Association of Elementary School Principals reported 75% of principals experience stress-related symptoms that affected their physical, emotional, and mental health (Queen & Schumacher, 2006). Also, the American Psychological Association (2010) reported that around 70% of Americans are stressed due to their work; principals experience more stress than the average American in the workplace.

More than ever, principals are dealing with stress and burnout, which directly results from increased job demands that can harm principals' health and well-being. Often, principals do not speak out for fear of being judged or perceived as incapable of performing the job (Blackmore, 2013; Leithwood & Beatty, 2008). When a principal has positive thoughts and emotions and feels supported (Beausaert et al., 2016), their emotional exhaustion and stress levels decrease, which benefits everyone on campus.

Theoretical Framework

Burnout is a syndrome characterized by chronic exhaustion, depersonalization, and a lack of personal accomplishment (Maslach et al., 2001). Over time, individuals may change from enjoying their work and feeling rewarded by having unwanted feelings, including that their work and contribution are irrelevant (Chang, 2013). Burnout is thought to be a resulting condition of a continued stress encounter (Leiter & Maslach, 2016).

Burnout has been studied for decades. Most research focused on Maslach's Burnout Theory and accompanying burnout inventory. Maslach's Burnout Inventory is the most frequently used measure among burnout research; it addresses three burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Maslach's work on burnout led to workers' interviews, mainly in helping professions and service industries, about dealing with stress (Leiter et al., 2014). The research results found that people in helping professions or service industries felt emotionally exhausted, developed negative feelings about clients, and experienced professional competence crises due to the emotional turmoil (Maslach et al., 2012). These feelings often result in burnout syndrome, leading to chronic occupational stress over an extended period (Lee et al., 2010; Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Valcour, 2016).

The concept of burnout has grown with more recent research and support, leading to it being differentiated from other closely related topics, including depression (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Depersonalization has been renamed "cynicism" in burnout studies that

use Maslach's Burnout Inventory. This was explained to better reflect its applicability to other work environments besides those considered helping fields.

Maslach identified exhaustion, depersonalization, and lack of personal accomplishment as the three areas needed to measure burnout (Lee et al., 2010; Leiter et al., 2014; Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Emotional exhaustion is physical and mental exhaustion that surpasses an individual's ability to cope (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Exhaustion is the main symptom of burnout. It can affect a person's mental and physical well-being and the ability to work and feel positive about what they do (Valcour, 2016). Depersonalization is a cynical attitude towards one's work, colleagues, and the importance of their work, which previously felt fulfilling and gratifying (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). Personal accomplishment is an individual's perception of their ability to be effective within their work and life activities. It has been renamed "professional efficacy" within some burnout research (Leiter & Maslach, 2016). A lack of professional accomplishment results in a decline in feelings of competence in the workplace.

Leiter and Maslach (2003) described burnout as a "fundamental disconnect between the worker and the workplace" (p. 91). Furthering the body of research on burnout, Leiter and Maslach (1999) noted that the organizational precursors typically associated with burnout easily fit within six general categories: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. Leiter and Maslach (1999) utilized these six key areas of work-life to describe the organizational context of burnout. They proposed that it is not an absolute value of a measure that is important in determining a factor's contribution to burnout. Instead, it is the level of disconnect between staff expectations and their perceived reality in the work setting (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). The areas of the

work-life model were further developed to address the gap between theory and practice with regards to preventing burnout and to integrate, rather than replace, the existing burnout research.

In the areas of the work-life model, job stressors are framed in terms of six key areas where imbalances take place in the organizational context: workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). These work-life areas accentuate employee fit regarding motivation and opportunity within the work environment (Leiter et al., 2014). In this model, burnout results from persistent mismatches between individuals and their work setting in terms of some or all of the six areas (Mojsa-Kaja et al., 2015). The work-life areas identified in the model relate to challenging workplace aspects by contrasting burnout and work engagement (Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006). When a mismatch is present in these six areas, the risk of burnout increases.

In the work-life model, the inner experience of stress is believed to play a significant role in how a person responds to external job demands or stressors and work-related outcomes (Leiter & Maslach, 2003). Leiter and Maslach (2003) suggested that previous frameworks for understanding burnout provided only narrow guidelines for defining the individual or organizational factors that influence burnout and focused mainly on the individual's personality traits or the tasks involved in the work. The approach proposed by Leiter and Maslach (2003) differed from previous frameworks because of its focus on the continuing relationship between an employee and their job. Leiter and Maslach (2003) suggested that this relationship resembles a psychological contract where problems arise when the terms of the contract are broken, and critical

issues remain unresolved, or the relationship changes to something considered unacceptable by the employee. The areas of the work-life model (Leiter & Maslach, 1999, 2003) focuses on a perceived discrepancy, or inequity, created by a mismatch between an individual's expectation and reality in six key areas of the workplace.

Burnout happens when there is a constant disconnect between people and their work setting in all or some of the six work-life areas (Leiter & Maslach, 1997). Each of the six work-life areas addresses a different angle on an employee's interactions with their work setting (Leiter & Maslach, 1997). All of the six dimensions of work-life are joined together in this framework, which also includes the major organizational pieces of burnout.

Workload

Maslach and Leiter (2016) suggested workload refers to job demands that exceed realistic human limits. Researchers have found that increasing a person's workload relates to increased burnout due to work exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Employees with little time to recover from extreme work hours and a demanding job are often prone to chronic work exhaustion (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach et al., 1996). There is a limit on the demands a person can reasonably meet, and greater work demands can lead to severe problems with exhaustion. This problem can increase when the work is emotional. Emotional work is even more draining when the job requires people to display emotions that are not aligned with their feelings (Lee, 1998). Misalignment between felt and expressed emotions results in a mismatch that affects the working relationship (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Another mismatch occurs between the

work demands and the worker's willingness to engage in types of labor that involve emotion.

Burnout occurs when there is a mismatch of some type within the workload (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). The workload area is often thought to be the most common and discussed of the six Maslach areas. Workload is discussed more than the other five areas partly because of the ever-present relationship between burnout and increased workload, especially with the exhaustion dimension (Maslach et al., 2001; Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006; Schaufeli & Enzmann, 1998). Therefore, workload is one of the most significant job factors and is a strong predictor of burnout.

Control

Researchers from many different perspectives have examined control. An individual cannot expect to have complete control over every aspect of their work; however, the opposite can damage a person's productivity (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). One perspective of research involves role conflict, a key contributor to exhaustion (Leiter et al., 2014). When role conflict occurs in an organization, problems generally occur. The issues that arise stem from various authorities who place conflicting demands or communicate contrasting values within an organization (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Individuals with an external locus of control exhibit higher burnout levels than individuals with an internal locus of control (Maslach et al., 2001). Also, when there is a role conflict, individuals cannot implement effective control in their work. Mismatched demands interfere with an individual's capacity to set priorities or commit themselves fully to their work. Studies focused on role conflict also addressed role ambiguity. Role ambiguity is often defined as the absence of direction at work (Leiter & Maslach, 1999).

The influence of inadequate control and mismatches in the work-life areas results from workers' inability to align the work setting with their values.

Reward

Reward refers to the degree to which monetary, social, and intrinsic compensation is consistent with a worker's expectations (Duke, 2010; Leiter & Maslach, 2004). A mismatch in reward occurs when people feel they are not paid according to their contributions or when they feel disregarded by the organization (Leiter & Maslach, 2006). Often, when a person feels a lack of recognition from colleagues and stakeholders, they start to believe that they and their work are undervalued, producing a feeling of inefficacy (Cordes & Dougherty, 1993; Maslach et al., 1996). Leiter and Maslach (2003) stressed that intrinsic rewards, such as the positive feeling grown through meaningful or fulfilling work, may outdo the importance of extrinsic rewards or monetary rewards. The pleasure and satisfaction experienced with a positive day-to-day workflow increase an employee's commitment and engagement in work (Bakker et al., 2008; Carter & Tourangeau, 2012).

Workers who feel neglected by an organization's material and social reward system can also feel out of sync with its values (Leiter & Maslach, 2011). This mismatch leads to negative thoughts about the organization. Studies have shown that burnout occurs when there is a mismatch in reward (Blix et al., 1994; Maslanka, 1996; Whitaker, 1995). The results of these studies are that not enough reward grows staff members' vulnerability to burning out. An employee can burnout due to excessive or insufficient amounts of rewards that are not balanced. By the time a person experiences burnout, they feel deprived of some quality in their work setting. The exhaustion or cynicism associated

43

with severe mismatches in workload or values has a significant emotional impact that is difficult to dismiss. The reward domain has repercussions for all three aspects of burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). In measuring equity balances, people focus on workload as the most direct measure of their inputs, which are the time, effort, and expertise employees bring to the job.

<p style="text-align:center">Community</p>

Community refers to the quality of the social environment of the workplace (Duke, 2010). Burnout research concerning the community has focused mainly on social support from supervisors, coworkers, and family members (Greenglass et al., 1994; Maslach et al., 1996). Research has shown that social support lessens the relationship between demands and burnout (Chappell & Novak, 1992). Supervisor support has been inversely linked with exhaustion, reflecting the supervisor's impact on staff members' workload (Leiter & Maslach, 2011). Coworker support is related to accomplishment or efficacy, reflecting the value staff members put on their peers' knowledgeable evaluation (Leiter, 1991).

Additionally, job satisfaction can be impacted positively or negatively by workplace conditions. Individuals often lose their sense of belonging if they do not feel connected with their coworkers, supervisors, or clients (Angerer, 2003). Communities must be developed to build and foster relationships among people, and individuals perform better in work environments that foster a sense of community (Maslach et al., 2001). However, a loss of community occurs when individuals have unsettled conflicts or feelings with others at work or when they feel isolated as technological trends result in

less interaction among employees (Angerer, 2003; Maslach et al., 2001). There must be a perceived feeling of community if balance in work life is going to occur.

Fairness

Research focusing only on fairness was rare; however, some considered it an essential dimension of administrative leadership (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). When staff members experience stress, they look to management for leadership related to problem-solving, optimism, fairness, and high expectations for organizational or personal performance (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Fairness also shares some characteristics with the community and reward dimensions. Fairness is a healthy community's quality, especially regarding its allocation of rewards, opportunities, and recognition (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). Fairness in Maslach and Leiter's (2018) model involves mutual trust among people in an organization. In a fair organizational environment, people show consideration for one another. Fairness is a quality of supervisor support in that people of higher authority in an organization must make judgments and decisions that affect staff members' work environment (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). To make fair decisions in the workplace, managers must consider the diverse conditions of staff members. Also, fairness results when resources and opportunities are allocated equitably and not distributed based on cliques or favorites. (Leiter & Maslach, 2008).

Fairness in decisions is assessed in terms of equitable procedures and the quality of the relationships among those affected by the decision (Leiter & Maslach, 1999). A fair decision occurs when people have a chance to offer their arguments and feel treated with respect. People analyze the quality of the procedures and their treatment during decision making as an indicator of their place in the community (Tyler, 1990). Unfair or

45

disrespectful decision making isolates individuals from their community. Fairness is rarely the direct focus of burnout research, but it is a quality in some measures of supervisor or management support (Leiter & Harvie, 1998). This research confirmed that employees' perception of supervisors as both fair and supportive adds to employees' acceptance of organizational change and a decreased susceptibility to burnout (Leiter & Maslach, 2008).

Values

Lastly, values refer to what is important to the organization and the people who work for it (Timms et al., 2007). One of the most apparent mismatches in work-life can occur when there is a conflict between values. A mismatch of values can lead to issues with an individual's relationship to their relationships. The values dimension of work-life is at the heart of employees' relationships with their work and includes the ideals and incentives that attracted them to the profession or organization (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Values connect individuals to their workplaces in ways that go beyond money and advancement.

The control of the personal effect is at the core of the values dimension. The ideal employee is one with the most significant overlay of values. When individual and organizational values overlay, work furthers the objectives of both parties. The smaller the overlap between individual and organizational values, the more often staff members find themselves making a trade-off between work they want to do and work they have to do (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). When an individual's values do not align with their employers' organizational values, the work itself can weaken employees' engagement (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). The tension associated with a lasting mismatch of values

drains personal energy, reduces involvement, and weakens professional efficacy or accomplishment (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Mismatches in values with an employee and an organization tend to move the person toward experiencing burnout.

Summary

The six areas of work-life relevant to burnout include workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values. The six work-life areas were created to determine individual experiences concerning employees' work environments (Leiter & Maslach, 1999; Maslach et al., 2001). Mismatches or imbalance in any of these six areas can significantly impact a workers' well-being and lead to burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Determining the mismatch is an essential step in decreasing burnout in the workplace. According to the work-life model areas, the work environment must be aligned with the individual's expectations to create and maintain a balance within the six areas of work-life (Leiter & Maslach, 2003). This will help to sustain the health and satisfaction of staff. Leiter and Maslach (2003) proposed that the greater the disparity between the individual's expectations and their perceived reality of the work environment, the greater the likelihood of burnout. It is essential to be able to identify and prevent burnout in the workplace.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a review of the literature associated with the ever-changing roles of campus principals and their impact on campus culture. The review included research into reasons why principals are leaving the profession. Research on principal

47

and teacher stress and burnout in the workplace was also considered along with a discussion of the six areas of work-life formulated by Leiter and Maslach (1996).

The desire to better understand the stress of the principalship was a primary driver of this research study. Identifying the most significant reasons for stress and principal burnout will contribute vital information for creating effective support systems for secondary-school principals. Ultimately, creating and maintaining these support systems will help to retain school leaders so their talent is not lost through attrition from this critical profession.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore current perspectives of secondary school

principals regarding their level of stress and burnout in order to identify the causes for the

stress and collect principals' suggestions for alleviating it. Knowledge about the causes

and possible solutions of stress and burnout in secondary school principals is needed to

retain quality school leaders who stay in the profession longer than a few years. Chapter

Three provides an overview of the methodology used to answer the research questions

guiding the study. The chapter also contains sections addressing the following

components: research questions, research design, site selection, participant selection, data

collection methods, data analysis, requirements for trustworthiness, and ethical

procedures.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to explore perceptions of secondary school

principals' stress and burnout in the workplace. Two primary research questions and one

subquestion were used to guide this case study:

RQ1.   How do secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated

with serving as the campus leader?

- How do challenges with balancing work and home life contribute to principals' perceptions of the stressors related to acting as campus leaders?

RQ2. How do secondary school principals seek to address the stressors of school leadership?

Research Design

This qualitative, single-embedded multicase study (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2014) was designed to explore the perceptions of secondary school principals' stress and burnout in the workplace in a South-Central Texas rural mid-size school district. After evaluating other potential research options, qualitative research was chosen for this study because the researcher wanted to understand how the participants perceived their world (Ashworth, 2015). This approach is aimed at developing an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon based on detailed data gathered from individuals who are willing to share their subjective experiences and perceptions with the researcher (McMillan, 2012). A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because it allowed for an exploration of secondary school principles' perceptions of work-life stress and burnout at the research site. The researcher examined the case by integrating multiple qualitative data sources, ranging from semistructured interviews to artifacts (i.e., documents). The nature of collecting rich data required a narrow focus on specific events described first-hand, resulting in an in-depth exploration that provided a deep understanding of the study's context.

After considering different research methods for this study, a single embedded case study design was chosen because of the pliable nature of educational research (Yin,

2014). A case study allows a researcher to focus on processes, meaning, and understanding that cannot easily be identified using numerical data (Merriam, 1998). Researchers in a case study focus on participants' lived experiences by slowly uncovering their unique perspectives (Tracy, 2013). The design aligned with the aim to study three secondary school principals (i.e., cases), bounded by region (i.e., South-Central Texas), locale (i.e., rural), district (i.e., one-site district), grade level (i.e., middle and high school), and time (i.e., the data collection period) which created the context for the study.

Site Selection

The study included two middle schools and one high school within the district site located in a South-Central Texas rural mid-size district. The district was selected using convenience sampling due to the researcher's status as an employee at a high school in the site district who works alongside both middle schools as needed. The pseudonyms assigned to the site district, high school, and two middle schools are the Rural City Independent School District, Central High School, East Middle School, and West Middle School.

The Rural City Independent School District served approximately 7,000 students. The two middle schools served approximately 800 students each in Grades 6–8. The high school was the only high school in the district, and it served over 2,000 students in Grades 9–12. Together, the schools employed approximately 450 professional and nonprofessional staff. Although the schools employed a variety of administrators, the study only considered the experiences of the three primary building principals (i.e., one from each campus). Seventy percent of the students from all three secondary campuses together were from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Also, the two middle schools were

51

designated "improvement required," which means they received an F from the TEA, and the high school earned a letter grade of C. TEA rated the Rural City Independent School District with a letter grade of D overall.

Participant Selection

The researcher used purposeful convenience sampling to identify and select the study participants (Patton, 1990). Convenience sampling was used because the researcher was employed by the site district. Once the researcher obtained approval from the Baylor University Institutional Review Board for an exemption, the researcher contacted Rural City Independent School District's superintendent for permission to conduct the study. The researcher discussed the study's purpose and the participants' criteria with the superintendent and obtained permission to contact the study's potential participants. Qualitative research is aims to understand the meaning of the participants' perspective, so it was necessary to select participants who could provide the most relevant information (Merriam, 2002). Three criteria were used to select the participants for this study. The participants were required to

1. be a current, full-time secondary school principal within the site district;

2. be a principal at a traditional secondary campus within the site district; and

3. if married, have a spouse who was willing to participate.

The prospective participants were contacted by phone to determine their willingness to participate in the study. Once the participants agreed, they were emailed the Consent to Take Part in a Human Research document that outlined the study information. Once they reviewed the document, I met with each participant to explain the

components of the consent form and answer any questions they had regarding the study. I obtained consent from each participant before collecting any data.

Data Collection Methods

Creswell (2003) described the qualitative researcher's role by explaining that qualitative "researchers do not rely on a single form of data; instead, they use open-ended question interviews, literature reviews and human-made documents with the primary intent of developing themes from the data" (p. 18). A case study allows the researcher to collect detailed data from multiple sources using interviews, artifacts, and observations (Creswell, 2007). With this in mind, data was collected from participants using a preliminary open-ended response questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and journals.

A four-question open-ended response questionnaire guided the pre-interview. This type of unstructured interview is often referred to as a "preliminary interview," where the researcher seeks areas or topics of significance from the interviewees (Bell & Waters, 2014). The pre-interview was created to substantiate and enhance the understanding of collected evidence from the participant interviews. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the researcher should design an instrument that uses open-ended questions to better understand the experience as seen through the participant's eyes (p. 5). Using open-ended questions in this context allowed the participants to include more detailed information about their preliminary understanding of stress and burnout concerning the principalship (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, open-ended questions allow the researcher to gather more candid information and insights because respondents may find them less threatening than answering scaled questions (Bell & Waters, 2014).

This study's open-ended questions were modeled after Leiter and Maslach's (1996) Six Areas of Work-life Scale survey.

Interviews in a case study are among the most essential sources of evidence (Yin, 2014) and are often used to uncover the story behind the participant's experiences (McNamara, 1999). Face-to-face interviews were not possible due to social distancing restrictions imposed to protect against the COVID-19 pandemic, so the interviews took place using a video call with screen sharing capabilities. The interviews were designed to uncover participants' personal experiences and perceptions (Creswell, 2012). Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that "the more open-ended the questioning, the better, as the researcher listens carefully to what people say or do in their life setting and experience" (p. 24). Open-ended questioning allows participants to be more open when sharing their experiences with the researcher.

The interviews were semi-structured, which offers a middle ground between unstructured and structured interviews (Leech, 2002). Semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to seek depth, detail, and an insider's perspective on the researched topic (Leech, 2002). Gall et al. (2007) explained semi-structured interviewing as "asking a series of structured questions and then probing more deeply with open-form questions to obtain additional information" (p. 246). Using a semi-structured interview format is important to understand participants' perspectives on the topic being researched. During the interviews for this study, the researcher used prompts to probe for additional information as needed. The researcher recorded the interviews and took notes by hand with each participant's permission. Recording the interviews ensured that the researcher could accurately transcribe and document the conversations (Harvey, 2011).

The researcher also asked the participants to complete a journal for a specified period. The participants were asked to journal over a specific prompt dealing with the stress they may have experienced that week. Journaling is often referred to as "self-report" or "contemptuous assessment methods" (Bolger et al., 2003). The researcher used journaling to gain additional insight into the participants' lived experiences (Meth, 2003). Diary methods can help researchers gather detailed and reliable data from the participants. Having participants use a journal can be used to triangulate emerging themes in different data sources (Schroder, 2003). Participants turned in their journals after the first nine weeks of school to allow the researcher time to identify common themes. Data were collected from August until mid-October.

Data Analysis

Once data collection was complete, a report was written on the participants' experiences as secondary school principals in the site district. The data collected was analyzed using a data analysis spiral (Bazely, 2013). In a qualitative study, it is essential to make the analysis process explicit because, often, the researcher learns by doing (Dey, 1993). The explicit analysis process helps establish credibility for the qualitative study, which some consider lacking or as being too soft (Bazely, 2013; Dey, 1993). NVivo was used to manage and analyze the data collected during the study (Creswell, 2013). The pre-questionnaire, transcribed face-to-face interviews, and journal entries were entered into NVivo for organizational purposes. Notes were kept during the transcript review.

After collecting and organizing the data, I analyzed what had been sorted into codes aligned to the study's research questions and theoretical framework. Coding is vital in qualitative research and involves making sense of all the data collected (Wolcott,

1994). Once the data was coded, I looked for emerging themes (Madison, 2011). Themes in qualitative research are large units of information comprised of several codes that form one common idea (Bazely, 2013). I concluded my data analysis by developing generalizations that presented a detailed picture of the single-embedded case study through a narrative (Creswell, 2007). The single-embedded case study narrative is presented in Chapter Five.

Role of the Researcher

A researcher in a qualitative study brings their beliefs and views to a research project, which impacts the writing of the study (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell (2007), "good research requires making these assumptions, paradigms, and frameworks explicit in the writing of a study, and, at a minimum, to be aware that they influence the conduct of inquiry" (p. 15). I must communicate my potential bias related to the research focus and my connection to this study's participants and site location. I am currently employed as a secondary associate principal at a high school, and I have served as an elementary principal. I recognize my perspective on stress and burnout in the principalship. I am also employed at the site location, and I have existing relationships with the participants selected for this study. These reasons affected my interpretation of the study. To counter these biases, I used the provisions for trustworthiness described in the following section.

Provisions for Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, I triangulated the data, used thick description, and conducted member checking. Data triangulation refers to the process of

collecting data from various sources to show consistency in the findings (Yin, 2014). The data collected from the pre-questionnaire, face-to-face interviews, and journals were used to triangulate the study's findings. This triangulation of the data created greater reliability of the study (Yin, 2014). I used thick description to provide detailed descriptions when writing. Thick descriptions, which are often used in qualitative research, require the researcher to describe the characters and their actions in detail (Denzin, 1989). According to Schwandt (2001), "Thick description is not simply a matter of amassing relevant detail. Rather to thickly describe, social action is actually to begin to interpret it be recording the circumstances, meanings, motivations, and so on that characterize a particular episode" (p. 255). Thickly describing the study participants and their current experiences as secondary school principals will allow readers to explore common elements and determine transferability. I also incorporated member checking, which "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2007, p. 208). All of the participants looked over their questionnaires, the face-to-face interview transcripts, and the journals after all of the themes had been analyzed. I encouraged feedback from the member checking to improve the study's data quality, reporting, and reliability.

To ensure reliability, findings were derived from interviews and journals using coding and analysis of thematic coding completed by the researcher and data gathered from qualitative analysis software. For a researcher to achieve the best results, they must combine electronic and manual methods to analyze and code for the best results (Welsh, 2002). The researcher did not see any risks to the participants in this study. Sample size was small, so the researcher used a pseudonym to keep the participants anonymous.

Limitations of the Research Design

The main limitation of this case study was the small sample size. The study only focused on one school district with only three secondary school campuses. Green and Thorogood (2004) recommended that the appropriate sample size be no less than 20 participants. The district site did not have more campuses that could be included in the study. Having a small sample size is not an ideal standard for a qualitative study. A qualitative study should have enough data to analyze repeated concepts or themes (Bernard, 2011). This redundancy needs to occur until concepts are repeated without new concepts or themes emerging (Bernard, 2011). The in-depth analysis allows for saturation to occur, which is a point where all questions have been thoroughly explored in detail, and no new concepts or themes can be ascertained (Schensul & LeCompte, 2010). This study's findings cannot be generalized because the data was limited to the participants' perceptions and experiences.

Ethical Issues

The study followed all ethical standards set forth by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979). Each participant was provided with the scope and limitations of confidentiality, and they were required to sign an informed consent to participate in the study (Patton, 2015) before the interview as outlined by Baylor University's Institutional Review Board. Participants were selected because they were secondary school principals at the research site and could provide a personal perspective based on their experiences on stress and burnout in the workplace. Participation in the research study was voluntary, and each participant was permitted to

withdraw at their discretion. Participants were not coerced, and none of them fell under the direct supervision of the researcher. When the study began, the researcher served as the associate principal for the district's high school, the research site.

Summary

The research design was described in this chapter. The design was qualitative, based upon a multicase study, and relied on convenience sampling and deductive analysis. Three principal participants were selected from a rural mid-size school district in South-Central Texas. The three participants were all secondary school principals during this study. Also, each participants' spouse was interviewed for the study. Data were collected through the use of a pre-questionnaire, one-on-one interviews, and journal entries. Subsequently, interviews were recorded and deductively analyzed using themes from the theoretical framework. Data was triangulated, organized, and sorted by hand and electronically using InVivo software (November, 2020) to validate the findings. Participants were asked to member check the findings once the data was analyzed for increase validity. The next chapter presents the findings of the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore current perspectives of secondary school principals regarding their level of stress and burnout, the causes for their stress, and how their stress could be alleviated. Knowledge about the causes and possible solutions of stress and burnout in secondary school principals was needed to retain quality school leaders in the profession for longer periods of time (DeMatthews, 2020; Fuller & Young, 2009; Levin & Bradley, 2019). A rural mid-size district in South-Central Texas with two middle schools and one high school served as the sites for this study. Although the school employed a variety of administrators, three primary building principals (i.e., one from each campus) participated in the study. All three secondary campuses were considered traditional secondary schools and serve a population where over 70% of the student body came from an economically disadvantaged background. Two primary research questions and one sub-question drove this research:

RQ1. How do secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated with serving as the campus leader?

- How do challenges with balancing work and home life contribute to principals' perceptions of the stressors related to acting as campus leaders?

RQ2. How do secondary school principals seek to address the stressors of school leadership?

Data Collection and Analysis

The researcher used a multicase study approach to collect detailed data in interviews, artifacts, and observations (Creswell, 2007). Each case study was explicitly focused on the principal of one secondary school in the district, and each included the perceptions of the principal's spouse. With this in mind, the researcher used a three-phased data collection process that involved using a preliminary open-ended response questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and three journal prompts.

Phase 1 was the pre-interview or preliminary interview, which consisted of seven open-ended questions centered around the theoretical framework created by Maslach and Leiter (2011). The pre-interview was used to gather information about the participants' background and understanding of stress and burnout concerning the principalship (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The open-ended questions were modeled after the study's research questions, and the questions used in the questionnaire were used to seek more candid information and insights for the researcher.

Phase 2 consisted of one-on-one interviews with each participant and each participant's spouse. Due to the pandemic and social distancing requirements, in-person, face-to-face interviews were not permitted. Instead, all of the interviews were held using the web-conferencing platform, Zoom, which allowed for uninterrupted time and space. The interviews were designed to uncover participants' personal experiences and perceptions regarding Leiter and Maslach's (1996) six work-life areas.

During the interview, the researcher recorded the interviews with each participant's permission and took notes by hand. Recording the interviews ensured the researcher accurately transcribed and documented each conversation (Harvey, 2011). The

interviews lasted approximately 45 min, and the participants were allowed to join the web conferencing platform from home, which allowed them to feel more relaxed and comfortable during the interview.

The third phase of data collection consisted of three journal prompts that the participants completed over three weeks. These prompts were designed to promote reflection on the stressors experienced that week or that had occurred since the start of the new school year. The resulting journal entries provided additional insight into the participant's lived experiences (Meth, 2003), allowing the researcher to gain an on-the-job understanding of the kinds of stressors that occurred on campus. The journal entries also enabled the researcher to triangulate the themes that emerged from different data sources (Schroder, 2003). Participants turned in their journals after the first nine weeks of school to allow the researcher time to identify common themes. Data were collected from September 2020 until the end of October 2020, when the researcher began the analysis process.

The analysis was conducted by employing a step-by-step process of deductive identification, coding, and categorizing of themes to generate findings using the study's theoretical framework (Merriam, 1998; Ortiz, 2014; Saldaña, 2009; Stake, 2006). Maslach and Leiter's (2018) six areas of work-life (i.e., workload, control, reward, community, fairness, and values) and Maslach's (1982) burnout theory provided the conceptual framework. The researcher first transcribed all of the collected data. Each transcript was then read numerous times to ensure accuracy and gain an initial understanding of each participant's answers. Third, the researcher coded each transcript deductively using the main components of burnout theory. Lastly, the researcher entered

the data into NVivo and used it to help organize it into themes. The researcher's hand analysis was the same as the analysis using the software program.

Setting

This study examined the perceptions of three secondary school principals working in two middle schools and one high school in a rural mid-size school district located in South-Central Texas. The Rural City Independent School District served over 7,000 students. The two middle schools included Grades 6–8, and each housed approximately 800 students. The high school was the only one in the district and served over 2,000 students in grades 9–12. The researcher used pseudonyms to keep the participants and the district anonymous.

Findings

In this section, each participant's case is presented to provide their unique context as secondary school leaders. Each case includes information about the participants' study-specific information as educational leaders and as individuals. Each participant's background in education is shared along with the background of their school. Next, relevant information related to the participant's spouse is presented, as well as the values participants said they relied on to guide and ground them as secondary school leaders. Last, the top four themes are presented for each case. The four themes that emerged from the six work-life areas from the conceptual framework for each participant were: work life, reward, community, and fairness. The areas of control and values were not an essential area of stress for the participants, so they were not included in the findings.

Each work-life area included different aspects within the theme that arose from analyzing responses related to stress. The work-life theme consisted of the individuals' work schedule and their ability to balance work and home life. The theme of reward in the study referred to recognition within and from an organization. When completing the research for this study and analyzing the data, two topics related to reward emerged: a recognition system for principals and staff and district leaders' appreciation. The theme of community included how the participants perceived stress based on their interactions with students and parents, interactions with teachers, and interactions with district leaders. Fairness in this study focused on a sense of how equitably principals were treated within the school district. One additional theme also emerged during the analysis: leading in a pandemic. Each case study ends with the participant's ideas and those of their spouse on ways of coping with stress. The findings will end with a cross-analysis identifying similarities and differences among all three cases for each theme.

Raul

Background

Raul grew up in a large family in Mexico and Del Rio, Texas. His parents placed a high value on education, family, and religion. He attended school at the University of Texas, San Antonio (UTSA), where he dreamed of being a coach. Raul valued his family and felt great pride in his three daughters. He has been married twice and recently celebrated his tenth wedding anniversary with his second wife. He had one daughter in college from his first marriage and had a 4th grader and a kindergartner from his second marriage. Raul said he tries to be there as much as possible for his daughters while

managing the job's time constraints and an hour commute to work. Raul took advantage of time commuting by reflecting on his day and what was coming up for him.

Raul has been an educator at the secondary level for twenty-six years. He started his career as a coach and a social studies teacher. During his career, he had served in numerous positions on one high school campus: department chair, academic dean, assistant principal, and principal. Raul left that district six years before this study to become the high school principal at Central High School. During his time there, he obtained a doctoral degree in educational leadership and began serving as an adjunct professor, preparing future educational leaders for a master's degree.

When asked why he decided to become a principal, Raul mentioned his past experiences with one of his leaders: "I worked for a principal who taught me the value of work ethic and building campus culture, and I wanted to be like him." He was a winning head basketball coach during his career and always thought he would become an athletic director. Raul decided to become an administrator because he wanted to affect change on a larger scale than he could as a teacher or a coach. Ultimately, Raul said he hoped to become a university professor and "teach real-world applications about his experience as a leader in both good and bad districts."

Raul's spouse, Marie, was also an educator, but she worked on an elementary school campus. At the time of the study, she was a certified reading specialist and had worked in education for 18 years. Although Marie felt she could understand and relate to Raul's job and its demands, she also believed their job levels caused a disconnect. She mentioned that when she met Raul, he always spoke of wanting to be more than a coach and becoming an administrator. They both attended graduate school while dating, which

was a unique experience for them to share in their relationship. Marie supported Raul when he went back to get his doctorate, and now that he has completed it, she has returned to school to become a certified dyslexia specialist. Marie has noticed an increase in Raul's stress level as he has moved to higher positions with more responsibilities.

Raul rated his current stress level as an eight on a scale from 1 to 10, citing unforeseen campus and personnel issues as the cause. He noted that "there is nothing more stressful than being a high school principal because of the age of the students and all the programs that require supervision." Raul also commented on how the stresses on principals "change on a daily basis." In the past, Marie believed that Raul's stress was extremely high, a nine on a 10-point scale. However, she explained that his current leadership staff had "helped him feel more supported and comfortable" on the campus, which had decreased his overall level of stress.

Raul explained his values guided him as a principal and said his highest-held values were "work ethic, honesty, and humility." These values guided him in his decisions and actions as a secondary school principal. Overall, Raul was driven by his values in this position and would not make a "decision that [was] not best for kids."

Central High School Background

Central High School was the only high school in the town. The campus serves over 2,100 students from various backgrounds. Over 70% of the students come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and the student body is comprised primarily of Hispanic and Caucasian students. The campus is unique because it serves many students living in extreme poverty, but there are also students who came from affluent families. The campus is designated an early college high school by TEA and allows first-generation

66

students to graduate with an associate's degree. The campus has a large career and technology program and has a flexible school day program for at-risk students who may not graduate.

The administration staff includes an associate principal, academic dean, three assistant principals, and one assistant principal intern. The campus was rated a C for the 2018–2019 school year and was awarded several distinctions in English language Arts progress and student growth. The campus was on track to earn a B before the campus shut down for COVID-19. The campus's strengths included its focus on instruction, but it struggled with discipline and the need to close large instructional gaps for certain students.

Raul was the most experienced principal in the study. He brought experience as a career principal to the table and understood the stress that came with the job. Sharing his beliefs about the stress of the principalship and managing the stress, Raul explained: "This job is always stressful, but it is how you manage the stress that makes or breaks you. Dealing with stress is always going to be a big part of the job." Raul shared that being a high school principal is a "difficult job" and that you can never be entirely prepared: "No one is ever prepared or ready for this. You simply learn every day on the job, but only the principals that can really manage people and their emotions well survive in this profession."

Raul had experienced stress throughout his career, and this continued stress had affected his overall health and well-being:

> I have been dealing with high blood pressure and weight gain. I have a hard time sleeping, and I know that all of these are a result of my stress. I do have to see a doctor regularly about these issues, but I have been working hard to lose weight and be healthier.

Raul and Marie both worried about Raul's overall health and the effect that stress had on him now and in the long-term.

The study looked at four of the six work-life areas developed by Leiter and Maslach (1997) as themes for the in-depth analysis. The four themes that were analyzed were workload, reward, community, and fairness. The four themes that were analyzed were workload, reward, community, and fairness. These four themes were used to illuminate the principals' perceptions of stress and burnout in the workplace. Also, values and control were determined during the analysis process not to be areas of added stress for the participants.

Workload

Raul believed that the workload experienced by a secondary school principal was more demanding than at the elementary level. For Raul and Marie, their ideas related to stress and the principalship included a lack of balance between work and home because a principal works such long hours. Raul spoke about this lack of balance between work and home and the stress it placed on his family, but he did add that working from home at least made him feel somewhat connected with his family: "It is always difficult, and I do not believe I have a balance. I am always working from home on the weekends. At least I am around my family and not at the office."

Marie candidly discussed how she had struggled being married to Raul due to the "endless hours," the "time spent away from home," and the lack of balance. Over the last ten years, she had struggled with the pressure of parenting their two daughters alone and not getting much support from Raul. She said:

Yeah, well, it comes with a lot of patience on my part. I feel like that is something I've had to learn in these 10 years of our marriage. It definitely was very difficult. When we got married, he was moving into his first administrative role, and I was pregnant with our first daughter. It was very difficult because I definitely didn't feel like I had support from him. Then we had our second child. I remembered again the pressure of not only raising two children by myself, but him just really being consumed with work, [which] has been really hard on me.

Being married to a secondary school principal had proven difficult for Marie over the years, but she had gotten through it with patience. Marie and Raul were both aware of the job constraints and the constant strain and pressure his job had placed on their marriage.

Marie continued to discuss the "patience" it took to help her process many of her feelings. She explained that sometimes she felt "angry" towards Raul for being absent. She believed that being an educator herself helped her understand and accept what was happening. For Marie, being married to a high school principal meant you had to learn to communicate with your spouse and be willing to "give and take":

Both of us have had to work on our relationship and the struggles of the job demands, but I will say it has gotten better in our 10 years of marriage. We do communicate now a lot more and that has been key for the both of us. I have learned to accept or not question when his phone rings or someone is texting him and it's two in the morning. Those feelings of mistrust and what's happening have turned into, "Is everything ok?"

Communication was the key for Marie during the marriage. She expressed that their communication had grown, which allowed their relationship to grow and become more secure. She said that without being able to communicate, their marriage would have a difficult time lasting.

In a typical 70-hr work week, Raul worked on the weekends and used Sundays to prepare for the upcoming week. Marie intimated: Raul "does not have a balance because he is always looking for more time to work even when at home. Raul is always on the clock 24-7". Raul admitted that he was afraid he would not be able to "keep up this pace"

and that he was "missing out on his daughters growing up." Raul's biggest concern was being able to keep up with the pace of always being on the clock and still be a dad and a husband. Raul and Marie both agreed Raul's job was very demanding, and there was no balance between home and work life. Raul and Marie both agreed that having an actual balance between work and home was next to impossible in Raul's profession.

Reward

Raul and Marie both agreed that there was no reward or real recognition system for principals in the district. Raul conveyed strong feelings about this position not being about recognition or a reward from the central office; whereas, Marie felt that some reward system should exist. Raul was open in the fact that he did not believe in doing the job to earn recognition from others. He said: "There is a lack of rewards for principals in the district but this job is not about recognition." Marie knew there was a recognition system in place in the district and was very clear that Raul deserved district recognition for his work: "I know that other people in the district have been recognized, but it has not been my husband. I feel he should be recognized for all the hard work and ideas and things he comes up with." Raul and Marie disagreed about the importance of an actual extrinsic reward system recognizing principals.

The second topic that surfaced during the analysis on rewards dealt with appreciation from the district and others at the campus level. When asked about reward, Raul pointed out that, "He does this job only to be appreciated by the kids." When Marie was asked the same question, she did not know if he was truly appreciated for his work but felt he should be. She said:

Raul feels appreciation from his staff for all of his hard work, but I am not sure if he really feels appreciated by central office and his supervisors for all of his work that he puts in on a daily basis. I feel that he should be appreciated for all of the programs and initiatives and good things he has brought to his campus and to the district.

Marie was adamant that everyone, especially principals, should feel appreciated and be rewarded by supervisors for a job well done; whereas, Raul did not feel he needed to be rewarded by his supervisors.

Community

The theme of community included how the participants perceived stress based on their interactions with students and parents, interactions with teachers, and interactions with district leaders. Raul believed his stress stemmed from his interactions with parents and the central office, and he said the students were the reason he came to work:

With students the only two things that are stressful are discipline and lack of academic preparedness. Students are not really that stressful. It's dealing with the adults like parents and central office when someone is not happy about the consequence [for inappropriate behavior] or central is not happy about the student scores. I love working with kids. They are the reason I come to work each day.

The primary stressor associated with students for Raul was dealing with discipline and the students' lack of academic preparedness. Students who didn't put forth the needed effort ended up failing all of their classes during remote learning related to the pandemic was an additional stress for Raul.

In his journal entry about the most stressful thing, Raul reflected on the need to "create a plan to address the large number of remote learners who failed the first six weeks." He noted that he had to create a plan independently without support from the central office to address over 60% of the students who failed one or more classes during the first six weeks of school. Overall, he was stressed because he did not have all the

71

answers for the unexpected situations on campus. Examples of this included leading

campus functions and activities during Covid-19 and trying to engage unmotivated

remote students. Raul explained:

> Not having students face-to-face due to Covid-19 is so hard. We can't force them
> to learn, do their work, or be there to support them academically. Our students
> already struggle and do not have support from home. I feel pressure from the
> parents and from the district office to get these students on grade level, but,
> honestly, I am not sure how to do that.

Raul felt stress related to not having all the answers regarding students and remote

learning during COVID-19. It had also been a struggle to figure out ways to get students

motivated or reengaged.

Raul also pointed out that one of his largest stressors related to the community of

students was worrying about their safety and discipline. Raul worried about student

discipline because absent students were not learning, and his job was to ensure all

students learned. He said: "If students are not behaving, then they are not learning, and

we are in the business to educate kids." Raul went on to state that students "not learning"

or "students who constantly misbehave" are two things that "[keep] me up at night."

Marie agreed with Raul that she thought "students caused her husband the least amount

of stress."

Raul emphasized that it was the "expectations" for the high school with the

community that could often be stressful and overwhelming. He felt that the parents and

community could be "unrealistic" in what could be achieved. According to Raul, parents

were among the most significant stressors that a principal had to deal with daily. Raul

wrote about one issue dealing with parents who were very demanding and wanted him to

do things that were not in his control:

> One of the most stressful things I dealt with this week were the nonstop emails and phone calls from parents that teachers never contacted them about their child not doing work or failing during the 6 weeks. When I contact the teacher, they tell me this isn't the case and then it becomes she said he said and I am left to fix the problem. The parents want me to fix the grade and get their child to pass which I cannot do.

Dealing with parents could be a daunting task for Raul that heightened his stress because they always wanted him to solve a problem that he could not control or fix.

The second topic that dealt with community related to the teachers. According to Raul, teachers could often be one of the most stressful aspects of a principal's job. In one example, Raul shared that a teacher was placed on administrative leave and caused several issues on the campus, which ultimately led to an increase in his stress levels because he was trying to figure out how to solve this unexpected problem and limit any disruption to student learning:

> Inappropriate adult behavior and lack of pride in the profession causes me the most stress. I never know on a daily basis what issue will arise or who will do something wrong next. This year I had a teacher who is now out on administrative leave get arrested for drug possession. Instead of just dropping it, the teacher actually posted their mug shot in the google classroom and asked all of her students to free write about legalizing medical marijuana. I had parents and central office calling, and I had to drop everything and deal with that issue. That issue is still ongoing.

Teachers' actions and choices that are often inappropriate had caused Raul much stress. He learned that he had no control over others' actions, which was hard for him to manage.

Another personnel issue related to the school community was losing a key administrator, which added to Raul's stress and his perception of handling the ramifications for his staff. This key staff member managed campus issues related to instruction. Without this person, Raul admitted that his stress level rose to a ten because he now had to figure out how to solve this unexpected problem. He explained:

73

Towards the end of the 6 weeks on a Monday, I lost my academic dean. This person is number three on the campus and in charge of all instructional programs. The person was moved to another campus, and now I am down one of the most important positions. I am now working even more trying to keep up. I do not know if I can do it to be honest.

Raul expressed concern about losing this academic dean and explained the loss of a key staffer had been overwhelming at times.

The last topic that arose from the theme of community and stress related strictly to the district office. The main issue with the district office was the "lack of support," their lack of "experience running a campus," and the "expectations" they had for principals. A primary stressor for Raul involved a lack of support regarding parent complaints or issues:

We have parents call central office alleging our school was not helping them. I personally spoke with this parent over six times in the last three days and held three parent conferences with the teachers. Instead of calling me to ask what I had done, central office calls me basically believing the parent and wants to know why I have not been helping them. To me they try to bend over backwards for parents and believe all they say. I think it is because none of them have ever been a campus principal besides one and he was an elementary principal. This lack of experience makes it hard to be backed up by them in my opinion. So, they make me drop what I was doing like today and find all of the emails, get all of the parent contact logs, and send this to central office. This still was not enough so I had to redo some items again with the same parent. This is so frustrating to me because they do not even ask me anything; they are very reactive.

The "lack of experience" of the district office staff created stress for Raul as a principal. This stress could have been caused by the lack of individuals at the district office who had ever worked as a secondary school principal. The lack of experience made Raul feel "not supported." He believed the district office personnel "[couldn't] relate to his job or even understand what he goes through on a daily basis." Raul explained that the lack of experience equated to a lack of understanding about the

dynamics of running a large comprehensive high school; therefore, they asked for things that were not feasible. Raul explained:

> I see their inexperience play out in the decisions that central office often make and things they ask me to do. District office try to roll out initiatives or programs that would work on an elementary campus but not at a high school. I have to make everything myself for the high school with my team. District office does not help me out at all because they do not know how to run a high school so they make me do everything alone without support. They all will help out the middle school's because both of the principals are new. They have an elementary director, so they get a lot of support, but I am my own island. The coordinators are not even allowed to help at the high school and only focus on elementary and middle school.

Marie agreed with Raul that the district office put the most stress on her husband. She explained that being the only high school in a district left him without peers with whom he could commiserate, explaining,

> The fact that he is the only high school in the district, I think that puts a lot of stress on him, too, because he's having to come up with things; he is not able to collaborate with someone working in the exact same district as him doing the exact same job. So, I feel like a lot of pressure comes from him having to be very innovative in a sense and create things that are created. He puts that pressure on himself a lot for sure.

Marie explained that isolation was difficult for her husband because he had no one in the district to rely on or go to for support.

Marie continued that she felt that a lot of her husband's stress was "self-inflicted" because he did not want to let anyone down. According to Marie, this stress could be lessened if her husband was not so hard on himself. Overall, both Raul and Marie agree that the school community added a lot of stress to Raul that could at times be "overwhelming" and "one of the hardest parts of the job."

75

Fairness

Fairness also emerged as a significant theme during the data analysis. Raul and Marie both saw a connection between fairness and additional stress because there was a lack of "perceived equity" in the workplace. Raul reiterated that being without resources or personnel "causes additional stress and hardship in the principalship." Raul explained in his one-on-one interview that he did not always feel that things were fair and that when he perceived things as "not being fair or equitable," it added to his overall stress level. He felt that other campuses get a lot more "support from central office," and to him, this was not fair. He explained he needed support to get through a challenging year:

> I know that both middle schools are "improvement required," but they constantly have people there to support them and I am always left alone. I know this is not always a bad thing, but for once, I would like someone to say, "Hey do you need anything?" Nobody ever asks me if I am doing okay, if I need anything or any support from the district office. Heck, they are never even on my campus.

Raul said that there was never a sense of fairness when it came to "available personnel," which frustrated him. Overall, he did not understand why these decisions were made this way or why he was not treated the same as everyone else:

> Sometimes I feel like you get punished for being good at your job. I mean both middle schools have over 1,000 less students than my campus, and they have more administrative staff than I do. I can't figure that one out. I joke with them and say that they have one admin per student, but it really does bother me.

Raul expressed frustration with the decisions that the district office made regarding his staffing allocations. According to Raul, he had less administrative staff than both middle schools. This shortage caused him to pick up the slack and stressed him out even more because he tried to keep up with everything on the campus without dropping the ball.

Raul contended that the principals should "not be compared to each other" because each campus is "unique and has different strengths and weaknesses." Marie also felt that there was not a sense of all principals being treated equitably and saw how the situation bothered her husband:

> I have heard him say that elementary school principals have probably a better relationship with the superintendent than he feels he has. I think he just feels like it's because he's secondary and he's like the male there and he's by himself. So he thinks that they are not being equitable in the way he presented it to me. I think he does think that there's not equity among them, and I would have to agree with him that other principals are treated better. I think it is because the superintendent can't relate to being a high school principal.

Marie did not feel that there was equity among the campus principals, and she wished that all were treated as equals in the district.

Fairness and equity in treatment and resources (i.e., personnel) were essential to Raul and Marie. They both agreed that perceived inequities added stress. Also, Raul and Marie both felt that there was lopsided treatment of principals in the district.

Leading During a Pandemic

A theme that emerged during the analysis that related to stress was leading during a pandemic. Leading during this time made Raul feel even more stressed than in past years. He talked about how "difficult" and even "scary" it had been to be a principal during this unprecedented time. He added that he felt like a "seasoned principal" until the pandemic hit. After it began, he worried about his ability to make the correct decisions:

> I am now expected to keep every employee and student safe from a virus I do not know that much about. I had to create a COVID plan for my campus, and I am not an expert. I have over 2,000 students on my campus, so what if I make a wrong choice; then what happens?

Raul pointed out that his safety was also important because he did not want to expose his own family to the virus. He worried about what would happen if he got sick and could not work. This pandemic had caused him to "rethink wanting to be a principal." He worried about the "unknown and the next thing that will happen" due to COVID-19 and how to handle the situation:

> Kids are having a hard time dealing with COVID and it is showing up not only in the gaps that they have come to school with, but also in their mental health issues. Teachers are really struggling. I have had a few who refuse to come back to work. Now because of the virus people want to stay home for any reason, and I have to let them if they get sick for fear that they have COVID. This has caused a shortage of subs throughout the campus. Some days we have up to 20 classrooms that are not covered. I do not know what will happen after the holidays and this worries me.

Raul experienced a high level of stress when dealing with the unknown during his time leading during the COVID-19 pandemic, saying he often felt like a first-year principal all over again.

This unprecedented situation weighed on Raul daily. He was not sure what the future held for the campus in the pandemic. Marie also talked about the added stressors due to COVID-19. She felt "frightened for her husband's life on a daily basis." She worried about his health and his contracting the virus. Marie admitted that her fears and concerns had added a lot of stress for her husband.

Ways to Address Stress

Raul and Marie spoke about their faith and the importance of daily prayer to helping Raul handle his stress. Marie recalled that Raul always seemed less stressed and more relaxed after he had recited the rosary or prayed:

> I do believe that Raul prays to help him with stress. It does relax him. God and prayer are very important in our family. We live through God, and we know that

He is always with us even during difficult times. Knowing that he is not alone but with God helps Raul get through the tough times.

Raul also discussed the importance of prayer in his interview. He believed in prayer's power to help relax him and reduce the stress levels he felt while on the job. He said that he "recites the rosary" on his way to and from work, and this simple act helped him deal with stressful things and relax.

Another way Raul liked to reduce his work stress was to "work out." Marie and Raul both agreed that Raul used exercise to relieve his stress and decompress when he was at home. Raul added that he "uses working out to relax and can tell when he doesn't work out because he has a hard time sleeping." Raul stated that he could not sleep well or turn his brain off if he did not exercise. Raul tried to work out for at least an hour a day as soon as he got home, and then he joined his family for dinner. During the year of this study, Raul had focused more on his health and working out, and he had lost over 30 pounds. He was proud that he was making his health a priority.

Raul said he would like to learn to trust more in others that he works with so that he could rely on them to help carry the burden of running a high school. He felt that this trust might decrease his workload, which would reduce his stress:

> I would like to learn how to delegate better and put more trust in people around me, not try to solve every problem at the given moment, not work on weekends. I would also like to work with more mutual trust with central office so that we are all trying to do what is best for our students.

Raul wanted to build trust among his team members and rely on them more. He was honest during the interview when he explained that relying on others would help to alleviate his stress levels because he would not be trying to do it all himself

Marie also had ideas about how Raul could alleviate his stress. She wanted him to communicate and lean on her more for support if needed and for him to have complete power over decisions for his campus:

> I wish he would communicate more with me about his stress. I think he doesn't want to burden me, and [he] probably just doesn't want to think about it once he is home. I think that if he had more say in decisions on his campus such as his staff members, especially the administrators he has, [this] would really alleviate stress. If he could manage those key personnel decisions, then that would be like an ideal world for any administrator.

Raul and Marie agreed that prayer and working out were ways that have been effective for Raul to reduce his level of work-related stress. Also, Marie wanted Raul to try and "communicate more" and also to "open up" with her about his stressors as a way to reduce his stress levels.

Henry

Henry grew up in San Antonio, Texas, on the south side of the city. He grew up in poverty and experienced the murder of 15 friends during high school. Gang violence was prevalent when he was growing up, and he always felt that school was important. He got away from this rough neighborhood and received a scholarship to college by a chance meeting with an individual who helped Latinos further their education. Henry had been married to his wife, Sara, for only three years. They had no children. Henry commuted 25 min to his campus by car, which he felt was manageable. Henry loved working in this community and felt a strong connection to his staff, students, and parents.

Henry had been an educator for almost 20 years. His route to becoming a middle school principal was not the same as most principals. He had no desire to become a building principal. Henry left his hometown of San Antonio and moved to New York

City to attend school. He stayed there for five years, obtaining his undergraduate degree.

He graduated from college when he was 21, and his first teaching and learning job was in

urban education. While there, he decided to become a teacher. New York's school system

was organized differently than in Texas. In New York, a person was required to have a

master's degree to teach. New York was also different than Texas because a district or

campus license could be obtained, and he only saw himself at the district level.

Additionally, New York required prospective teachers to complete a year

internship on various campuses. He taught part-time in three different schools during his

internship year. The schools were all urban districts, and they came with unique issues

and problems.

After his year in New York, Henry realized he was very marketable because he

was a young Hispanic teacher with a master's degree. He was recruited by Boston Public

School and also New York Public schools, but Henry decided to return to his hometown

of San Antonio. He came back home and taught for two years at a middle school. In his

third year of teaching, he moved to high school and helped found a program for inner-city

Latinos. Henry eventually became bored and frustrated with red-tape, which led him to

move to Philadelphia. There he earned a second master's degree in public policy. While

in Philadelphia, he worked on large projects in risk management. He then moved back to

New York City and worked for a Wall Street startup company after 9/11, looking at

NCLB and corrective action. Henry oversaw school reform for schools in the Bronx,

Washington Heights, and parts of Brooklyn.

After four years, he decided to return to Texas and move onto a campus. He had

served as an assistant principal, academic dean, associate principal, coordinator of social

studies and was now a middle school principal. This was his sixth year in this district and his first full year as a principal. He moved over to this campus to help get the campus back on track right before COVID-19 restrictions shut down the district. While working at the campus, Henry obtained his doctorate in educational leadership and had just completed his superintendent certification. When asked who most influenced his decision to be a principal when he returned to Texas, he stated:

> I think two people. One of them was my deputy chancellor in New York and she told me that if I were going to make district decisions, I needed to have experience on the ground. The other influence was my mentor and boss in Texas when I was an academic dean and associate principal, and he was the first person here that was really innovative and thought outside the box in my opinion. Both of these people got me thinking about being a principal differently, and that I didn't have to be the principal I saw while growing up.

This change in thinking helped shape him as the administrator he was at the time of the study. When asked about his next steps and career goals, Henry said he wanted to become a superintendent. He saw himself being a campus principal for a few years and then moving on to the next level.

Henry's spouse, Sara, was not an educator. Sara worked as a grant manager for a hospital and helped find grants and scholarships for individuals to attend nursing school. She also helped locate money to provide professional development in the nursing department and fund ways to educate the community. Sara felt that in some broad way, she could relate to educators. She acknowledged that the first year of being married was challenging for her. Sara was not working, and Henry was an assistant principal at a high school who worked many hours and attended many school events. Henry always made sure that a family member could spend time with his spouse to keep her company. This interaction with family allowed her "to feel like I was spending time with people and not

feel alone." In recent years, she had learned how to handle being married to an administrator and how to create some time for them.

On a scale from 1 to 10, Henry rated his stress at a seven. He felt he was "calm" but said he was always "waiting for what is next." Henry was working on getting better at "functioning in his role," and he thought this helped his stress levels drop. He said he believed every person deals with stress differently, and he could handle different levels of stress. Sara rated Henry's stress level at a five. She had noticed that this was the first job she had ever seen him perform that created stress for him. Henry said that he has always "hid his stress from her" in the past, but now when he came home, she "sees the stress on him" and saw that it affected him physically.

East Middle School was one of two middle schools in town. The campus served over 800 students from various backgrounds, with over 70% of the students coming from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The campus was majority Hispanic and Caucasian, and the leadership team included a lead principal, academic dean, two assistant principals, and one assistant principal intern. The campus was rated an F for the 2018–2019 school year and was expected to be an improvement required campus again or rated an F before COVID requirements shut down the campus. The campus's strength included a focus on instruction and the professional learning community process, but the campus had come under a new principal's leadership in the spring of 2019. The campus had a high teacher turnover and had been given a new principal's every year for three years in a row. The campus administration was focused on creating and implementing sustainable systems.

Henry had the second-highest level of experience in this study, but he was still considered a new principal. His experiences in education had helped him deal with

various job stressors. When asked how often his work as a secondary school principal was stressful, Henry said, "This job is always stressful but it is how you manage the stress that makes or breaks you." Henry also talked about how stressful his work had become since the COVID-19 pandemic began:

> I became a principal right before COVID-19 hit the world, so I do not know if work can be any more stressful. Almost all of my experience of leading a campus has been leading a campus and dealing with COVID-19.

Henry's various roles in education and past experiences helped him to understand what stress is and that it will always be a part of the job. Henry admitted that he had experienced health issues due to his high levels of stress. He explained:

> Yes, I have and have had some issues with my health. I have high blood pressure. Sometimes I see stars in my eyes, and I get really bad headaches. I take medicine for high blood pressure, and I work out as much as I can.

Henry and Sara both worried about his health and the effect the stress could have on it in the long term. Sara shared that she had seen the stress on his face:

> This is the first time I have told him that I've seen some type of physical stress. Not really where he's breaking down, but just more when I look at him. I'm like, "Wow, I can tell that today was a hard day for you." That's the one thing that he does cover very well, at least in our relationship.

Sara was concerned about Henry and tried to work with him to lose weight and focus on his health. Sara felt that she was more concerned about his health than he was:

> I'm always worried about his health. I guess I have to stay on him so when he does feel bad then to get him to actually take the day off or make sure he makes his doctor's appointment. I feel like I'm complaining as a wife, but I think I feel in his field that sometimes you can't just take that day off. I get this somewhat, but to me his health his more important than his job.

Henry admitted that he took a more serious approach to lose weight and eating healthy, thanks to his wife, who made sure that he tried. He knew that she worried a lot about him.

Henry felt he was ready to lead because he had worked with some great mentors

throughout his career:

> Yes. I have spent years under good leaders, and I have a full tool belt. For the things I am weak in, I have strong people in those areas. In terms of resources, I have more than my predecessor. For what I don't have, I create. In the end, we do what we can. In terms of what we don't have, we really need a turnkey LMS for remote learning. The system would go a long way in lowering stress levels for teachers and students.

Henry knew what it took to be a principal and what resources he lacked to get the job

done.

Workload

Henry shared that he "struggles trying to maintain a balance between work and

home." This balance had been difficult for him, and the long hours had added stress to his

home life. He felt that he had a hard time managing the workload because he was married

at a late age and was set in his ways:

> I was married at a later age than most, so I was used to working late and not having to come home to anyone. I have had to adjust this thinking and remind myself to put my wife first before my job.

Sara also has had issues with Henry not balancing work and home life. She was

sincere during the interview about the struggles of being married to a secondary school

principal and how she wished that he spent more time with her at home:

> I want to say he probably works about 70, 80 hours a week. I mean, I just felt like he is always working. Let's just say he goes to work, gets up in the morning, goes to work, comes home. On a normal day he gets here about 7 o'clock then we spend part of our night talking and eating. Sometimes he needs to decompress, so he will go change. From there, it's probably calls or doing emails. He probably doesn't finish till about 10 or 11 p.m., but he has been trying to limit his schedule. So that's kind of our day and our week.

Henry was aware that he worked too much and that his job took time away from his wife. He said Sara still "struggles with the time I spend towards my job," but she was getting better at learning how to cope. Henry was also trying to change his work habits and decrease the time he spent on work. He agreed with his wife that he needed to learn to "cut back" and not just be "consumed" with work all the time:

> Oh, my God. A week ago right now when we're talking like over 80 hours on campus, I'm working nonstop. I'm trying to do better, but I probably work in a regular week about 70 hours and a regular week is Monday to Friday. Then I put anywhere from 5 to 10 hours, sometimes more on a weekend, so I'm doing about 90 hours, maybe a week. I mean, I feel comfortable saying 80 or 90 hours a week, but I know I need to work on cutting back [working] at home.

Henry was candid when he talked about how his wife "ground[ed] him," and how she was a good woman who "puts up with him," so he recognized he needed to make sure he did better.

> Sara believed Henry was not able to balance work and home:

> It's not there, there is no balance between work and home. He tries to give me time on the weekends and the weeknights, but that just means that he is working in the same room as me. I do really appreciate the effort, but it gets lonely for me at times. I wish he was able to leave work and put the job behind him and only focus on us when he got home.

Sara expressed concern that Henry could not balance work and home, but she also conceded he had improved at this since they were first married. She admitted that she had to understand and accept his demanding job and work hours.

Henry and Sara focused on being patient with each other and allowing space to work when needed. Henry was working on meeting his wife's needs and disconnect from his job, so he was not always focused on work. He said:

> There are times I have to cut the office off and disconnect. I remind myself that even if I died today, someone else would step right in and take over. So, I have to manage myself as a resource to make sure I have a long career.

Henry realizes that he had to "take time for his family" if he planned to last in this career and remain married. He hoped to learn to balance his work and home life better but felt he was not doing a very good job.

Reward

Henry and Sara had different thoughts about recognition for principals in the district. Henry was okay without recognition most of the time, and Sara thought principals should be formally recognized. Henry said there was no proper district recognition system in place but that the district had made to "acknowledgments" that year:

> The district has this champion belt that keeps going around to people who make decisions to help the district as a whole. This is not just for principals but for everyone in the district. We got shout outs sometimes by central office, and that is nice. People can see what you're doing.

According to Henry, principals, "don't do this job to be praised." He believed that you do the job for the "community you serve." He did not get stressed out about not being recognized for his job. Sara was not aware of any reward or recognition system in the district.

The second topic under reward was the idea of being appreciated by people in the district. When asked if he felt appreciated for his work, Henry had a lot to say on the subject. He felt appreciated by those he worked with on the campus, but he thought that this changed daily:

> I think any principal to say to yes is lying because, I mean, you give up your family, you give yourself up, and you give up your love, right? You give up your time, your energy, maybe your health. You really do. Someone told me, when a teacher sends you an email, that's the most important email they'll send that day, but to you as a principal, that's one of 35 emails you got that day. And yet, and

each one is important. Teachers are fickle creatures. You know, they love you, love you, love you. But if you sneeze in the wrong direction, you're the worst person that ever lived. And, you know, I don't know. I can't think about appreciation like I appreciate when people appreciate me. That's nice.

According to Henry, appreciation changed daily, and when the teachers did not appreciate him, it caused him stress. Henry wanted the staff to enjoy working on the campus, and he cared about what they thought about him as a leader.

Sara was also asked if she thought her husband felt appreciated or not. She could not say one way or another but noted that this topic was not something that they ever really talked about, and that Henry never showed it bothered him. Henry recognized that as a new principal on campus, he would have to get the teachers to "appreciate what he does for them," which will build a positive and collaborative culture.

Community

Henry felt stress related to students, but he noted that this group caused him the least amount of stress:

> For me at this moment, the largest stressor I have related to students is how to engage the remote learners. They are not doing anything at home, and I am still responsible for them. How do I fix this problem? This is something I do not know how or what to do to get them back engaged with school.

Student stress for Henry centered around getting the remote learners to engage. The students who opted not to return to in-person school were not as successful as their peers who were being taught on campus. In his journal entries for all three weeks, Henry expressed his concern about student learning and safety as the most stressful issues he faced:

> My main source of stress has been grades with only 19% of remote students passing all classes, as compared to 82 % of in-person students passing all classes. Also, trying to figure out how to integrate 100 new students back to campus for

the second 6 weeks. I need to make sure I keep them safe as well as all of the staff safe from COVID.

In his pre-interview, Henry pointed out that he always worried about "student safety" and discipline. In Week one of his journal entries, he shared concerns about a new problem with students in the behavior unit and how these new disruptive behaviors were causing stress for him and his staff:

> This week, the main stressor on our campus has been addressing the rising disruptive behaviors of the five behavior program students we have received back to campus. One of the behavior students has been charging at women teachers and trying to dance on tables and desks. He is becoming increasingly more aggressive. Needless to say, these students are raising teacher anger with the perception that our campus has been "dumped on."

Dealing with students with special needs was a stressor for Henry. He noted that this changed every day depending on the behaviors of the students. His main goal on any day was to guarantee the safety of all students and staff on campus.

Sara could not recall a time when Henry ever talked about feeling stressed out over an incident that involved students besides the high failure rate for remote students during the pandemic. She said that parents caused more stress for Henry, especially when they complained about their child not being adequately supported during remote learning:

> I have dealt with many parent concerns and complaints about their child not receiving help while they were remote. I created stock responses for parents, along with links and resources that have been created to support families. Out of five complaints, I responded to all and have not heard anything back from families. I have been careful to respond as our campus is still recovering from a negative principal experience in the previous year. I am still spending Friday, half of Saturday, and half of Sunday preparing for the coming week.

Henry was honest about how the stress had begun to harm his health. He had started getting "a massage about once every 2–3 weeks, but I see a chiropractor at least one time a week. The adjustments keep me from getting headaches." He discussed another

parenting issue that involved two parents and an autistic child. The primary stressor in

that situation was that the parents were very demanding and had threatened him

physically:

> I had to have law enforcement present during the meeting because the mother was
> threatening me before we met. The law enforcement stayed during the meeting at
> the request of the father because he did not trust how his wife would behave
> towards me. I was not able to leave until late because of the three-and-a-half-page
> follow-up email outlining the documentation from the meeting.

Henry was adamant that he had to spend more time with his parents because they had a

negative experience with the previous principals. He was trying to change their

perception of his school.

The second topic concerning community dealt with teachers. Teachers had been

one of the most time-consuming parts of Henry's job as a principal. He explained that he

had been trying to "change a negative campus culture and also focus on breaking bad

habits by teachers." He wanted kids to be the campus focus and not adults. Henry felt that

he was most stressed about adult behaviors and how they negatively impacted students:

> I have become obsessed with adult movements, whether it's movement in the
> cafeteria or movement in the classroom. I become obsessed with it. It's what I
> think about on a day-to-day basis. And when I walk into a classroom, what are
> adults doing? Because if I remember what they're doing, the evidence of what
> kids are producing is I can see it.

Henry worried about the actions of adults and the behavior of the adults on his

campus. He said he was never surprised by adult behavior anymore:

> I also worry about adults knowing how to behave with each other, like a human
> being. I've seen it. The childlike behavior teachers have with each other.
> Regression adults have, like I'm shocked by it and it happens, but I'm shocked
> when it happens. I'm like, why did you do that? You know better or why did you
> say this? I think adults don't always think that everything they do, especially in
> low-performing schools matters. Everything they do really matters. Everything
> has value and adults forget that.

During the interview, Henry spoke about the importance of having teachers who support kids and who don't cause harm. He felt this was more important on his campus because they were rated as requiring improvement and were trying to move the needle forward academically. Henry said his focus with his teachers was always to remain "positive" and try to make sure they knew he "believed in them."

The last topic in the theme of community involved the district office. Henry voiced frustration with the district office in his journal entry for Week 3 because he felt they were wasting his time meeting over things he already had diagnosed himself, and he had more pending issues he needed to deal with:

> The biggest stressor outside of these issues was that [Learning and Leadership Services] conducted a walkthrough on our campus to review our instructional protocols. We all met afterwards to debrief and some of the present people from central office were upset because I was distracted at the end of meeting. I was dealing with a COVID-19 issue on my phone and had already submitted my findings and expectations moving forward from my own personal walkthroughs before the meeting, and we had all come to the same conclusions after the meeting. I was frustrated because although the walkthrough was intended to uncover what instruction was occurring and ways to improve it, we had in essentially, I had to allow [Learning and Leadership Services] to tell me what we already knew and had submitted with the plan we were already addressing. Needless to say, I was stressed at not being able to deal with other matters.

Henry explained that this was a common stressor because he did not think the district office related to his role as a principal. He added that they often had him work on "trivial things" that did not impact on his campus. He felt that if more people at the district office had experience running a campus, then maybe they would "relate more to what is really important." Henry talked about the stress surrounding the "lack of experience" at the district office and how it "hurts his campus in a negative way." He spoke honestly about "losing sleep at night trying to figure out how to move the needle forward without real support." Henry also felt frustrated by the unrealistic expectations

91

the district office placed on him. They wanted him to turn a failing campus around in 1 year from an F to a B:

> Unfortunately, there's probably a lack of talent at our . . . district office right now. And I'm not saying they're not talented people, but I'm saying that there's a lack of like exceptional talent and experience. I don't think I'm putting towards anything that any principal has ever been in this district has not seen. . . it is incumbent on me as a principal to guide my campus, to guide our campus. And it is incumbent on me as a principal to translate the central office wants. I'm having a difficult time trying to translate what central office wants. They are not able to really articulate what they want. I mean they'll ask me things that sometimes are inherently destructive to our campus and they don't—or obstructive to our campus—and they don't understand that. How do I tell my boss that is not a good idea?

Henry felt he was getting better at navigating his work with the district office. His main goal was to offer his opinion without offending anyone. During her one-on-one interview, Sara also mentioned feeling that the central office became upset with principals or placed blame on them. She said:

> I think that they get their feelings hurt when they suggest something that a principal does not think is a good idea. Also, they are quick to blame the principal when something goes wrong, and they do not provide a lot of support.

However, Henry and Raul's wife, Marie, both understood that having better scores and a good working relationship with the district office would ultimately help him keep his job. Henry worried about being "demoted" daily, and he also felt like there was a "lack of trust" between principals and the central office.

Fairness

Fairness arose as an important theme for Henry. Henry explained that he did not think things were fair and felt principals were "treated better when you have better scores." He added:

I can tell you that we're not. I think our system is a little flawed in how we treat people equitable. Supports are created according to the data or perceptions of central office for your ability. I'm not saying that is right or wrong. The better your score is, the better the principal or that is what they seem to think. But the perception also is that I don't have the scores but I took over an [improvement required] campus. I'm doing all the right things and I know I'm doing them because when they're telling me I should do I am able to say I am already doing them. They sometimes treat me like I do not know what I am doing is all I am saying.

Sara was not sure if things were fair or equitable in the district. She said that this was something that Henry never talked about with her. Meanwhile, Henry mentioned he would like to see district changes to better align resources and support in the district.

Leading During a Pandemic

Being a principal during a pandemic caused a lot of additional stress for Henry. He openly discussed how "stressful it is to lead during this time." Henry was not sure that anything would ever be as stressful as trying to "run a campus in the unknown, create systems for things I do not know anything about," and "ensure I am keeping everyone safe." In his Week 2 journal entry, Henry discussed the stress of dealing with the district office and trying to navigate a COVID-19 safety issue:

I was trying to deal with a student who was positive for COVID. I needed to do the required contact tracing, contact parents, notify staff and all that comes with our "new world" under COVID, and I was stuck with central office.

Sara also spoke about her husband's added stress due to COVID-19 and the additional strain it has caused him. She felt that it was even more stressful for him because he was a relatively new principal:

The COVID situation just kind of an added something new keys, just because it's such they're having to implement new things that weren't, you know, unfortunately weren't developed because of this is something new.

Henry also felt that COVID had added a new dimension and an extra layer of stress to his job. He talked about how he had to calm the fears of teachers and parents about the virus and how this became overwhelming for him at times:

> My main sources of stress has been trying to maintain low-to-no COVID-19 cases on campus. We have had one case in 7 weeks of school. I have to ensure that we are constantly following the COVID protocol to keep everyone safe. Every time we add new students back to campus my teachers freak out. I have to remind them we control the campus and the COVID protocols. It takes a lot more of my time to be in [professional learning communities] and meeting with teachers about COVID fears than if we were not dealing with COVID.

Henry also pointed out that not all things with COVID were terrible. He admitted that the COVID issues had allowed for new "technological changes" to take place that should have happened years ago. He stated that he was "thankful for the changes and the positive push" COVID had brought about.

Ways to Address Stress

Henry and Sara were asked what strategies could be used to reduce his stress or things that he currently did to reduce his stress. Both of them focused on his "working out" and "trying to eat healthy" as things he did to reduce his stress levels. Sara was honest during the interview when she said she would make sure to "stay on him" and make him "take off from work when he is ill or needs a break." Henry only had one idea that he could try out to reduce his stress, and that was being able to lean on a mentor:

> I would like to try and rely on my mentor more. I know he is busy since he is also a secondary principal, but he is the only one in the district with experience. This job is lonely and you always seem to be out there alone by yourself. Having support and someone to bounce off ideas with would be a really great thing for me.

Henry felt that relying on his mentor more would help him manage stress in his position better.

Sara also had ideas about ways Henry could alleviate his stress:

I would [like] to see some type of reward system for principals. For the district office to take time to listen and consult with the principals before making decisions that will affect their campus. I think there are times where you hear the district is making a decision when it's like no this will not work at the high school or in the middle schools. Maybe it's time to value and listen to your principals. Better communication and not making political decisions. These things will help in my opinion.

Stewart

Stewart grew up in Iowa. He was raised in a blue-collar family that valued a strong work ethic and family. He had one sibling, and neither parent attended college. Stewart's mom worked as a paraprofessional at the local educational center, testing hearing and vision for 4- and 5-year-olds. His father was a marine and then left the service to become a blue-collar worker. Stewart had been married to his wife, Ashley, for over 20 years. They had two adult children, who were 19 and 22. Stewart commuted over 1 hr. to work each way, so he tried to use his commute to "relax, reflect on the day, and learn through audible books and podcasts." Stewart noted that his commute took over 12 hr. per week on top of his already long work hours.

Stewart had worked in education for 25 years, and he had always been involved in some way in instruction. He had served in numerous roles over the years at the middle school, high school, and central office. Stewart started his career as a social studies teacher and a coach and then transitioned into being a department chair. He had been an assistant principal and helped open up a large comprehensive high school as the academic dean. After that, he moved to a new district, where he served as the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction. In the summer of 2020, Stewart transitioned into a new role in the district as a middle school principal and district social

studies coordinator. Stewart had wanted to become a campus principal for the last five years and he "missed being on campus serving students" when he was at the central office. He had always believed that to be a successful principal, you need to focus on "relationships, professional learning, and removing obstacles so teachers can create a successful campus that teachers want to be a part of." Stewart hoped to eventually become a principal at a campus closer to his home in another district but said he would be fine staying at his current position for a few more years.

Ashley was also a career educator. She was a lead counselor for one of the largest high schools in San Antonio. She felt that having worked in secondary schools for over 20 years had helped her "relate" to her husband and "understand what he deals with on a daily basis." Ashley also noted that Stewart's work as a middle school principal had not been challenging for them to manage because they had "grown children and she understands the profession." Stewart had always served in a "leadership capacity most of his career," so she was used to him being "busy and working long hours." On a scale from 1 to 10, Stewart rated his stress at a five. He felt "energized by his new role" even though he had only been a principal for a short while. Stewart believed his stress was low because he received strong professional development over the summer that prepared him to be a turnaround principal. Ashley rated Stewart's stress level as a four. She felt it was difficult to truly assign a number because this was his first year as a principal, and he was enjoying his new role. She was hopeful that once he got the school turned around, his stress level would continue to stay low.

West Middle School was one of the two middle schools in town. The campus served over 850 students from various backgrounds. Over 60% of the student came from

low socioeconomic backgrounds. The campus was comprised predominately of Hispanic and Caucasian students. The administration staff included an academic dean, three assistant principals, and one assistant principal intern. The campus was rated an F for the 2018–2019 school year and was expected to earn an F; an improvement required rating again before COVID regulations shut down the campus. The campus had endured extensive teacher turnover and brought on many new teachers during the year of the study. Stewart was the third principal on the campus in the previous three years. The campus was struggling with discipline and special education as well as with other systematic issues.

Stewart had the least amount of principal experience of the participants in this study; however, he was the only participant who had been an assistant superintendent at a district office. His experiences had helped him deal with the various types of job stressors. His road to the campus principal included his previous role of assistant superintendent over curriculum and instruction. He previously supervised all of the district principals and was now a principal in the same district. Stewart said he experienced daily stress as a principal, saying, "Work is stressful for me on a daily basis, but that is expected in this role." Stewart felt he was prepared to lead the campus, and he had been preparing for this role throughout his career: "I'm ready to lead. I feel like I have been preparing for this my whole life. I have a variety of experiences in multiple settings that will help me in this new position."

Stewart had one health issue that related to high stress levels:

"I have lost some sleep from time to time, but I exercise and try to communicate for help if needed to help me deal with my stress." Ashley did not appear to be concerned about any health issues related to high stress levels for Stewart. She said:

> I think that he is experiencing a different kind of stress in this position. He has been more stressed in both his central office position and the academic dean position than I have seen in his position as principal. The stress that he experiences with this position is due to coming into a school that is a failing campus and having to be the guy to fix it and the expectation is that he fixes it now. The stress he has is not unhealthy stress for now.

Ashley realized the stress he experienced could change because this was Stewart's first year as the main building principal. Stewart echoed this, saying this year would result in less stress for him than what he felt in his previous district office position.

Workload

Stewart did not feel high levels of stress due to the workload, and he admitted that he "is able to work a little less in this position." Stewart discussed his typical work week and his ability to balance and prioritize his time:

> I spend an average of 10 hours a day working as a principal. I then spend an average of 12 hours a week or so commuting to work. I live over an hour away from my current campus. I have been in this business since 1996, so I have learned to prioritize well. My wife is a career educator as well, and she understands that things get busy from time to time. My children are pretty self-sufficient at 19 and 22. I take 1 day during the weekend to pursue my passions.

Ashley agreed that there was a good balance at home and work for Stewart. She felt that her experience as an educational leader helped her relate to him and understand the work he put in:

> Since I am in a leadership position myself and we don't have small children at home, I think that I have managed this quite well. I don't mind the extra hours that he has to put in at work.

Stewart felt that the support of his spouse had helped him be successful during his career. The year 2020 had been a difficult one for both Stewart and Ashley. They had a traumatic family event take place involving their child. Both had to be present for their child and put work to the side. During the interview, Ashley was candid and said she had "no problem reminding him when he needs to be present at home." Stewart discussed the stress of this family incident and the added stress of trying to balance family with campus needs in his last journal entry:

> The toughest time these 6 weeks for me personally was trying to balance the role of principal with the role of supporting my daughter and wife after the accident that occurred on October 1. I felt some pressure from district office after being out for 2 weeks to take care of my family. I was able to work through these stressors with my administrative team.

Stewart and Ashley both agreed that family came before everything else. Focusing on the family helped strengthen their marriage, and they always supported each other in their careers.

Reward

Stewart made it clear that there was not a reward system for principals in the district. Stewart thought that the shout-out system used by the district functioned as the reward system:

> I have not really seen any reward system in the district, but we do get kudos from time to time, which is nice. It would be nice to have something a little more formal, but we don't do this job to be rewarded.

Ashley agreed with her spouse that there was a lack of overt recognition for principals. However, she felt that principals did not do the job to be rewarded: "I don't see a lot of recognition for campus administration in any school district. Principals do not

get extra rewards for their work. I rarely see any type of recognition for campus principals other than shout outs."

The second topic of reward that surfaced related to appreciation from the campus. Stewart felt appreciated by his campus staff, and he thought the longer he was there, they would recognize him further. He said: "I generally feel appreciated by teachers and other campus personnel. Hopefully, the longer I am on the campus, the teachers will recognize my hard work and dedication that I put forth on the campus." Ashley could not say if her husband felt appreciated or not in this position. She noted that this was not something they discussed.

Community

Stewart explained that trying to reach all students caused him the most student-related stress: "For me at this moment, the largest stressor I have related to students is how to engage the remote learners. How do I focus on student growth when so many of them are not on campus?" Ashley also agreed that the main stressors related to students for her husband were his fear of not being able to educate them all and their well-being:

> The worry about how to properly educate students who do not necessarily want to be educated is always on my husband's mind. The concern of his students' emotional well-being so that they are ready to learn while at school is something he is always thinking about. I am a counselor, so I can also relate to these issues and we talk about student issues and concerns a lot at home. I feel I am able to offer him ideas and support on this topic.

Stewart did not discuss any stressors related to parents in the interview, journal entries, or prequestionnaire. He felt that students and parents are the least stressful part of his job. Consequently, the second topic concerning community related to teachers. Teachers had been one of Stewart's top priorities because he was a new principal to the

campus. He explained that he had been trying to "change the culture on the campus," and he had "over 15 new teachers" with whom he worked. Stewart added that trying to grow teachers and provide balance for them and not overdo it was stressful: "For me, I am stressed about trying to increase teacher capacity due to the need for growth while balancing initiative fatigue. I also stress about my overburdened teachers and their general well-being."

Ashley believed that dealing with adults was stressful for her husband because he expected a lot from them:

> Dealing with adults is often more stressful than dealing with students. You expect more from adults and when they do not live up to your expectations it can cause a lot of stress. My husband is having to work and develop a lot of new teachers this year and that is difficult to do.

Stewart and Ashley agreed that it is essential for principals always to support teachers. According to Stewart, teachers are the "backbone of the campus," and it was his job to support them during the school year.

The last topic that arose from community related to the district office. Ashley felt there was a "lack of support" for her husband from the district office, and this had become a source of stress:

> District office forgets what it is like to be on a campus. They always have an agenda but they don't give the support needed to carry out their agenda. This is a constant battle for my husband trying to figure out how to give them what they want with little to not support or resources. This adds stress for him because he feels like he can't really turn to anyone for help.

Stewart was honest when he expressed his concerns regarding the lack of support and said he would like to see more communication and resources from the district office.

Another stressor for Stewart was figuring out how to put the "initiatives into place that district office wants without any help." At times, he found this frustrating. Stewart

wrote about the pressure of dealing with "expectations" from the district office in his journal:

> My most stressful issue this week was turning around district office expectations and communicating these expectations in a positive manner with my admin team. Sometimes they want something done right then and that is not realistic. I have to make sure that I stay supportive of my admin team and that I do not place additional stress on them.

Stewart felt he did not always "know what they really want or what is always expected." He also discussed stressors of the expectations placed on him by the district office during the interview:

> I am always worried about my job. I am constantly trying to figure out how I am going to achieve their goal of a B or better on my campus. We were [improvement required] and so that means we are an F campus and now I have to try and get a B. I do not know how I can move the needle forward, and I know this is how I will lose or keep my job.

However, Stewart did feel he could work closely with the district office because he was there for the last three years as the assistant superintendent.

Fairness

Fairness was not that important of a theme to Stewart. He felt overall that things in the district were fair and that all principals were treated equally: "I am treated equally for the most part. I think that I am provided the same resources as other campuses except for the Title 1 campuses." Stewart was given a principal's coach to work with him in the 2019–2020 school year because he was new to the job. The coach served as a mentor and was on campus with him almost every day. Ashley was not sure if things were fair or equitable in the district when asked the same question. She said that this was something that she and Stewart never talked about.

Leading During a Pandemic

Being a principal during a pandemic was a theme that caused a lot of stress for

Stewart. He talked about the stress related to opening school in the fall of 2020 in his

journal:

> There was definitely a high level of stress associated with opening school on
> September 8. I am always worried about academics, and student safety, teacher
> safety and campus culture. All of this is now through the lens of COVID and the
> changes it has forced us to make.

> Stewart was sincere and admitted that he felt more "stress due to leading during

this unprecedented and unexpected issue of being a principal during a pandemic." Ashley

agreed that he had added stress due to the pandemic and trying to keep everyone safe:

> I see that there is a lot more stress now than before due to COVID. My husband
> now has to worry about keeping everyone safe, try to set new expectations, and
> follow through with his vision. This is a difficult task for anyone. I do feel that
> once his vision is in place, this will help decrease the level of stress he feels.

Stewart felt that COVID-19 had added a new layer to his job as a principal and that this

issue was something he would be dealing with for a while.

Ways to Address Stress

Stewart and Ashley were both asked how Stewart could reduce his stress or what

things he currently did to reduce stress. Ashley felt like he handled his stress pretty well

and said he needed to continue to "communicate and rely on his admin team." Stewart

mentioned that he "uses his commute" to help clear his head and reflect and that he tried

to spend as much time outdoors as possible. In the interview, Stewart stated that he would

like to learn more about mindfulness:

> I could see myself learning more about mindfulness and meditation or a wellness
> program: The district could really use a wellness program to help alleviate some
> stress. I know that we have capable individuals in the district that are trained on

these type of things. The district should really tap into these people and conduct wellness institutes for all of us.

Stewart felt strongly about this initiative and thought that having all administration members utilize "mindfulness" would reduce stress.

Cross-Case Analysis

The researcher took the data from all three cases and compared the themes. In general, the participants agreed that stress was a part of the principal's job and that individuals in this position had to learn how to manage it. All three participants also worried about students' well-being and how to engage them in the remote learning environment created by COVID-19 restrictions. Dealing with the pandemic was a new stress for all participants and an unexpected problem they were not sure how to address. Based on the data, the school's unique contexts (i.e., school history, principal and teacher turnover, and the community) did not affect the student-related stress each principal experienced. However, each principal's contextual situation, which changed daily, caused the participants' stress.

Workload

The three cases were very similar regarding the long hours they were required to work. All three reported working more than 10-hr days and said they were always on the clock. Raul and Henry both said they were expected to work "24/7". However, Raul and Stewart reported working long hours and most of the weekend, and Stewart did not work very much during the weekends.

The participants disagreed when it came to having a balance between work and home life. Raul and Henry both felt there was no balance for them, and their spouses

agreed. On the other hand, Stewart and his spouse, Ashley, thought he had achieved a balance between home and work. Stewart explained, "I feel like I have a good balance between home and work. I am used to working the long hours, and I take a day off each weekend to focus on my own personal interests."

Marie and Sara both felt an imbalance and admitted that the long hours caused some issues and added stress to their marriages. Sara explained that the long hours and the constant focus on work had been hard for her:

> Henry works I want to say probably 80 hours a week and more. I feel like he is always working. He gets up and goes to work then comes home and goes to work. There is never a lot of time for me in that picture and it is hard.

Ashley, Stewart's spouse, felt there was "a balance between work and home" and that she "understood his job," which made all of the difference. Stewart and Ashley had also been married the longest, and Ashley felt she had learned to "deal with him working long hours over the last 20 years." The spouses seemed to have an easier time managing the balance the longer they were married.

All three participants felt the workload of a secondary school principal was demanding. However, Raul and Henry admitted to working almost nonstop, where Stewart seemed to have achieved more of a balance between work and home life than the other two. Also, Sara and Marie had struggled more to cope with the long hours, and Ashley said she was used to her husband working long hours because they had been married for a long time. All three participants admitted they worked too many hours and should learn how to find more balance between home and work.

Reward

All three participants agreed there was not a district reward system in place for principals. They mentioned district "shout outs" and the "most valuable player belt" as ways principals were sometimes recognized. They all agreed, however, that they worked for the students and not for the recognition. On the topic of receiving appreciation from staff, all three felt appreciated. However, Henry made the distinction that teacher appreciation "can change daily," and he said this fickle nature was stressful for him. Ashley was not aware of whether the staff appreciated her husband. However, Marie and Sara thought the teachers appreciated their husbands. Marie also "did not think district office" appreciated her husband enough, and Sara echoed this sentiment. All three spouses felt their husbands were not appreciated enough or at all by the district office.

All three participants asserted they had not become a principal to be rewarded and performed their duties for the benefit of the students and teachers. All agreed the district lacked a formal reward system for principals. All three participants agreed that teacher appreciation could change daily, which could be a source of stress. Sara and Marie both wanted to see their husbands rewarded, while Ashley did not think rewards were needed.

Community

The principal participants had the same concerns and stressors when it came to students. All three worried about improving student growth, discipline, and safety. Each principal expressed stress surrounding student learning and development, especially given the remote teaching requirements of COVID-19. The participants' journal entries highlighted the stress generated by remote learning. Marie and Ashley were both aware of their husbands' student-related stress, but Sara said Henry never mentioned anything

about students to her. Parents were a primary source of stress for Raul and Henry. They talked at length about trying to please parents and how difficult parents took time away from their work and created stress. Stewart did not mention feeling stressed by parents.

Regarding the stress related to teachers, all three participants agreed that poor teacher choices caused stress. They all commented on the child-like behavior of adults or having to deal with teachers' bad decisions. The participants focused much more on stress related to adult behaviors and actions rather than those of students.

The third topic in community involved the district office. All three participants talked about the unrealistic expectations placed on them by the district office. In their interviews, they discussed the pressure of making a higher rating in the state accountability system. Stewart stated, "I know that making a B is what is going to help me keep a job." The participants also agreed that these unrealistic expectations were even more stressful due to the district offices' lack of support and its limited understanding of the secondary context. As Raul noted, "the focus is not on my campus and nobody from the district office comes to offer me support or to see if I need anything."

The three spouses acknowledged that the actions and expectations of the district office increased their husbands' stress. Ashley said the "central office asks for initiatives to be put into place but does not offer the support to carry them out." She added that the administrators "forget what it is like to be on a campus." Raul and Henry also shared frustration about the lack of experience at the district level. Raul mentioned that "nobody at the district has ever led a secondary campus." He said he felt this lack of experience and awareness of the secondary context was to blame for the stress he felt from the

district. The stress stemming from the district showed through in the principals' perception that the responsibility for fixing each campus fell to them alone.

All three participants found the students caused them the least amount of stress. All of the stress related to students centered around discipline, student safety, and the lack of effort and engagement coming from remote students. The participants all experienced added stress pertaining to teachers. Raul and Henry worried about teachers making poor choices that negatively affected the campus. However, Stewart did not express this stress but struggled to balance his many new teachers' demands. The district office caused the highest level of stress for all three participants. They all mentioned the unreasonable expectations placed on them by the district office and how this has been hard to navigate. Also, Henry and Raul felt the district offices' lack of experience negatively impacted their campuses, but Stewart did not mention this as being an added stressor. All three participants agreed that dealing with the community was one of the most stressful parts of their jobs.

Fairness

Raul was adamant that principals were not treated equally by the district office and that resources and personnel were not allocated equitably. He felt that "some campuses have more admin staff on their campus" than he did even though his school had more students. The lack of resources meant more stress for Raul because he had to carry additional workloads and figure out how to run his campus with less. Henry and Stewart felt some areas were not fair but generally thought everyone was treated the same. They both noted that Title 1 campuses received extra resources that they didn't receive.

Sara and Ashley could not answer any questions related to fairness due to a lack of communication with their husbands on this point. Marie was aware that her husband felt stress related to fairness. She knew he stressed over "lack of personnel," and she explained that her husband felt like "other principals were treated better than him." Overall, fairness was more of a stressor for Raul than it was for Henry and Stewart.

Fairness was not a significant stressor for any of the participants. Raul expressed the highest level of concern in this area because of personnel changes and the feeling that his staff had been moved to the middle schools. He also felt the middle schools received more support and resources than his campus. Henry and Stewart both believed resources and personnel had been distributed equitably across the district, except everyone agreed the elementary schools received more. None of the three spouses had discussed the topic of fairness with their spouses.

Leading During a Pandemic

The participants all spoke about the stress added to their job by the COVID-19 pandemic, with each one detailing the additional workload they took on to respond. New responsibilities revolved around creating a new plan of action to try and keep everyone safe. Henry wrote about the stress of "preparing for students to return and trying to make sure everyone stayed safe and followed the protocols." Stewart talked about how stressful the school year' start was and how it was "difficult to plan for the unknown." Raul mentioned the additional stress caused by the remote learners who refused to work. All three principals expressed frustrations revolving around remote students' lack of progress and engagement. The stress of dealing with remote teaching and learning was new for all principals and was definitely out of their control.

All three spouses added that the participants experienced more stress during the 2020-2021school year due to COVID. Marie and Sara both mentioned that their husbands were expected to "create plans" independently without support, which had been difficult for them. This emerging theme represented one of the most stressful things for all three participants during the 2020-2021 school year.

All three participants agreed that leading in a pandemic caused an incredible amount of stress for them. They all felt they were navigating the challenges alone, and they felt like new principals. Although the pandemic brought new challenges for all three campuses, all three participants felt there were some positives due to COIVD, such as better use of technology in the classroom. All three agreed that the positive changes had been overdue in public education, and they were excited to see the better use of technology on the campuses.

Contextual Situation

Although all three participants experienced stress related to teachers and staff, the nature of that stress differed. For Raul, he experienced teacher or staff-related stress because he dealt with multiple personnel issues. He had three teachers out on administrative leave in the fall of 2020. Raul said "he can't control his staff or their actions, and then they make poor choices that result in them losing their job." This had been one of the most challenging years for him regarding poor choices by his staff. The teachers' poor decisions and actions caused him "so many lost hours" spent dealing with parents and the district office regarding the consequences of poor staff choices. Raul said staff actions caused significant stress on him, and "never really surprised anymore from what will come next."

Similarly, Henry experienced teacher-related stress due to "poor teacher actions," which negatively affected students. He felt he was "always focused on the actions of adults" rather than spending time working with students. Henry also expressed concern over "teacher inconsistencies towards students" that caused daily issues. Henry shared he was trying to create a positive culture for all students, but he needed to start with teachers who could accept all students and treat everyone with respect.

For Stewart, teacher-related stress came from the need to build their capacity without overburdening them. Stewart shared that trying to turn around an F-rated campus with new teachers on staff was overwhelming and stressful. He wanted to support all teachers while maintaining high-expectations for them in the classroom. All three participants experienced different issues that caused added stress during the 2020-2021 school year. All three reported this stress was constant because there was always another issue that arose and demanded attention.

Summary

This study's conceptual framework was derived from Leiter and Maslach's (1996) six work-life areas to assess the burnout experienced by the participants in the principalship. The work-life areas were used as guides, which also served as the basis for the pre-interview survey and the semi-structured interview questions. The purpose of this qualitative, multicase study was to explore the secondary school principals' perceptions of their level of work-related stress and burnout in a rural mid-size South-Central Texas school district. The researcher analyzed the data from each case then conducted a cross-case analysis.

All three participants and their spouses agreed that stress was and would always be a part of their jobs. The participants also felt that leading through uncharted territory (i.e., during a pandemic) was stressful and added a layer of stress to their work. The unexpected things that arose on campus during the fall of 2020 created some of the most stressful and challenging times for each participant during this study. All of them felt prepared to lead, but these unexpected moments created additional work for each participant.

During the analysis, it was discovered that the most stressful areas for each participant-centered around workload, reward, and community. Issues related to fairness, values, and control were determined to create the least amount of stress for each participant. However, even though each participant and spouse felt adequate control, the unexpected issues that arose during the pandemic made each participant feel a little out of control. Managing the workload was difficult for most of the participants, and all three agreed they were challenged to keep pace with the job's demands without the support of their spouse. The three spouses all agreed that being married to a principal was difficult but that it got easier to understand over time. In all three marriages, communication was vital to each spouse's ability to understand and support the participant in ways that alleviated their workplace stress. The data gathered and analyzed in this research highlighted the impact of secondary school principals' stress and burnout in Texas and, more generally, the United States.

CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

Principals have one of the most significant influences on student achievement in public education (Boberg & Bourgeois, 2016; Day et al., 2016; Leithwood et al., 2004; Seashore Louis et al., 2010, Young et al., 2007). As educators face a growing number of demands and challenges that force them to perform at high levels, these demands weigh heavily on the school principal, creating the need for additional preparation and training and, in some cases, a withdrawal from the profession. Some researchers have found that principals are now retiring younger and younger, stating that the job is not "doable" (Usdan et al., 2000). Principal turnover is an issue of concern all across the United States (Carpenter & Poerschke, 2020). This is an issue of concern because high turnover on a campus can impede school progress, impact teacher retention, and lower student achievement (Levin & Bradley, 2019).

Frequent principal turnover makes it difficult for a campus to retain teachers and create and sustain a positive school climate. Research has shown that principals need at least five years on the same campus to establish a vision, improve instruction, and implement policies and practices that will positively affect the school's performance (Hull, 2012). Principal longevity on a campus affects student achievement and overall school improvement (Babo & Postma, 2017; Fullan, 1991), so schools that cannot retain principals will have difficulty implementing meaningful change (Hull, 2012).

113

Principal attrition in Texas has also been a growing problem. Davis (2020) found that one-third of all Texas principals were leaving campuses after five years. DeMatthews (2020) also found that principals in rural districts were leaving at a higher rate than their counterparts in other districts. The secondary principal turnover rate in the Rural City School District, the secondary school principal turnover rate was 67% for the 2019–2020 school year. As a result, there had been a lack of consistent leadership, a decline in positive campus climate, a high teacher turnover rate, and reduced student achievement scores.

This research was designed to explore why principals experienced stress and burnout in the workplace to the degree that many were leaving the profession. Through this study, the researcher sought to determine the most significant stress and burnout sources for secondary school principals in South-Central Texas rural mid-size school districts. With additional research and information, the researcher hoped to gain a greater understanding of the factors that three secondary Texas principals and their spouses perceived as contributing to stress and burnout. The knowledge gained from the research may help district supervisors alleviate stress and prevent burnout for campus principals. This study relied on six contextual work areas where stress might occur to structure the line of questioning. Knowledge about the causes and possible solutions of stress and burnout in secondary school principals was needed to retain quality school leaders who would remain in the profession longer than a few years. Two primary research questions and one sub-question guided this study:

RQ1.　How do secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated with serving as the campus leader?

- How do challenges with balancing work and home life contribute to principals' perceptions of the stressors related to acting as campus leaders?

RQ2. How do secondary school principals seek to address the stressors of school leadership?

In this study, a multiple case study approach was used to capture the participants' contextualized experiences and perceptions by examining each participant and spouse as one unique case. The researcher used a preliminary open-ended response questionnaire, semi-structured interviews, and reflective journals for data collection. The semi-structured interview questions were formulated using the Areas of Work-life Scale created by Leiter and Maslach (1996).

Three secondary school principals and their spouses participated in the study. The researcher chose to use convenience sampling because the researcher was employed by the district where the study was conducted. Three criteria were used to select the participants for this study. The participants were required to

1. be a current, full-time secondary school principal within the site district;

2. be a principal at a traditional secondary campus within the site district; and

3. if married, have a spouse who was willing to participate.

The data collected from this study came from the pre-questionnaire, semi-structured one-on-one interviews, and journal entries. The researcher started collecting the data in September of 2020 and finished at the end of October 2020. The data was analyzed using deductive coding. The codes were based on the conceptual framework developed by Leiter and Maslach (1997) that included the six areas of work-life that can

lead to stress and burnout in the workplace. The researcher coded the research by hand and also by using NVivo to strengthen the analysis process. Once the data were analyzed, the researcher presented the findings for each participant in single cases and then cross-analyzed the three cases.

Through the analysis process, four of the work-life areas were determined to cause stress for the participants. The four themes that emerged were: workload, reward, community, and fairness. The participants did not feel that control or values added stress to their role as principals because they felt like they had control in their role as a campus leader. In addition to feeling they had adequate control over their campuses, they believed their values aligned with the district office. However, the district office and teachers often created issues or events that were not in the principals' control, which caused stress for each participant. A final theme that emerged during the data analysis was that leading a campus during a pandemic created additional stress for the participants.

Research Question 1

The first research question was: How do secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated with serving as a campus leader? In addressing this question, the researcher drew four main conclusions. These were that the principals (a) perceived that stress would always be a part of their job, (b) felt subject to unrealistic expectations by the community, (c) felt they were handling the "unknown" alone, and (d) and perceived no equity among principals. In the next section, each conclusion is presented and connected to prior research.

116

Stress Will Always Be a Part of the Job

The first conclusion about how secondary school principals conceptualize the stressors associated with serving as a campus leader was that all three participants believed stress would always be a part of their job. Raul said: "This job is always stressful; it is how the stress is managed that makes or breaks you." All three spouses also recognized the work of a school principal was stressful and that their spouse always felt stress for a various reasons. All of the participants and their spouses rated the participants' stress level as five or higher. The principals agreed their stress levels could change daily according to what events took place on campus that day. For instance, in his interview, Henry mentioned that "today my stress is a 6; last week my stress was a 9" to exemplify the point that every day in the life of a campus principal is different, and they never know what to expect. Raul rated his stress level as a seven on the scale and shared that he was "always waiting for what is about to happen next." Stewart noted that "work is stressful on a daily basis."

Aside from the number rating, the principals believed they could not separate stress from their jobs due to the nature of their work. They felt continually subject to situations pertaining to parents, teachers, and district office that added to their already stressful workload. These stressors were internalized and not often openly shared with their spouses. The participants' spouses were all aware of the daily stress that each of their husbands dealt with; however, they all admitted they did not often discuss work or the stressors related to it at home.

The principals' belief that stress would be ever-present in their job was not surprising and aligned with current research. Recently, researchers Pollock et al. (2019)

reported that principals are expected to do more now than ever before. The increased time on tasks and workload has led to "work intensification," which is when school leaders have no downtime and cannot de-stress in the workplace (Pollock et al., 2019). Work intensification threatens the well-being of principals, teachers, and students and harms the campus culture. This study found similar findings in that the principal position became increasingly challenging to maintain in a positive manner.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2006) reported that over 75% of principals in the study experienced stress in the principalship. However, this study looked at only elementary principals. In 2019, Learning Forward asked five principal experts about potential stress (Farag, 2019). The five participants all agreed stress was part of a school leader's job. Farag (2019) results and this study align in that both confirmed that all leaders experience stress. One key difference between the two studies is that the current study was focused on stressors related to the principal position, whereas Farag (2019) looked at principals from all levels and included input from field experts rather than focusing on current building principals.

In another study conducted by Lovell (2016), principals all reported feeling chronic stress related to their work. However, Lovell's study differed from this one because it focused on eight elementary school principals from the North Texas area, and this one focused only on secondary school principals in one rural mid-size district in South-Central Texas. These differences are significant because responsibilities and potential stressors differ according to the level of the school.

Unrealistic Community Expectations

The second conclusion for how secondary school principals conceptualized the stressors associated with serving as a campus leader was that participants found their communities placed unrealistic expectations on them in their role. These expectations came from parents, teachers, and the district office. The perceived unrealistic district office expectation that each campus earns a B or better left the principals fearing for their jobs. Stewart admitted that "the stress of taking over an [improvement required] campus and trying to get a B stresses me out a lot, and I know if I don't perform well, I might not have a job." This same sentiment was expressed by Raul, who was short key personnel fall of 2020 due to district office decisions, but still worried about having to earn a B or better. The stress related to these expectations had been overwhelming for Henry as well. He discussed the stress associated with "unrealistic" parent expectations. To cope with a flood of parent emails about changing student grades or teacher-related complaints, he was forced to create "stock responses" that streamlined his ability to reply in a timely fashion.

All three participants said dealing with difficult parents was often the most stressful part of their position. Parents were more stressful to Henry and Stewart than any other member of the community. According to the participants, the stressors related to parents and the district office created the most stress for them in the principalship. The participants and spouses all agreed that district personnel's lack of experience intensified their stress levels. Henry mentioned that the "lack of experience from district office often hurt his campus in a negative way." The three participants were unified in their belief that the lack of experience made the district office "out of touch" and lacked "real-world and

on the job knowledge" to solve problems. All three participants agreed that if they felt more appreciated in their work, they would feel more successful. Henry expressed that "everyone needs to feel appreciated, especially principals" and that appreciation "makes the job worthwhile." The three participants agreed there was no formal recognition system in the district and that little pats on the back would go a long way.

The conclusion that principals experienced stress related to unrealistic expectations placed on them by parents, teachers and the district office confirms previous research. In their study, Garbacz et al. (2017) found that principals felt that addressing the expectations of parents was an added job stressor. In 2000, the Wallace Foundation found that the increased demands placed on principals from parents were becoming too much for some to handle. The study also found that parents' high expectations of principals had caused the ever-growing job load to increase. These findings are similar to those in this study because the three principals who participated also reported that parents, teachers, and the district office added to their stress.

In a different study, Mahfouz (2018) looked at principals and stress and reported that study's principals felt their relationships with others could induce stress. This stress often resulted from the need for each participant to deal with different personalities and attitudes. Mahfouz also reported that most of the stressors were related to students' parents, upper administration, teachers' unions, and teachers. Among all of the participants' relationships, the researcher found that interactions with unhappy or combative parents were the most challenging and stressful. Mahfouz's findings align with this study's findings; however, teacher unions were not considered in the latter because

Texas does not have teacher unions. The absence of teacher unions makes this study unique because Texas is one of the few states that does not allow teacher unions.

Leiter and Maslach (1999) reported that the work-life area of community could show a loss or mismatch when individuals have unsettled struggles or there is not a sense of community. A lack of community or an understanding of continued struggle leads to stress and often burnout in the workplace. A disconnect was found in this study for the same reasons. The participants felt there was no strong sense of community and trust where all parties supported one another. The results confirmed that all three of the participants felt a mismatch in the work-life area of community.

In regards to the work-life area of reward, there was also a mismatch for all three participants. A mismatch in reward occurs when people feel disregarded by the organization employing them (Leiter & Maslach, 2006). This feeling of disregard was expressed primarily concerning the district office leaders and their lack of support and failure to listen to the participants.

Handling the Unknown Alone

The third conclusion for how secondary school principals conceptualized the stressors associated with being a campus leader was the participants' perception that solving new or unknown problems alone was one of the most stressful aspects of the job. The unknown for the participants came in various forms for all three principals, but they all agreed that they struggled more during the fall of 2020 than in years prior. For Raul, one of his unknowns related to the loss of his academic dean, who was placed on administrative leave. Raul said he experienced stress during this time because he lacked the power to fix the issue. Also, he felt stress because the "district office did not

understand the impact of this decision to remove and not replace this key person on my campus." Raul could not call on a peer for support or suggestions, and for him, this was one of the most stressful parts of his job. Raul said: "Not having anyone to rely on at the district office or another high school principal is hard." He explained that he often felt helpless and alone when things get tough, and he was the only person in the district with high school principal experience. All three participants also experienced significant stress due to the unknown of how to lead during a pandemic.

COVID-19 was a new situation for everyone, and it was something the three were not able to plan for or understand thoroughly. Henry felt that COVID-19 "created more stress for everyone on the campus," which he thought required a new focus on "mental health issues for staff and students versus just focusing on academics." Dealing with the unknown was sometimes overwhelming for Henry. All three participants agreed that one of the most stressful parts of their job during the pandemic was dealing with remote learners. Remote learners were unique and had never occurred in public schools until the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The three participants all struggled with how to get remote learners to engage and learn. Also, all three participants felt pressure from the district office to solve this issue. Not one participant in the study had an answer to this problem.

The conclusion that principals felt stress related to dealing with the unknown somewhat aligns with the research. The previous studies were different because they looked at the unknown from the point of a principal being isolated and did not look at the onset of unexpected issues. In their study, Boerema (2011) found that almost every principal mentioned experienced stress related to loneliness. Also, Howard and Mallory

(2008) concluded that isolation was a variable that worked in concert with the stress created by principal job expectations. This concept of loneliness partially aligns with my study because all three participants felt that, in addition to not having the answers, they had no one to turn to for advice. One key difference between this study and Boerema's (2011) was that the former did not focus on feelings related to isolation. Additionally, Boerema only interviewed novice principals.

There are currently only a few studies related to principals' stress while leading through a new and uncharted challenge such as COVID-19. In one of these studies conducted by the Consortium for Policy Research in Education in October of 2020, 120 principals were interviewed in 19 states. This study aligns with mine in that we both found additional stress dealing with COVID-19 and dealing with teachers' and students' mental wellness. My study differed from other studies because of the study location and the fact the participants were all current secondary school principals. This study was conducted using the theoretical framework created by Leiter and Maslach (1999), who suggested that a disconnect or mismatch in the work-life area of community might result in feelings of isolation. All three participants felt a mismatch and all three felt isolated at some point during the period studied. The results of this study align with the framework.

No Equity Among Principals

The third conclusion for how secondary school principals conceptualized the principal stressors was that they perceived no equity among principals, which created stress in the workplace. This perception became evident when the participants agreed that the district office did not distribute resources or deliver treatment equally. Raul explained that he often felt as "if he is not being treated as good as the other principals, especially

the elementary principals." Raul was honest when he stated he "feels more stress when things do not seem fair," and he tried not to "let it bother him." Henry and Stewart both agreed that the elementary principals seemed to receive more support and resources from the district office.

All three participants also felt that the better treatment was reserved for the campuses with the higher the campus scores. Stewart admitted that "being a principal of an improvement required campus made him feel like he was not as good a principal as some of his colleagues. He said he felt this way because of how the district office would often "talk down to him." Henry experienced this feeling of "lower self-worth" as a principal due to the way the district tended to "babysit and oversee his campus because of his low scores." Raul also felt the campuses were treated better based upon scores, but his point of view was that you were "punished for being successful." He added that he lost key personnel to the middle school campuses because they needed help to improve their F ratings. He noted that district personnel were always on other campuses and that he never received any additional personnel. To Raul, this was not fair, and he was tired of being punished for doing a good job. The three participants shared that they sometimes felt "distrust with district office" due to some of the unfair decisions made. They all agreed there would be greater trust in the organization if personnel's resources and decisions seemed fair. Overall, all three participants and their spouses agreed that it often added to their stress level when things in the district were not equitable or fair.

The researched confirmed the conclusion that there was no equity or fairness among principals. A study conducted by the NASSP and the LPI was aimed at uncovering reasons for principal turnover (Levin et al., 2019). The study identified five

124

primary reasons principals leave their jobs in the first phase of the study, and in the second phase of the study, they dug deeper into each identified area. One identified area was the lack of equity in the distribution of resources. Several participants felt it was time-consuming to continually try to get the campus resources needed to be successful (Levin et al., 2019). The participants also discussed salary as not commensurate to the number of hours worked on the job and how the low pay caused principals to leave the profession (Levin et al., 2019). The study conducted by NASSP and LPI differed from this study because the participants selected by NASSP and LPI were from several states and included all levels of principals, and this study only included secondary school principals from one site. Also, none of the participants in this study felt under-compensated. All three of the participants said they believed they were paid adequately and fairly for their work.

Fairness, according to Leiter and Maslach (2008), is an important area in administrative leadership. The concept of fairness also shares some characteristics with the areas of community and reward areas, and when the three are combined, they can add additional stress. Fairness is often referred to as the quality of supervisor support (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). Also, fairness refers to the equitable distribution of resources and opportunities (Leiter & Maslach, 2008). Leiter and Maslach (2008) confirmed that employees' perceptions of supervisors as both fair and supportive adds to employees' acceptance of organizational change and decrease the likelihood of burnout. Leiter and Maslach's findings align with the findings of this study. All three participants and their spouses believed that resources were not equitably distributed, and all three expressed

feelings of distrust at some point during the study. This study found an imbalance in fairness, which added to the participants' already stressful job.

A Principal is Always on the Job

Within Research Question 1 was the sub-question: How do challenges with balancing work and home life contribute to principals' perceptions of the stressors related to acting as campus leaders? The researcher drew one conclusion for how balancing work and home life contributed to principals' perceptions of stress: The participants all reported they were always on the job and experienced continued expectations that interfered with their ability to be present at home. This imbalance between home and work life caused stress for all three participants. For instance, Raul expressed concern about "how much longer he could continue to do this job." All of the participants agreed they worked more than 60 hr. per week and that their job often took away from family time. Raul's spouse was also unsure how long he could continue the pace of work required by his job. She added that she worried a lot about his overall health due to his high stress levels.

Henry admitted that he "struggles turning off work and just being with his wife" during the study. Sara realized that being married to a secondary school principal had been "a struggle for her," and she often "feels alone" due to him always working. All of the spouses expressed this sentiment in the study. The long work hours continued during the weekend for most of the participants. Raul added that "even when I am not working, all I am thinking about is work." Marie and Sara also admitted that their spouses did not balance work and home, which caused stress in their marriages.

The conclusion that a principal is always on the job and that it is difficult for most principals to balance work and home life was confirmed throughout the research. In their study, Valentine et al. (2002) found that principal workloads can impact their sense of stress and overall well-being. Schiff (2001) also reported that high school principals felt like they were always working and still did not have enough time to get the job done. Schiff's study differed from this study because it was focused only on high school principals in Kentucky; whereas, this study focused on Texas's secondary school principals.

A study conducted by Harris Interactive for the MetLife Foundation in 2013 included a survey of school principals in determining their perceptions of on-the-job demands. The researchers found that almost half of the principals left their schools because of the job demands (MetLife Foundation, 2013). These studies align with this current study with one key difference: the current study included the principals' spouses. At the time of this study, no other research found included the perceptions of both secondary school principals and their spouses.

Maslach and Leiter (2011) explained that workload refers to job demands that exceed realistic human limits. Their research found employees with little time to recover from prolonged and excessive hours in a demanding job were more prone to work exhaustion (Maslach et al., 1996). Also, they reported a limit on the demands a person can reasonably meet. The problem of exhaustion at work has increased when the work is emotional (Lee, 1998). Burnout occurs when there is a mismatch of some type within the work (Leiter & Maslach,1999). Accordingly, all of the participants expressed concerns regarding their overall well-being due to working long hours. This result aligns with

Leiter and Maslach's (1999) theory because the participants felt exhaustion due to the intense workload and demands placed upon them in the principalship. Workload was perhaps one of the most discussed work-life areas in this study because of the ever-present relationship between burnout and increased workload, especially as it relates to exhaustion (Leiter & Shaughnessy, 2006; Maslach et al., 2001). Therefore, workload is one of the most significant job demands and is a strong predictor of burnout. This finding was also evident in this study, and workload was the area out of the six work-life areas studied that caused each participant the most stress, and it was also the most challenging area for each participant to manage. All three spouses expressed concern with their workload and the lack of balance between their work and home lives. The mismatch in workload harmed each participant's health and caused additional strain on each of the three marriages.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was: How do secondary school principals seek to address the stressors of school leadership? The researcher drew one conclusion for Research Question 2: There was a need for principals to disengage from the job. The importance of disengaging was evident when each participant reported "health issues related to stress," which consisted of headaches, trouble sleeping, and high blood pressure. These health issues were a concern for all three spouses, and they reported continually trying to identify solutions to help their spouses disengage from work and de-stress. Raul and Henry both spoke about exercising to reduce their stress. Raul stated, "I work out an hour a day and I feel my stress start to leave my body. If I don't work out, I can tell and can't sleep." Marie and Sara also identified exercise as a way for their husbands to cope with

daily job stressors. Sara wished Henry would spend more time focusing on his health by working out and eating healthily. Henry also reported that he had begun "getting a biweekly massage and sees a chiropractor weekly to help deal with the stress." Stewart explained that he always "tries to spend 1 day a weekend exploring his passions, which is normally out in nature," to help him disengage from the workplace. He said that he had learned over the years that he must do this to remain healthy. Raul and Marie also spoke about the importance of faith in their lives. They reported using prayer and leaning on God during difficult times as a source of comfort and a way to de-stress for Raul.

All three participants mentioned their desire to spend time with family to reduce their stress levels. Stewart said he tried to "spend time with his adult children and just be present" when possible. He added that this helped to "reenergize" him and get him focused back on work. Henry liked listening to podcasts during his commute and found this a relaxing way to de-stress. All three participants mentioned they wanted to build more trust with the district office and increase communication with key personnel. They felt that increased trust would benefit all parties. Also, each participant wanted access to a mentor who had secondary school leadership experience. They felt that having a mentor would decrease their feelings of isolation. Each participant and spouse also wanted to be there and provide "more support" to the other during difficult times. Sarah planned to do this by "listening more and being more open to his needs." Ashley also felt that she must continue to "communicate and actively listen" when Stewart needed to talk. Increased communication and support were cited as priorities by all three participants and their spouses. Overall, the three participants admitted they still had not achieved the balance

between work and home life they desired, and this was cited as something they needed to improve if they wanted to stay in the profession.

The conclusion that principals need to disengage from the job and do activities they find enjoyable was not surprising. However, although studies showed a need for principals to reduce their stress levels, little research showed how principals could disengage from the workplace. In one recent study, Mahfouz (2018) found that the participants reduced workplace stress by spending time with loved ones and having an outlet outside of work. The findings from my study were similar; however, one key difference was that Mahfouz (2018) considered only two coping strategies to alleviate stress for principals where my study participants' were able to speak freely about what helped them disengage from the job. Also, most of the research focuses on ways to reduce stress while at school; whereas, this study looked specifically at ways to disengage from the workplace when outside of it.

In another study, Beausaert et al. (2016) looked specifically at the effects of social support on the stress and burnout felt by principals and confirmed that principals' overall level of stress decreased if a principal felt supported. This study aligns with the findings of my study in that both found support was needed to reduce stress levels in the workplace. However, my study differed in its inclusion of participant spouses and in discussions of support from the spouse, the district office, and a mentor. The participants' desire for support from another experienced principal is important because support is often limited to district office support. All three participants and their spouses agreed that principals needed to learn how to disengage from the workplace to de-stress and reduce burnout.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study show the potential for change at individual and organizational levels. As individuals, principals are the key drivers on a campus, and they are the connection to the district office. These school members determine whether or not the school is academically successful and can build a positive culture with all stakeholders. This research provided evidence to show that stress is ever-present for secondary school principals and that high levels of stress could lead to principal turnover.

From the organizational level, principal graduate programs are tasked with preparing the next generation of school leaders across America. The findings indicate that pre-service programs fail to prepare tomorrow's leaders to deal with the principalship stressors adequately. Another organizational area with potential for change is the school district. School districts should consider how they prepare and support current principals and future leaders. District leaders will need to find ways to better support struggling new principals and veteran principals who are navigating the unknown. Also, principals themselves will need to learn how to deal with the princiaplship's constant stress in the principalship and how this stress might affect their personal partnerships. Principals will need to learn how to achieve a balance between work and home life that enables them to feel connected both to their jobs and their families. Stress is not something that will disappear from the principalship, so future leaders must be provided the tools they need to manage their stress levels.

Recommendations for Practice and Research

The findings in this research provide evidence to support principal training related to (a) ways to de-stress, (b) how to better manage time, (c) how to manage difficult

adults, and (d) how to approach the unknown. This professional development should be included in all principal preparation programs at universities and educational service centers. In addition to focusing on education theory, principal preparation programs should focus on hands-on training that equips principals to meet the job demands they will face. These revisions to principal preparation programs should help principals address the stressors associated with the position, learn to manage their work demands proactively, build healthy relationships with the community, and manage time while focusing on their well-being. Preparation programs should also consider revamping the principal intern program. The program as a whole is a great idea and is in place to enable a future principal to gain on-the-job training, but time constraints often reduce this program to following a check-off list. Perhaps districts should work closely with principal preparation programs and move towards assistant principal interns who serve as an assistant principal under a principal's direction and receive teacher pay with a stipend for one school year. This internship would allow for proper on-the-job training and would ensure that future principals are better prepared for the demands of the job. Also, this would help prepare future leaders to work in school districts after the year-long internship.

School districts should also offer current principals mindfulness training to convey ways of balancing the job's stresses and disengaging. Self- care should become a focus for all administrators and a part of the professional development they receive from the district. In order to support self- care districts should provide free individual and marriage counseling to all administrators as needed. Another recommendation for school districts is to provide on-site mentors or principal coaches for all principals. The mentors

132

or principal coaches should have experience working as secondary school principals so they can relate to what the current principal is going through. This person should focus only on working with principals and should be available to walk alongside them on their campus and help troubleshoot any concerns that arise. The mentor or principal coach can help each principal set professional and personal goals for each school year and then help assess whether these goals were met.

Districts should also provide more time for principals to interact with each other to build a collegial support network. These meetings should be held on campuses and led by principals rather than by the district office. The focus of these meetings should serve as a professional learning community in which principals can promote their growth and learning and consult on the challenges of the day. For these meetings to be effective, district office members should not attend unless they are also a mentor or principal coach.

Further research is needed in several areas related to the topic of principal stress. More research is required to understand better what practices can help principals learn to de-stress in the workplace. More research is also necessary to understand stress for female secondary school principals who were not included in this study. Additional research on the effects of administrator mentor programs could identify their impact on workplace stress levels. Also, regarding the areas of work-life identified in the framework for this study, further research could be conducted to examine each work-life area and reveal how they interconnect to add or decrease stress for principals on all levels. Lastly, more research is needed on how principals can better balance their home and work lives. This could strengthen relationships outside of work and better support principals' spouses.

Limitations

This research has several limitations. Most notably, the qualitative data collected are not generalizable to a larger target population. The qualitative sample was small and not diverse as the participants recruited are all from one midsize rural district in South-Central Texas. Also, all of the participants were male, which narrowed their perspectives and their spouses. However, the interviews and journals offered rich, in-depth data that captured the perceptions of school principals' stressors and how they manage these stressors. Thus, it adds to the literature and highlights a need to find strategies and develop skills to alleviate the stressors. Lastly, due to the political dynamics in the site district some of the participants may not have felt safe to share as openly as others in the study.

Final Discussion

This study was designed to examine how secondary school principals perceived stress and burnout related to their work. This study was unique in its focus on principals' perceptions and the perceptions of their spouses. Incorporating the participants' spouses was needed to better understand how working as a principal affects relationships with spouses or other partners. The findings in this study revealed that stress is a prevalent issue among school principals that must be addressed to stabilize the profession. The results pointed to a need to better equip principals to cope with job-related stressors. Principals are now expected to do so much more on a campus than ever before, and these increasing expectations are increasing principal turnover. The study also revealed how stress related to the different components of the six work-life areas is experienced in the principalship. Out of the six work-life areas, four (i.e., workload, community, reward, and

fairness) were all identified as having a mismatch for each of the three participants, an indicator of additional causes of workplace stress.

On the other hand, the remaining two work-life areas (i.e., values and control) were areas with the least amount of stress for each participant. The study participants were honest when they discussed the stress they felt on the job and how difficult it was to be a campus principal. To improve school performance, educational leaders and policy makers must think beyond accountability measures and focus on nurturing the whole school and enriching all stake holder's experiences, especially school principals, who play a pivotal role in campus function.

REFERENCES

Alvoid, L., & Black, W. L., Jr. (2014). *The changing role of the principal: How high-achieving districts are recalibrating school leadership*. Center for American Progress.

American Psychological Association. 2010. *Stress in America Findings*. http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/national-report.pdf

Andreyko, T. A. (2010). *Principal leadership in the accountability era: Influence of expanding job responsibilities on functional work performance, stress management, and overall job satisfaction*. http://dscholarship.pitt.edu/9894/1/Andreyko_ETD_Templated_update_3.PDF

Angered, J. M. (2003). Job burnout. *Journal of Employment Counseling, 40*(3), 98–107.

Ashworth, P. (2015). Conceptual foundations of qualitative psychology. In J. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 175–206). Sage.

Bakker, A., Demerouti, E., & Euwema, M. C. (2005). Job resources buffer the impact of job demands on burnout. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 10*(2), 170–180.

Beausaert, S., Froehlich, D., Devos, C., & Riley, P. (2016) Effects of support on stress and burnout in school principals, *Educational Research, 58*(4), 347–365.

Beck, L. G., & Murphy, J. (1992, August). Searching for a robust understanding of the principalship. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 28*(3), 387–396.

Bentley, S. (2010). Nursing retention through addressing burnout. *Nursing Management, 41*(12), 19–21. https://doi.org/10.1097/01.NUMA.0000390467.13410.d4

Béteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2012). Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes. *Social Science Research 41*(4), 904–919.

Boyland, L. (2011). Job stress and coping strategies of elementary principals: A statewide study. *Current Issues in Education, 14*(3). http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eric&AN=EJ962963&scope=site http://cie.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/cieatasu/article/view/806/260

Branch, G., Hanushek, E., & Rivken, S. (2013, January). School leaders matter. *Education Next, 13*(1), 2–8.

Buck, F. (2003). Flexibility begins with organization: The best way to structure your to-do list is to include everything, but to tackle major projects just one step at a time. *Principal, 34*(2), 30–33.

Burkhauser, S., Gates, S. M., Hamilton, L. S., Ikemoto, G. S. (2012). *First-year principals in urban school districts: How actions and working conditions relate to outcomes* [Report]. RAND Corporation.

Carpenter, B. W., & Poerschke, A. (2020). Leading toward normalcy and wellbeing n a time of extreme stress and crises. *The School Leadership Survival Guide: What to Do When Things Go Wrong, How to Learn from Mistakes, and Why You Should Prepare for the Worst*, 363.

Carroll, T. G. (2007). *Policy Brief: The High Cost of Teacher Turnover*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED498001

Carver-Thomas, D., & Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teacher turnover: Why it matters and what we can do about it*. Learning Policy Institute.

Coelli, M., & Green, D. A. (2012). Leadership effects: School principals and student outcomes. *Economics of Education Review, 31*(1), 92–109.

Combs, J., Edmonson, S. L., & Jackson, S. H. (2009). Burnout among elementary school principles. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice, 5*(4), 10–15.

Cotton, K. (2003). *Principals and student achievement: What the research says*. ASCD.

Creswell, J. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Cunningham, H. I. (2000). *It's the principal of the thing: A phenomenological study on the leadership role of the principal* [Doctoral dissertation, Claremont Graduate University].

Daly, A. (2009). Rigid response in an age of accountability: The potential of leadership and trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 45*, 168–216.

Darling-Hammond, L. (1999, December). *Teacher quality and student achievement: A review of state policy evidence*. Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.

Davis, B. (2020). Data may help slow turnover in principals. *EdWeek, 39*(18), 1–10.

Day, C., Sammons, P., Hopkins, D., Leithwood, K., & Kington, A. (2008). Research into the impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes: Policy and research contexts. *School Leadership and Management 28*(1), 5–25.

DeMatthews, D. (2020, March). We need good principals to stay longer in rural school districts. *Caller Times*. https://www.caller.com/story/opinion/2020/03/12/we-need-good-principals-stay-longer-rural-school-districts/5030826002

Donaldson, G. (2006). *Cultivating leadership in schools: Connecting people, purpose, and programs* (2nd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Dussault, M., & Thibodeau, S. (1997). Isolation and performance at work of school principals. *Journal of School Leadership, 7*(5), 521–536.

Dye, C. F., & Garman, A. N. (2006). *Exceptional leadership: 16 critical competencies for health care executives*. Health Administration Press.

Elmore, R. F. (2000). Building a new structure for school leadership. *American Educator, 23*(4), 6–13.

Engels, N., G. Hotton, G. Devos, D., Bouckenooghe, & Aelterman, A. (2008). Principals in schools with a positive school culture. *Educational Studies 34*(3), 159–174.

Evers, W. J., Brouwers, A., Tomic, W., & van Alphen, H. (2001). Self-efficacy en burnout bijleraren in het studiehuis [Self-efficacy and burnout among teachers of the study-home]. *Pedagogische Studiën, 78*, 169–183.

Evers, W. J., Tomic, W., & Brouwers, A. (2005). Constructive thinking and burnout among secondary school teachers. *Social Psychology of Education 8*, 425–439.

Felman, A. (2017, November 28). Stress: Why does it happen and how can we manage it? *Medical News Today*. https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/145855

Fernet, C., Guay, F., Senécal, C., & Austin, S. (2012). Predicting intraindividual changes in teacher burnout: The role of perceived school environment and motivational factors. *Teaching and Teacher Education 28*(4), 514–525.

Friedman, I. A. (2002). Burnout in school principals: Role related antecedents. *Social Psychology of Education: An International Journal, 5*(3), 229–251.

Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change* (3rd ed.). Teachers College Press.

Fullan, M. (2009). Leadership development: The larger context. *Educational Leadership, 67*(2), 45–49.

Fuller, E., Orr, T., & Young, M. D. (2008). *The revolving door of the principalship. Implications from UCEA*. University Council for Educational Administration, Curry School of Education, University of Virginia.

Fuller, E., & Young, M. D. (2009). *Tenure and retention of newly hired principals in Texas*. University Council for Educational Administration.

Fuller, E. J., Baker, B., & Young, M. D. (2007, April). *Examining the relationship between principal attributes and school-level teacher quality in Texas* [Paper presentation]. American Educational Research Association. Chicago, IL.

Garbacz, S. A., Hermon, K. C., Thompson, A. M., & Reinke, W. M. (2017). Family engagement in education and intervention: Implementation and evaluation to maximize family, school, and student outcomes. *Journal of School Psychology, 62*, 1–10.

Gaziel, H. (2007). Re-examining the relationship between principal's instructional/educational leadership and student achievement. *Journal of Social Science, 15*(1), 17–24.

Ginsberg, R. (2008). Being boss is hard: The emotional side of being in charge. *Phi Delta Kappa, 90*(December), 292–297.

Glover, E. (2007). Real principals listen. *Educational Leadership, 65*(1), 60–63.

Goldring, R., & Taie, S. (2018). *Principal attrition and mobility: Results from the 2016–17 Principal Follow-up Survey First Look* (NCES 2018-066). National Center for Education Statistics.

Gonzalez-Morales, M., Peiro, J., Rodriguez, I., & Bliese, P. D. (2012). Perceived collective burnout: A multilevel explanation of burnout. *Anxiety Stress & Coping, 25*(1), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2010.542808

Good, T. L. (2008). *21st century education: A reference handbook.* SAGE.

Grayson, J. L., & Alvarez, H. K. (2008). School climate factors relating to teacher burnout: A mediator model. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*(5), 1349–1363.

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2011). Exploring the journey of school improvement: Classifying and analyzing patterns of change in school improvement processes and learning outcomes. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 22*, 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/09243453.2010.536322

Harms, P., Credé, M., Tynan, M., Leon, M., & Jeung, W. (2016). Leadership and stress: A meta-analytic review. *The Leadership Quarterly, 28*(1), 178–194. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2016.10.006

Hoppey, D., & McLeskey, J. (2013). A case study of principal leadership in an effective inclusive school. *The Journal of Special Education, 46*(4), 245– 256.

Howard, M. P., & Mallory, B. J. (2008). Perceptions of isolation among high school principals. *Journal of Women in Education Leadership, 6*, 7–27.

Izgar, H. (2009). An investigation of depression and loneliness among school principals. *Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice, 9*, 247–258.

Kaplan, L. S., & Owings, W. A. (2015). *Introduction to the principalship: Theory to practice*.

Klocko, B. A., & Wells, C. A. (2015). Workload pressures of principals: A focus on renewal, support, and mindfulness. *NASSP Bulletin, 99*(4), 322–355.

Kraft, M. A., Marinell, W. H., & Shen-Wei Yee, D. (2016). School organizational contexts, teacher turnover, and student achievement: Evidence from panel data. *American Educational Research Journal, 53*(5), 1411–1449.

Kraft, M. A., & Papay, J. P. (2014). Can professional environments in schools promote teacher development? Explaining heterogeneity in returns to teaching experience. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis 36*(4), 476–500.

Kyriacou, C. 1987. Teacher stress and burnout: an international review. *Educational Research 29*, 146–152.

Lambert, L. (2003). Beyond leadership: A framework for shared leadership. *Educational Leadership, 59*(8):37–40.

Lashway, L. (2000). Who's in charge? The accountability challenge. *Principal Leadership, 1*(3), 8–13.

Leiter, M. P., & Maslach, C. (2011). *Areas of worklife survey manual* (5th ed.). Mind Garden, Inc.

Leithwood, K., & Azah, V. (2017). Characteristics of high-performing school districts. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 16*(1), 1-27.

Leithwood, K., & Beatty, B. R. (2008). *Leading with teacher emotions in mind*. Corwin Press.

Leithwood, K., & Day, C. (2008). The impact of school leadership on pupil outcomes. *School Leadership and Management, 28*(1), 1–4.

Leithwood, K., & Jantzi, D. (2008). Linking leadership to student learning: The contributions of leader efficacy. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 44*(4), 496.

Leithwood, K., Jantzi, D., & Steinbach, R. (1999). *Changing leadership for changing times*. Open University Press.

Leithwood, K., Louis, K., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research*. The Wallace Foundation.

Levin, S., & Bradley, K. (2019). *Understanding and addressing principal turnover: A review of the research*. National Association of Secondary School Principals.

Marshall, K. (2008). The big rocks: Priority management for principals. *Principal Leadership*, (March), 16–22.

Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Association for supervision and development of curriculum.

Maslach, C., & Jackson, S. E. (1985). The role of sex and family variables in burnout. *Sex Roles 12*, 837–851.

Maslach, C., Jackson, S. E., & Lieter, S. E. (2012). Making a significant difference with burnout interventions: Researcher and practitioner collaboration. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 33*(2), 296.

Maslach, C., & Leiter, M. P. (2016). Understanding the burnout experience: Recent research and its implications for psychiatry. *World Psychiatry 15*(2), 103–111.

Maslach, C., Schaufeli, W. B., & Leiter, M. P. (2001). Job burnout. *Annual Review of Psychology, 52*, 397–422.

McEllen, K. W. (2019). *Stop the churn: How districts can support principals to increase their retention* [Doctoral dissertation, Name of School]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

McEwan, E. K. (2003). *Seven steps to effective instructional leadership* (2nd ed.). Corwin Press.

McMillan, J. H. (2012). *Educational research: Fundamentals for the consumer* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Meador, D. (2016). *The role of the principal in schools*. ThoughtCo. http://teaching.about.com/od/admin/tp/Role-Of-The-Principal.htm

Merriam, S. B. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. Jossey-Bass.

Murphy, J. T. (2011). Dancing in the rain tips on thriving as a leader in tough times. *Phi Delta Kappan, 93*(1), 36–41.

National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015). *Professional standards for educational leaders 2015*.

Nettles, S., & Herrington, C. (2007). Revisiting the importance of the direct effects of school leadership on student achievement: The implications for school improvement policy. *Peabody Journal of Education, 82*(4), 724–736.

Odhiambo, G., & Hii, A. (2012). Key stakeholders' perceptions of effective school leadership. *Educational Management & Leadership, 40*(2), 232–247.

Pas, E. T., Bradshaw, C. P., & Hershfeldt, P. A. (2012). Teacher- and school-level predictors of teacher efficacy and burnout: Identifying potential areas for support. *Journal of School Psychology, 50*(1), 129–145.

Phillips, S., & Sen, D. (2011). Stress in head teachers. In J. Langan-Fox & C. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Handbook of stress in the occupations* (pp. 177–201).

Quast, L. (2011, September 26). The importance of proactively managing workplace stress. *Forbes*. http://www.forbes.com/sites/lisaquast/2011/09/26/the-importance-of-proactivelymanaging-workplace-stress/

Queen, J. A., & Schumacher, D. (2006). A survival guide for frazzled principals. *Principal*, (November/December), 18–23. https://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2006/N-Dp18.pdf

Rhodes, C., Nevill, A., & Allen J. (2004). Valuing and supporting teachers: A survey of teacher satisfaction, dissatisfaction, morale and retention in an English local education authority. *Research in Education, 71*(1), 97–80.

Ronfeldt, M., Loeb, S., & Wyckoff, J. (2013). How teacher turnover harms student achievement. *American Educational Research Journal, 5*0(1), 4–36.

Ross, J., & Gray, P. (2006). School leadership and student achievement: The mediating effects of teacher beliefs. *Canadian Journal of Education, 29*(3), 798–822.

Stronge, J. H., Catano, N., & Richard, H. B. (2008). *Qualities of effective principals*. ASCD.

Seashore Louis, K., Leithwood, K., Wahlstrom, K. L., & Anderson, S. E. (2010). *Learning from 98 leadership: Investigating the links to improved student learning*. The Wallace Foundation.

Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline*. Doubleday.

Senge, P. (2000). *Schools that learn: A fifth discipline field book for educators, parents, and everyone who cares about education*. Doubleday.

Sergiovanni, T. (2005). *The principalship: A reflective practice perspective*. Pearson.

Sergiovanni, T., Kelleher, P., McCarthy, M., & Wirst, F. (2004). *Educational governance and administration*. Pearson.

Sergiovanni, T. J. (1994). *Building community in schools*. Jossey-Bass.

Sesemann, E. M. (2019, December). *Healthcare employees' burnout, job stress, health, and workplace social networks: Addressing the quadruple aim* [Doctoral dissertation, East Carolina University]. The Scholarship: East Carolina University's Institutional Repository. http://hdl.handle.net/10342/7611

Sogunro, O. A. (2012). Stress in school administration: Coping tips for principals. *Journal of School Leadership, 22*, 664–700.

Sorensen, L. C., & Ladd, H. (2018). *The hidden costs of teacher turnover* [Working Paper No. 203-0918-1]. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. https://caldercenter.org/publications/hidden-costs-teacher-turnover

Stephenson, L. E., & Bauer, S. C. (2010). The role of isolation in predicting new principals' burnout. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership, 5*(1), 1–17. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=eue&AN=61015882&scope=site

Supovitz, J., Sirinides, P., & May, H. (2010). How principals and peers influence teaching and learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(1), 31–56.

Sutcher, L., Darling-Hammond, L., & Carver-Thomas, D. (2016, September). *A coming crisis in teaching? Teacher supply, demand, and shortages in the U.S.* Learning Policy Institute.

Tirozzi, G. (2001). The artistry of leadership: The evolving role of the secondary principal. *Phi Delta Kappan, 82*(6), 434–439.

Tomac, W., & Tomac, E. (2008). Existential fulfillment and burnout among teachers and principals. *Journal of Beliefs and Values, 29*, 11–27.

Tracy, S. J. (2013). *Qualitative research methods: Collecting evidence, crafting analysis, creating impact*. Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.5613/rzs.43.1.6

Van der Merwe, H., & Parsotam, A. (2012). School principal stressors and a stress alleviation strategy based on controlled breathing. *Journal of Asian and African Studies, 47*(6), 666–678.

Van Dick, R., & Wagner, U. (2001). Stress and strain in teaching: A structural equation approach. *British Journal of Educational Psychology, 71*, 243–259.

Waters, T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. (2003). *Balanced leadership: What 30 years of research tells us about the effect of leadership on student achievement. A working paper*.

Wells, C. M. (2013). Educational leaders describe a job too big for one: Stress reduction in the midst of leading. *AASA Journal of Scholarship & Practice, 10*(3), 32–45. http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/JPS-Fall2013.FINALv2.pdf

West, D. L., Peck, C. M., Reitzug, U. C., & Crane, E. A. (2014). Accountability, autonomy, and stress: Principal responses to superintendent change in a large U.S. urban school district. *School Leadership & Management, 34*, 372–391.

Wills, Gabrielle. (2016). Principal leadership changes and their consequences for school performance in South Africa. *International Journal of Educational Development, 51*, 108–124.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Sage.

Young, M. D., Fuller, E., Brewer, C., Carpenter, B., & Mansfield, K. C. (2007). Quality leadership matters. *UCEA Policy Brief Series, 1*(1), 1–8.