THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP ON SCHOOL CULTURE

AND TEACHER RETENTION

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To determine the impact that school leaders have on school culture and teacher retention, a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach was used to study schools in a district feeder pattern in in a large, suburban district in Texas with a student population of approximately 25,000. In Phase 1, teachers at one elementary, one middle, and one high school were asked to complete a 26-question Likert scale survey about school culture. The last statement in the survey asked participants if they were willing to participate in a focus group about school culture and teacher retention. In Phase 2, focus group interviews were conducted with volunteer participants who took the survey and stated they would be interested in participating in a focus group. Three focus groups were held to divide the participants by grade level grouping taught: elementary, middle, and high school. Focus group participants stated that they believe school leaders play a vital role in creating the culture of the school and in teachers' desire to remain not only teaching at their school, but also remaining in the field of education. The survey data supported these findings. By examining teachers' perspectives, the findings of the study may positively inform and influence district hiring practices, develop leadership profiles and behaviors, and provide school leaders with ways to recruit and retain teachers. Further research could include a case study at one specific school or expanding the sample size and including more schools or studying a variety of districts to find additional ways to build school culture and retain teachers.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

School culture is invisible, but it permeates every aspect of school operation. It impacts school leadership, staff morale and retention, quality of instruction, and students' attitudes toward their education. In *School Culture Rewired*, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) stated the following about the culture of a school: "Culture represents the unwritten mission of the school—it tells students and staff why they are there" (p. 30). Culture is often the underwritten stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. Thus, the school culture is affected by the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values held by those who are associated with the school which, in turn, can impact how the school operates. It is up to school leaders to identify, shape, and maintain strong, positive, student-focused cultures. Without a collaborative culture, reforms may wither, teachers may leave, and student achievement can slip.

In the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic, school leaders were facing the unique challenge of rebuilding school culture, retaining high-quality teachers, and improving student achievement. The pandemic upended America's education system, as most schools in every state closed their doors for extended periods of time to combat the spread of the virus. Schools at every level were sent scrambling as the world made the abrupt shift to virtual learning, with teachers and students quickly adapting to an entirely new way of life. A year after the start of the pandemic, teachers and students were still teaching and learning in a hybrid model. Both teacher burnout and academic learning losses for students were growing concerns among all educators. The Coronavirus pandemic undoubtedly changed our education system, and as we look toward the future of our schools, leaders must have an intentional focus on building culture, retaining the

very best teachers for students, and addressing the widening gap in student learning and the mental well-being of students.

Leadership and culture have been shown to correlate directly with student achievement (Helterbran, 2010; Perilla, 2014; Yahaya et al., 2010). Establishing collaborative and congenial working relationships with administrators and teachers and nurturing teacher-teacher relationships through support of professional learning communities has been found to be effective in closing the achievement gap for learners (Leithwood et.al., 2010). That type of school culture and climate can directly influence retention of the strongest teachers who then influence student performance (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011).

Problem Statement

The problem of practice for the current study is a recognition that school culture is shown to be a major component of success at the school, teacher, and student levels (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010; Yahaya et al., 2010). Therefore, following the Coronavirus pandemic, it is imperative that school leaders have an intentional focus on building up a school's culture to support and retain high quality teachers who lead the charge for student learning. School leadership has been linked to school culture and teacher commitment. In turn, school culture and teacher retention have been linked to student performance (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Gruenert & Whitaker (2015).

Statistics show that student achievement is declining; in fact, in 2021 data showed that many students were underachieving on the State of Texas Academic Achievement Readiness exam (STAAR), not demonstrating a year's worth of growth, and not graduating from high school due to the inability to pass all five STAAR tests required for graduation. In the spring of 2021, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) released the results of STAAR exams via the agency's

website. As a result of the learning disruptions caused by the Coronavirus pandemic, the number of students not meeting grade level expectations across all subject areas and grade levels, except English I and English II, increased from the 2019 administration. Mathematics saw the largest decline in student proficiency across all grade levels. Districts with a higher percentage of students learning virtually experienced a greater degree of decline. Districts with the highest percentage of in-person learners largely avoided any learning declines in reading. Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath (2021) stated:

> It is painfully clear that the pandemic had a very negative impact on learning. We all have full assessment results in hand for nearly all Texas students. The data may be disheartening, but with it, our teachers and school leaders are building action plans to support students in the new school year. (paras. 3-4)

School district leaders are facing the challenge of refocusing their efforts on academic achievement for all students. Due to these demands, the goal of every school leader is student achievement.

In their seminal report, *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, Deal and Peterson (1990) described the pressures faced by education leaders regarding school improvement and student achievement. They introduced five specific strategies for school improvement. One of the strategies was the focus on school culture, or an ethos approach. This approach focuses on behavioral patterns and the values, beliefs, and norms that define those patterns. The authors stated that this approach is premised on the assumption that teachers and students are heavily influenced by morale, routines, and conscious or unconscious conventions about how things are done in their schools. School leaders experience difficulty when ineffective or negative practices become accepted practices within a school. Change and reform in a school can be accomplished through a focus on changing school culture through effective practices which must be modeled and implemented by school leaders.

Findings from previous research studies revealed that leadership impacts student success in school and many leadership factors play a role in increasing student achievement. Ohlson et al. (2016) stated that high-achieving schools demonstrate a culture that nurtures teachers' collaboration, empowerment, and engagement. These authors emphasized that "student achievement can be increased by creating a culture that endorses a shared commitment to student success, the collective decision-making process, continuous professional growth, and a firm belief that all students can achieve success" (pg. 116). To be effective leaders, there must be evidence that the leader's actions made an impact on student learning (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). As early as 2007, Fullan (2007) stated that the concept of re-culturing is a key component of successful school change. School leaders need to focus on creating, or reestablishing, a collaborative school culture. Such a focus leads to higher levels of trust and respect among colleagues, improved professional satisfaction which leads to increase retention, improved instructional practices, better outcomes for all students, and school change that is maintained over time.

<div align="center">Conceptual Framework</div>

A conceptual framework includes the elements of a study that guide the researcher. The framework also informs the reader about how a study is viewed and how the various components being studied are interrelated. To better understand the predictive nature of how school leadership impacts school culture and the impact on teacher retention, the conceptual framework (Figure 1) for this study was created. The framework components were gleaned from the current literature about the role of the school leader, educational leadership styles, school culture, and teacher retention.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework Model of School Leadership
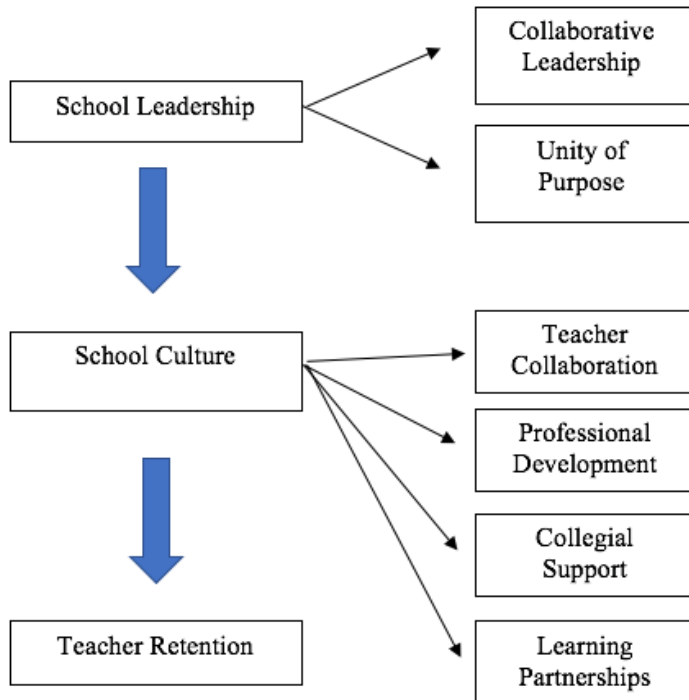
A collaborative school culture provides an ideal setting for student learning (Gruenert &

Whitaker, 2017). It also provides a setting in which teachers can learn from each other as much

as they do from other sources. Thus, the development of a positive school culture is carefully

crafted by the leaders within the organization and employees tend to be strategically placed in

situations where collaboration can occur. The challenge is for school leaders to get the school

culture to embrace this approach. One way to address the challenge is to ensure that collaborative

leadership is used within the school and that all stakeholders achieve unity and embrace the

purpose and vision of the school. Leadership is predictive of a school's culture. Factors that

make up school culture include teacher collaboration, professional development, collegial

support, and learning partnerships. Collaborative leadership has been shown to have a positive

correlation with teacher efficacy (Mehdinezhad & Arbabi, 2015) and is an initial driver in school

improvement (Heck & Hallinger, 1996). In addition, because the teacher has been identified as

the single most important school level resource that impacts student achievement (Hattie, 2017),

the retention of quality teachers becomes a matter of critical importance. Positive teacher

efficacy and teacher retention have been linked to actions taken by the administrator to create a

positive school culture (Pierce, 2019). The opportunity to improve student achievement, which is

the top priority for all schools, lies within school leadership, school culture, and retention of the

best, most highly qualified teachers (Yahaya, et al., 2010).

Purpose Statement

The culture of any organization sets the tone for how the mission of that organization will

be accomplished. Moreover, the school leader has a strong impact upon the culture of the

organization, the ability of the school to meet its goals, and the retention of highly qualified

teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of school leadership on

school culture and teacher retention.

Methodology and Research Questions

To address the purpose of the study, a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach

was used. The following questions guided this study:

1. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence school culture?
2. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence teacher retention?

Significance and Relevance of the Study

The findings of this study may inform school leaders about the impact they have on the

culture of a school and how the culture of a school can impact teacher retention and, potentially,

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student achievement. The results may also inform school leaders of the most appropriate types of hiring practices to employ, providing data and insight to both current and aspiring school leaders. By collecting data and the subsequent analysis of data and reported findings, the findings may provide school district leaders ways to better identify and target strategies in recruiting and retaining effective school leaders who can influence a school's culture and increase teacher retention.

While there are many definitions of culture, even in 2008, Boman and Deal (2008) stated that culture is the glue that binds an organization, unites people, and helps an organization accomplish a desired goal. Culture is not a problem that needs to be solved, but rather a framework that a group can use to solve problems; it is how we learn to survive, one generation passing down what it has learned to the next (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Now, more than ever, the role of the school leader is critical to the creation of a school culture of academic excellence. Because leadership and culture have been shown to correlate directly to student achievement (Gruenert, 2015), a school's most important work, the retention of highly qualified teachers contributes to the continuation of that work (Adnot et al. , 2017). The findings of this study could add to the current knowledge base and provide a better understanding of how each component affects the overall success of schools.

<center>Delimitations</center>

Delimitations are the limits or boundaries of the study that are within the researcher's control and help to narrow the scope of what will be included in a purpose statement and a review of literature (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). One controlled variable is the selection of sites. One elementary, one middle, and one high school within one north Texas school district were sites proposed for the study. The district was proposed because of its large size, serving over

25,000 students, and has a diverse population. The sample was limited to full-time teachers at the selected schools. Data collected were limited to those teachers' experiences and their willingness to participate in a survey and interviews.

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

The following assumptions are associated with this study. It was assumed that teachers would agree to participate in the study, with the understanding that they could opt out at any time. It was also assumed that teachers would respond openly and honestly to the survey. Finally, it was assumed that during focus-group interviews, teachers would participate willingly and provide honest responses to the questions.

<p style="text-align:center">Definition of Terms</p>

To foster a clear understanding, definitions of the following terms provide clarification of meaning within the context of this study.

- *Climate*. The National School Climate Center (2021) described school climate as the quality and character of school life. School climate is based on patterns of student, parent, and school personnel experiences of school life and the climate reflects the norms, goals, values, interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning practices, and organizational structures. A sustainable, positive school climate fosters youth development and learning necessary for a productive, contributing, and satisfying life in a democratic society.

- *Collaborative leadership.* Such leadership is a management practice in which members of a leadership team work together across sectors to make decisions and keep their organization thriving. Collaborative leadership fosters a sense of unity among leaders, allowing them to make effective decisions quickly, maintain the organization's core values, and strategically address issues as a single, cohesive team (DiFranza, 2019).

- *Organizational culture*. Organizational culture "is the collective effect of the common beliefs, behaviors, and values of the people within the company" (Groysberg et al., 2018, pg. 1). Organizational culture provides norms within an organization that (a) regulate how employees perform and serve others, (b) set guidelines about how employees should interact and work with others, and (c) decipher how motivated employees are to set and accomplish their goals as well as the extent to which they are committed to the school's overall mission (Groysberg et. al., 2018).

- *School culture.* The *Glossary of Education Reform* (2013) defined school culture as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions.

- *Student achievement.* In this study, the STAAR is the state's measure of student achievement. Student achievement is defined as the amount of academic content a student learns in a determined amount of time. Each grade level has learning goals or instructional standards that educators are required to teach (Carter, 2018).

Organization of Study

This dissertation is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 is a general overview of the study, which includes the statement of the problem, conceptual framework, purpose, methodology and research questions, significance and relevance of the research, delimitations, assumptions, and definitions of terms. Chapter 2 consists of a review of research and literature that focuses on school leaders, school culture, and student achievement. Chapter 3 includes the research design, population, sampling information, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter 4 provides an in-depth look at the results of the study. Chapter 5 is a summary of the

study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further studies.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of leadership on school culture and to explore the impact school culture has on teacher retention. This chapter introduces the critical role of the principal in achieving the goals of a collaborative school culture and the potential to increase teacher retention as a result of the school's culture and provides an overview of the purpose and the structure of the study as well as the research questions that guided the study. The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship among various leadership variables and their impact on school culture and teacher retention. Chapter 2 explicates a review of related literature.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of school leaders on school culture and teacher retention. One strategy for improving schools is to improve the culture of a school. A positive school culture can increase teacher retention and increase student achievement, given that teachers have been identified as the most important school-level resource that impacts student achievement (Gruenert & Whitaker (2015).

Because student achievement is the ultimate goal of a school, school leaders must place utmost importance on establishing a positive school culture. For more than 20 years, Dr. Steve Gruenert has extensively studied how the presence of a positive school culture impacts student achievement. His findings suggest that the better the school culture and climate are, the more collaborative the staff is, thus, the higher student achievement is. He noted that a school leader's focus must be on building a collaborative and positive climate and culture, not on student achievement. When schools narrow their focus to student achievement on test scores, rather than focus on culture, student achievement suffers. Gruenert (2015) stated, "School culture and student achievement are not divergent issues for school leaders to consider; this is not an either/or decision" (p. 50). Earlier, Leithwood et al. (2006) argued that student achievement will not peak without an overall positive school culture and climate, and then Fullan (2012) affirmed that school culture is imperative to students' achievement and teachers' commitment to student learning.

This review of literature relevant to both the conceptual framework and the purpose of the study provides a description of the evolution of the roles and responsibilities of the school leader, examining leadership styles and their impact on school culture and student achievement.

Also included is an examination of school culture and its role in a successful school. The chapter closes with literature relevant to school culture factors that impact student achievement and teacher retention.

The Role of the School Leader

The principal's role has become increasingly complex as the nature of society, political expectations, and school organizations has changed (Valentine & Prater, 2011). Being a school leader is not the same today as in years past. In tracing the role of principal over the years, Leithwood et al. (2006) noted that the predominant role for principals from the 1920s through the 1970s was one of administrative managers. This approach to leadership focused on the functions, tasks, and behaviors of the principal and assumed that if these things were done well, the school would operate effectively. Then, during the 1980s work of Ronald R. Edmonds (1982), the Effective Schools Movement focused on the principal as an instructional leader. Edmonds worked to convince those in the field of education that schools could be changed and reformed to become effective schools for all students. In Edmonds' paper, "An Overview of School Improvement," he defined five correlates, or characteristics, of unusual school populations where, despite students coming from low-income families, teachers taught over 90% of their students to a standard achievement that permitted the students to succeed at the next grade level. Edmonds explained that schools cannot control external environments and factors affecting students; instead, the school must find ways to work around the barriers that hinder a student from learning. Edmonds' five correlates of an effective school include:

- Strong instructional leadership by the principal
- A pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus
- An orderly, safe climate and culture conducive to teaching and learning

- Teacher behaviors that convey the expectation that all students are expected to obtain at least minimum mastery

- The use of student achievement as the basis for program evaluation

Edmonds believed that the five correlates are related to each other, that they are interactive, and that they all are present in an effective school. Edmonds' theory about school effectiveness laid a strong foundation for other researchers.

After Edmonds' sudden death, over the years of its existence from 1986-2004, The National Center for Effective Schools Research and Development (NCESRD) clarified and made consistent unifying principles drawn from Edmonds' original 1982 correlates. Although their approach to answering the effective school question may have been different, Edmonds' beliefs about what makes schools effective remained the basis and structure for those succeeding him.

Following Edmonds' (1982) seminal work, researchers continued to study characteristics of instructional leaders and the potential impact of the leader in an educational setting. Early effective schools research found that instructional leadership focused on establishing school-wide goals, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, hiring and monitoring of effective teachers, and close monitoring of student progress. These were reported by researchers at the time to be key descriptors of effective principals (De Bevoise, 1984; Bossert et al., 1982; Hallinger & Murphy, 1985).

Next, in the 1990s, educational reform leaders recommended a change in the organization structure, professional roles, and goals of public education. In 1994, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act came into action. The legislation codified the National Education Goals (2000) and offered grants to states that committed themselves to specific plans for systematic reform of K-12 education. A result of this act was the creation of The Blue Ribbon Schools program that gave national recognition to public and private schools that were unusually effective in meeting the

goals for 2000 for the purpose of promoting nationwide school improvement (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The identified conditions of effective schooling were: leadership, teaching environment, curriculum and instruction, student environment, parent and community support, and organizational vitality.

Notice that the first condition of an effective school is the leadership within the school. The school leader is the driving factor to create change and implement programs. The program also provided indicators for success within the initiative, which included:

- Student performance on measures of achievement

- Daily student and teacher attendance rates

- Students' postgraduation pursuits

- School, staff, and student awards

- High student retention and graduation rates

This program provided an incentive for schools to demonstrate academic growth for their students.

Then in 2001, President George W. Bush authorized the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002). The major focus of that act was to close the student achievement gaps by providing all children with a fair, equal, and significant opportunity to obtain a high-quality education while being educated in safe classrooms by well-prepared teachers. The U.S. Department of Education (2020) emphasized four pillars within the bill:

- Accountability: Ensures that students who are disadvantaged achieve academic proficiency

- Flexibility: Allows school districts flexibility in how they use federal education funds to improve student achievement

- Research-based education: Emphasizes educational programs and practices that have been proven effective through scientific research

- Parent options: Increases the choices available to the parents of students attending Title I schools. (NCLB, 2002)

NCLB required that states establish state academic standards and a state testing system. The accountability system was called Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) which required school leaders to ensure proficiency on state standardized tests or face sanctions and corrective actions. NCLB required a shift in thinking for school leaders to meet the expected outcomes of the legislation. As Anthes (2002) noted,

> Today, expectations for school leaders run well beyond managing budgets and making sure the buses run on time. They are counted on to be the instructional leaders of their schools and districts, to understand effective instructional strategies, regularly coach and observe classroom teachers, and be able to analyze student achievement data to make more effective instructional decisions. The NCLB puts more pressure on the public education system to increase student achievement for all students. (p. 1)

Researchers Darling-Hammond (1993) and Leithwood (1992) suggested that the metaphor of the principal as an instructional leader was inadequate, given the changing contexts in which schools function. As a result, the idea of the principal as a transformational leader emerged. Kenneth Leithwood (1992) led the way in the exploration and application of transformational leadership in education administration. Leithwood based his argument on two assumptions. First, leadership primarily manifests itself during times of change, and the nature of the change is the critical determinant of the most helpful forms of leadership. Second, the era of school change, reform, and restructuring will likely extend into the foreseeable future. Transformational leaders also make use of personal relationships. A transformational approach to leadership relies on encouraging and motivating others to participate in molding a successful future for an organization. This often includes establishing a group's common purpose by establishing a vision and mission to help define and outline goals. Teasley (2017) explained that an organization's vision tells the organization where it should be in the future and why. The

mission explains the reason for the organization's existence, its purpose. He argued that no organization can succeed without a clear vision and mission.

In summary, the work of Edmonds (1982) led the way and allowed law makers to continue to refine and implement programs like the Blue Ribbon Schools program and No Child Left Behind, programs that focused on key characteristics that can help school leaders effectively lead and grow their schools. In both programs, the emphasis was placed on the work school leaders need to do to retain high quality and effective teachers to support student achievement on their campus. Over time, many principal leadership styles emerged through research. The next section outlines how leadership styles impact school culture and teacher retention.

Leadership Styles and Their Impact on Culture

The leadership style of an administrator has a strong impact on a school's culture and the ability of the institution to meet its goals. Creating a personal leadership style is not only possible, but also necessary; it requires a deep sense of self-awareness, a willingness to know the components of leadership, and a desire to practice those components. While leadership style is dependent upon certain factors, such as personality, cultural background, experiences, psychological health, and education (Inandi et al., 2013), it can be learned. School leaders must lead with a style that sets a positive tone to provide a positive, quality education for students (Bonnici, 2011). Leadership style has been found to have a direct effect on a school, the program and instruction, and student outcomes (Menon, 2014). Leadership style also was found to influence teacher efficacy (Hinnant et al., 2009). Hattie (2016) stated that teacher efficacy is the number one influence related to student achievement. Given that a principal is not typically involved in the direct delivery of instruction, the behavior of a principal, especially when supportive, collegial, and not overly restrictive, can have a positive impact on student

achievement through the impact this behavior has on school culture and climate and thus on the teachers in the school (Tschannene-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011).

Teacher efficacy has a long list of positive effects on the people within a school building, from improving student performance to establishing a school climate that builds teacher commitment to the school (Brinson & Steiner, 2007). While it would be impossible to provide a single image of a school leader that would be appropriate for all schools, studying the complimentary relationship among a principal's leadership qualities, the school culture, and teacher retention could provide useful information regarding best practices for school improvement. The results of focusing on strong leadership and the development of a positive school culture will benefit teacher retention and student engagement, and bring about a rise in the levels of student achievement (Allen et al., 2015).

Culture is shaped by five interwoven elements, each of which principals have the power to influence: fundamental beliefs and assumptions, shared values, norms, patterns and behaviors, and tangible evidence. Each of these components influences and drives the others, forming a circle of reinforcing beliefs and actions that develop strong connections among every member of the school community (Shafer, 2018).

As the roles and leadership styles for principals evolved, one thing that remained is that the power and presence of an effective school leader is a key component of a successful school. Leaders must employ a leadership style that provides them with the highest probability of success in every situation they encounter. The Situational Leadership theory, developed by Dr. Paul Hersey and Kenneth Blanchard (1993), suggested that no single leadership style is always effective; rather, effective principals must find a style that is effective for each situation they encounter and is best-suited for the task. According to this theory, the most effective leaders are

those who can adapt their style to the situation and look at cues, such as the type of task, the

nature of the group, and other factors that might contribute to the situation. Hersey and

Blanchard suggested four primary leadership styles: (a) telling, (b) selling, (c) participating, and

(d) delegating. They explained that the situational approach to leadership allows for flexibility so

leaders can adapt to the needs of their followers and the demands of the situation. This style also

helps avoid the pitfalls of the single-style approach because it recognizes that there are many

ways of dealing with a problem and leaders need to be able to assess a situation and the maturity

levels of the people with whom they work to best determine the approach that is most effective

in the situation.

Yet, leadership style is not just limited to elements of the school building. In 2004,

Frances Van Voorhis and Steven B. Sheldon completed a longitudinal study involving 320

schools throughout the United States. Their purpose was to identify the impact the principal had

on student achievement when the principal worked to build positive, significant relationships

with the entire school community. In their study, the teachers rated the degree of support from

the principal for school-wide efforts of family and community involvement; in addition, the

school provided data on principal turnover. The authors explored other essential elements of

partnership program success, including teamwork and external support variables. Their

regression analyses of the data indicated significant and positive relationships between principal

support and partnership program quality. The results of their study suggest the importance of

engaging the principal in partnership efforts; developing strong support for partnerships among

parents, teachers, and community members; and continually expanding and evaluating the work

of the partnership team to promote student success and development.

Then in 2013, Johnson shared, "Asking for help from the community sends a crucial

message to the broader public. It demonstrates that school leaders value and respect what the community brings to the table" (p. 20). One of the most crucial attributes of effective leadership is the ability to motivate followers. Thus, the principal's leadership style should include skills for motivating and inspiring all stakeholders within the school and within the greater community (Bass & Riggio, 2007).

Regardless of leadership style, Herbert (2011) stated his belief that, "…a school administrator must be able to articulate a vision for success, inspire others to embrace the vision, and have the ability to make the necessary changes happen" (p. 4). A leader who is capable of and willing to build relationships and often interact with teachers can build a positive school culture and impact student achievement (DiPaola et al., 2004). Shafer (2018) noted that culture is all about connections and leaders must utilize their leadership style to ensure that their school has a strong culture in place where there are many, overlapping, and cohesive interactions among all members of the organization. While there are no simple answers for achieving leadership excellence, the research does reflect that trained and committed leaders who have chosen a specific leadership style that improves and sustains the overall school culture enhances teacher efficacy and increase student achievement. Those leaders are the ones that increase the effectiveness of schools (Fisher & Carlyon, 2015; Allen et al., 2015; Davis, 2018; DiFraniza, 2019).

<center>School Culture</center>

One of the main tasks of school leaders is to create, form, and maintain a strong school culture. Shafer (2018) explained that a school's culture will be strong or weak, depending on the interactions between people in the organization. In a strong culture, there are many, overlapping, and cohesive interactions, so that knowledge about the organization's distinctive character—and

what it takes to thrive in—is widely spread. Shafer explained that often it is tempting to think that school culture is too vague to prioritize; however, she explained that it would be a mistake for leaders to not prioritize culture. Through her research at Harvard, she tracked and demonstrated strong and significant correlations between an organization's culture and its performance. Once principals understand what constitutes culture, and they no longer view it as intangibles but as something that can be pinpointed and designed, they can execute a cultural vision and put action steps in place.

The culture of a school determines behaviors, attitudes, goals, and student outcomes. The culture of the organization sets the tone for how the mission of that organization will be accomplished. Davis (2018) provided a definition of organizational culture as "what is valued, the dominant leadership styles, the languages and symbols, the procedures and routines, and the definitions of success that make an organization unique" (p. 3).

Inside a school, subcultures may exist within departments or teams and those groups may have their own set of rules, routines, and cultures. How members of these subunits view their relationship with each other has a great impact upon the culture of the organization (Cansoy, 2017). Careful attention must be paid to the subunits and subcultures that may exist. Those units can help promote the mission of an organization, but they also could divide the team and distract from the mission. School leaders must pay close attention to any negative subunit or subculture that could powerfully influence an organization in a negative direction.

Roby (2011) found that if teachers are treated professionally, are engaged in conversation, and are allowed to communicate and collaborate, they are likely to contribute positively to the culture. Schools that have a strong school culture are ones where teachers have a high motivation to teach, and where students have a high motivation to learn. For these reasons,

school leaders must carefully craft their culture and staff should be strategically allocated in situations where collaboration can occur. Culture is "the glue that binds the organization together" (Teasley, 2017, p. 3), and it must be given the utmost attention and monitored accordingly. School leaders must be intentional about developing, discussing, and continually assessing their school culture.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) described and noted the importance of distinguishing between culture and climate. The climate of a school typically deals with the what, while the culture deals with the why. Gruenert and Whitaker further stated: "Climate is around us, but culture is part of us" (p. 11). Culture is linked to the bigger purpose behind why educators in the building do what they do, not just the day-to-day tasks, but their purpose. These authors defined culture as the framework that a group can use to solve problems. Senek (2009) claimed that knowing your why is the only way to be successful at accomplishing your mission, both in the short term and most importantly in the long term.

Culture awareness is critical for the success of school leaders and the school and community they serve. Davis (2018) noted that many people, including school leaders, are not aware of their school culture until it is challenged or threatened. The lack of cultural awareness becomes increasingly evident when leaders and teachers within a school face change or difficult times, such as the Coronavirus pandemic that plagued education in 2020. School leaders must critically examine the school culture that was exhibited during this difficult time. Davis explained that, in many schools, culture is rarely discussed and less frequently measured. However, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) noted that cultural awareness can be created when school leaders utilize assessment tools such as a school culture survey and then have discussions with teachers about the information revealed from the survey. Once teachers are engaged in

conversations regarding change, they are likely to contribute positively to the culture of the school. Culture must be carefully crafted within an organization and employees should be strategically placed in situations where collaboration can occur. Ultimately, school leaders must be intentional about developing, discussing, and assessing the school's culture.

School Culture and Student Achievement

There are many factors that influence student learning and student achievement. A school's culture is found to be an important factor in student achievement. Significant research has been conducted related to the effects of school culture on student learning. Weiner (2017) found direct correlations between a strong professional culture and a high level of student learning. In that study, the perceptions of both students and teachers demonstrated a strong connection between student engagement and the professional culture of the faculty. Utilizing a longitudinal study of 130,000 students and 90,000 teachers in New York City, Weiner examined the connection between sustained culture-building practices and student success. The findings of that research support the idea that changing a culture takes a steady and intentional approach that allows healthy subunits to develop within the school, an approach that ultimately becomes the catalyst for lasting change.

In their seminal report, *The Principal's Role in Shaping School Culture*, Deal and Peterson (1990) described the pressures facing education leaders regarding school improvement and student achievement. As noted by the authors, calls for education reform have been ongoing. A 2015 report from the Texas Education Agency showed that nearly 105,000 students in the fifth and eighth grades could not pass the reading portion of the State of Texas Academic Achievement Readiness exam (STAAR) in three tries, putting their high school graduation in jeopardy since passing all five STAAR End of Course Exams (EOCs) is a requirement for high

school graduation. School leaders are under increased pressure to stay abreast of their students'

current data trends, including academic strengths and weaknesses, and the areas that show a lack

of academic growth. Leaders must also provide solutions and ways to improve student

achievement for all.

In addition, school leaders must place an important focus on recruiting and hiring

teachers for their campus. Often, the focus of recruitment and hiring is on experience and

degrees, but there is recent research suggesting that a candidate must also meet the collaborative

needs of a school's culture to positively impact student achievement. Ohlson et al. (2016) found

that teacher collaboration is the most powerful predictor of student behavior, success, and

achievement in school. Their research outlined how effective collaboration includes shared

cross-curricular planning, data-driven decision making, and subject-specific professional

development. Areas of teacher quality, such as experience, certification, and degree status, did

not have an impact on student behaviors and opportunity for success, such as attendance and

suspensions. This research determined that a school's culture can impact not only students'

success and achievement at school, but also their behaviors while at school. Similarly, Brown

(2004) found that when a school's culture is focused on academic excellence and prosocial

development of students, even expulsions are greatly reduced.

Further research suggested that teacher retention and teacher turnover both have a direct

link to student achievement. Young (2018) found that there was a 2% drop in mathematics and

English achievement scores during years that significant teacher turnover occurred. The findings

of this study revealed that it was cultural issues, such as administrative support, student behavior,

and collegiality, that caused teachers to leave and seek employment in other schools. This

demonstrates the need for school leaders to work to retain effective teachers. Cochran-Smith

(2006) described the importance of school leaders developing and maintaining school cultures that sustain and support teachers' learning over the long haul, as a critical impetus for staying. Because teacher turnover directly affects student achievement, retaining qualified and effective teachers is important. Researchers argue that to do this, school leaders need to support quality teaching (Martinez-Garcia & Slate, 2009). Teachers are more inclined to stay when they believe school leaders support them. School leaders must implement supportive and mentoring programs, create time in the school day for collaboration and participation in professional learning communities (PLCs), and provide opportunities for growth. Walters and Marzano (2006) conducted research that revealed that the direct influence teachers have on student work is a result of the principal's direct influence on teachers and how teachers perceive themselves as educators; thus, principals' indirect influence has a substantial effect on student engagement and achievement.

Banerjee (2017) found a significant connection between teachers' job satisfaction and student achievement, especially in reading. Students whose teachers demonstrated higher levels of job satisfaction scored slightly higher than students whose teachers expressed dissatisfaction with their job. Earlier, Borman and Dowling (2008) found that issues of teacher retention and attrition were closely tied to the influences of culture within the school and that attrition ultimately impacted student achievement and that a school that shares the same values, beliefs, and visions inadvertently strengthens collaboration. This, in turn, enhances teaching strategies and teacher job satisfaction, allowing students to experience great success. When stakeholders at one school in the study were interviewed and given the opportunity to share their thoughts on a recent increase in student achievement, the researchers found "the visible outcomes of school improvement are often the result of deep-seated changes in school culture" (p. 206).

Teacher Retention

In Texas, according to the 2004 report to the Senate Education Committee on Teacher Turnover and Shortages, it was reported that while the number of teachers being certified each year continued to increase, those newly certified teachers cannot keep pace with the percentage of teachers who were leaving. According the to the report, at that time, Texas experienced a 21% teacher turnover rate per year. Then, according to the Texas Education Agency's 2018 Annual Report on teacher retention, 31.3 % of educators left the job within five years of being in the profession.

Sutcher et. al. (2016) noted that the estimated cost to replace each teacher who leaves a district is almost $20,000. This price includes the cost of recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement teacher. The monetary cost does not include the cost to students in terms of lost learning opportunities. It can be difficult to sustain a learning community with turnover, and the student cost for high teacher turnover is student achievement due to the students not being with a highly qualified, effective teacher or with multiple new teachers over a period of time.

Sutcher et al. (2016) pointed out that the teacher supply is shrinking. If current trends continue, Texas will see as few as 200,000 available teacher hires each year by 2025, resulting in an annual gap of more than 100,000 teachers. There are fewer new entrants, with teacher preparation enrollments having dropped 35% and teacher preparation graduates having dropped by 23% between 2009 and 2014. Darling-Hammond (2016) explained that high turnover rates can intensify shortages of qualified teachers, especially in mathematics, science, special education, and English language development, particularly in hard-to-staff schools with limited resources. For Title 1 schools, the number is 50% higher. According to the Texas Academic Performance Report (2020), there were 27,413 beginning teachers in Texas that year. Teachers

with five or less years of experience make up 36% of our teaching force. This means 125,000 teachers have five years or less of teaching experience.

The New Teacher Project (TNTP) (2012) researchers studied a group of teachers described as "irreplaceables" (p. 2). These teachers were high achieving and engaging with their students, and they were nearly impossible to replace. Those researchers found that too often teachers vanish from schools because of neglect and inattention. In the districts studied by TNTP, when an irreplaceable teacher left a low-performing school, that school had to hire an average of 11 different teachers before finding one of comparable quality. Schools cannot afford to continuously lose their irreplaceable teachers; therefore, it is critical that school leaders place emphasis on retaining their most valuable asset - the teachers.

Hirsch (2006) found that teachers stay due to supportive school leadership, salary and benefits, time to plan and teach, quality of facilities and resources, community environment, collegial experience, involvement in the decision-making process, professional development opportunities, and the cost of living. According to Patton and Kristonis (2006), there are five principles that should be implemented when trying to increase teacher retention. The first principle is to recruit teachers who are passionate about teaching and who love children. The second principle is to provide new teachers with a highly qualified mentor as part of an induction program. Relatedly, a study from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (2019) found that schools with effective induction programs have a 71% better rate of retention than those without a program. Hirsch's third principle (2006) is that school leaders must support teachers with classroom and school concerns and explain how to handle situations as they arise. It is important to help teachers navigate through both the written and unwritten cultural norms. The fourth principle is to train teachers on curriculum and strategies. Providing learning

opportunities for all, paired with the necessary resources and training, is a critical part of retaining the best teachers. The final, and fifth, principle is to empower teachers. Following these five principles will help increase retention rates and decrease teacher mobility and attrition rates (Patton & Kristonis, 2006).

Summary

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature related to school leaders, school culture, and teacher retention. Student achievement is the ultimate goal of a school and studies show evidence that student achievement is directly related to a school's culture and climate and retention of the most highly qualified teachers (Gruenert & Whitaker, 2015). Chapter 3 is a description of the research methodology and includes the research design, reflexivity/positionality, ethical considerations, research site, selection of participants and documents, data collection tools/instrumentation and procedures, data analysis strategies, limitations of the study, and a summary.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the research design chosen for examining the extent to which

school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention. This chapter is organized into eight

sections: research design; ethical considerations, including researcher positionality; population

and sample; data collection tools, data collection procedures, data analysis strategies; limitations;

and a summary. The following research questions (RQs) guided the study:

1. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence school culture?
2. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence teacher retention?

Research Design

To address the purpose of the study and answer the research questions, a sequential

explanatory mixed methods research design was used. Creswell and Creswell (2018) described

the sequential explanatory mixed methods design as one in which the researcher first conducts

quantitative research, analyzes the results, then connects those results with the results generated

in the qualitative portion. It is considered explanatory because the initial quantitative data results

are explained further with the qualitative data. It is considered sequential because the initial

quantitative phase is followed by the qualitative phase.

Mixed method research is defined as research in which quantitative and qualitative

techniques are mixed in a single study, and the logic behind this research model is that the whole

is greater than the sum of parts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Using a mixed-methods design

challenges the researcher to mix the methods in a way that shows complementary strengths.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that a researcher can simultaneously broaden and strengthen

a study through mixed methods research. Figure 2 summarizes the research design.

Figure 2

Sequential Explanatory Mixed Methods Research Design

Phase 1
- Identify schools for the study: All 1 elementary, 1 middle, 1 high school campus in a suburban school district.
- Recruit teachers at each selected school to respond to the survey.

Phase 2
- Conduct Wendorff Adapted School Leadership 26-item Likert scale survey administered through Qualtrics.
- Email survey to 400 teachers working at the selected schools.
- Survey window will last two weeks.

Phase 3
- Analyze survey data using the six survey variables as a priori codes: collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnership.
- Utilize survey results to select focus group questions.

Phase 4
- Identify and recruit participants for the focus group.
- Conduct focus group.
- Transcribe and deductively code focus group data for themes.

Phase 5
- Synthesize quantitative and qualitative findings.
- Identify emerged themes and write results.

Mixed methods research began in 1959 with the multi trait-multi method matrix that wascreated by Campbell and Fiske (1959). According to Yin (2011), a mixed methods approach to research design "offers an option that actually tries to take advantage of the similarities and differences of qualitative and quantitative methods" (p. 289). A mixed methods design has its challenges in that the researcher conducts extensive research, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Once the data are collected, it takes time to analyze both types of data. It is important for the researcher to be familiar with both forms of research.

A fast-growth suburban school district served as the unit of analysis for this study. An explanatory case study approach was selected because of the rich data-gathering possibilities and for what that might represent or reflect regarding other similar cases. Utilizing an exploratory design allows researchers to gain new insights into their research question with the goal of formulating specific ideas or theories that the researcher wants to use later to test out ideas on similar cases (Hess-Biber, 2017).

<center>Ethical Assurances</center>

In any research study, there are ethical aspects that affect the study. Therefore, it is important that those aspects are discussed and revealed. This section includes a discussion of the ethical standards in place and the researcher positionality.

Ethical Standards

Since this study involved human participants, the guidelines and procedures set forth by the IRB of the University of North Texas were followed. The Board approved the study before any research began. All participants were assured of confidentiality throughout the study and in the report of the results. The identity of the individual participants and any individuals named by the participants was kept confidential. Each participant signed a consent form that ensured the participant's willingness to participate in the study. Participants were able to decline participation without concern for retaliation. Participants could quit their participation at any time. Participants were given the opportunity to look at their comments in the qualitative data transcript and provide feedback. Information was coded so all data remained confidential. Inter-rater reliability was established through member-checking and triangulation of data. Approval from the district and campus administration was secured before the data collection.

As the researcher, I was careful to ensure that the four main areas of ethical principles,

<center>30</center>

according to Diener and Crandall (1978) are not violated, including: (a) no harm to participants, (b) assurance of informed consent, (c) no invasion of privacy, and (d) no deception is involved.

Researcher Positionality

For this mixed-methods dissertation study, as the researcher, I was the primary instrument who collected and analyzed the qualitative data. Throughout the research process, it is important for researchers to be cognizant of their personal role and the way their "subjectivity, and assumptions directly relate to and shape [their] research" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 46). My role in this study could have presented a concern since I have been employed in the school district for 16 years, at both the middle and high school levels. I spent my first six years in the district at a middle school, teaching English language arts and reading, then moved to an instructional coach position, working with all subjects and all grade levels. I was an assistant principal at one of the district high schools for six years, moved into a role at the district's administration building, then became a high school principal, and now I am back at the administration building. Those experiences allowed me to bring practical knowledge about teaching and learning within the school district.

The creation of the research problem, research questions, selection of participants, survey instruments, and established interview questions may be, in part, influenced due to my position as both a former teacher and a campus administrator within the studied district. I had a vested interest in the outcome of this study due to the impact the findings could have on the district, about campus hiring practices, and potential impacts on teacher retention. I believe the findings of this study may impact the district's future success in hiring school leaders and a potential increase in teacher retention practices.

Acquiring data, through both a survey and focus group interviews at one elementary, one

middle, and one high school within the district, may have allowed for teachers to provide open and honest feedback about the campus practices of their leaders and the impact the leaders have on both their school's culture and teacher retention. As an inside researcher, someone who is part of the community where research was conducted, my experience within the district may have lent itself to more responses from the participants and their willingness to participate in the research due to my known experience and my reputation within the district; however, it was vital for me to be reflexive to limit the impact my position could have on the outcome of the study, as encouraged by Yin (2016).

My experiences as an administrator, an instructional coach, and a teacher within the district allowed me to gain feedback and insight from teachers and school leaders within the district. While my experiences cannot be separated from the study, they should not be viewed as a negative aspect to this research as they helped to shape this study and enabled me to relate to both the teacher and administrator participants. These experiences, along with my work ethic, integrity, and reputation built within my time in the district, created a more trusting environment for open and honest responses throughout the process. Throughout the study, bracketing helped me remain objective and not allow my current role in the district, or my beliefs, thoughts, or experiences to influence the participants or the analysis of the data. Hesse-Biber (2017) articulated how the goals of qualitative research are to interpret the lived experiences of participants; therefore, engagement with participants is key to obtaining the most detailed and accurate responses to the interview questions and being an insider researcher will be a benefit in that process. Because of my positionality, the campus where I previously served as an administrator was not included.

Population and Sample

This section describes the context of the research site, the sampling universe, and the process for selecting participants.

Context of the Site

To protect the confidentiality of the researched school district, a pseudonym was used, that of New Star Independent School District (NSISD). NSISD is a large, suburban school district in Texas with a student population of approximately 25,000. At the time of the study, including administration and support buildings, the district maintained almost 70 facilities covering more than four million square feet on over 600 acres of grounds. The district employed approximately 2,800 staff members, including teachers, administrative staff, and other district personnel. The district consists of one early childhood education center, 21 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and four alternative campuses. From that sampling universe, this study was focused on one elementary, one middle, and one high school within the school district, all of which had an experienced principal who had the time, skills, and resources to build school culture.

At the time of this study, the demographic makeup of the student population across the district was approximately 48% White, 28% Hispanic, 5% Asian, and 15% African American, with 3.1% of students identifying as more than one race. The approximate percentage of students in designated subgroups were as follows: 33% economically disadvantaged, 9% gifted and talented, 12% bilingual/English as a second language, and 12% special education.

For this study, I focused on one elementary, one middle, and one high school and their leaders and teachers on each campus. Those sites were purposively chosen, to meet the purpose of the study. To protect the confidentiality of the schools participating in the study, each was

given a pseudonym: Star Elementary School (SES), Diamond Middle School (DMS), and Turner High School (THS). The demographics of each site are described next.

According to the Texas Education Agency (2019), SES had over 500 students on campus. On the state's grading scale of A through F, the school received an accountability rating of an A grade for the 2018-2019 school year. For this campus, the approximate percentages of students in designated subgroups was as follows: 9% of the students were considered economically disadvantaged, 9% were in the special education program, and 3% were enrolled in bilingual and English learning programs. The school employed 75 teachers, with an average teacher experience of 11 years.

DMS had over 1,000 students on campus. On TEA's grading scale of A through F, the school received an accountability rating of an A grade for the 2018-2019 school year. The approximate percentages of students at this campus who are in designated subgroups are as follows: over 20% of the students were considered economically disadvantaged, 10% of the students were in the special education program, and 4% were enrolled in bilingual and English learning programs. The school employed 150 teachers, with an average teacher experience of 15 years.

THS had 3,000 students. This campus received a TEA accountability rating of a B. Nearly one-third of the students were considered at risk of dropping out of school; however, the school's current dropout rate was .3%. The approximate percentages of students in designated subgroups were as follows: 34% of the students were considered economically disadvantaged, 6% were enrolled in bilingual and English learning programs, 8% were enrolled in gifted and talented programs, and 10% were in the special education program. The school employed almost 200 teachers, with an average teacher experience of 11 years.

Population

Robinson (2013) defined the sampling universe as "the totality of persons from which cases may legitimately be sampled…" (p. 26). The sampling universe for this study included all teachers and principals in the studied district.

Sample

Through purposive sampling, recruited participants comprised a set of teachers from three of NSISD's schools, teachers who were qualified to provide insights related to the research questions. The three campuses were selected based on having a tenured, established principal and were all within the same feeder pattern. The campus websites were mined to compile an initial list of potential participants. From that list, a recruitment email (Appendix A includes all components related to the quantitative survey) was sent to all teachers at the three selected campuses inviting them to participate in the Likert-scale survey to assess their perceptions of their school's climate and culture. The final question of the survey asked if the participant teacher was willing to participate in a follow-up focus group interview. The number of recruited teachers for the survey was approximately 400.

Teachers were selected for the focus group based on their survey responses about their willingness to participate in the survey. From the list, I then selected nine teachers to participate in focus groups; there was one focus group with three teachers from each selected campus. I included both teachers and teacher leaders to provide a variety of perspectives and insight. Selected teachers received a recruitment email (Appendix B includes all components related to the qualitative focus group) invitation to participate in a focus group. The focus group provided participants the ability to share additional thoughts, feelings, and experiences with how their school leader impacted school culture and teacher retention, perceptions that may be unique to

them and not captured through a specific survey item, as suggested by Hesse-Biber (2017).

Data Collection Tools

In a mixed methods study, there are two types of data to be collected. In a sequential mixed methods study, quantitative data are collected first. The tools used for both quantitative and qualitative data are next described.

Quantitative Data Collection

To gather the quantitative data for this study, the School Leadership Survey, by Karen Kay Wendorf-Heldt (2009), was adapted and used with permission. The School Leadership Survey is an instrument designed to be administered to teachers in a school to get a sense of how much their school leader impacts the culture of the school. The survey questions helped determine if there is an existence of trust, peer observations, and a compelling mission that teachers are working towards together. The survey helped inventory the behaviors that are typical of a collaborative school culture, including collaborative leadership, teacher collaboration, professional development, unity of purpose, collegial support, and learning partnerships. It also provided a baseline for school leaders who wish to shape a new school culture or improve upon an existing one. The School Leadership Survey had a strong reliability. Teachers are likely to interpret the survey items in a similar way. High reliability was achieved by using statistical analyses. The Cronbach's Alpha factor reliability coefficient is a measure of internal consistency. It comprises several items that make up a scale designed to measure a single construct, and it determines the degree to which all the items being measured are of the same construct. Strong reliability using the Cronbach's Alpha are values that are close to 1.0; weaker ones are closer to 0.0. The values for the items within each variable in the survey were close to 1.0, showing a strong reliability.

All teachers from the selected elementary, middle, and high school campus within the district were recruited to respond to the survey. Teachers at the selected schools received a recruitment email that includes the description of the purpose of the study and the purpose of the online survey, as well as details about how the participants' responses were kept confidential. Data collection for the survey took place during the 2022-2023 school year. The time frame allowed ample time for completion of the survey, in hopes of gaining as many survey participants as possible. The survey took approximately 20 minutes to complete.

The 26-question Likert-scale survey was used to examine and assess the school culture at the selected campuses. For each question in the survey, the range, mean and standard deviation for each response were calculated.

Teachers were informed that there were no consequences if they declined to participate, and if they choose to participate, they could opt out at any time after they begin the survey. The purpose of using this survey was to gain insight from a large number of teachers about each site's current school culture and what qualities in school leaders increase school culture.

Qualitative Data Collection

To investigate participants' thoughts related to school leaders and their impact on school culture and teacher retention, focus group interviews were conducted. A focus group interview protocol (Appendix B) was developed to examine the extent to which school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention. Focus groups were appropriate for this phase as they yield descriptive, process-oriented data from multiple participants at once, giving both depth and breadth to the subject, as noted by Hesse-Biber (2017). At the beginning of the focus group interviews, I explained the purpose of the study, provided details related to how participants' responses would be held in the strictest confidence, and assured participants that their identity

would be protected. All participants were assigned a pseudonym. We then went over the informed consent form.

Hesse-Biber (2017) noted that focus groups have a distinct advantage over other available research methods. Focus groups can help the researcher inductively figure out what the key issues, ideas, and concerns are from multiple participants at once. Focus groups can be used to gain exploratory data. In this study, the focus group questions were based on the qualities and actions school leaders take to support teachers and increase school culture. The participants of the focus group included purposively selected teachers from the selected elementary, middle, and high school campus, from among those who indicated at the end of the survey their willingness to participate in a focus group.

Data Collection Procedures

Hesse-Biber (2017) explained that in an explanatory mixed-methods design the idea is that the quantitative portion goes prior to the qualitative. The qualitative portion of the study then provides clarification or elaboration of results derived from the quantitative findings. The qualitative data assists in understanding such things as negative results, or outliers, findings that do not appear to fit the overall hypothesis or theoretical perspective. In this type of research, the qualitative data can be used to supplement quantitative data and help the quantitative researcher salvage the data by understanding erroneous results that potentially come from the survey responses. For this study, I utilized Qualtrics™ to collect survey responses. The informed consent was the first page of the survey. If the recruited person agreed to participate, they clicked the accept button which took them into the survey. I then selected nine focus group participants to ask focus group questions. Those nine were selected from among teachers who indicated willingness to participate in a focus group via Zoom™. The goal of the focus groups was to gain

a better understanding of how school leaders can improve school culture and teacher retention, so the quantitative data allowed me to gain a better understanding of what questions needed to be posed within the focus group, thus, to refine those initial focus group questions.

With the participants' permission, interviews were audio recorded. I had the recordings transcribed utilizing an online transcription service called Rev™. After I received the transcripts, I listened to the recordings as I read the transcripts, both to familiarize myself with the text and to assure that the online transcription process accurately captured the comments of the participants. For member checking, I provided each participant a copy of the transcript, asking them to confirm that it accurately captures the content of our interview. Each participant was asked to review only their comments, which were highlighted. The recording, transcript, and my handwritten notes were kept secure according to UNT policies.

Data Analysis Strategies

Creswell (2018) characterized mixed methods research as one that "focuses on collecting and analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study" (p. 210). Through the data analysis process of the mixed methods study, the researcher must examine both qualitative and quantitative data to respond to the research questions. The data analysis processes for this study are detailed below.

Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative survey data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to examine the mean, median, mode, variance, and SD. Each survey item was evaluated to draw conclusions related to the culture of the school. A quantitative analysis allowed me to analyze and inventory how collaborative a school's culture was and to what extent the leader has impacted the behaviors that are typical of a collaborative school culture. It also provided a baseline of

knowledge for school leaders who wish to shape a new school culture. A quantitative descriptive analysis allowed me to analyze leadership qualities and their effect on school culture and teacher retention.

After the survey data were received, I included in the report the number of participants who did and did not return the survey and identified the method by which response bias was determined. I utilized the IBM SPSS Statistics software to analyze the data, then presented the results in tables and figures and interpreted the results.

Qualitative Analysis

Hesse-Biber (2017) asserted that the process and steps that a researcher takes to analyze and interpret qualitative data do not "proceed in a cookbook fashion" (p. 308). While the first step begins with collection of the qualitative data, the researcher must make decisions after the data are collected, as part of the qualitative data analysis process. For this study, Hesse-Biber's steps for qualitative data analysis were followed: data preparation, data exploration, data specification and reduction, and interpretation.

After the focus groups were conducted, audio-recorded files of the interview were uploaded and sent to Rev.com for transcribing. Rev.com provided a high level of security for the files and securely stores and transmits files using 128-bit Secured Sockets Layer (SSL) encryption. SSL is the standard security technology for establishing an encrypted link between a web server and browser. SSL ensures all data passed between sources remain secure. Following the transcription process, each participant had the opportunity to review the transcript to ensure that the transcription accurately represented their responses. Each participant's words were highlighted so the member checking process included only a review of what that person stated. Once transcripts were checked for accuracy, the transcriptions were uploaded to NVivo™

software, which assisted me in organizing the data and identifying major themes. The NVivo software allowed me to use an inductive coding process. NVivo securely stores and transmits files using the 128-bit SSL encryption security ("What Security Measures," 2010). I familiarized myself with the data by carefully reading and re-reading the responses from the participants in the focus group. I then identifed themes using a priori codes developed based on the literature, but they also arose from the data as emergent codes. NVivo helped me identify and track codes.

Once the data were coded and the themes developed, the next step was to validate the themes against the data. This process ensured the emerged themes accurately reflected what the participants said in the interviews. The next step was to cross-validate the themes by comparing the themes to ensure that each theme was complete, meaningful, and unique. Lastly, I recontextualized the themes. This involved making a list of the themes, then applying this list against the literature and the specific study context.

The final step of the data analysis process was to triangulate the data. Per Yin (2017), triangulation entails comparing the results across different sources of data. In triangulation, the objective is to identify points upon which the different datasets agree and points upon which they conflict. The points of agreement or convergence are those upon which the results can be said to speak with strength. Points of contention, by contrast, represent aspects of the phenomenon under study for which more examination is needed to determine the cause of divergence.

<div align="center">Limitations</div>

Hesse-Biber (2017) advised listing the limitations of a study to create trust with the reader, which in turn increases the validity of the study. One of the limitations of this study was that I am in a leadership position in the district being studied; thus, it is possible that the results were influenced by my involvement as the researcher. Another limitation could be researcher

bias. Hodkinson, P. and Hodkinson, H. (2001) asserted that interpretations of data collected during studies are constructions of the researcher and cannot be completely objective. The authors recommend that researchers be completely transparent about their judgments and present adequate evidence to support their conclusions. Since the study focused on surveying teachers at one elementary, one middle, and one high school within the selected school district, participants' responses may not be representative of all teachers in the studied district. It is possible that some participants were not forthright in their responses, or they might feel they had to respond in a certain way.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to explore the leadership factors that positively influence school culture and teacher retention. Chapter 3 outlines the research design and methodology. The quantitative data gathered from the survey, along with the qualitative data gathered through focus groups, determined how school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention in one Texas school district. Understanding the specific leadership qualities that influence school culture and teacher retention may inform hiring practices and help district level leaders place school leaders in positions where they can be most impactful in improving school culture and retaining the best teachers. Chapter 4 includes an analysis of the collected data.

CHAPTER 4

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of school leadership on school culture and teacher retention. I investigated teachers' experiences to determine if they believed, and if they did, to what extent, their school leader influenced their school's culture and teacher retention. The findings of this study may inform school leaders about the impact they have on the culture of a school and how the culture may impact teacher retention and, potentially, student achievement. The results may also inform school leaders of the most appropriate types of hiring practices to employ school leaders, providing data and insight to both current and aspiring school leaders. By collecting data and the subsequent analysis of data and reported findings, the findings may provide school district leaders ways to better identify and target strategies in recruiting and retaining effective school leaders who can influence a school's culture and increase teacher retention. A sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was used in this study, including both quantitative and qualitative methods. The two research questions that guided this study were:

1. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence school culture?
2. In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence teacher retention?

The first phase of data collection was the School Leadership Survey, a 26-question Likert-scale survey. I received permission to utilize the survey (Appendix A). The survey was sent to the 400 teachers at one elementary, one middle, and one high school within the studied district. The survey results were then used to examine and assess the school culture at the selected campuses. The last question on the survey asked if the participant would be willing to participate in a focus group, and if so, to send an email to me. From this list, I was able to select participants for the second phase of data collection, which was to conduct focus group

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interviews. A focus group interview protocol (Appendix B) was developed to examine the extent to which school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention. I held three separate focus group interviews: elementary, middle, and high school. To answer each of the research questions, I analyzed the data collected from both the survey results and the focus group responses to determine if and how school leaders impact a school's culture and teacher retention. In this chapter, I describe the processes used for the analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data collected and the outcomes of the analysis.

Processes

Data collection consisted first of the School Leadership Survey. The survey was sent to teachers at one elementary, one middle, and one high school, all within the same feeder pattern. Out of the 400 teachers who were emailed the survey, 52 of them responded to the survey, resulting in a 13% response rate. Of those 52 participants, 9 sent me an email stating that they would be willing to participate in the focus group interviews. I held three separate focus group interviews: one elementary school, one middle school, and one high school with three participants from each level. A Doodle poll was used to determine the time that was most convenient for the participants. Each of the participants was assigned a pseudonym (e.g., the first elementary teacher was E1), thus participants are referred to as such in this paper.

Context

The teachers who completed the survey and participated in the focus groups were under contract with the studied district for the 2022-2023 school year. The teachers were all full-time staff members. The years of experience in teaching among the focus group participants ranged from 6-17 years. The focus groups included eight females and one male. Table 1 includes the

participants, broken down by elementary, middle, and high school, and their years of experience

in education and within the studied district.

Table 1

Focus Group Participants

Particpants		Years of Experience in…	
School Level	ID	Education	District
Elementary School	E1	6	3
	E2	8	6
	E3	11	11
Middle School	M1	17	17
	M2	15	15
	M3	17	17
High School	H1	16	16
	H2	15	8
	H3	13	8

Recruitment was conducted via email. All teachers studied were within a feeder pattern.

Nine teachers agreed to participate in the focus groups. With participant permission, each

interview was recorded via Zoom™ and then sent to the Rev.com™ application for transcribing.

The average time for the focus group interviews was 25 minutes.

Once the focus group interviews were transcribed, I read and checked each transcription

for errors. The transcriptions also were sent to the participants for member checking. Participants

were provided the opportunity to review the transcript and make corrections, but none of the

participants provided any constructive feedback. Those who did respond stated that the transcript

required no changes.

After the transcripts were member-checked, I used Braun and Clarke's (2006) six steps of

thematic analysis to analyze the focus group data. I first became familiar with the data, going

through the data multiple times and taking initial notes. Then I began highlighting sections of the text, identifying key phrases and sentences that created codes. There were 132 codes that emerged from the study. From that point, I was able to generate patterns and start coming up with themes. Next, I began reviewing the themes to confirm their presence in the focus group responses. After I had my final list of themes, I was able to name and define each of them which allowed me to precisely describe what the data were telling about a school leader's impact on school culture and teacher retention. I came up with six final themes that answered the research questions. Lastly, I wrote up my analysis of the data. I then reviewed the School Leadership Survey results and compared, based on the percentages, which survey questions and responses supported the themes that were generated from the qualitative data. The next section presents the data from the focus group interviews and survey that helped answer the two research questions.

<div align="center">Results</div>

The data resulted in six themes. One theme answered only Research Question 1, two themes answered only Research Question 2, and three themes answered both research questions. The numeric data from the quantitative survey were then used to substantiate and confirm the six themes. The results are next presented according to the research question.

Research Question 1
In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence school culture?

Data that answered the first research question resulted in one theme, that of *lead by modeling*. School leaders can influence school culture if they are showing the way and modeling expected behaviors for their staff. The first theme evolved through the focus group as teachers stated that school culture was impacted the most by having a leader who led by modeling the

expected behaviors with the school and how they were expected to interact with students and parents. For example, E3 made the following comment:

> The leaders I have are willing to do anything they ask us to do…they help you get things done and are in the trenches with us, right there by your side. They show us the way and they won't abandon us during hard times.

> Participant M2 shared a similar line of thinking. "Everything starts from the top and goes down from there. They are leading in a way that shows by example. They're not going to ask us to do anything that they're not willing to do." H3 stated: "Our leader models for us what she wants to see in our school. We try to emulate her behaviors in all things because she has shown us how she wants us to handle situations with students and parents." H1 highlighted the involvement of the leader in every aspect of the school and how her expectations for teachers and subsequent visibility and involvement served as a model for them. She stated:

> Our leader is at everything. I don't know when she sleeps, and I'm not saying that every leader needs to be that way, but we know that she loves us, and the school, and she thrives off her work. She is certainly very visible and at an equal number of fine arts versus athletic events and it's not misbalanced in representation. And her expectations are that we are there and I'm there for the kids and this is why we're here. And so, I think her visibility when she's out in the morning greeting students out in the rotunda and out in the front of the school sets the tone for us.

H1 noted, as well, that the former school leaders displayed the same type of behavior, teaching and modeling their priority to connect with the students:

> And our former leader did the exact same thing. Every single morning, we could count on them to be there, opening the door for staff and students. And I think that when you have that type of leadership placed in strategic places on your campus, I think it's huge for the staff to see how important presence is with our kids. I remember back when I was a brand-new teacher, one of our previous leaders told me that they utilized lunchtime in the cafeteria to connect with kids. You would see this leader, walking with the trash can all throughout the café and using this time to connect and talk with kids, so that it wasn't always related to discipline. They taught me and modeled for me that it's incredibly important to have face time with kids and that they see you and know you, so they're more apt to buy into something. They modeled for us the importance of presence with our kids.

The results from the School Leadership Survey align with this theme, through the responses to Questions 3, 17, 20, 21, and 24. Those questions focused on the topic of the leader modeling desired behaviors within the school and asked to what extent teachers saw that behavior from their school leader. The results indicated that 75% of the survey respondents answered *always* regarding seeing their school leader lead by modeling and 20% saw that behavior most of the time.

Research Question 2

In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence teacher retention?

The data that answered the second research question resulted in two themes, those of *value and growth.* Each theme is next reported.

RQ 2 Theme 1: Value

The first theme that answered Research Question 2 was the idea of value. Teachers who were interviewed for the focus group felt that school leaders influenced teacher retention by valuing them at a high level as professionals. Participant H2 spoke about how the principal demonstrated support for their ideas, offering parameters for guidance while searching for funding and other resources to help make the teacher's idea come to fruition:

> Whenever I present ideas to my principal, whenever I recommend programs to them, they would say, "Go for it. I support this." They will give me the parameters that I need to stay within, for example budget, and I appreciate that because I understand there will be certain parameters I have to observe. But then my principal will follow up and ask, "What do you need? I'll make whatever I can possible. Let me know if there is any funding or anything you need to make it work." That's what I love about her, that she values me enough to make things possible.

H1 reiterated the support provided by the principal, even during times when the principal "could have slapped their hand." Instead, the participant descried how the school leader chose to focus on H1's overall job performance:

I have always felt supported by our leader. She has always trusted me to do my job. There was a time where I felt like I had disappointed my principal and they could have slapped my hand, but they decided not to aggravate the matter, know I already felt so awful, and instead they hugged me and just shared with me, "You're doing your job." It could have gone so differently but they chose to value me.

E1 echoed a similar statement of feeling valued considering the number of years the teachers had remained at the school:

I could tell people were valued at this school when I asked people how long they'd be there. The answers were things like 13 years, 20 years, 17 years. People don't leave a place where their leaders value and support them, where they're treated well, and taken care of.

It was interesting to note, however, that teachers can feel valued by their school leaders but may still want to leave education due to outside factors such as money. M2 made an interesting statement regarding the focus group question that asked: "What would make you want to leave education?"

There are many reasons people want to leave education. The money is absolutely a big piece of why people want to leave. To feel value in that we are recognized as professionals is a huge piece of this. We are constantly improving ourselves. I don't know of another profession that sends its employees to better themselves and to make themselves better in their job as much as an educator does. And so, I think there's frustration in knowing that we had a huge surplus of financial means within the state of Texas, but the teachers didn't get to benefit from any of that…it's very frustrating. I feel valued in my district and by my leader. I know we are paid competitively, so there's that. But the state of Texas could do more to make us feel valued.

The results from the School Leadership Survey align with the theme of value, as seen through the responses to Survey Questions 9, 11, 12, and 23. These survey questions asked to what extent teachers see their leader promote cohesion, purpose, and well-being among teachers (Q 9), recognize and celebrate the accomplishments of your school's students and staff (Q 11), recognize teachers for their performance (Q 12), and look for the positive side of people and situations (Q 23). The responses show that 60% of teachers always see their leader promote cohesion and 25% see that most of the time. The responses show that 84% of teachers always see

their leader celebrate the accomplishments of their students and staff and 12% see that most of

the time. The responses show that 40% of teachers always see their leader celebrate teachers'

performance and 40% of teachers most of the time see their leader celebrate teachers. Lastly,

72% of teachers surveyed always see their leader look for the positive side of people and

situations while 16% of teachers saw that most of the time. The survey responses support the

theme of value which emerged from the focus group interviews.

RQ 2 Theme 2: Growth

The theme of growth came up quite often around the topic of retention. At all three

levels, teachers reiterated the importance of growth in their career. Having the opportunity to

learn and grow as an educator was an essential part of their desire to stay, not only at their school

but also in the teaching profession. Elementary focus group Participant E1 gave this perspective

about the leader's advocacy for growth, not only in the present but in the future:

> For me, my leader has definitely been a big advocate for me gaining more experience as a
> leader and understanding leadership and administration. That's something I am
> considering doing, and they have been supportive and very welcoming and gives me a lot
> of tips on try this, do this, research that, and that's been a huge thing for me. Because for
> me, I feel like there's a long road, but it's not the same road every year, it's growth. I can
> see growth for myself. And that's what makes me want to stay and stick it out and just
> see how much I can grow over the next 25 years.

Participant E2 brought up the fact that they get to go and observe other teachers, so they can

learn from each other. "When we go learn from other teachers, our leaders are showing that we

value what all our teachers bring to the campus. We value their skills, and we are learning and

growing from each other."

Focus group teacher H3 offered an important perspective about how her leader helped a

struggling teacher on her team grow through a difficult situation with inclusion classes and

managing the various student behaviors. The principal partnered with the teacher, searching for

ways to level the classes, offering additional staff support in the classroom, and offering

opportunities for district-level training and support. H3 commented:

> I had a teacher on my team struggling with her inclusion classes. Their classes were getting larger, and the teacher was unable to teach the class because she was busy managing so many behaviors. The teacher didn't want to let our principal know because they were worried that she would be upset or think she couldn't do her job. Our principal, instead of getting frustrated, she came to the teacher and said, "We are getting through this together." She was able to help even out the classes, get her an extra para position to help with behaviors, and offered to bring in the district leaders to help train her. She's always in the defense of the teacher and willing to step in to help us learn and grow as well. I hope people know how lucky we are to have someone who wants to invest in our growth, especially post COVID when everything is so different, and not just get rid of us.

It was interesting that in the middle school focus group, teachers spoke less about their

own personal growth and more about the idea that their school leaders are focused on growth for

students instead of just test scores and that made them feel a lot less stressed and that they could

stay, working at their school, because the focus was on growing all students and not just passing

all students. They didn't feel that their professional value was tied up in their student scores, but

that they were valued for their students growing academically. M3 offered this insight

considering the changes that occurred relevant to the core content dictated by the Texas Essential

Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) and the state's focus on testing and student outcomes as opposed

to considering the level of individual growth and importance of celebrating students'

accomplishment along that path. M3 made this comment:

> We have gone through a lot of changes lately with every core content. The test has changed, our TEKS have changed, and I think to have somebody come to you and say, "Hey, I know this is coming and I know it's going to be hard, but I'm here for you. I'm going to be right alongside you as these changes come and go." I think her focus and her reminders to us that we're looking for growth and stressing that over anything else, as far as results from testing go, is huge. Because I think even if it's easy to get bogged down on, well, I had this many students fail, or this many get masters, or whatever, I think you can get trapped in that minutiae. But if you think about, well, how much do they grow? You might have that poor baby, that SPED baby who is giving their best and they may show growth and may still fall behind where the state would like them to be. But because we're about celebrating individual growth, I think that is huge. For our administrators to

make that our focus this year, and for the last few years, I think it's huge for teachers and it doesn't feel like such a daunting, never achievable task. I can help kids grow at their own rate, and I think that's a huge gift from our administration.

The results from the School Leadership Survey align with the theme of growth, as seen in responses to Survey Questions 5, 13, and 15. These survey items asked to what extent teachers see their leader invest in their staff, encourage and empower their teachers to take risks, and ensure that teachers have the necessary staff development opportunities. The responses show that 65% of teachers surveyed always see that from their leader and 25% see that most of the time.

There were three themes that emerged that answered both research questions.

Combined Themes for Both Research Questions

RQ 1 and RQ 2, Theme 1: Personal Connections with Staff

Throughout the focus groups, the terms family and connections with staff were repeated. It was evident that the participants felt that their school culture was centered around the family. Thus, the reason they wanted to stay at their school and in education was because their leader invested in them, to build relationships with them beyond the school, and even knew their families at a high level. They felt connected to their leader and to their school family. When asked why they stayed in education and at their current school, E3 highlighted the personal aspects of their relationships and how they worked with one another on a day-to-day basis. E3 explained it this way:

> I stay because of the relationship piece from our administrators and our leaders. Our leaders get to know each one of us and how each one of us is going to receive feedback and even what our love language is and taking that time to get to know who you are as a staff member, and not just a staff member, but a person, so that way you continue to want to be here and work for these people. Because these are the people you're with every day, you can't control the outside circumstances. If technology's not working, or the political agendas, we can't control any of that, but what we can control is within our circle and how we approach each day.

Focus group Participant E1 spoke quite a bit about how his school leader influenced

school culture in the way that they "created a sense of mutual respect amongst teachers." E2

stated that "because you know each other well, you feel safe with them." The elementary focus

group participants reiterated the element of safety which contributed to their willingness to try

new ideas and take risks. Participant H2 :

> When you feel safe, and that these are your people, you're willing to take risks and try
> new things and you're not afraid of failure because you know your team is going to
> support you, love you, and care for you.

> Participant M2 reiterated the fact that at their school they "felt like a big family and we

are very supportive of each other, not just the members of our teams, but of everyone." This

teacher went on to talk about how teachers on their campus are "happy this year and rebounding

well from COVID." This participant stated that "COVID made teachers feel burned out, but we

can now finally see the return of happiness in education." In the same focus group, M3 reiterated

the importance of the leader creating a culture of family. This participant felt that it was

important to her, and the staff at the school, that the principal not only knew their teachers well,

but also knew their family members and cared for them, interacted with them, and made them

feel part of the larger school family. She emphasized that because teachers and their families feel

connected to their leader then people want to stay at her school. She pointed out:

> I think getting to know the staff is the biggest/best way our leader has enhanced our
> school culture and it's what makes me want to stay here. If you know that somebody's
> husband has been ill, making that a priority to circle around and check on them on a
> personal level. Maybe it's not always about school but show interest in getting to know
> them as an individual teacher and their family. My little one comes to school every day
> and she passes by all the admin and they all know who she is. Our principal will be the
> first one to say, "Hey, did you get some candy from my office?" And that speaks volumes
> to me, that she cares more about what's happening in our personal lives and she knows
> that that's taken care of. Then the professional will come too.

> Teacher M2 explained that the reason she hasn't moved to another school or moved up to

high school is "because of the connections with staff." She added that the leaders "value her

opinion and the work they do each day to grow children" and that "The students will change year

to year but it's the connections with staff that keep you coming back." M1 echoed that sentiment:

"We say we are a family, and we are a family. We step up when we need to step up and that

keeps me staying."

In the high school focus group, the idea of family emerged as well. Teacher H1, who had

been at the school since its opening, stated, "Our catchphrase from the beginning has been

"family." This teacher added that the focus of all they have done, from the very beginning, is

"We're a family." They went on to state, "It's because our leaders have always focused on

getting to know our teachers, and supporting us, and meeting our needs and where we are at. It's

always been about the small details that make our staff happy." H2 explained the theme of

family due to the administrators' demonstration of excellence, trust, and support.

> I truly believe the administrators, through their leadership, have influenced greatly this
> school, our culture, and my decision to stay and keep staying at this school. I think as
> leaders, our administrators demonstrate excellence. They demonstrate trust. They give all
> of our teachers support. And because of that culture that we have here as a family that
> we're supported, I think that's one of the reasons why a lot of teachers would want to stay
> at our school and to keep coming back to our school, even after all the hard we've been
> through in recent years.

Participant H3 offered an interesting perspective that speaks to both research questions

and that was around the topic of trust. H3 believed that because their school has a culture of

family and that their leaders have taken the time to connect with their staff and get to know them

personally, there is an increased level of trust amongst the staff. H3 felt that the trust led to

"autonomy and not being micromanaged." This teacher believed that their leaders trust them

professionally and "allow them flexibility in professional development days, allowing us to work

on things we need to do, so that we are not overwhelmed and stressed" and that goes a long way

in building school culture and retaining staff. H3 noted that their leader says, "You are

responsible for your time, use it to plan and to do what you need to be ready to serve kids." She explained that this is "a huge piece of why they like being here and has stayed for 13 years."

The results from the School Leadership Survey, through the responses to Questions 1 and 7, align with the theme of personal connections with staff. Survey Question 1 asked to what extent does your school leader strive to build and maintain positive relationships with staff. All, 100%, of the respondents answered always. Question 7 asked to what extent does your school leader listen attentively to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, even if different. Similarly, 75% of the respondents answered that they always see this behavior from their leader and 10% answered that they see this most of the time. The numerical data supported the theme of personal connections with staff.

RQ 1 and RQ 2, Theme 2: Clear Expectations

The theme of clear expectations emerged as a leading indicator of a positive school culture and a place where staff were compelled to stay and work. The idea of communication was mentioned several times, stressing that strong leaders were able to clearly communicate expectations with staff. Elementary teacher E3 explained that it can be chaotic if the leader does not communicate clearly with staff. To run an effective school, they felt it was imperative for the school leader to communicate with all stakeholders, but most importantly the staff who are working to serve the students and parents. E3 commented:

> One of the most important qualities a leader can have to impact school culture is being an effective communicator. Without communication, there is just chaos. When the leader of your school is making sure to communicate thoroughly, that's going to make sure everyone's in the know, everyone feels like we're on the same page, we're not just all fending for ourselves.

Elementary participant E1 explained that they appreciate the way their new principal set expectations for the leaders on the campus. "They expect us to be able to take feedback and

reflect on our influence on our campus." E1 went on to say, "At each leadership meeting, we are required to participate in reflective prompts that ensure that we are reflecting on our own leadership." Because of this focus, all campus leaders know that being able to "take feedback and respond in a professional and appropriate way is important and powerful for our culture."

The middle school focus group appreciated the "directness" of their principal. M1 reiterated that they appreciated knowing "what is expected of them and how to have success under their leadership." One example provided from teacher M2 showcases the importance placed on knowing the students, making connections, and reaching out to students who might need additional help. M2 explained:

> Our administrators expect that we know our students, but they also know our students. They have a pulse on the campus, and they know what's happening. For instance, I brought a student's name up today to one of the administrators and I said this child is going through a lot at home and explained the situation. The first thing out of my principal's mouth was, "I need to connect that child with an impact counselor. Would you put that name on a piece of paper and put it on my desk?" She knew who the student was, she was thinking instantly about how they could help the child. I appreciated that yes, I am expected to know our students, but so are they. The great thing about their expectations is that it's not just lip service. We are all accountable for our students.

The high school focus group teachers felt like having clear expectations gave them the feeling of increased "autonomy and not being micromanaged." H3 stated that she appreciated how her school leaders "have an expectation that when you're on a team, you teach the same skills, yet they still allow us the flexibility to do our own individual version of whatever the lesson is." This allows their staff to feel "trusted and safe." All three members of the high school focus group felt that autonomy was an important piece of their school culture and why all three have stayed at their school for so long. H2 explained that she "appreciates that her school leader shared with her specific decisions she was good with her making for her department." H2 went on to say that "because our leader was clear with what she needed from me, I was empowered to

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lead my department and make decisions for them because I knew she trusted me." H1 emphasized the importance of their school leaders being clear on even the smallest of details, by saying "we can wear jeans whenever we feel like it. Knowing this allows me to feel like I'm not going to get in trouble about dress code because they know I'm showing up to be my best for our students." The high school group emphasized how important clear expectations are "in things both big and small." They felt like leaders who have clear expectations not only increase the culture of the school but the desire for teachers to stay because they know exactly what is expected of them.

The results from the School Leadership Survey, through the responses to Questions 6, 14, 16, 19, 25, and 26, align with the theme of clear expectations. Survey Question 6 asked to what extent does your school leader establish and communicate a shared vision. Over half, 62.5%, of the respondents answered that they always see this behavior from their leader, while 25% answered that they see this from their leader most of the time. Question 14 asked to what extent does your school leader ensure that teachers have the materials and equipment necessary. Interestingly, 75% of the respondents answered that they always see this behavior from their leader and 25% answered that they see this behavior most of the time. Question 16 asked to what extent does your school leader keep a continued focus and attention on learning and performance goals. More than half, 60%, of the respondents stated they always see this behavior from their leader and 22% stated they see this from their leader most of the time. Question 19 asked to what extent does your leader hold high expectations that all students can learn at high levels. This question generated a higher percentage, 82%, of the respondents who stated they always see this behavior from their leader and 13% stated they see this most of the time from their leader. For Question 25 that asked to what extent does your school leader inspire others to work toward a

compelling vision for the school's success, 72% of the respondents stated they always see this

behavior from their leader and 19% of the respondents stated they see this behavior from their

leader most of the time. The final question, Question 26, asked to what extent does your school

leader work to resolve conflict by facilitating open communication regarding disagreements. For

this question, 71% of the respondents stated they always see this behavior from their leader and

21% of the respondents stated they see this behavior from their leader most of the time. The

numerical data from the survey supported the theme of clear expectations derived from the focus

group responses.

RQ 1 and RQ 2, Theme 3: Voice for All Stakeholders

All three focus groups emphasized the importance of both staff and students having a

voice in their school. All teachers felt that it was a key element of creating a positive school

culture and is a reason that teachers stay (or leave) their school. High school teacher H3

mentioned that one thing her principal does well is to listen to both staff and students. H3

specifically mentioned that "She always has time for us, and I always feel seen and heard by

her." H2 mentioned that "because of the school leaders consistently being present in the hallways

and on campus, both staff and students know where to find them to speak with them." H2 felt

that this contributed to staff and students feeling safe and welcome to speak to their leaders about

issues going on in the school. H1 emphasized the importance that the voice of student leadership

has made on the culture of her campus, by saying:

> I think the way our leaders allow our student leaders to lead on campus makes a huge
> impact on the culture of our school. Our student council and all of our student leaders on
> campus are involved. In my classes, I have the leaders of every student group and the
> captains of every sports team on campus, and when you have those types of leaders who
> see and catch on to what the campus administration is doing and then try to emulate it on
> campus, it's really powerful. It's really created a ripple effect on our campus. It's evident
> how our campus leadership is connected to our student leadership, and everyone has a
> voice and can make a positive impact here at our school.

High school Participant H2 echoed the fact that "every stakeholder has a crucial role in contributing to the positive school culture in the school." She further noted that while "the leader sets the tone and makes an impact, it is the responsibility of all to contribute."

In the middle school group, those teachers considered that the creation of various committees to encourage voice and input on campus was one thing that was done by their administrator that enhanced their school culture. M2 even stated, "Prior to our current administration, we didn't have as big of a voice on campus. Now I feel like teachers are stepping forward to participate in committees that mean something to them because it's important to our leaders." M2 went on to explain about the various committees and involvement they had in how the school operated, honoring staff involvement and the voices of students and adults, by stating:

> We have a safety committee. We have a group called the Sunshine Club that is working on providing opportunities for staff to focus on their wellbeing. We also have the PAWs committee and the PBIS group that are committed to getting student voice and helping students. There are so many ways to get involved and make your voice heard. I think our administrators value everyone's voice and participation in these groups. Because of these groups, we're making our campus a safer, better place all the way around. And each of us lift each other by participating in the committees to be the best campus we can be.

M3 reiterated the importance of the campus committees to get input and better serve students and the impact on school culture and teacher retention:

> I am biased because I serve on the PAWs committee, but I believe it has made a huge difference on our campus culture. We take time to build advisory lessons and activities that speak to our social emotional health of our students. I think it's made a huge impact on campus culture because we are living out our school pride and walking the walk. I think the PBIS committee has helped a lot as well. We work hand in hand to help our students and keep a pulse on our school, to see what the needs are and how we can help fix issues. I'm grateful that my voice, and the voice of the committees, is important to our leaders. Our goal is to make the campus a safe place, and safety of a school always enhances culture and, let's be honest, people want to stay at a place where they feel safe.

In the elementary focus group, the teachers focused on the idea of safety and how their staff felt safe in knowing they had a voice on campus and were able to speak openly and honestly

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to their leaders about the needs of the campus. E1 stated, "I'd never want to leave this place because of the positive culture and that my opinion matters here and that is not the case everywhere." E3 emphasized the importance of staff feeling safe to voice their opinions and to advocate for themselves and for their students. This teacher pointed out that it can be done only when the leader has established a safe and supportive culture, adding:

> I think because our culture is so safe, we feel free to speak up and advocate for ourselves. Our former principal established lines of communication that allowed us to give input and advocate, and really the advocacy piece is instilled in us now. If something is hard, or not going right in your position, we need to advocate. I appreciate that it is not okay to stuff it down and settle and be okay with it. We're only going to get better, and make our school better, when we're willing to advocate and give that feedback to our leaders. But, as we all know, that can only be done in a safe culture, so I'm grateful we have that and that our voice and opinions are valued.

> Elementary teacher E1 made an interesting point about the "trickle-down effect" that can happen when a school leader prioritizes providing opportunities for teachers to have a voice on campus:

> I see it as a trickle down. The leader has to have the mentality that teacher voice is important, and they have to desire to make it part of the school culture. If that is the case, then you will get buy-in for teachers and teachers will want to share. This is my first year as team lead and it's something that I am working really hard on. I need to make sure that my team feels that they always have the opportunity to share with me and that we will support each other through anything. Providing a space for voice has to come from the administrators and then from there it can go to team leads and then teachers. The more we communicate and collaborate with our teams to solve problems, the better care we will be able to take of our students.

The results from the School Leadership Survey, through the responses to Questions 8, 10, 18, and 22, align with the theme of voice for all stakeholders. Question 8 asked participants to what extent does your school leader facilitate effective means of communication with and among teachers. For this survey item, 78% of the respondents answered that they always see this behavior from their leader and 13% stated that they see this behavior most of the time. Question 10 asked to what extent does your school leader provide opportunities for teachers to be involved

in decision making and the development of school policies and encourage teachers to express diverse opinions. Only 53% of teachers who participated in the survey responded that they always see this behavior from their leader and 30% stated they see this behavior most of the time. Question 18 asked to what extent does your school leader facilitate effective means of communication with and among students. For this item, 63% of the survey respondents stated they always see this behavior from their school leader and 25% answered that they see this behavior most of the time from their school leader. Question 22 asked to what extent does your school leader advocate for your school with parents and the community, resulting in 81% of the survey respondents stating that they always see this from their school leader and 13% stating that they see this most of the time. The responses to these questions support and align with the theme of voice for all stakeholders that came out of the focus group interviews.

Summary of Data Analysis

The data collected for this study included 52 participants who responded to the adapted School Leadership Survey followed by three focus group interviews with three teachers each from one elementary, one middle, and one high school within the studied district. Participants included only full-time teachers. The focus group data were analyzed according to the Braun and Clarke process that provides six steps to thematic analysis of data and the responses were used to answer both research questions that guided this study. Chapter 5 contains a summary of the study, a discussion of the findings, conclusions derived from the analyzed data, implications for future practice, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter includes several sections. First is a brief outline of the study overviewing the problem, purpose, research questions, and methodology. Next is a discussion of findings with my embedded interpretations of how each of the research questions is answered and how the findings are related to published literature. The chapter closes with conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research.

Overview of the Study

School culture is invisible, but it permeates every aspect of school operation. It impacts school leadership, staff morale and retention, quality of instruction, and students' attitudes toward their education. In *School Culture Rewired*, Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) stated the following about the culture of a school: "Culture represents the unwritten mission of the school—it tells students and staff why they are there" (p. 30). Culture is often the underwritten stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that have built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. Thus, the school culture is affected by the attitudes, expected behaviors, and values held by those who are associated with the school, which, in turn, can impact how the school operates. It is up to school leaders to identify, shape, and maintain strong, positive, student-focused cultures.

Leadership and culture have been shown to correlate directly with student achievement (Helterbran, 2010; Perilla, 2014; Wilhem, 2016; Yahaya et al., 2010). Establishing collaborative and congenial working relationships with administrators and teachers and nurturing teacher-teacher relationships through support of professional learning communities has been found to be effective in closing the achievement gap for learners (Leithwood et al., 2006). That type of

school culture and climate can directly influence retention of the strongest teachers who then influence student performance (Adeogun & Olisaemeka, 2011).

The problem of practice for the current study is a recognition that school culture is shown to be a major component of success at the school, teacher, and student levels (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010; Yahaya et al., 2010). Therefore, following the Coronavirus pandemic, it is imperative that school leaders have an intentional focus on building up a school's culture to support and retain high quality teachers who lead the charge for student learning. School leadership has been linked to school culture and teacher commitment and retention. In turn, school culture and teacher retention have been linked to student performance (Bradshaw et al., 2014; Gruenert & Whitaker (2015); Helterbran, 2010; Hulpia et al., 2010).

The culture of any organization sets the tone for how the mission of that organization will be accomplished. Moreover, the school leader has a strong impact upon the culture of the organization, the ability of school leaders to meet their goals, and the retention of highly qualified teachers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of school leadership on school culture and teacher retention. To address the purpose of the study, the following questions were posed: RQ1: In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence school culture? RQ2: In what ways does a school leader's leadership style influence teacher retention? The findings of this study may inform school leaders about the impact they have on the culture of a school and how the culture of a school can impact teacher retention and, potentially, student achievement.

To address the purpose of the study and answer the research questions, a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design was used. To gather the quantitative data for this study, the School Leadership Survey, by Karen Kay Wendorf-Heldt (2009), was adapted and

used with permission from the copyright holder. The School Leadership Survey is a 26 question

Likert-scale survey designed to be administered to teachers in a school to get a sense of how

much their school leader impacts the culture of the school. The survey questions helped

determine if there is an existence of trust, peer observations, and a compelling mission that

teachers are working towards together. It also provided a baseline for school leaders who wish to

shape a new school culture or improve upon an existing one. The purpose of using this survey

was to gain insight from many teachers about each site's current school culture and what

qualities in school leaders increase school culture.

To investigate participants' thoughts related to school leaders and the leader's impact on

school culture and teacher retention, focus group interviews were conducted. A focus group

protocol examined the extent to which school leaders impact school culture and teacher

retention. Focus groups were appropriate for this phase as they yielded descriptive, process-

oriented data from multiple participants at once, giving both depth and breadth to the subject, as

noted by Hesse-Biber (2017). Hesse-Biber noted that focus groups have a distinct advantage over

other available research methods. Focus groups can help the researcher inductively figure out the

key issues, ideas, and concerns from multiple participants at once.

Discussion of the Findings

The discussion section is organized into three parts. The first portion is a discussion about

the emergent theme that corresponds with RQ1. The second portion discusses the emergent

themes that correspond with RQ2. The third portion is a discussion about the emergent themes

that correspond with both RQ1 and RQ2.

RQ 1 Theme: Lead by Modeling

School leaders can influence school culture if they are showing the way and modeling

expected behaviors for their staff. Hirsch (2006) wrote that school leaders must support teachers with classroom and school concerns and explain and model how to handle situations as they arise. It is important to help teachers navigate through both the written and unwritten cultural norms. This theme was prevalent in all three focus groups as teachers stated they wanted to have their school leaders "in the trenches" with them.

In the high school focus group, there was quite a bit of discussion on how post-COVID 19 negative student behaviors had increased and often became too much for a teacher to handle. Those participants felt that the biggest impact their leader made was simply by being present with them, helping them problem solve how to handle the students, not making them feel bad when asking for help, but instead showing them the way. The collaborative partnership evolved because school leaders lead by modeling.

RQ 2 Theme 1: Value

Teachers who were interviewed for the focus group felt that school leaders influenced teacher retention by valuing them at a high level as professionals. Because teacher turnover directly affects student achievement, retaining qualified and effective teachers is important. Researchers argue that to do this, school leaders need to support quality teaching (Martinez-Garcia & Slate, 2009). Teachers are more inclined to stay when they believe school leaders support and value them. School leaders must implement supportive and mentoring programs, create time in the school day for collaboration and participation in professional learning communities (PLCs), and provide opportunities for growth. Marzano et al. (2005) conducted research that revealed that the direct influence teachers have on student work is a result of the principal's direct influence on teachers and how teachers perceive themselves as educators; thus, principals' indirect influence has a substantial effect on student engagement and achievement. It

became evident that if we value teachers, they are more willing to stay in their current role, at their current school. Valuing teachers also empowers them to stay in the field of education instead of pursuing alternate careers.

RQ2 Theme 2: Growth

Teachers, at all three levels, reiterated the importance of growth in their career and that having the opportunity to learn and grow as an educator was an essential part of their desire to stay, not only at their school but also in the teaching profession. Hirsh (2006) stated that it is critical to train teachers on curriculum and strategies. Providing learning opportunities for all, paired with the necessary resources and training, is a critical part of retaining the best teachers. Teachers need to feel empowered and invested in to remain in education.

In the middle school focus group, all three participants stated that they had previously thought about pursuing other careers; however, they were given so much autonomy to learn and grow in their profession that it encouraged them to continue teaching. It was specifically noted that there was a fear of being stagnant and not learning, and that would be a reason to seek a different position in education. They appreciated that their school leader allowed them to pursue growth, and they were allowed to lead growth on their campus, which prevented them from getting bored or frustrated in their profession.

RQ 1 and 2 Theme 1: Personal Connections with Staff

Throughout the focus group interviews, the term family and connections with staff were repeated. It was evident that the staff members who participated felt that their school culture was centered around the family feel and the reason they wanted to stay at their school and in education was because their leader invested in them, built relationships with them beyond the

school, and even knew their families at a high level. They felt connected to their leader and to their school family.

Hattie (2016) stated that teacher efficacy is the number one influence related to student achievement. Given that a principal is not typically involved in the direct delivery of instruction, the behavior of a principal, especially when supportive, collegial, and not overly restrictive, can have a positive impact on student achievement. A supportive, collegial principal makes an impact on school culture and climate and thus on the teachers in the school (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2011). In all three focus groups, this theme was the most prevalent. It was important to teachers, at all levels, to feel connected to their school leader. The school leaders who they highly praised and stayed in education for and with were ones who were great connectors and relationship builders.

RQ 1 and 2 Theme 2: Clear Expectations

The theme of clear expectations emerged as a leading indicator of a positive school culture and one where staff were compelled to stay and work. The idea of communication was mentioned several times. Participants stated that strong leaders were able to clearly communicate expectations with staff. Herbert (2011) stated his belief that, "…a school administrator must be able to articulate a vision for success, inspire others to embrace the vision, and have the ability and expectations to make the necessary changes happen" (p. 4).

In each focus group, participants stated how they wanted clear direction and expectations from their school leader. They wanted to know how to be successful working with their leader. The high school group spoke about the fact that they wanted their school leader to have clear expectations and hold them accountable to those. They appreciated and praised their school leader for being willing to have difficult conversations with staff when it came to not meeting

expectations. It seemed that the most important piece to teachers was that the expectations were simple and clear.

RQ 1 and 2 Theme 3: Voice for All Stakeholders

In all three focus groups, participants emphasized the importance of both staff and students having a voice in their school. They each felt it was a key element of creating a positive school culture and was a reason that teachers stay (or leave) their school. Shafer (2018) noted that culture is all about connections and collaboration and leaders must utilize their leadership style to ensure that their school has a strong culture in place where there are many, overlapping, and cohesive interactions among all members of the organization. It was interesting that in the elementary focus group, the emphasis was on the importance of including individual teacher voice as often as possible. In the middle school focus group, participants' emphasis was on including teacher voice through various committees. They spoke quite a bit about the fact that they like the use of committees because it allowed them an opportunity to come together with their peers, collaborate, and unify themselves as a group to have a say in what happens in the school. In the high school focus group, the emphasis was on student voice and how the school leader should consider the students' voice as they are a key stakeholder in campus events and decisions.

Implications for Action

The purpose of this study was to examine the school leader's impact on school culture and teacher retention. The findings can be used to inform school leaders about the impact they have on the culture of a school and how the culture of a school can impact teacher retention and, potentially, student achievement. This could serve as a learning tool and growth opportunity for current school leaders. The case is made that it is important to implement a leadership academy

that includes a principal coaching and mentoring portion to help ensure that leaders have the abilities necessary to effectively build school culture. It is important that districts prepare future leaders so that the district has the capability of replacing individuals who retire or take positions elsewhere. This would allow for a seamless process of replacing leaders without affecting the culture of the school or district. The results can also inform district level leaders of the most appropriate types of hiring practices for employing leaders. The findings provide data and insight to both current and aspiring school leaders, as they show the types of leadership behaviors one should employ to effectively build school culture and retain the very best teachers. The findings can provide school district leaders ways to better identify and target strategies in recruiting and retaining effective school leaders who can influence a school's culture and increase teacher retention, which can lead to increased student achievement. This work has become increasingly important for recruiting and retaining the very best teachers. Gruenert and Whitaker (2015) stated that one strategy for improving schools is to improve the culture of a school. A positive school culture can increase teacher retention and increase student achievement, given that teachers have been identified as the most important school-level resource that impacts student achievement. Roby (2011) found that if teachers are treated professionally, are engaged in conversation, and are allowed to communicate and collaborate, they are likely to contribute positively to the culture. Their research aligns to what I heard from the teachers interviewed in the focus groups.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study was limited in scope since it only included teachers from one elementary, one middle, and one high school from a single district. There were only three teachers from each level who were willing and able to participate in a focus group. It would be advantageous to

interview a few more teachers at each grade level. It would also be interesting to research if the tenure of leadership impacts the school's culture and teacher retention rate. There could be further studies that look at the quality of leadership and the abilities of leaders as it pertains to school culture and teacher retention. It would also be good to look at the ability of the district to maintain and strengthen the school culture when school leaders transition to other positions or retire and new leaders need to take their place. This study could be replicated to include a case study of one or more schools. In one of the focus group interviews, a participant wanted to see a deep dive conducted to learn more about their specific school. It would be interesting to interview more teachers at one school to get a wide variety of teacher feedback on school culture and teacher retention. This study could be expanded to a greater sample size and include more schools and in a variety of districts. It would be interesting to see how the responses vary in different size districts, even looking at rural and urban school settings. Also, it would be interesting to consider a longitudinal approach as it may be helpful to look at school culture and teacher retention over a period of years and throughout a school leader's tenure.

Surprises

Though many of the processes in this study and some of the findings were anticipated, there were a few surprises. I anticipated that the quantitative survey would drive this study and the findings; however, the data and evidence from this study really evolved through the focus group interviews. In the data collection phase, the length of time used for the focus groups was shorter than I expected, especially relative to the vast amount of rich data collected. The interviews took half the time estimated, but I collected great feedback from teachers related to school culture and teacher retention. It also was surprising that so many people demonstrated genuine interest in the study and are hoping that the findings of the study will impact the district;

however, so few people answered the survey and wanted to participate in the focus group that these findings may be considered limited. Many people have shared that they were glad that someone was exploring this topic and hoped the findings from this study would be shared with both campus and district leaders to improve our campuses. It is interesting that many people want to know the outcome, but don't have time to invest in the actual process.

Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of school leadership on school culture and teacher retention. I investigated teachers' experiences and perspectives to determine if they believed, and to what extent, their school leader influenced their school's culture and teacher retention. The findings of this study inform school leaders about the impact they have on the culture of a school and how the culture of a school can impact teacher retention and, potentially, student achievement. The results also inform district level leaders of the most appropriate types of hiring practices to employ quality teachers, providing data and insight to both current and aspiring school leaders. By collecting data and the subsequent analysis of data and reported findings, the findings provide school district leaders ways to better identify and target strategies for recruiting and retaining effective school leaders who can influence a school's culture and increase teacher retention, which can lead to increased student achievement. This study reinforces the idea that school leaders have to be intentional about building school culture to increase retention in a school.

The findings were achieved through a sequential explanatory mixed methods research design. The first phase included surveying teachers in one elementary, one middle, and one high school campus in a large school district in Texas using a 26-question Likert-scale adaptation of the published School Leadership Survey. The second phase of data collection was to conduct

focus group interviews. A focus group interview protocol was developed to examine the extent to which school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention. I held three separate focus group interviews: elementary, middle, and high school. The data from the focus group interviews provided the most compelling piece of data in the study. Repeatedly, the teachers who participated in a focus group stated that the school leader is a critical component to developing the culture of the school and teacher retention, not just for the school but retention in the field of education. While examining how school leaders impact school culture, teachers spoke about the importance of leaders having clear expectations, making personal connections with staff, and providing a voice for all stakeholders. While examining how school leaders impact teacher retention, teachers spoke about the importance of their school leader valuing them as professionals and providing them time and opportunities to grow in their profession.

This study reinforced my passion for developing school leaders and ensuring that they have the tools and resources necessary to lead our schools. The school leader has a significant impact on the school; therefore, it is critical that both current and aspiring leaders learn and develop a leadership style that allows them to intentionally focus on developing a strong school culture because we know it is directly linked to teacher retention and increased student achievement. I would argue that who we choose to lead our schools can make or break a school; therefore, it is of utmost importance that those making hiring decisions be informed of these data and the body of work to make the best decisions possible for a district, its schools, the teachers, and all students.

APPENDIX A

DOCUMENTS RELATED TO ONLINE SURVEY TOOL

Recruitment Email for Online Survey

Salutation,

My name is Shelly Spaulding, and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas. I am currently conducting my dissertation research and would be pleased if you would consider participating in an online survey regarding your school's culture. The survey should take no more than 60 minutes to complete.

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine how school leaders impact school culture and to what extent school leaders and school culture impact teacher retention.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study, and you will not be compensated for your participation. An informed consent letter is presented at the beginning of the survey. At the end of the consent letter, you will be asked if you do or do not consent to taking the survey. If you consent, you will enter the survey.

At the end of the survey, there is an item that asks if you are willing to participate in a focus group.

(Link to survey)

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Shelly Spaulding

School Leadership Survey

All items in this adaptation of the original survey were designed to answer Research Question 1. The survey was conducted via Canvas, using a Likert scale with options 1 = *always*, 2 = *most of the time*, 3 = *seldom*, 4 = *never*. Only 10 of the 26 items used in this survey are provided in this abstract. For information about the complete survey adaptation, please contact the author.

Directions: For each item, click on the number on the continuum that most accurately describes your perceptions of the impact your principal has on the culture and climate of your campus. From your perspective as a teacher, to what degree does your principal…

1. Strive to build and maintain positive relationships through respect and cooperation

2. Adapt their leadership style to effectively meet the needs of specific situations

3. Adapt to uncertainty and changing conditions and initiate and lead productive change

4. View unexpected situations as opportunities rather than threats

5. Invest effort in developing other people's abilities

6. Establish and communicate a shared vision through clear, achievable goals for curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices

7. Listen attentively to understand the feelings and perspectives of others, even if different teachers

8. Facilitate effective means of communication with and among teachers (e.g., establishing bi-weekly meetings to discuss staff concerns, sending regular emails to keep staff informed of district progress on initiatives, etc.)

9. Promote cohesion, purpose, and well-being among teachers (e.g., facilitating a back-to-school retreat to revisit school mission, data, and improvement plans; protect instructional time for team members to plan together, etc.)

10. Provide opportunities for teachers to be involved in decision making and the development of school policies and encourage teachers to express diverse opinions

Are you willing to participate in a follow-up focus group? If you are, please email me at shellyspaulding@my.unt.edu.

Participants who were willing to continue into the next phase of the study were contacted via email to arrange for a focus group interview.

APPENDIX B

DOCUMENTS RELATED TO FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS

Recruitment Email for Focus Group

Hello.

My name is Shelly Spaulding and I am a doctoral candidate at the University of North Texas. Recently you participated in an online survey that I conducted about your school culture. In the survey you expressed an interest in participating in a follow up focus group. I would be pleased if you would consider participating in a 30-minute focus group interview related to your school culture. The focus group interview will take place at ___ am/pm via Zoom.

The purpose of this mixed methods study is to examine how school leaders impact school culture and to what extent school leaders and school culture impact teacher retention.

You are under no obligation to participate in the study, and you will not be compensated for your participation. If you are willing to participate, please respond to this email. An informed consent letter is attached to this email. Please read it prior to the focus group. I will go over it with you before the interview begins and answer any questions you may have before you sign the form.

Respectfully,

Shelly Spaulding

Teacher Focus Group Interview Protocol

Researcher duties before beginning the interview:
- Introduce yourself.
- Review the IRB informed consent document.
- Explain the purpose of the focus group.
- Ask participants to introduce themselves with a pseudonym of their choosing and to state that pseudonym each time they make a comment.
- Explain the question-and-answer protocol.
  - Researcher asks questions
  - Any participant may answer the question.
  - Encourage participants to engage in conversation around the question.
- Thank participants for participating.
- Answer any questions from participants before beginning the focus group interview.

Interview location: _____   Date: _____

School Level: Elementary   Middle   High

Participant numbers/pseudonyms: _____

Introduction

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this focus group interview. My name is Shelly Spaulding, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Texas. For transparency's sake, I am also a campus level administrator in the district.

Prior to agreeing to participate in this study, you were provided a copy of the UNT Institutional Review Board's informed consent form. You were asked to review and sign this form prior to our time together today. However, at the beginning of our session, I will review the form with you. Please remember that your participation in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to end your participation at any time during the study. Are there any questions related to the informed consent form or your participation in the study?

The purpose of this study is to explore how school leaders impact school culture and teacher retention. The purpose of this focus group is to gain an understanding of your school's culture, what impact you believe your leader has on school culture, and whether your school culture impacts your desire to stay or leave your current position at your school.

With your permission, our interview today will be audio recorded, and I may take some handwritten notes. The recording will be transcribed using an online transcription service called Rev.com. I will read the transcription while listening to the recording to ensure its accuracy. I then will provide you a copy of the transcript for you to confirm that it accurately captures your comments during our interview. Your comments will be highlighted to lessen the time it takes you to review the transcript. The recording, transcript, and my handwritten notes will be kept

secure according to UNT policies. Pseudonyms for each participant, as well as the district and school name, will be used to protect the confidentiality of everyone involved in the study. Do you have any objections to the use of an audio recorder for today's interview? To help create a clear recording and transcript, please refrain from speaking while someone else is talking, speak clearly and loudly, and identify yourself with your pseudonym before speaking.

Again, thank you for your time and participation today. I look forward to hearing about your unique perspectives related to the purpose of the study, which serves as my doctoral dissertation. Are there any questions before we proceed?

1. Please introduce yourself, using your pseudonym. Please include where you teach, what you teach, and the number of years you have been in the district.

The next 5 questions relate to school culture:

2. Tell me about the culture at your school.
   Probes:
   - Do you perceive that teachers are happy working in that culture?
   - Has the school culture changed recently? If so, please describe how and why.
   - If you previously worked in another setting, how does your current school culture compare with what you previously experienced?

3. To what extent do you think the school leader has any effect on the school culture?
   Probe: Please provide specific examples from your previous or current experiences.

4. What leadership qualities that impact a school's culture do you think are most important?
   Probe: Does your current leader display those qualities? If yes, please give a few examples.

5. What does your campus leader do to enhance your school culture? Probe: Please provide specific examples.

6. What conditions or people other than the principal have had an impact on your school culture, either positive or negative?

The next 3 questions related to teacher retention:

7. Please describe the conditions you enjoy in your workplace.
   Probe: How do those conditions encourage you to stay in your current role?

8. Please describe any experiences you had, if any, that made you want to leave.
   Probe: How did you overcome those experiences?

9. In what ways has your principal established a culture that supports your desire to remain in the profession?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share with me about your school culture, your campus leader, or the impact of school culture on teacher retention?

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