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HOW DOES THE STAY INTERVIEW IMPACT THE FUTURE OF RETAINING EDUCATORS?

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EDUCATORS?

By

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University of Nebraska, 2024

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Abstract

The teaching profession is constantly evolving, making the retention of educators
increasingly competitive and challenging. As districts create innovative incentives and
strategies to attract both new and experienced talent, the role of the principal has become
more demanding, particularly in the search for qualified educators to meet the needs of
students.

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore the experiences and
perspectives of nine principals from elementary, middle, high schools, and young adult
programs, with a focus on how stay interviews impact the future of retaining educators.
The research was conducted through a series of semi-structured interviews. The findings
highlight that educators value the principal's role as an listener, holds working
relationships with leadership and colleagues in high regards, fosters a positive school
culture, and prioritizes feedback and recognition as a regular practice.

The study recommends that districts prioritize retention of their current educators
as a strategy to enhance and enrich teachers' skill set and meet their educational goals for
the future. Over the course of several months, a principal focus group collaborated to
examine the key elements of stay interviews, design and refine the interview process and

questions, analyze the outcomes, and establish next steps for principal accountability and

follow-through on their findings with the stay interview as a retention tool for educators.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As I reflect back upon my diverse journey in education, I've certainly worn many different hats and gotten the opportunity to view education from numerous different lenses. As an early educator, I have always been fascinated by observing and learning from seasoned paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, and administrators. Observing these educators has had a profound impact on my practice and profession as I began to navigate my amazing educational journey. Educators have been more than mentors; they've been architects of my professional identity. Their relationships, built on guidance and shared passion, have made me into the educator I am today.

My journey started as a special education paraprofessional in a small town in Nebraska. As a special education paraprofessional, I realized quickly that I had a lot to learn about the teaching and learning of students. I knew that relationships are the foundational blocks for any and all students and are paramount in teaching and learning of students at any level of education. I also discovered that the relationships I would build in education would be unique and special. These relationships I formed early and throughout my journey displayed to me what it means when educators refer to school families as unique and special. I recall clearly watching how firm yet caring the special education teachers and classroom teachers were with the students we shared. One 2nd grade teacher in particular often would kindly ask if he could give me some feedback or advice on how I was working with a student and would very professionally provide me

with strategies to make my next interaction with that student a more meaningful and impactful experience for both the student and I. The amazing fact about the feedback is that at the time, I thought that this was advice for the in-the-moment situation or with a student. I later learned this invaluable advice was actually for any and all students I would encounter in the years ahead and the different students I would serve. It began to teach me the importance of continuous improvement when working with students and in education. It was these special education teachers and the 2nd grade teacher that would inspire me to finish my teaching degree and who would inspire me to make a bigger impact on future students and staff I would work with.

When I became an elementary teacher, these lessons on relationships and how they can make a difference for the people I work with continued to foster. My work as an elementary teacher started in 2nd grade for three years in a school that was in a lower socioeconomic status and would conclude as a 5th-grade teacher for three years in a school that was on a higher socioeconomic status with a different district from where I started. It was at each of these schools that I quickly learned that the school I was at would not define me, but rather the relationships with the students, staff, and administration that would. I continued my education by learning the value of working closely with other grade levels, working closely with the school leadership team on our school's continuous improvement team, listening and learning from my administrators and families, and enriching and educating the holistic child while creating a positive educational environment.

The work I was doing as a teacher was very important to me, and the impact I felt that could be made on a wider scale really resonated with me. As I began my master's

degree in educational leadership at the University of Nebraska Kearney during my second year of teaching, I did not know exactly what I wanted to do with that degree. Still, I knew that if I wanted to continue to influence and impact people's lives on a larger scale, I would need to work hard to learn more about myself and my leadership style. I began my first administration job in 2014 as an Assistant Principal/Career Advancement and Development for Recruits and Experienced (CADRE) Teachers Associate in a building of about 500 students. I would quickly learn that although I learned a lot during my three years at UNK, the education I got as a first-year Assistant Principal would be a priceless experience that no college degree would prepare me for. The job was broken up into three different areas of focus. The intention was that I would serve 50% of my time as assistant principal, 25% of my time mentoring two other teachers in the district, and the other 25% at the University, where I would work and learn from their educational program. The assistant principalship experience paired me with an amazing veteran principal who emphasized the importance of relationships when working with adults. A lesson that I had already been learning was of value to students in the elementary setting. My work as a mentor with two teachers in the district, completing both their first year of teaching and their master's degree all in one year allowed me to use my fresh out-of-the-classroom experience and wisdom gained from those who instilled in me the value of strong relationship building, strong classroom management, strong instructional practices, as well as work/school/life balance while still making an impact on the students you interacted with daily. Although I leaned heavily on my administrator, university colleagues, and former teaching partners, this felt a little like the phrase "building the plane as it flies". Finally my work as a CADRE Associate with the university taught me

how to work with other educators at the higher educational level as well as how to develop and plan strong professional development, and how to continue to develop trusting relationships. The staff and professors I would work with were of great value to my development as an administrator and would help me to provide professional development that would influence my school staff as well as provide impactful feedback using the latest research around teaching and learning to the teachers I was evaluating. "Those who lead by influencing help their teams reach a much broader audience" (Rath and Conchie, p. 25, 2009)

The next year, I found myself in my first principal position and, at one point, asking myself if I had what it took to run a building effectively and efficiently. It would be safe to say that I still did not have my leadership style ironed out completely and found myself as a chameleon of the principals that I had worked with throughout my career at this stage. I did have one thing solidified: how important it was to me to build strong and meaningful relationships with people that I would be working side by side with doing very important work for the next five years.

The true test of building meaningful relationships would come when I opened our district's newest elementary school at the height of COVID and at an alternative setting due to the fact that the school building construction would not be completed until the second semester. My commitment to meaningful relationships and building trust with a new staff I hired would be put to the test when I was tasked with trying to build relationships and begin to create a culture via Zoom calls prior to the school year starting and then trying to connect with a staff I had not worked with before, as well as trying to foster relationships at a six-foot distance with face masks. I would learn very fast that the

interactions I had on a daily basis with teachers, staff, students, and parents would be directly tied to both recruiting future teachers and retaining new teachers to the profession as well as our veteran teachers.

In 2022, I would find myself, yet again, asking myself how I can make a bigger impact on people and reach people at a larger capacity. In December of 2021, our district's Board of Education approved a new human resource position entitled Director of Human Resources for Classified Staff. I was fortunate to apply, interview, and be offered the position. I would now be responsible for working at a district level, helping to serve and impact 12,000 students, and being a human resource representative for over 2,000 employees.

Problem Statement

It is no secret that the education profession K-12 is getting some attention with the turnover observed over the past several years. K–12 schools in the United States are finding it increasingly difficult to retain teachers, with potentially far-reaching ramifications for society. Over the past decade, the annual teacher turnover rate has hovered around eight percent nationally and is more than double that for schools designated for Title 1 funding (Bryant et, 2023). It does not take long to quickly stumble on the various experts claiming the reasons for the departure of so many educators. Among the list of reasons for burnout are heavy workloads, staff shortages, mental health issues, safety issues, and low salaries. (Peck, 2023). Although there are several other specific examples of burnout, workload, and staff shortages are among the ones cited as the most influential. According to the National Educational Association survey,

three-fourths of members said they've had to fill in for colleagues or take other duties due to these shortages.

Furthermore, 80 percent report that unfilled job openings have led to more work obligations for the educators who remain (Walker, 2022). A study conducted by Gallup in June of 2022 stated that more than four in ten K-12 workers in the U.S. (44%) say they "always" or "very often" feel burned out at work, outpacing all other industries nationally. College and university workers have the next-highest burnout level, at 35%, making educators among the most burned-out groups in the U.S. workforce. (Marken and Agrawal, 2022).

It is known that districts all across the country are rethinking how they recruit and retain teachers in creative ways. In several states during the 2022 school year, it was reported that more teachers are leaving the classroom than usual. In fact, one state reported seeing more teachers leave the profession in 2022 than over the last two decades (Barnum, 2023). Districts and principals across the state of Nebraska are starting to focus on retaining their talent within their schools, with the hope that this investment will begin to retain the quality they have and recruit more educators.

One retention effort that is being utilized in companies across the country is a strategy called stay interviews. The purpose of these conversations is for the principal to facilitate a structured interview with an individual within the building to learn the specific actions they can take to strengthen employee engagement and retention (Finnegan, 2018). These one-on-one interviews reveal to leaders what employees like and don't like about their current job and, as a result, serve as a proactive approach to retaining and preventing

an employee from leaving the profession before it is too late (Vozza, 2023). This interview strategy provides the leader with a wealth of benefits, including teachers feeling they are being heard and that they matter, and can prevent schools from losing quality teachers (Kurter, 2022).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study will be to analyze the implementation of stay interviews in one Midwest Suburban Public School District by building principals of all levels PK-12 and the principal of the district's Young Adult Program ages 18-21.

Research Question

For decades, organizations have struggled to find clear solutions to better engage and retain their best employees (Finnegan, 2018). The profession of education continues to present challenges and struggles that deserve a collaborative approach from our current educators to help resolve. It's not just a matter of valuing the employee but a bottom-line issue that may be the difference between hitting or missing expectations (Saratoga, 2006).

1. How does the Stay Interview impact the future of retaining educators? Describing the stay interview process from the perspective of the building principal.

Theoretical Framework

Job embeddedness is inspired by the ideas that people can be deeply invested into their surroundings in both the organization as well as their community. The research discoveries propose that a person who becomes embedded in their job in various ways is

related to both on and off-the-job factors (Holtom et al., 2006). Holtom, Mitchell, and Lee identify fit, links, and sacrifice as key dimensions influencing an employee's decision to stay or leave a company. The extent of an employee's engagement and integration within these areas significantly impacts their retention. It's crucial to recognize that stay interviews serve as a tool for retaining staff, helping to answer why staff stay in the positions they choose to work, and building upon existing theories and models that have been in place for a considerable period of time. "Long ago, the conventional answer to the question of why people leave may well have been because they don't like their jobs and have someplace else to go. The primary explanations for staying were high levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement" (Lee et al., p. 200, 2013). Job embeddedness was created in an effort to give more of an explanation of employee turnover (Sessa and Bowling, 2020). Previously, before the concept of job embeddedness was examined, employees would depart from their positions, leaving employers puzzled about the reasons for their departure, especially since many of their colleagues, who were in similar roles, chose to stay. Job embeddedness represents a variety of influences on employee retention (Holtom et al., 2006). Job embeddedness is both a theory and a model of retention (Halvorsen et al., 2015). "It has been recognized as a key factor to address the issue of employee turnover and employee attitudes" (Yoon et al., p. 1 2022). This model and theory have been tied to a variety of positive work outcomes such as job performance and behaviors (Lee et al., 2014).

The job embeddedness theory or model is a theory/model that was said to have come from a journal article published in the Academy of Management Journal in 2001. The journal authored by Terence R. Mitchell, Brooks C. Holtom, Thomas W. Lee, Chris

J. Sablynski, and Miriam Eerez and was entitled "Why People Stay: Using Job Embeddedness to Predict Voluntary Turnover". The journal article described job embeddedness as how connected and stuck an employee feels in their job due to various factors. Job embeddedness encompasses a wide range of factors including both the organization and community that affect an employee's inclination to remain in their position. These factors cover aspects related to the workplace, like relationships with colleagues and the alignment of an individual's abilities with job requirements (Holtom et al., 2006). Holtrom, Mitchell, and Lee describe this embeddedness like a net or a web created by strands connecting the different parts of one's life. An employee engaged in diverse roles, responsibilities, and relationships will likely have a more intricate network, becoming more deeply entrenched and committed to their position, thus less inclined to leave these extensive connections behind. Authors Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablynski, and Erez break down the critical aspects of job embeddedness and provide three categories defined as fit, links, and sacrifice.

- **Links** or connections are identified as formal or informal ties between an individual or organization. The concept of job embeddedness refers to the idea that a number of connections weave an employee and their family into a complex that encompasses social, psychological, and financial ties, including relationships with colleagues, friends, outside-of-work community groups, and even the local environment. The higher the number of connections an individual has within the network, the more attached they become to their job and the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).

- **Fit**-Can be defined as how well an employee feels they align or mesh with their organization and its environment. The theory suggests that for an employee to experience a good fit, their personal values, career ambitions, and future aspirations need to align with the organization's climate or culture. It is thought that the more aligned an employee feels with these aspects, the more likely they are to be both professionally and personally connected to the organization (Mitchell et al., 2001).

- **Sacrifice-** This is the perception that an employee departing from an organization and the community would be giving up numerous valued aspects, including engaging projects, fulfilling work relationships, and a healthy social life outside of the workplace. The better the alignment between the employee and both his organization and community, the deeper connection that is had with the company and his local environment. The stakes are higher when it comes to the loss one would have if they decided to leave the company or business, and this is likely to deter them from leaving (Johnson, 2008).

The job embeddedness theory/model is pictured in Figure 1.

Figure 1:

The Job Embeddedness Theoretical Model

The Job Embeddedness Theoretical Model

(Gibbs and Duke #)

Operational Definitions

Stay Interview-According to Dr. Richard Finnegan's book The Power of Stay Interviews, "A stay interview is a structured discussion a leader conducts with each employee to learn the specific actions that leader must take to strengthen the employee's engagement and retention with the organization."

Building Principal-Nebraska Teacher and Principal Performance Framework defines building principals as those certificated whose primary assignment is to act as the chief administrator of one of the district's schools.

Employee Engagement-How involved, enthusiastic, and committed an employee is in order to help the overall organization move forward (Finnegan, 2018).

Significance of Study

When school districts can't attract and retain enough teachers, students suffer. And the COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded the nation's education talent challenges (Bryant, 2023). McKinsey & Company surveyed more than 1800 U.S. educators, mental health providers, and administrators. Over 33% of them stated that they planned to leave the profession at the end of the 21-22 school year. This is an alarming number of educators among the 1800 surveyed, not to mention if you were to apply this same percentage to the nation as a whole. National trends show that the number one reason for leaving the profession is dissatisfaction, at 55%. Among specific reasons for

dissatisfaction are as follows: Testing and accountability, 25%, Unhappiness with school administration accounts for 21%, and finally, dissatisfaction with their teaching career came in at 21%, which could be related to multiple factors (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017).

In a profession that seems to get more and more attention for the departure of staff due to numerous factors, the retention of your current staff is the most important investment and focus of our current principals. Rath and Conchie (2009) discovered three key findings during their research on strengths and leadership. Their first discovery was that most effective leaders are always investing in the strengths of their employees. Principals who have engaged educators are likely to see an overall increase in employee engagement. Rath & Conchie state that employers who do not invest in employees' strengths have 9% of their staff that show employee engagement, in comparison to 75% engagement with leadership that does invest in their employee's strengths. The second key finding they discovered is that most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people to maximize their team. This approach allows the individual principal to invest in the skills of each team member and, as a result, have a more complete school team. Finally, they state that most effective leaders understand their followers' needs. Principals who are in touch with their staff understand their needs and can provide support in the areas that a particular teacher may need further development on.

Teachers are best supported when they work in environments characterized by trust, respect, and commitment to student learning (Kraft et al. 2021). Leaders and principals play a big role in developing and sustaining relational trust. Principals establish

respect and personal regard when they acknowledge the vulnerabilities of others, actively listen to their concerns and abstain from inconsistent actions (Bryk and Schneider, 2003).

This case study consists of research collected from a variety of principals at the elementary level, middle school level, and high school level, as well as our Young Adult Program level who agreed to be part of a focus group that conducted stay interviews in their buildings with certified staff of various years of experience. The main objective of this focus group was to explore the process of conducting stay interviews from the perspective of school principals, documenting their experiences, and providing recommendations for principals and leaders considering the use of stay interviews as a retention strategy going forward. Research conducted through interviews with participants and their experience of planning and was the stay interviews within the building they lead. The research assumed that all the participating principals had established strong trusting relationships with the teachers that were chosen to participate in the study. The researcher chose the following participants based on their experience and with the understanding that the case study would be carried out with honest feedback on how the experience went when planned as a group and conducted in a consistent manner across the seven school buildings participating.

This study involves a case study conducted with principals who volunteered to participate in these retention interviews. Along with the the case study components, it will also include three data points:

1. A comprehensive roadmap and documented experience of the five phase approach the principals who participated experienced with this case study.

- *Phase I*: An overview of the purpose and value of stay interviews with all administrators from the district. This research was conducted in alignment with the district's strategic goal in relation to recruiting and retaining quality staff. The overview also included a review of five different pieces of literature supporting the impact of Stay interviews as a retention tool. Principals were then asked to reflect on the strengths, barriers, further information needed, and sign up on a voluntary basis if they had an interest in conducting these interviews in their buildings.

- *Phase II*-This phase finalized the selection of principals who were interested in participating and after they were selected this focus group of principals took a deeper dive into the research and importance of employee engagement and retention, the importance of creating trust when conducting these interviews, and the key content and essential components of this experience for both principal and teacher.

- *Phase III*-Principals reviewed their understanding of the key components or content of stay interviews, developed and discussed a consistent physical environment for these interviews, and how they could collaboratively create a consistent warm and welcoming experience with all seven buildings participating. We also created best practices around the concepts of active listening, appropriate note-taking skills, probing questions when you receive an answer that requires a deeper dig, and company policy. We concluded with an analysis and selection of the five key questions each principal would ask during their stay interviews..

- ○ *Phase IV*-This phase was planned as a check-in on how the first few interviews went and what, if any, adjustments needed to be made. This was also an opportunity to discuss engagement data around schools and how stay interviews can assist with this.

- ○ *Phase V*- This phase was another checkpoint where each principal had the opportunity to reflect on their experience up until this point, with questions asked to help with the reflection. This also involved a collaborative approach with principal analyzing and determining any patterns or themes that emerged from the stay interview conducted. The feedback from principals was captured in the conversations during the focus group's time together.

2. Formative checkpoints were conducted throughout the journey with reflective questions presented to the focus groups of principals.

   a. How was the overall stay interview experience up until this point?

   b. What questions have you found to be the most beneficial or insightful during this process?

   c. Are there questions that you feel are not working or giving you the information needed for their intended purpose?

   d. What questions are not on here that would be beneficial?

   e. What adjustments will you make moving forward with the rest of your interviews?

3. Semi-structured interview questions were conducted with the nine principals who would agree to provide their findings as part of the study. Interview questions

were developed for the focus groups that participated in this experience. These

questions were based on a deeper analysis of themes that may have come out of

the reflection questions done with the focus groups. It may be necessary to

include the original five questions that were constructed and presented to the

principals initially. This allowed for any adjustments that were made halfway

through to be assessed and documented.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter two will delve into a comprehensive review of the scholarly work related to how stay interviews serve as a tool for employee retention and some of the history in retention theories and models. These one-on-one valuable conversations with principals/leaders have proven to be effective ways of retaining employees and more importantly can help to solve present-day concerns of issues in the workplace by improving the workplace environment for current employees, as well as future employees. These initiatives are ways to tap into the valuable insight our teachers and staff offer and improve the overall climate of a school setting. This literature review will cover various perspectives, encompassing theories, practices, themes, and beliefs from leading retention experts, reflecting years of research and observation. The sections that will be included in my literature review will be as follows:

- Section I-Contemporary data/insight into education shortage/AASPA actions
- Section II-Behaviorism theory
- Section III: The importance of employee engagement/retention and the impact of stay interviews.

Section I-Contemporary Data/Education Shortage/AASPA Actions

When evaluating retention strategies like stay interviews, it's crucial to base our assessment on data that will confirm their value. By examining information from a national, state, and district level, we gain a deeper understanding of the issue, enabling the development of both immediate and future strategies tailored to our district's unique

data. While it is important to identify the challenges, it is also important to look at educational initiatives being made at national, state, and district level.

In February of 2022 the American Association of School Personnel Administrators (AASPA) created a unique gathering entitled the Educator Shortage Summit. AASPA serves as a national organization that supports school personnell and the students they serve. Their mission is to be leaders in the education, support and advocacy for their members and students that they support ("Governance - American Association of School Personnel Administrators"). The purpose of the summit was to gather educators and outside agencies to discuss challenges and barriers as well as develop solutions and a plan moving forward for the national educator shortage. "The goal of the National Educator Summit was to initiate comprehensive conversations among the PK-20 education community, promote the sharing of diverse perspectives, and identify opportunities to replicate promising practices" (5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage, p. 3, AASPA).

The result of the summit was a plan entitled the "5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage". The document included a comprehensive approach to what was identified as five key components to be considered. The five shifts were as follows:

1. Reduce barriers to careers in education while preserving standards of excellence.

2. Design comprehensive human capital management systems.

3. Establish transparent and equitable total reward systems.

4. Strengthen educators' sense of purpose, belonging, and connection.

5. Delivery of exceptional employment experiences.

Within each of the shifts was an extensive breakdown of stakeholders' actions at the federal, state, association/nonprofits, preparation programs, and PK-12 district & education organizations platforms (5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage, AASPA). Within each individual level was a list of 4 to 5 high-level recommendations that varied with each of the different shifts. For example, shift 5 provides a comprehensive breakdown of the following topics: customer service, work-life integration, data-driven improvements, employee value propositions, and internal ambassadors for the profession. For the purpose of this study we are looking primarily at the federal, state, and district actions as well as focusing on one key shift that will include shift 5, delivery of exceptional employment experiences. Focusing on shift five will align with the literature that leads to the why behind stay interviews as an effective retention tool.

Nationally

The National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) School Pulse Panel, which serves as a monthly data collection of vital information in public education ("School Pulse Panel - Overview"), communicated that during the 22-23 school year, 42% of educational leaders stated that teachers and staff leaving the profession is more concerning. This figure becomes even more alarming in schools with predominantly minority populations, where the data indicates that 40% of schools with over 75% minority students face multiple teaching vacancies. (Chernikoff, 2023). The worry over educators and supporting staff departing the profession is equivalent to the urgent stress schools face in finding qualified, talented individuals to fill the vacancies left by those exiting.

The NCES report stated that more than 50% of all public schools during the 2022-2023 school year started the school year understaffed (Camera, 2022). It quickly becomes apparent that an increased rate of staff departures, coupled with difficulties in securing replacements, can significantly strain educational leaders and impose extra burdens on remaining staff, potentially leading to further teacher and staff burnout. These shortages and unfilled vacancies have forced states to start to think differently when it comes to being certified within each given state. States like Oregon and California are allowing educators without state licenses to be issued a teaching certificate that allows them to teach within those states without any further requirements (Chernikoff, 2023).

While states make adjustments to the requirement needed to teach in each state, it does not address the ongoing stress and strain that current teachers are facing regarding the increase in behavior due to the lack of training that incoming teachers are receiving (Balingit, 2023). "When school districts cannot attract enough teachers, students struggle, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only compounded the nation's education talent challenges" (Bryant, 2023, p. 2). To make matters worse, at a national level, many teachers feeling burned out feel that the work that they are choosing to put into the profession is not being compensated. Around 75% of educators in this group express a sense of giving more to their profession than they receive in terms of recognition or reward, while 69% believe that their overall compensation, encompassing both base salary and bonuses, does not accurately reflect their qualifications and dedication. Additionally, 65% indicate that their teaching income does not afford them a comfortable standard of living (Bryant, 2023).

While some educators can fall into the habit of admiring the problem, organizations such as the American Association of School Personnel Administrators are developing stakeholder actions to address these issues proactively. When it comes to delivering exceptional employment experiences, shift five highlights the following actions at a national level:

Shift 5-Federal Government-Stakeholder Actions:

- Work-Life Integration-funds geared towards retention, turnover, and burnout and support in overall educators well-being.

- Data-Driven Improvements-Further research into retention improvement that reduces burnout.

- Employee Value Proposition-

- Internal Ambassadors for the Profession-Identify your high performers and allow them to serve as the beacon for the promotion of education.

(5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage, AASPA)

<u>State Level</u>

The Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) publishes both a teacher vacancy survey report and a teacher vacancy survey report summary each fall, and they have been conducting this valuable survey for decades now. The purpose of the survey is to give a breakdown of the hard-to-fill areas in education in the state of Nebraska. The survey includes all public schools, nonpublic school systems, and Educational Service Units or ESUs (Teacher Vacancy Information, 2023, NDE). The survey is sent in the fall through the NDE and gives educational leaders, educators, and other stakeholders from across Nebraska the opportunity to review data that includes endorsement areas and the

hard-to-fill positions as a whole. This data also helps districts as they start to plan for

recruiting of soon-to-be graduating seniors in educational colleges across the state. The

2023-2024 survey represents a large population of the public schools and ESU with 239

of 261 responding to the survey (91%). Nonpublic school participation is not as high,

with 71 of 175 respondents to the survey (40%). Since the pandemic, we have seen quite

a change and increase in not only the number of vacancies but also the variation of

positions that were deemed not hard to fill and now are contributing to the shortage seen

across the state in both urban and rural areas of the state. Table 1, adapted from the

Nebraska Department of Education Teacher Shortage page, shows you the increase in

teacher vacancies and the endorsement area in the last four years.

Table 1-NDE Teacher Vacancy Survey Report Results

2020-2021

Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #	Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #
Special Education	56.00	17.43%	22.00	Music Instrumental/Vocal	12.00	3.73%	0.50
Career Education Areas	29.81	9.28%	1.50	Health and/or Physical Education	11.04	3.44%	0.60
Language Arts	23.55	7.33%	3.05	Early Childhood Education	9.00	2.80%	3.00
Science	20.20	6.29%	5.00	School Library	8.00	2.49%	
Mathematics	19.70	6.13%	2.00	ESL/ELL†	5.50	1.71%	
World Languages	18.82	5.86%	5.50	Art	4.40	1.37%	
Speech Pathology	14.00	4.36%	8.00	High Ability Education	1.00	0.31%	
School Counselor	13.50	4.20%	1.00	Bilingual†	0	0.00%	

2021-2022

Top 10 Shortage Areas							
Public				**Non-Public**			
Endorsement Area	Unfilled** Total	Unfilled** %	Vacant***	Endorsement Area	Unfilled** Total	Unfilled** %	Vacant***
Special Education	86.00	19.70%	8	Elementary Education	11.00	23.84%	6
Language Arts	48.00	10.99%	3	Other	4.50	9.75%	1
Elementary Education	36.50	8.36%	4	Science	4.24	9.19%	0
Science	35.65	8.17%	5.65	World Language	4.00	8.67%	0
Career Education Areas	29.75	6.81%	4.5	Mathematics	3.50	7.59%	1
Mathematics	25.50	5.84%	6.5	Music Instrumental/Vocal	3.40	7.37%	1
World Language	21.65	4.96%	3.5	Career Education Areas	2.50	5.42%	0
School Counselor	20.00	4.58%	1	Middle Level - Include under content area	2.50	5.42%	0.5
Speech Language Pathology	20.00	4.58%	3	Language Arts	2.50	5.42%	0
School Psychologist	17.50	4.01%	2.5	Health and/or Physical Education	2.00	4.33%	0

Represents Common Shortage Areas

2022-2023

Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #	Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #
Special Education	143.4	18.65%	47.4	Early Childhood Education	28.6	3.72%	14.0
Elementary Education	117.9	15.34%	22.5	Art	21.55	2.80%	2.0
Career Education Areas	70.85	9.22%	12.25	World Language	21.45	2.79%	3.5
Language Arts	54.1	7.04%	2.0	School Counselor	21.05	2.74%	2.3
Science	48.97	6.37%	8.0	Health/Physical Education	20.87	2.71%	0.0
Mathematics	46.93	6.11%	18.6	Social Studies/Social Science	18.25	2.37%	1.0
Speech Language Pathology	45	5.85%	34.0	School Psychologist	17.5	2.28%	7.0
Music Instrumental/Vocal	32.8	4.27%	5.9	School Library	13.1	1.70%	0.0

2023-2024

Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #	Endorsement Area	Unfilled** #	Unfilled** %	Vacant*** #
Special Education	209.60	23.63%	76.1	Art	30.33	3.42%	13.33
Elementary Education	109.50	12.34%	61.0	School Counselor	29.75	3.35%	1.0
Career Education Areas	75.25	8.48%	21.0	Health/Physical Education	29.50	3.33%	11.5
Language Arts	74.50	8.40%	35.0	Music Instrumental/Vocal	27.25	3.07%	2.25
Mathematics	66.80	7.53%	47.6	World Language	26.00	2.93%	4.5
Speech Language Pathology	54.80	6.18%	15.8	School Psychologist	20.70	2.33%	17.2
Science	49.50	5.58%	29.0	ESL/ELL	18.10	2.04%	10.5
Early Childhood Education	35.00	3.95%	2.0	Social Studies/Social Science	16.00	1.80%	9.0

(Teacher Vacancy Information, Nebraska Department of Education, 2020-2024)

Immediately noticeable is the repetition of certain endorsement areas among the vacancies, with the primary concern being the magnitude of the increase in these vacancies. Specifically, the field of special education has witnessed a remarkable surge in vacancies, escalating from 22 to an astonishing 76.1, marking an increase of more than 245% within a span of four years. Across the board, all endorsement areas have experienced growth in vacancies, identifying one particular area as the most significantly impacted by unfilled positions. Alarmingly, the trend of rising vacancies encompasses nearly all endorsement areas, reflecting a widespread issue of increasing unfilled and vacant positions over four academic years. These results from NDE are proof that we need to look at long term solutions for the trend in which teacher vacancies are increasing.

As mentioned with the national concern, the AASPA 5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage recommends some actions at the state level at shift 5.

Shift 5 State Officials Stakeholder Actions:

- Work-life integration—Using data collection, identify work-life integration and state-level needs. This data can be used to help prepare workforce trends.
- Data-driven Improvement-Collect and share statewide data on educator exits and transfers.
- Internal Ambassadors for Profession- Identify your high performers and allow them to serve as the beacon for promotion of education.

(5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage, AASP)

District Level

The school district being used for the purpose of the study is a midwestern suburban public school district that spans more than 30 square miles of urban and rural regions and encompasses 16 elementary schools, three middle schools, two high schools, and one alternative program. Since gaining accreditation in 2010, the district has served a community of over 12,000 students with a workforce exceeding 1,700 employees, and it is experiencing consistent growth (District Overview, 2023).

Historically, the district has fared better than many others across the state in filling teaching positions. However, looking ahead to the 2023-2024 academic year, the district acknowledges facing challenges similar to statewide trends in recruiting for specific areas such as special education, math, science, and world languages. These areas remain a priority, with concerted efforts underway to devise strategic solutions. For instance, the district is proactively identifying potential special education teachers among its current paraprofessionals, collaborating with nearby colleges to offer them the chance to work while pursuing a teaching degree in special education in the evenings.

In February 2020, the strategic planning team of this district, consisting of staff, community members, students, and families, wrapped up a three-day Strategic Planning Session aimed at forging a path to excellence and beyond. The session began with an in-depth analysis of the district's internal strengths, external opportunities, and challenges. Following this, the group crafted belief statements to propel the districts forward and revised the district's mission statement (Strategic Plan, 2022). The strategic planning team's work to develop three strategic goals that would help to navigate coming

years with areas including teaching and learning, mental health, and a focus on human resources and a focus of hiring and retaining staff.

Strategic goal three was explicitly written as a goal to recruit, develop, and retain while providing all students with a highly qualified staff that will foster a positive environment based in relationships. The action teams focused on a number of areas, including strategic goals, specifically retention. Several action steps have developed because of this very important strategic goal, and a stay interview is an impactful action step that would be an effort towards the retention of staff and, as a secondary effort, recruit staff that may feel they need to be heard in their position. Stay interviews provide immediate, actionable information, offering insights into engaging and retaining employees, especially top talent. They position leaders to develop tailored retention strategies actively (Finnegan, 2018).

The district's efforts have been an ongoing example of how it is being proactive on education shortage. AASPA 5 Shift to Address the National Educator Shortage includes recommendations and stakeholder actions from a PK-12 District and Educational Organization standpoint and they are as follows:

Shift 5 PK-12 Districts & Education Organizations Stakeholder Actions:

- Customer Service-Increase transparency and improve sharing of data as well as development of programs and onboarding experiences that attract candidates as well as a mainstream efficient way to get questions answered regarding preparation programs.
- Work-life Integration-Educate and promote work-life balance where employees can work, but still put the attention needed on their personal responsibilities.

- Data-Driven Improvements- List and collect current staff's and incoming staff's feedback to help improve future preparation programs as well as praise points and pain points. Conduct stay interviews and exit surveys to gain insight into why staff are choosing to stay or leave districts.

- Internal Ambassadors for the Profession- Implement an employee referral program and educate and empower educators to be ambassadors for their organization/district.

Section II-Organizational Behaviorism Theory/History

To understand the impact of stay interviews and the benefit they can have on existing educators, educators sense of value, and educators sense of belonging it is important to explore the heritage of the different organizational behaviorism theories and studies that these ideas originated from. "Organizational behavior is a field of study that investigates the impact individuals, groups, and structure have on behavior within organizations for the purpose of applying such knowledge toward improving an organization's effectiveness" (Robbins, p. 2 2016). This theory originated from the fields of psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, and economics (Borkowski, 2016).

The beginnings of behavioral organization theory can be traced back as far as the 1700s, during the Industrial Revolution times, when factories were employing large numbers of employees. Managers during that time had concerns with the efficiency and productivity of the work their employees were performing and began to look at methods to increase productivity (Borkowski and Meese, 2020). As time went by, different types of behavioral organizational theories evolved. In 1911, a gentleman by the name of

Frederick Taylor developed a well-known framework of scientific management or "Taylorism" as it was referred to then; the purpose of this framework or theory was to increase efficiency, human energy, and other productive resources (Borkowski and Meese, 2022). To provide and example of behavioral organization theory Taylor established four principles entitled the Management Theory of Frederick Taylor and they are as follows:

1. Each element of work can (and should) have a science to it.
2. Employers should select, train and develop employees using a scientific approach.
3. Employees and employers must collaborate.
4. Employers should divide work and responsibilities among employees. (Sean, 2023)

In the opening of Frederick Taylor's book "Principles of Scientific Management " published in 1911, he states that the principal object of management should be to secure the maximum prosperity for the employer, coupled with the maximum prosperity for the employee (Taylor, 1911). Since Taylor's influential book and theory were published, there has been considerable expansion and further investigation into organizational behavior theories.

The research will show that there were two primary periods of time when in relation to organizational theory and that each category can be categorized or classified into two historical periods, including:

1. Classical Organizational Theory

2. Behaviorist Period

(Chance, 2009)

Classical Organizational Theory

The early stages of organizational behaviorism theory or classical organizational thought can be traced back to the late 1800s to early 1900s by Frederick Taylor, who was also a mechanical engineer and authored the book "Principles of Scientific Management," a book that was published in 1911. Taylor is often referred to as the father of Scientific Management (Ward, 2021). Taylor put forward that deficiencies within a work process could be systematically addressed via enhanced management techniques, asserting that optimizing the execution of tasks is the most effective means to boost labor productivity. The principles Taylor introduced for enhancing worker efficiency remain evident in contemporary organizational practices to this day (Masterclass, 2021). "What we are all looking for, however, is the ready-made, competent man, the man whom someone else has trained. It is only when we fully realize that our duty, as well as our opportunity, lies in systematically cooperating to train and to make this competent man, instead of in hunting for a man whom someone else has trained that we shall be on the road to national efficiency" (Taylor, 1911, p. 6). This quote from Frederic Taylor could be concluded to align with the purpose of the stay interview and with the primary purpose of investing your professional development and training into your current teachers and staff. Taylor's early recognition of the importance of tapping into and retaining employee talent clearly foreshadowed the development of theories in organizational behavior that would follow, showcasing his foresight and influence on the field. Another contributor in the classical organizational period was work that was done by a gentleman named Henri Fayol from

the time of 1916 to 1949. Fayol's work expanded on Frederick Taylor's view of management and focused on the upper level of management. Fayol believed that organizational efficiency could result in issues of planning, organizing, commanding, coordination, and controlling being used in management positions (Chance, 2009). Dr. Patti Chance, author of Introduction to Educational Leadership and Organizational Behavior, believes that these early periods are still very much embedded in the school organizational structure today.

Behaviorist Period

The next era of impact that would be influential and impactful when it came to organizational behavior would be the period from the 1930s & 1940s. The Hawthorne studies took a closer look into the work that Taylor started and be considered the start of a new error of organizational theory called the behaviorist period on were a man by the name of Elton Mayo, a professor out of Harvard University, conducted experiments that used experimental groups on how illumination or lighting impacted work production. The experiment was staged and initiated in 1924 in Chicago, Illinois, with the Western Electric Company and the use of a variation of lighting that was thought to impact the productivity of workers (Wickstrom and Bendix, 2000). The experiment tested if altered work environments impacted work productivity. This experiment concluded that productivity increased regardless of whether lighting was increased, decreased, or held constant. These results could pave the way for subsequent longitudinal studies, where various factors like rest breaks, workday duration, and other working conditions are adjusted. The outcomes of these studies closely mirrored those of the initial lighting experiments carried out at the Western Electric Company (Chance, 2009). Dr. Chance,

Author and Professor and Coordinator for The M. Ed. in Educational Policy and

Leadership, concludes that two themes were developed and merged during the

behaviorist period. The first approach identified was the human relations orientation,

highlighting the significance of an organization's informal frameworks, social dynamics,

and the morale and satisfaction of workers. It suggested that individuals are more

productive when they receive positive treatment. The second insight gained was the

behavioral science approach, emphasizing the conduct of individuals within an

organization's formal structure and integrating concepts from classical organizational

theory with psychology, sociology, political science, and economics (Chance, 2009).

Dr. Chance highlights that while the contributions of theorists in the late 19th

century and the first half of the 20th century significantly improved working conditions

and environments by emphasizing the human aspect for employees, these analyses and

considerations overlooked the external environment impacting the workforce.

Furthermore it is important to explore and discuss the work of a more recent

pioneer in the area of more organizational theory by the name of Dr. Peter Senge. Dr.

Senge has led the field of organizational learning since his seminal work, The Fifth

Discipline, was published in 1990. Dr. Senge is seen as a leader when it comes to

organizations and systems thinking (MIT Sloan, 2019). Peter Senge's work highlights five

disciplines that he views as practices that offer genuine assistance when dealing with the

ongoing issues and pressures of the educational world today (Senge, 2000). Those five

disciplines are as follows:

1. Personal Mastery

2. Mental Models

3. Shared Vision

4. Team Learning

5. Systems Thinking

Personal mastery according to Senge (2020) is a discipline that involves individuals continuing to clarify and deepen their personal vision. The discipline encourages and promotes continuous improvement. Mental models are the discipline of reflection and inquiry aimed at fostering awareness of both your own attitudes and perceptions, as well as those of the people around you. Another discipline, entitled shared vision focuses on common goals that provide focus and energy learning. This discipline involves influencing and encouraging employees' personal visions and emphasizes the importance of contributing to that vision for the benefit of the group as a whole. Team learning is another of the disciplines that Senge lays out as a key component of organizational success. This discipline focuses on the importance of dialogue and group collaboration to improve collective thinking. Team discipline can help to build on both personal mastery and shared vision and can influence the team to develop new understandings. The fifth discipline deals with systems thinking and how educators learn to better comprehend interdependency and change, and as a result are able to step back to see the larger picture (Senge, 2000). Dr. Senge explains in his book, The Fifth Discipline that these core disciplines can be viewed as a three legged stool. He supports this by explaining that the core learning capabilities for teams serves as the seat portion of the stool, each of the legs representing the support system. One of the legs is the aspiration that includes both the personal mastery and the shared vision, the second leg of the stool represents reflective conversation and includes both mental models and dialogue, the third

leg of the stool represents understanding complexity that involves systems thinking. All three of the legs of the stools, or in this case the core disciplines are vital and without either one the stool will not be supported (Senge, 2006). All five disciplines are instrumental in effective and successful education institutes. Dr. Senge's work with the disciplines will be further explored with some of the themes discovered during the participants' interviews as well as in chapter five when I reflect and give implications and professional recommendations.

Section III: The Importance of Research and Discoveries Regarding Employee Retention and the Impact of Stay Interviews

Turnover or lack of retention is not only a costly process; it is estimated that the total cost of replacing an employee can range from 70% to 400% of an employee's annual salary (Kaye and Jordan-Evans, 2015). Specifically, the financial burden of replacing teachers can be significant, with estimates suggesting that the cost can exceed $20,000 for every departing teacher. Furthermore, turnover affects the educational outcomes of every student in a school, beyond just those assigned to a new teacher, by undermining school stability, damaging collegial bonds, hindering collaboration, and eroding the accumulation of institutional knowledge (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond, 2017).

A significant component of this research involves orchestrating and executing stay interviews with a cohort of principals who were unfamiliar with this method before participating in this stay-interview focus group. In January 2023, this technique was introduced to principals across all educational levels (PK-12) as a proactive measure to retain existing teachers. It involves one-on-one discussions with teachers to understand their reasons for staying, explore ways the administration can enhance their working

conditions and manage their workload, and further emphasize the critical importance of cultivating strong workplace relationships. Stay interviews offer three advantages that exit surveys typically lack: they yield actionable information for immediate use, offer insights into how to engage and retain employees, especially high achievers, and position leaders to proactively create personalized retention strategies (Finnegan, 2018). Among the benefits of these short five-question one-on-one meetings they also help to identify current problems, help to build trust and loyalty, and retain your top talent in your schools. These benefits from meeting with teachers and staff help the principal when it comes to finding solutions to alleviate any current or ongoing issues that are occurring (Test, 2021). The increasing popularity of stay interviews reflects a shift in leadership focus towards understanding the unique experiences of each employee, moving away from a broad, generalized view of employee desires. By asking questions that pinpoint an employee's specific likes, loves, and dislikes about their current role, employers are empowered to take proactive measures (Hall, 2022).

A critical aspect of the stay interview approach is the significant influence and impact principals have when they personally conduct these interviews. The format is intended for the principal or organizational leader to carry out the interview directly with the employee in a one-on-one setting. It's understandable that communication is the foundation of any strong relationship between an employee and their principal, manager, or supervisor. Regular communication helps employees feel more engaged, and they appreciate when their principal, manager, or leader takes an interest not only in their professional duties but also in their personal lives outside of work. Exceptional leaders possess the ability to motivate and inspire employees and build authentic connections

with them (Gallup, 2019). Dr. Richard P. Finnegan is the CEO of C-Suite Analytics and is considered one of the experts in the field of conducting stay interviews states that "stay interviews build trust and leadership who ask, listen, act, and communicate honestly strengthen trust with their employees, the absolute most important supervisory skill for increasing engagement and retention" (Finnegan, p. 24, 2018). Dr. Finnegan's book "The Power of Stay Interviews for Engagement and Retention" discusses in Chapter 4 the essential ingredients of stay interviews and breaks down what he refers to as the "Stay Interview Ingredients." The components included in the diagram as follows:

1. Core Features

2. Preparation Activities

3. Administrative Support

4. Manager Training

When working with nine leaders from various school buildings, these four fundamental elements were a central point of attention. Together, as a focus group, we engaged in an in-depth exploration of what each component involves, reaching a shared comprehension of how to implement them consistently. This approach was aimed at generating actionable recommendations for our future direction and would later be referred to as phase I-V when training principals.

Core Features:

Dr. Finnegan emphasizes in his stay interview framework that such interviews should be conducted by organizational leaders, specifically identifying principals as the non-negotiable interviewers for their respective buildings. To enhance the personal and intimate nature of these discussions, the interviews ought to be held on a one-on-one

basis, rather than in the context of grade-level team meetings, departmental gatherings, or full staff meetings. While it might be argued that employee surveys fulfill a similar function to stay interviews, conducting these interviews one-on-one with as many employees as possible yields richer insights for leadership to act upon (Proctor, 2023). Finnegan continues by stating that part of the core features is making sure the interview is conducted in person and not via phone or remotely, this may require planning accordingly and in advance to meet with someone who may be an employee that travels or is not always available in your building, such as a school psychologist or district specialist.

The next step in the process is planning and scheduling the interviews ahead of time. This is important and was replicated in Phase I or the focus groups conducted with the school district that participated in these. "Stay interviews should focus on identifying specific improvements that raise employees' levels of engagement and retention and should not morph into telling employees ways they can perform better" (Finnegan, p. 26, 2018). Dr. Finnegan concludes this section by emphasizing that participating members should not be sent the questions ahead of time and should be asked at the moment to focus on probing when staff answers each of the questions. It is recommended that these interviews have a consistent opening with setting the purpose and goal of the stay interview.

Preparation Activities

The preparatory phase encompasses activities related to initiating and organizing stay interviews. Participants agreed to hold a staff meeting to uniformly introduce the concept and purpose of stay interviews across all buildings. This phase, evaluated during phase II focus groups with principals, determines the target audience for these interviews.

While the ultimate aim is to conduct stay interviews for all employees, it's advisable to begin with a specific group. In this phase, principals were tasked with selecting high-performing teachers they trust to answer five predetermined questions candidly. Dr. Finnegan recommends arranging these interviews in advance to ensure that both teachers and principals can allocate time for them in their schedules. This enables effective planning for the week ahead and ensures sufficient time is allotted for the interviews. Additionally, this phase emphasizes the importance of establishing a preliminary plan for follow-up actions.

Administrative Support

The administrative support element entails providing principals with the necessary materials for conducting the interviews. These resources comprise collaborative environment norms, the recommended five stay interview questions, a stay interview response sheet, and a document outlining common themes and patterns. The interview questions were presented to the principals and any feedback on the questions was taken, as well as revisited after the first initial interview. The structure of the questions and follow-up probes are a product of Dr. Finnegan and have proven to be effective in strong conversations. The questions can be found in Figure 2 below. They were distributed via a shared folder for principals to access during their interviews.

Figure 2: The Stay Interview Questions and Probing Follow-Up Questions

Stay Interview Questions

1.	What do you look forward to each day when you commute to work? ☐ Give me an example ☐ Tell me more about ☐ Who do you look forward to working with the most?
2.	What are you learning here, and what do you want to learn? ☐ What other grade levels or positions look attractive to you? ☐ What skills do you think are acquired for those jobs? ☐ What skills would you have to build to attain those jobs or some responsibilities of those jobs?
3.	Why do you stay here? ☐ Tell me why this is so important to you? ☐ Is that the only reason you stay or are there others? ☐ If you narrowed your reasons to stay to just one, what would it be?
4.	When was the last time you thought about leaving us, and what prompted it? ☐ Tell me more about how that happened? Who said what? ☐ What's the single best thing I can do to make that better for you? ☐ How important is that to you now on a scale of 1-10?
5.	What can I do to make your job better for you? ☐ Do I tell you when you do something well? ☐ Do I say and do things to help you do your job better? ☐ What are three ways I can be a better principal for you?

Manager Training

This phase of the process held significant importance, as emphasized during the initial all-administration meeting in January. The meeting covered the concept of stay interviews, the underlying research, and their associated benefits. A sign-up sheet was circulated among principals to gauge interest, ensuring representation across all levels K-12, which was successfully achieved. Following identifying and finalizing the focus group, we strategically scheduled five meetings, termed phases, to guide participants through the retention process. These meetings provided time for principals to prepare and establish how their stay interviews would look and feel. It allowed for them to review and select questions they felt would best give them information to help move buildings forwards and get an understanding for what teachers value. Additionally, this phase

involved participating principals presenting their findings to other PK-12 principals and

administrators during district-wide human resources admin meetings.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Analyzing national and state-level data on teaching shortages is vital to grasping

the scope of the issue and formulating successful retention solutions. Through thoroughly

examining data, educators and stakeholders can pinpoint trends and areas with the most

pressing teacher shortages. This critical information is indispensable for implementing

innovative retention strategies and cultivating a supportive environment, ensuring the

success of our teachers. Now, more than ever, this analysis is crucial for advancing

toward a stable and qualified teaching workforce, guaranteeing a high-quality education

for future generations of public educators.

Research Question

This study's research query is: How does the stay interview impact the future of retaining

educators?

Research Design: Qualitative

Creswell defines qualitative research as an "inquiry approach useful for exploring and

understanding central phenomena. To learn about the phenomenon, the inquirer asks

participants broad, general questions, collects the detailed views of the participant in the

form of words or images, and analyzes the information for description and themes. From

this data, the researcher interprets the meaning of the information, drawing on personal

reflections and past research" (Creswell, 2012, p 626). Creswell states that several

elements should be true when best determining if your study fits the qualitative research

criteria. Among those elements I am going to touch on are reporting the voices of

participants, going out to the setting to collect data, focusing on a small number of people

or sites, lifting up the silent voices of marginalized groups or populations, and creating multiple perspectives or views (Creswell, 2016).

- Reporting the Voices: the research included seven schools encompassing a range of teacher job titles and varying years of experience.

- Going Out to the Setting for Data: The participating building principals in this study collected data from various geographic areas within the district, diverse demographics, and across different age categories of students.

- Focus on a Small Number of People and Sites: The research conducted included a subset of the schools within the Midwestern School District and included principal-selected teachers.

- Empower Unheard Voices: The research incorporated carefully crafted questions to amplify the voices of teachers and aid principals in recognizing common themes and strategies to improve working conditions.

Adopting a qualitative research approach seemed fitting to comprehend the effects of a regularly practiced approach involving principals collaborating closely with teachers to enhance the work climate. Creswell (2013) defines qualitative research as an inquiry approach useful for exploring and understanding a central phenomenon. To learn about this phenomenon, the inquirer asks participants broad, general questions, collects the detailed view of participants in the form of words, and analyzes the information for description and themes" (Creswell, p. 626, 2013). Qualitative research requires that people approach research from a perspective that may be different than what they have previously learned (Creswell, 2016). Fossey, Harvey, McDermot, and Davidson (2002) stress that qualitative research aims to give privilege to the research participants.

Participants' outlook have been authentically represented in the research process and their views made from information gathered.

Qualitative Research Approach: Phenomenological/Phenomenography

"Phenomenological study describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or phenomenon" (Creswell, 2013, p. 76). The findings presented in this research include the feelings and recollections of the participants' experiences during the focus group as well as their findings and experienced emotions during this small study. The data was gathered through direct participant interviews, reflective sessions, and data collection conducted during five-phase focus group meetings. Those under study must possess firsthand experience with the phenomenon, and the group size can range from 3-15 individuals (Creswell, 2016).

According to Savin-Biden "phenomenologists seek not only to uncover what individuals experience but also how they experience the phenomenon" (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013, p. 215). The study participants were unfamiliar with this retention approach, yet they were interested in conducting stay interviews. They aimed to gain a deeper understanding of their staff, enhance retention, and ultimately improve the overall climate of their educational building during challenging times. All participants had accumulated significant leadership experience before consenting to take part in the study. The insights derived from these interviews and experiential findings emerged from the trust established among participants in the focus groups and the fieldwork they individually conducted within their respective buildings over the course of several weeks.

Savin-Baden and Major inform us that within phenomenology there are three different types that are commonly referred to and as follows: transcendental

phenomenology, hermeneutic phenomenology, and phenomenography. This particular study would have more of an emphasis on phenomenography in the way that the "researcher does not seek to describe things as they are but, instead, attempt to characterize how things appear to people" (Savin-Baden and Major, p. 218, 2013). This essentially is listening and learning about individuals' understanding of their learning, and in this case what their understanding of the current school environment workload and day to day struggles with being in education.

In summary, a phenomenological phenomenography approach was adopted to explore the collective experience of principals engaging in focus groups. During these sessions, they conducted stay interviews with educators in their assigned buildings, offering feedback and reflections on their encounters with this retention strategy. A number of participants disseminated their experiences and discoveries to fellow administrators and principals across elementary, middle, and high school levels. The intention behind sharing these experiences was to advocate for the recognition of stay interviews as a valuable retention tool within their respective school environments.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, I have a lot of passion when it comes to retaining highly effective educators. In my capacity as a researcher, I bring 16 years of diverse roles in education, spanning from paraprofessional and teacher to assistant principal, principal, and human resource director. My undergraduate studies encompassed a K-6 elementary education endorsement, and I taught 2nd and 5th grades for a total of 6 years across two suburban school districts. During my teaching tenure, I pursued and obtained a master's degree in educational administration PK-8. Starting as an assistant

principal/CADRE associate, I oversaw a K-6 elementary school, mentored new teachers, and collaborated with a local university on seminars for successful first-year teaching experiences. After a year in the assistant principal/CADRE associate role, I assumed the position of principal, serving in this capacity for two different elementary schools, including the opening of our district's 16th elementary school. In my present position, I hold the role of Director of Human Resources for the same district, where I serve as the human resource representative for the district's classified staff.

Participant Selection

The phenomenological study focused on participants who had various years of experience ranging from 2 to 11 years in their principalship. A total of five principals and four assistant principals participated in the study. Savin-Baden and Major state that as few as two to four participants, but the fewer the participants, the more one begins to question the validity of the study. However, too many participants in a study can create difficulty in the completion of the study and interview process (2013). The participants in the study come from the midwestern and serve in the same suburban school district in the same geographical area. In participant selection, ensuring diversity was crucial, encompassing various genders, school-age experiences, and representation from principals in schools with different socioeconomic backgrounds.

The study included three female assistant principals, three female principals, one male assistant principal, and two male principals. This group further featured two assistant principals and two principals representing the elementary level, two principals for the middle school level, two assistant principals for the high school level, and one principal from the young adult program ages 18-21. The study included two elementary

schools, two middle schools, two high schools, and one young adult program. Notably, two of these schools held Title I status.

Instruments

A set of semi-structured interview questions will be created and serve as the basis for the research. An appropriate interview platform will be established with input from the participants and their preference on what they are comfortable with. These could vary from face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, online-based video and audio interviews, etc. According to Michael Quinn Patton (2002), The aim of interviewing is to enable us to understand another person's viewpoint. Qualitative interviewing is based on the belief that others' perspectives are valuable, understandable, and can be clearly expressed. We conduct interviews to uncover what someone is thinking and to collect their personal stories.

A focus group interview is a valuable tool for researchers to collect insights into participants' perceptions regarding a specific research area. Essentially, its overarching purpose is to give the researcher a comprehensive understanding of how a group collectively views a particular topic (Savin-Baden and Major, 2013). In addition to interviews, participants convened five times as a focus group throughout the study. During these sessions, detailed discussions took place on the various phases of the study, and comprehensive notes were recorded both during and after each focus group meeting. The following topics were discussed during each phase.

- ○ In *Phase I*, administrators across the district received an introduction to the purpose and significance of stay interviews. This research aligned with the district's strategic goal of recruiting and retaining high-quality staff.

The overview encompassed a review of five pieces of literature endorsing the efficacy of stay interviews as a retention tool. Principals were subsequently prompted to reflect on the strengths, barriers, additional information requirements, and their voluntary interest in implementing these interviews within their respective buildings.

○ In *Phase II*, the focus groups were concluded, delving further into the research on the significance of employee engagement and retention. This phase also emphasized the crucial role of trust in conducting stay interviews and explored the key ingredients and essential components of this experience for both principals and teachers.

○ In *Phase III*, principals assessed their grasp of the essential components of stay interviews, established the physical environment for these sessions, and collaborated on creating a consistently warm and welcoming experience across all seven participating buildings. Norms were established regarding active listening, note-taking, probing, and adherence to company policy. The phase concluded with an analysis of the five selected questions to be posed to the staff.

○ In *Phase IV*, the plan was to assess the initial interviews and identify any necessary adjustments. This phase also provided an opportunity to delve into school engagement data and explore how stay interviews could contribute to improving overall engagement.

○ In *Phase V*, each principal had another opportunity to reflect on their experiences thus far. Guiding questions facilitated this reflection, aiding in

formulating plans based on their interviews and findings. Additionally,

principals identified the pros and cons, preparing to present their findings

to the district administration team.

Data Collection and Analysis

When conducting interviews, I was sure to follow the University of Nebraska

Omaha's guidelines to obtain permission to conduct research. I completed the required

modules for the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI) that the university

requires to be able to conduct research. It was required that I meet the requirements laid

out by the doctorate program and I submitted and was approved through the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) prior to conducting interviews and moving forward with any further

research related to this study.

In addition to university permission, CITI certification, and IRB approval I also

followed the guidelines laid out by my district as it relates to conducting research. Board

policy states any person conducting research projects involving staff, students, or

facilities of the Midwestern School District must submit a request in writing to the

Director of Assessment, and receive approval. This step was taken, submitted and

approval was granted.

Any participants who were part of the study, which included interviews, did

receive both verbal and written consent. The appropriate procedures for seeking consent

by the University of Nebraska-Omaha were followed during this study.

Verification Strategies

It is essential that when conducting research verification or validity strategies are in place to assure and assess the accuracy of the researcher's understanding. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that all research is concerned with ethically producing valid and reliable knowledge. It is important to understand that a variety of validation strategies are used when conducting research. Savin-Biden and Howell Major (2013) list a number of different strategies when it comes to ensuring quality during the research process, including methodological coherence, experience over time, triangulation, audit trail, member checking, peer examination, and negative case analysis. The strategies I plan to use for my study are as follows:

- Triangulation: According to Savin-Biden and Howell Major (2013), triangulation is a cross-examination of multiple points and can include data, investigations, theory, or analysis. This strategy emphasizes using multiple data points when proceeding with the study. This approach will be important, considering there are multiple different participants involved.

- Member Checking: According to Broussard (2023) member checking is a crucial element when ensuring findings. Member checking can be very beneficial enhancing credibility, increasing dependability, improvement in confirmability, and transferability (Broussard, 2023). The primary focus of this study involves a group of principals that expect me to capture their findings accurately and will involve sharing transcripts that are captured from interviews as well as possible draft proposals that involve the participants' input.

- External Audits/Peer Examination: According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), this

  approach is a natural strategy for research candidates who work with a

  dissertation committee. I also have the opportunity to work very closely with a

  handful of colleagues in education who have recently completed their doctorate

  and would serve as peer examiners and provide feedback based on their

  understanding of findings.

Ethical Considerations

Participants in this study were made aware of the intent, and an understanding of

the importance of their confidentiality and privacy was communicated as the utmost

importance. The participants selected and who participated are colleagues that I have a lot

of respect for and who I have worked with for several years. Capturing their input

accurately and authentically was my priority as I progressed with my dissertation.

CHAPTER 4

Findings

The main goal of this study was to assess the impact of stay interviews on retaining educators. Data was collected and analyzed to identify common experiences, patterns, and themes among the participating administrators. The results, presented in this chapter, will be divided into two sections:

Section 1: Research Context

- Research Question

- Interview questions for participants

- Participants profile

Section 2: Emerging Themes/Administrative Reflections

- Emerging themes/Administrative Reflections

  - Theme I: The Power of the Principal Listening

  - Theme II: Importance of Working Relationships with Leadership and Staff

  - Theme III: Positive Culture Matters

  - Theme IV: Feedback and Recognition is Essential

Section 1: Research Context

Research Question

The initial motivation for this study was to explore innovative methods to retain educators and understand the factors that contribute to their decision to remain in their

current roles, as well as the concerns or issues that might lead them to consider leaving the school district or profession. The research question posed is: How can the stay interview impact the future of educator retention?

Interview Questions

A carefully curated set of interview questions was developed for the participating administrators. The purpose of these questions was to capture their insights and experiences through their unique perspectives. In an effort to answer the research question, each participant was given the opportunity to answer the following questions.

1. Can you describe the process you followed for conducting the stay interviews with your staff?

2. How did you prepare yourself and your team for the stay interviews to ensure open and honest communication?

3. What were some of the key themes or concerns that emerged from the stay interviews with your staff?

4. How did conducting stay interviews change your perspective on staff retention and satisfaction?

5. Can you share a specific instance where feedback from a stay interview led to a tangible change or improvement in your school?

6. How did staff members react to the concept and execution of stay interviews? Did you notice any changes in morale or engagement following the interviews?

7. What challenges did you encounter during the stay interview process, and how did you address them?

8. In what ways have stay interviews influenced your leadership style or approach to managing your team?

9. Looking back, is there anything you would change about how the stay interviews were conducted or how the information was utilized?

10. What advice would you give to other principals or school leaders who are considering implementing stay interviews with their staff?

Participants Profiles

The principals who participated in these focus groups were administrators with a general interest in stay interviews, sparked by an informational meeting I held with all district administrators prior to selecting focus group participants. Initially, a large group of principals expressed interest in implementing stay interviews in their buildings and exploring the benefits of these interviews. The participants selected demonstrated a strong interest in stay interviews and represented all levels of the district from K-12. Each principal brings unique experiences and reflects the diverse employee population of the district.

Principal One Profile

Current Position: Young Adult Program Principal/Secondary Special Education Supervisor

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 10 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Principal: 3 Years

Other Educational Experiences: School Psychologist for 7 years

Principal Two Profile

Current Position: Elementary Principal

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 21 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters Degree in Elementary Education/Masters Degree in

Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Principal: 11 Years

Other Educational Experiences: Assistant Principal/CADRE Associate/Elementary

Teacher

Principal Three Profile

Current Position: Elementary Principal

Gender: Male

Number of Years in Education: 13 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters Degree in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Principal: 3 Years

Other Educational Experiences: Assistant Principal/Title I Facilitator/PE Teacher

Principal Four Profile

Current Position: Middle School Principal

Gender: Male

Number of Years in Education: 16 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters Degree in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Principal: 8 Years

Other Educational Experiences: High School Biology & Physical Science/Assistant Principal

Principal Five Profile

Current Position: Middle School Principal

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 22 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Doctorate in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Principal: 7 Years

Other Educational Experiences: High School Math Teacher/Assistant Principal

Principal Six Profile

Current Position: High School Assistant Principal

Gender: Male

Number of Years in Education: 17 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as a Assistant Principal: 5 Years

Other Educational Experiences: Middle School Social Studies Teacher/Coach

Principal Seven Profile

Current Position: Elementary Assistant Principal

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 16 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters Degree in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as an Assistant Principal: 4 Years

Other Educational Experiences: Elementary Teacher/Middle School English Teacher

Principal Eight Profile

Current Position: Elementary Assistant Principal

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 17 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters in Early Childhood Education/Masters in Curriculum &

Instruction/Administration Endorsement

Number of Years as an Assistant Principal: 2 Years

Other Educational Experiences: Headstart Teacher/Elementary Teacher/Early Childhood

Coach/Instructional Coach

Principal Nine Profile

Current Position: High School Assistant Principal

Gender: Female

Number of Years in Education: 19 Years

Highest Degree Earned: Masters Degree in Educational Leadership

Number of Years as an Assistant Principal: 5 Years

Other Educational Experiences: High School English Teacher/Talent Advisor for

Non-Profit Organization/Substitute Teacher/High School English Teacher/Dean of

Students

Section 2: Emerging Themes/Administrative Reflections

The analyzing or coding methods used to identify themes from the interviews

started with the inductive approach. Dr. Andrea Bingham, author of "A Practical Guide

to Theoretical for Social Science Research" and Director of the University of Colorado's

Educational Leadership for Equity and Justice states that inductive coding is a common

strategy where the researcher reviews the collected data, including participant responses, and allows codes to naturally emerge, naming the concepts that arise. It can often help to make sense of the data, develop themes and findings, identify representative data to support findings, and explain findings using theory and literature (Bingham, 2020). This approach was beneficial when taking a large amount of dialogue transcript with a range of different philosophies and experiences. Dr. John W. Creswell explains the process of coding transcripts with eights steps that include: the setup, reading through each text, coding each of the text, listing all of the codes, grouping the codes, writing a theme passage, creating a conceptual map of the themes, and finally developing a narrative story (Creswell, 2016). Both of these approaches helped me to narrow down the main themes that would emerge from my interview data. The inductive process took a large amount of time and required close observation and analysis at each of the semi-structured interview questions and the participants' responses. It was very beneficial to view and listen to the interviews several times with the transcript and just highlight and identify broad and early themes that did naturally emerge. This approach helped me to identify four key themes that came out of the text that included; the power of the principal listening to staff, importance of working relationships with leadership and staff, positive culture matters, and feedback and recognition is essential.

Theme I: The Power of the Principal Listening to Staff

It became apparent early in the interviews that effective listening was something that all participating principals felt was a skill that was crucial when it came to retention of teachers as well as providing insight into ways in which they could improve their schools. Shane Safir, author of the article "Learning to Listen" states that listening is

central to school transformation. It enables leaders to bridge racial, cultural, gender, and socioeconomic divides; collect valuable insights from those directly involved in change; enhance staff capacity through reflective questioning; and propel reform through strong relationships (Safir, 2017). By actively listening, leaders can foster an environment conducive to equitable school transformation and develop the best solutions to problems through a staff-led, homegrown approach (Safir, 2017). Safir offers several reasons why adopting listening is important for leadership.

- Listening helps us tune in to dominant narratives and shift them.
- Listening helps us keep our finger on the pulse of complex change.
- Listening helps leaders stay true to their values in the face of pressure.
- Listening helps leaders model humanity and compassion in the face of trauma.

Several of Safir's reasons for listening are supported through my findings in the semi-structured interviews.

When interviewing Principal Six they offered this insight into the importance of listening to their teachers and stay interviews.

I think from these stay interviews there is just so much more intentionality we can put behind these conversations when it comes to listening to staff. I had a couple of conversations with other administrators, and the administrator mentioned that we must be naive to think that we can change people, and my response to that was it is not about changing people it is about understanding people better. We know the levers we need to pull, we understand maybe, how we could address issues if we really put resources behind it. This experience shaped the way I think about my teachers. The experience

allowed me to see things from the teachers point of view, allowing me to be more empathetic.

 Principal Four provided the following insight into the importance of making time to listen to teachers.

> Stay interviews help to promote that open door policy for staff members to come in and talk to you about things. We need for teachers to understand that it does not always need to be a stay interview when you want to provide feedback or share feedback. It is important, and staff appreciate knowing that you value their opinion. You can listen to them, but know that you may not be able to solve everything, but just giving them the opportunity to get things off their chest.

Principal Two provided a powerful example about how listening helped her to learn that she had a teacher interested in leadership.

> The stay interviews help to solidify how important it is to have ongoing conversations with staff, and how important they are to have especially to help teachers grow professionally. I learned from one of my conversations with a special education teacher that she wanted to get more involved in leadership and become a principal one day. I don't know if I would have ever learned that through post observation conversations or evaluation conversations. So for me as a leader, how do I continue to have those conversations about their goals and it not always be tied to what they are doing in the classroom.

Principal Five discussed further the importance of listening and growing our current

teachers.

> Retention of current staff is really important to me, I take a lot of pride in
>
> helping to support people, to get to whatever their next goal is. So if you want a
>
> director position, or you want to move up in your positions, if you want
>
> administration, whatever their goal is I want to listen and help them get to their
>
> long term goal.

Principal Three provided another example of how stay interviews provided new

knowledge of a specialist teacher and her issues that were not apparent prior to interview.

> I met with a specialty teacher and she was the only one in the building that
>
> does her content area. I learned that, and I would have not known otherwise
>
> because she is a little more reserved and she did not feel like she had enough
>
> collaboration time with other colleagues throughout the district when it came to
>
> her specialty area in English Language Learner. It helped me to set up structures
>
> to help meet those needs, as well as bring that forward when we were planning for
>
> the new school year with her and other similar teachers in different schools.

As part of our interview preparation we discussed as a focus group what it meant

to listen when conducting interviews. Many principals admitted that truly letting go and

listening without interruption, especially when it may be a topic or subject that they felt

passionate about, was difficult. As part of the preparation for the interview we

collectively agreed that we listen without interruption or defending ourselves and

paraphrasing and repeating what you are hearing to check and validate you are listening

and understanding. Peter Senge's book "Schools that Learn, A Fifth Dimension Fieldbook for Educators, Parents, and Everyone Who Cares for Education" discusses listening to others using understanding and empathy. "Some psychologists believe that the ability to listen to another person, to empathize with and to understand another's point of view, is one of the highest forms of intelligent behavior." (Senge, p. 198, 2000). Dr. Senge confirms that paraphrasing ideas being presented by the person you are listening to, while reading any body language, emotion, and or expression is a necessary listening skill.

Theme II: Importance of Working Relationships with Leadership and Staff

Pete Hall, author of "Building Teachers Capacity for Success" reminds us that "one of the most beautiful and poetic aspects of an educator's job is that it involves working with people" (Hall, p. 114, 2008). Hall continues by reminding us that no matter the teacher, they are unique and special individuals complete with an assortment of strengths and areas of opportunities. "If you don't truly know the teachers, you cannot possibly hope to learn their strengths and maximize their potential" (Hall, p. 115, 2008). A second theme that was of significance that came out of the field interviews was the importance of working relationships with leadership and staff. It became apparent very quickly when discussing with each of the principals that participated in these interviews that in order to move the needle at all with your staff an established relationship was of great importance. John Hattie's book entitled "Visible Learning for Teachers" dedicates an entire section of the book to the importance of mind frames for not only teachers, but the importance of this for both school leaders and the systems that are created throughout our school districts. "A major reason why teachers stay in a school or stay in teaching

relates to the support by the school leaders so that teachers can have a positive impact."
(Hattie, p. 174, 2012). Hattie highlights several impactful mind frames within his book
and discusses the impact that each of them have and how crucial they are when it comes
to how we think and run our schools. When it comes to the mind frames and the
importance of working relationships, he discusses one of the mind frames and the
correlation between teachers and leaders and how both of their primary goals when it
comes to positive relationships are essentially the same outcome. Although we all like to
feel that we have very strong relationships with our staff, or if we are a teacher, our
students. As school leaders, we are committed to fostering an environment where
teachers are encouraged to embrace mistakes as learning opportunities. We advocate for
classrooms where students feel secure in making mistakes without fear of judgment, and
as principals, we must extend this philosophy to our interactions with teachers as well.
We must get to a point as leaders where we accept and embrace a safe harbor for
welcoming error (Hattie, 2012).

When interviewing and talking with Principal Two she talked alot about how
fortunate she was to be able to work with a staff that she had been with for 11 years and
to be given the opportunity to continue to deepen and enrich her already established
relationship with them.

My staff has a lot of trust in the vision of our schools' shared leadership
and I value their ideas and allow them to take some of those leadership roles as
well. This was definitely not something that was set up overnight, it takes a long
time to develop and build trusting relationships with your staff. One approach I

take is to set up opportunities for teachers to serve as mentors with other teachers.

There is a lot of positive feedback that comes back from this experience from both

the mentor and the mentee, there is a sense of belonging and I feel the approach is

a big reason for why a lot of my teachers come back year after year.

Principal Three shared a similar experience but added to the importance of working

relationships with staff:

I truly believe that people are the most important factor for student

success. So that's where you put your time. And what a great way to make sure it

happens! Do you want your kids to be successful? You have to invest time in your

people. You have to want to get information, and you have to want to do

something with the information you are receiving, because they expect that. If you

are a servant leader, and you care about your people, it matters.

Principal Six helped to summarize some of the challenges as well as benefits to

deepening relationships and how the stay interviews helped with this.

There are parts of being a principal when you may not feel as connected as

maybe you once did when you were a teacher, and sometimes you can feel

disconnected. Having these one-on-one meetings helped me to feel more

connected and tied to the teachers that I met with. I think back to those

conversations and just feel more connected and closer to them through those short

conversations. I believe people want to stay in places not only because you say

you care about them, but because you show them through the years in your

actions. The interviews have allowed us to be very intentional about getting to know our staff better, and we are even looking at doing these for our staff who are not on the evaluation cycle, but more in the self-directed phase. This will allow us to deepen our relationships with our tenure staff too.

Principal Nine elaborated not only on how dependent she was on the relationships with her staff, but also how her staff were dependent on their relationships with each other in the school.

Teachers and staff really elaborate more on not only liking to work for the district but also that they really enjoyed coming to work and depended on the relationship they have among colleagues in their own buildings and on their school teams. It is refreshing to know that what keeps them coming back to work is the people and many of them mentioned the students that they work with. This just reemphasized to me the importance of building strong relationships within our school and although the work we do is hard we can get through this with meaningful working relationships.

Principal Five talked about a practice she utilized as an effort to impact building relationships and how conducting stay interviews has changed the way she does this practice moving forward.

During my first couple of years I tried to invite each of my staff out for lunch in the summertime, just to have a casual conversation and help to get to know them better. The conversations were never planned and they were much

more of whatever you want to talk about and nothing was off the table. These were just about finding time outside of school to sit down and learn about people. Now because of stay interviews I pick two or three people that I want to purposely connect more with and deepen our working relationship with. I have worked hard to not only meet with them, but be very intentional on my approach when I do meet with them. I take notes and revisit my notes throughout the year, and that is now how I set my year up.

Every principal I worked with emphasized the importance of relationships. While none felt they had fully mastered this aspect, they all agreed that it is crucial to continually deepen these connections and prioritize them at a high level. Motivational speaker and best selling author Jon Gordon reminds us that relationships serve as the pillars that establish strong teams and organizations. He reminds us how communication is an essential foundation in building a great relationship (Gordon, 2017). Joe Sanfelippo and Tony Sinanis, authors of "Hacking Leadership"emphasize the significance of administrators fostering and cultivating healthy, positive relationships that are built on a foundation of trust and respect. (Sanfelippo and Sinanis, 2016). "Relationships rooted in trust, respect, and compassion can take a nice school and make it an extraordinary space where excitement and passion become palpable" (Sanfelippo and Sinanis, p. 19, 2016).

Theme III: Positive Culture Matters

A third important theme that was identified from my analysis of the interview data was that a positive culture matters. Culture reflects how human influence shapes the

environment. At the heart of an organizational culture are the values shared by its members and the guiding principles that direct their behavior (Dongjiao, 2015). A principal/administrator's most crucial role is to help cultivate a positive culture within their school. This culture should inspire and uplift everyone, promote strong relationships and effective teamwork, empower the team to learn and develop, and create an environment where everyone can excel in their work (Gordon, 2018).

Casas (2017) states that an excellent culture is critical in the success of your organization and highlights four core principles of a positive school culture:

1. Champion for All Students-Believe that all kids in your building can succeed.
2. Expect Excellence-All staff must expect excellence from each other and hold this to a high standard.
3. Carry the Banner-All staff must hold their school in a positive manner, and be a positive voice that helps contribute to the great things happening in your building.
4. Be a Merchant of Hope-We get to decide everyday how we want our climate in our building.

All principals discussed culture whether it was related to staff or students in their responses and there was definitely a theme that resonated throughout each of the interviews.

Principal Two shared how she was proud of her culture and this was celebrated in several of her stay interviews.

Some of the things also is a lot of trust in the vision of shared leadership that I value their ideas and allow them to take some of those leadership roles as well. I think that the key thing, the biggest thing that comes back that I gained from the stay interviews is just our culture and climate that we have here in the building. The staff shared that they feel that they have very much a family feeling, and I think that that came out, and how we are, how we work together for the students.

Principal Seven shared that although it was nice to hear that their school felt that their culture was positive, it is always something that needs to be focused on daily.

One of the biggest key themes that kept popping up was the culture of the building and how overall it felt very positive. This was very helpful for us to take that information and make sure that we are continuing to keep that positive culture in the building daily. It was helpful that the teachers that spoke of it gave examples and explained the why behind the culture.

Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) reinforced and emphasized Principal 7's point when they stated that the essence of an effective school culture lies not in grand gestures or major events. Building a strong staff culture isn't about occasional social gatherings or team-building exercises. Instead, it is rooted in the consistent and ongoing practice of habits that model excellence, daily. Bambrick-Santoyo continues by referring to culture as a lather, rinse and repeat strategy. "Staff culture is incredibly fragile. If you don't actively and regularly work to build and mold your staff culture toward your vision, then

the habits your staff develops will be very different from your expectations"

(Bambrick-Santoyo, p. 204, 2012).

Principal Nine talked about being reassured through the stay interview process that their

leadership team were doing some good things in the area of culture and that the teachers

that she interviewed shared those sediments.

> Teachers expressed that they enjoy working, not just for the district, but
>
> specifically for our building. They felt that they came to school specifically for the
>
> people, and whether it was the teachers that they worked with on their team or
>
> their department as well. A lot of the teachers talked about their students and how
>
> they enjoy coming to work daily to work with them.

Principal One who recently moved into her leadership position within two years

discussed strategies that she has worked on to help show that she is there for her teachers.

> I have really tried to do a great job about making sure I am there when I
>
> say I will be there for my teachers. This is very important when it comes to the
>
> challenge of daily schedules in the special education world, as well as being a
>
> support when they are meeting with parents for IEP meetings. As a new person in
>
> this role this has been something I have really strived to do as well as ask how I
>
> can support in different ways.

Principal Four emphasized the importance of staff depending on their students to help

motivate and continue to cultivate the culture of their school.

It was refreshing to hear my staff discuss the kids for their reason for coming to work daily. When it comes to building culture you would think saying kids would be pretty status quo, or generic, but that is a good thing in this instance. You wanna hear that from your teachers and some who hear this or are reading this might think that is a generic answer, but when it comes to the right answers, kids are the right answer for this reason.

Participants continued to emphasize students and colleagues as the driving force behind their culture. This newer principal stated:

My staff were very clear and said over and over again that they do what they do for their students and their colleagues. The job is hard everyday but we continue to work for the students and colleagues. If it wasn't for sharing ideas and collaborating with colleagues the job would be even more challenging.

Excellent cultures take work and practice conducted by both adults and children (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012). When it comes to getting a feel or read on your culture, Deal and Peterson (2003) remind leaders that it takes different forms such as watching, sensing, listening, interpreting, and using intuition. "Every school is a repository of unconscious sentiments and expectations that carry the code of the collective dream-the high ground to which they aspire. This represents emerging energy that leaders can tap and a deep belief system to which he or she can appeal when articulating what the school might become" (Deal and Peterson, p. 86, 2003).

Theme IV: Feedback and Recognition is Essential

The final theme that emerged from the data collected from participants was how essential feedback and recognition was from leadership. It seemed that although all participants had different ways in which they do this, it was apparent that the educators they met with indicated that it was important and essential for the growth and retention of teachers. Jimmy Casas discusses in his book Culturize (2017) the importance of how our interactions with and feedback to teachers matters and states that educators who take on the responsibility of leadership and dedicate countless hours to making a meaningful difference in their school communities. The experiences of our students and colleagues are heavily influenced by our actions and communication within the school environment. It's not just the content of our words, but the manner in which we convey them that matters. Sometimes, what we leave unsaid can foster mistrust or, even more damaging, contribute to a negative experience for those we are responsible for leading and serving. Robert Evans (2001) suggests that one of the most effective and inexpensive methods to boost performance, morale, and foster a positive environment for change is to significantly increase meaningful recognition among educators.

One of our newer principals discussed learning early the importance of feedback when it comes to educators.

> You have to have a passion for wanting to keep your teachers. You have to have a passion for wanting to grow and retain your staff. One of the primary focuses needs to be on giving educators the feedback they deserve, they crave it, and want to know what they are doing is making a difference, or what they can

improve on to make more of a difference. The feedback I got from my stay

interviews related to stay interviews and the impact it can make on our teachers

inspires me to want to continue to get into the classroom, leave a note with some

positive feedback, even if it's more of an informal interaction within the hallways

it matters.

Hall and Simeral (2008) discuss the nature of leadership's feedback and highlight four

major areas that they can fall within:

Positive Comments: This approach can be as simple as a verbal compliment or

recognition of how you might have seen them interact with a student or the way in which

they addressed a student during a walk through of their classroom. Hall & Simeral say

that this approach can go a long way in establishing strong relationships when the

delivery is genuine.

General or Specific Observations: This approach is a little more of a formal approach and

may require making a note to yourself to later discuss with the teacher, these can be very

general and be as simple as an observation you made while walking through or spending

time in the classroom. These approaches are intended to be non evaluative in nature and

only require the observation and not the opinion of what the administrator felt about it.

General or Specific Suggestions: This approach is with the purpose of improvement or

reinforcement of what you might have seen while observing a lesson or interaction with

the educator and student. This approach can be positive and used to reinforce a strategy

or teaching method you felt was impactful or has a high effect size on the students. This

approach, when specific examples are used, can serve to redirect or give an alternative

suggestion to what should be considered moving forward to have more of an impact on the educator's work.

Prompts: This approach is designed to provide the educator with a little more in depth thinking about the prompt presented. This allows the teacher to be more reflective and may not always require a direct immediate response to the administrator. In this category the principal or leader may prompt a question on classroom management, or a small group suggestion on how maybe the teacher could have better engaged the group or class in a particular activity.

Dufour and Marzano (2011) encourage us to remember that effective leaders help those they lead more capable by helping them become more capable. They continue by discussing the importance of empowering those around us, not by exerting a superior feeling of knowledge, but rather empowering them because you made them, being successful in their work a priority and commitment. "Believe in others more than they believe in themselves, it's amazing what people will accomplish when they know you believe in them!" (Gordon, p. 115, 2017).

An experienced principal who leads in the secondary world talked about his continued focus at not only getting better at providing feedback, but also with following through with the feedback you are given educators.

The accountability piece is huge for me when it comes to feedback and following up with the suggestions you are given. It is important that we are making it a point to get in and recognize those great teachers who are putting the work in day after day, but also being accountable as a principal to provide

feedback and direction to those teachers who may be skirting by a little, or maybe not being as impactful as they could be. It is important to me that teachers know that their availability and their conversations matter to me, it's about making sure that I am impacting them as teachers, and essentially this improvement overall helps our building. These stay interviews have helped to open up some of these conversions and allowed teachers to talk about themselves instead of always talking about their students.

Another one of the secondary principals discussed the importance of feedback, and emphasized making sure that people are heard and that we are direct when delivering it.

I'm a person that really likes feedback, too. Many or my teachers appreciate a more direct approach, and as a principal you need to be willing to hear the hard stuff when you are asking for feedback. I don't want an Oreo cookie approach with this, meaning that it doesn't tell me what I need to do in the middle and then end with a positive, I feel that some people just want to know that they need to get better in areas or an area.

In discussions with Principal Six he worked a lot more with newer teachers and his insight into what recognition and feedback teachers at this phase or stage of their career may be a little different.

My feedback with our newer teachers can tend to be a little different depending on where they are in their career, but also where they are in life. Some of our newer teachers are not aware of what a healthy or

good culture looks like in a school, and are even just trying to figure out the balance between working a career and their lives. Many of the teachers I worked with were just getting their own car for the first time, getting married or maybe just having a child for the first time. So a lot of my conversations with people in relation to feedback was really emphasizing that we care for you as a person first, before we even start talking about instruction. So when it comes to feedback as a leader, we need to recognize those parts of teachers' lives and be willing to remember, for some of us that is where we were at one point, life moves fast.

Principal Eight discussed her experience with teachers and their need for feedback. She is a newer principal to the field and was positively overwhelmed by the teachers who sought feedback and recognition.

Every person I met with for my stay interview and talked with expressed how they welcomed administration in their classroom. They welcomed any kind of coaching that I may be able to provide to help and also for them to be seen in their role with students daily. More importantly they wanted us to share in their successes and be able to celebrate with not only them, but with their students and the work they were doing daily. I found that teachers are ready for this in our case, and that they are ready for the feedback to move them forward.

Principal Nine also shared a similar experience with the other participants in regards to the importance of feeling valued, seen, and appreciated.

These stay interviews really helped remind me that even when teachers are not in the evaluation process, they still are seeking feedback, feeling connected with their administrator, feeling valued, appreciated, and most importantly heard. It was really great to be reminded of how much teachers value that time with leadership and it has served as a reminder how important relationships are within our roles.

Michael Fullan emphasizes loving your employees in his introduction of the book Educational Leadership he states that "if you build your organization by focusing on your customers without making the same careful commitment to your employees, you won't succeed for long" (Grogan, p. 214, 2013). This sediment is also echoed in Gordan's words "Good Leaders know their vision and purpose. Great leaders also know and love their people" (Gordon, p. 103, 2017).

CHAPTER 5

IMPLICATIONS & PROFESSIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter will explore insights, experiences, and professional recommendations for district human resource departments, district leadership, and school administrators who seek to understand, investigate, and implement stay interviews as a strategy for retaining educators. The chapter's findings are based on this researcher's reflections from this qualitative study.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze the future impact of the stay interview on retaining educators. A focus group was utilized to explore this phenomenon through the experiences of nine participating principals from elementary (4 participants), middle school (2 participants), high school (2 participants), and our young adult program-18-21 year olds (1 participant). Data was collected in a variety of different ways. The first approach was through visiting with participants in the focus group and recording their findings and reflections over several a month period of time through a comprehensive five phase process discussed in chapter three. The next effort on data collection was conducted through interviews and follow up conversations. The interviews lasted approximately 60 mins and were conducted individually through an online method. Upon completion of the interviews a thorough review was done to identify and create themes that emerged as a result of the interviews. All participants were given the freedom to share their experiences and findings with the stay interview they conducted and how their experience was received with the teachers selected in the study. The interviews and research was developed around the research question of how

the stay interview impacts the future of retaining educators and participants in the study were made aware of the research question.

Validation Process Revisited

The validation process of this qualitative research was essential in assuring that the information being presented and shared captured accurately what the participants' experience and reflections were. In an effort to validate the study a number of strategies were used including triangulation, member checking, external audits, and peer examination.

- The triangulation strategy was crucial in ensuring the use of multiple data sources to provide a more comprehensive qualitative study. This approach incorporated a focus group, participant interviews, a literature review, and thematic findings, all supported by extensive research from leading experts in each of the discovered themes' fields.
- Member checking was employed to verify with participants that the information gathered was both valid and accurate. After each interview, a detailed transcript was provided to participants for their review. They had the opportunity to examine all questions and discussions from our session and confirm whether the conversation was accurately captured. If clarification was required, follow-up conversations or emails were conducted.
- External audits and peer reviews were conducted frequently throughout the course of this qualitative study. The peers involved were highly respected administrators or college professors in their respective fields, all of whom had earned their

doctoral degrees. Meetings with my committee chair occurred every three weeks, focusing on work progress, leading researchers in various fields, feedback on ongoing research, and recommendations for additional research to thoroughly support my research question. Alongside these regular meetings, I engaged in discussions with colleagues who had recently completed their doctoral degrees. These conversations provided valuable advice from their personal research experiences, feedback on my current work, and guidance based on their prior challenges and successes.

Summary of Findings

Comparison of Findings to the Literature

The results of this research confirmed and were consistent with prior studies on employee retention and the factors influencing why educators remain in their roles. The theoretical framework introduced in chapter one emphasized job embeddedness as a key model, offering a more in-depth understanding of the reasons individuals stay with their organization and community. While an employee may experience immediate relief after resigning, the decision to leave a job is typically challenging and stressful due to the personal toll of uncertainty, adapting to new circumstances, and the disruption of established social connections (Holtom et al, 2006). Additionally, the behaviorism theory discussed in chapter two reinforces the themes that surfaced in the principals interviews, particularly aligning with Dr. Peter Senge's Fifth Discipline concepts, including personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking. "If you want to improve a school system, before you change the rules, look first to the ways that

people think and interact together. Otherwise, the new policies and organizational structures will simply fade away, and the organization will revert, over time, to the way it was before" (Senge, p. 19, 2000).

The results and findings of this study included experiences and input from building principals and aligned with themes that emerged from the interviews.

- Theme I: The Power of the Principal Listening
- Theme II: Importance of Working Relationships with Leadership and Staff
- Theme III: Positive Culture Matters
- Theme IV: Feedback and Recognition is Essential

The Power of the Principal Listening

This study provides a number of examples shared by principals from all levels K-12 in relation to the importance of their staff feeling heard to move them and the building forward. Senge defines personal mastery (2006) as the discipline of consistently refining and expanding one's personal vision, directing one's energy with focus, cultivating patience, and perceiving reality with clarity and objectivity. The discipline of team learning begins with open dialogue, where members are able to set aside their assumptions and engage in collective thinking and problem-solving together (Senge, 2006). Jon Gordon emphasizes that most teams and working relationships falter due to ineffective communication. Despite having more tools to communicate, the quality of our interactions has diminished, leading to a decline in relationships, teamwork, engagement, and overall performance (Gordon, 2017).

Conclusions from this study suggested that listening was essential for the success of the individual educator as well as the building as a whole. Study participants shared their experiences and understanding that when principals are available for conversations trust is built and a true open door policy can exist, where it becomes just part of the culture of the building. The philosophy of not always needing an event or scheduled meeting is necessary when it comes to listening to suggestions or concerns. The participants believe in ongoing conversations with staff as a healthy option to grow teachers and move buildings forward. A secondary principal explained the importance of listening to staff and how important it is for staff to feel that their principal wants to hear from them:

> The stay interviews have helped to serve as a great reminder of the importance of the conversations and connections with staff members. So whether they're on the evaluation cycle or not, just making sure I continue to do those check-ins so they feel valued, so they feel appreciated, so they feel heard. The high school world gets very busy with discipline and navigating problems. It is an important reminder to find uninterrupted time to sit down with your staff and make some true connections with them. The feedback I got from my teachers was that they loved the time sitting down to talk with me and that we as a school need to make the time to keep doing them.

Another secondary principal in another high school also emphasized the importance of the principal as a listener.

As a principal instruction is important, but these jobs are about people and understanding them better. If we understand our people better, through conversations we are having with them then it is gonna impact the decisions we make, it is gonna help us maybe soften our feelings about our staff because we know them better. If we are not listening and trying to understand them, then we're missing out on so many opportunities. We need to remind administrators that it is about understanding people, it is not about predicting what the next steps are going to be.

When leadership teams commit to scheduling regular stay interviews or listening sessions, they not only gain insight into their team's goals and concerns, but also provide principals with the opportunity to better understand educators' aspirations, where they are in their professional development, and how they are managing the balance between their personal and work lives. "Personal mastery is a set of practices that support people, children, and adults in keeping their dreams whole while cultivating an awareness of the current reality around them." (Senge, p. 59, 2000). This discipline allows for educators to get an idea of what direction they want to go and what their focus or craft may be as they continue the journey in education. The principal's role in understanding each of their staff's goals and aspirations is crucial in setting them up for success and fostering their areas of passion. Several of the principal participants acknowledged learning something new about the staff members they chose to conduct a stay interview with. In two incidents the principals themselves were unaware of their staff interest in leadership and were able to develop a plan for future involvement in some leadership opportunities. Effective principals understand that the most significant factor in improving student

achievement is the quality of their teachers. Therefore, strengthening teachers' skills and abilities should be a top priority on the to-do list of any principal focused on success (Hall et al., 2016). Educators deserve our confidence in their commitment to growth and continuous learning. Passion projects give staff members the chance to explore subjects they are deeply interested in, while administrative teams support this by offering the necessary time, resources, and opportunities for that learning to thrive (Sanfelippo and Sinanis, 2016).

One of the secondary principal participants summed up the importance of the stay interview as:

>Be ready to feel all the emotions in regards to the good, the bad and the ugly, and be willing to listen to all of those as well. Making these stay interviews a priority and not seeing them as one more thing to do, but rather see it as the thing to do to retain your staff.

The findings and evidence from this study and research clearly support that educators are more likely to stay when they feel that they are heard by their principal. All principal participants expressed the benefits of meeting with staff and hearing their feedback on their current reality when it comes to improving the overall school climate and culture. The strength of these meetings were that they were held in a one-on-one uninterrupted setting where teachers could freely express themselves in a safe trusted environment.

Importance of Working Relationships with Leadership and Staff

Findings and conclusions from this study strongly support the desire and need for working relationships among staff and leadership. "In building shared vision, a group of people build a sense of commitment together along with values that will be important in getting there and the goals they hope to achieve along the way" (Senge, p. 72, 2000). In addition to shared vision Gordon (2018) emphasizes that shared vision is a purpose greater than oneself that inspires and energizes individuals and teams. It's not just about having a common vision, but about being motivated by a deeper purpose that motivates you toward achieving that vision. Additionally, a shared vision is a discipline that fosters teamwork by involving staff in decision-making, creating a collective sense of purpose, encouraging collaboration, and promoting shared responsibility for overall outcomes (Lambert, 1998). A shared vision is essential for learning organization as it creates the direction and motivation necessary for effective learning (Senge, 2006).

 It became apparent very quickly with the principal participants the importance of working relationships with leadership from their findings and experiences with the educators who participated. One of our elementary principals provided feedback from teachers that affirmed the importance of working relationships with leadership and shared vision .

> It's the unknown, and as a leader you make decisions based on what you
> know. If you don't know certain things about people, then you could be thinking
> you are making the right decision, but in actuality making matters worse. The
> more you engage and talk with people and know trends you can actually avoid the

unintended consequences that may be a result of a decision you made without involving staff.

Another example provided from a veteran middle school principal highlighted the importance of when a decision has been made involving shared vision or team learning then communicating that is important to build trust and accountability.

> When a decision is made through a school improvement team or through teacher's summer meetings then when the principal rolls it out to the staff making sure they say that this decision was due to the ideas/feedback brought forward from the stay interviews that were conducted. This is what your department leaders, team leaders came up with based on the feedback from the stay interview that you provided us, not administration, your teacher leadership teams. It is important for teachers to hear and make the connection that these decisions came from stay interviews to validate that the principal is listening and doing something with the information. This might sound something like opening a meeting thanking all who participated in the stay interviews validating that their concerns and thoughts were captured and based on that feedback here are adjustments we are making moving forward.

In summary the research study supports and will provide evidence of the impact of shared vision in alignment with teachers expressing to their principals the importance of working relationships with their principals as a factor for retention.

> "To be the best leader you can be, don't hoard power; give it away. Don't view yourself as the heroic individual who will single handedly improve your

district, school, or classroom; view yourself as a hero who develops the leadership

potential of those you serve" (Dufour and Marzano, p. 207, 2011).

Positive Culture Matters

The results of this study provided valuable experiences and insight from nine

established principals and in conclusion found that positive culture matters when it comes

to retention of educators.. School culture influences every aspect of the organization,

from the conversations among staff in the lounge, to the instructional methods that are

established, the perception of professional development, and the emphasis placed on

student learning. A strong, positive, and collaborative culture can directly impact

elements of a school (Deal and Peterson, 2003). Additionally Evans (1996) reminds us

that when it comes to culture, there are core, shared beliefs that influence behavior and

shape how group members perceive, think, and feel. Although culture has many aspects

and factors to it, and it can often be a challenge to know where to begin when impacting a

culture, Hall and Simeral (2017) refer to a culture of reflective practice where the

educator transitions from compliance to commitment. This shift requires an action step

from leadership and allows for staff to have an impact on the present and future of their

school culture. Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) discusses one principal approach as a weekly

check in with her staff at a staff meeting asking the following four questions:

- What is going well?
- What is one thing that could be going better?
- What is one thing any of the school leaders could do to make your life easier?

- A fun question that could deal with a variety of different topics such as music, food, holidays.

The purpose of this is an ongoing check in with staff is to be able to gauge how the morale and spirits of a staff are. Although the stay interviews are quite a bit more intimate and tailored more towards the individual educator, the overall goal of improvement of culture is the same.

When visiting with principal nine who will be switching to a new building for the 24-25 school year they talked about the stay interviews as possibly a way to learn more about where the school has been and where they would like it to go.

Although I am planning on a getting to know your principal meeting this summer with my new staff, I know I won't remember all their spouses and kids names, but I will begin to start the relationships, and the stay interview questions are a really great way to ask some open ended questions and learn more about the current climate and culture I am joining and leading.

All data observed and learned from both interview participants and the focus group experience strongly support that positive culture matters and that its impact can be the difference on whether educators decide to commit to their school long term or decide to part ways to look for another opportunity that will provide that sense of investment within the culture. The data would also support that principals feel that time spent one-on-one with staff members was a strong step in strengthening culture and shared vision.

Feedback and Recognition is Essential

The principal's primary responsibility is to promote collaboration among teachers, which plays a crucial role in enhancing student learning. This involves carefully focusing on personalized learning, assessing students' learning needs, tailoring instruction to meet those needs, and encouraging teachers to share effective practices with one another (Fullan, 2014). In order to do this, principals must have a strong understanding of what is happening within the classroom walls, have trusting relationships with their teachers that they are providing the feedback to, and be willing to make classroom visits and provide feedback regularly. Schools goal should be to move towards a culture of feedback as a method of continuous improvement for both the teacher and school. Senge (2006) would say that this type of approach would foster an educators personal mastery when it comes to discipline of a teachers personal growth and learning to help to promote continuous learning that leads to the learning organization as a whole.

Principal four gave his account of the importance of feedback and recognition given from the teacher interviews he experienced:

Teachers crave feedback, they want to know that what they are doing is correct and want you to provide positive affirmations. They want to know that all the work they are putting into their job or craft is making a difference, that was a huge theme across the board from every teacher I met. It is a good reminder to get into classrooms, leave feedback, even if it means stopping them in the hallway to show your appreciation for what they are doing and the effort they have put into the lessons and students.

Bambrick-Santoyo (2012) writes that all visits to classrooms should be purposeful and that we should have an understanding of the following questions when offering feedback:

- How frequently is each teacher being visited?

- Who are the teachers you are not seeing often? Why aren't you seeing them?

- What feedback was this teacher given a week ago? A month ago? Last year?

- How have they put it into practice?

- What are the schoolwide strengths in instruction? What are the areas for growth?

- What feedback has led to meaningful changes for teachers?

- What feedback has not?

Furthermore Hall (2016) reinforces that successful principals dedicate a substantial amount of their time to visiting classrooms, giving feedback to teachers, having meaningful discussion with staff about planning and instruction, and promoting ongoing reflection that exceeds their standard evaluation requirements.

Based on the data, findings, and research tied to the importance of feedback and recognition. In conclusion the interview participants and literature evidence would strongly suggest that principals who provide regular feedback and recognition will have significant chances of retaining educators and recruiting others.

Considerations for Districts/Principals Conducting Stay Interviews

For principals that are considering conducting stay interviews in the future it is important to remember that all research would indicate that stay interviews have the most impact when principals themselves are conducting them. The principal's job is not to be underestimated when it comes to the intensity of topics and issues they are dealing with on a daily basis, and initiatives like this can add more to an already busy day. Although it would be tempting to delegate stay interviews to teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or department leaders, as a way of reducing workload it is essential that these are conducted by the principal themselves or if conducted from a district level that they are conducted from the top down. An example of a district approach may be a superintendent conducting stay interviews with his/her assistant superintendents. The assistant superintendents conduct stay interviews with the directors of their department. All participating principals in this study expressed how beneficial these meetings were in regards to connecting with staff. Principal participants expressed learning something new about their teachers and having an appreciation for not only the work they do at school but were able to empathize with others challenges they were dealing with in their personal lives and with that, have a better understanding of their life outside of work.

A second consideration for districts investing in stay interviews for the first time would be to carefully prepare for them. There are a lot of variations of stay interviews out there that can give the perception that you just ask the questions and things will just improve. Although the stay interview with the teacher itself is not time consuming, the environment, philosophy, and priority you set up for it does require some adjusting and mutual trust building. Principals who are new to a building and may be adopting prior

leadership traditions may want to assess if stay interviews are an appropriate step. It is important that staff provide honest feedback when meeting for their stay interview time. If your assessment of a building is that trust among staff and leadership has not been established yet, then other climate and culture activities should be considered to help with building trust before committing to stay interviews.

It is recommended that districts consider the stay interview process as a pilot to start with. This would be best supported by having a group of schools conduct these at the same time to learn about the process and to be able to iron out any unforeseen challenges that teams face initially with the roll out of stay interviews. This will benefit the district when they decide to do it on a larger scale and will also provide the district with principals who can help guide other principals that may decide to conduct these meetings in their building. Furthermore, by participating in stay interviews as a team of schools or school arrays, principals were able to grow and learn about the benefits of the process as well as collaborate and share their experience and what adjustments to make moving forward for the next set of interviews. Although all principals are going to get different results from the stay interviews, the process itself should be consistent on how you are delivering the experience to educators across your district. Providing an environment that is safe and trusted is the heart of stay interview and the information learned should be documented as a means of accountability for the principal. The feedback given from principal participants during the focus group was that it was beneficial to have time to learn about the research and benefits behind them, analyze and discuss the questions that are going to be asked to anticipate what that may feel like, as well as preparing for probing questions and follow up questions to answers you anticipate

getting. Principals appreciated conducting one or two interviews to start with and then back as a group to process, tweak, and improve. The information captured from stay interviews should be held confidentially and used as a way to improve school environments. When we met as a focus group we never discussed teachers names, but rather how to improve the process and overall themes that were emerging.

Committing your building to stay interviews is a strategic initiative that can significantly impact teacher retention. Building principals who conduct stay interviews will experience the ability to proactively address concerns individually with staff or departments, strengthen and deepen professional relationships with your staff, and provide a platform where educators feel heard and valued. Stay interviews may positively impact your school's culture and have educators who will be more committed and engaged in the work they do daily. These considerations were themes and experiences from the principal participants through interviews and focus group reflection meetings.

Limitations of Study

Although the time spent on this study was significant and spanned over a year there are some limitations based on the focus that I would adjust and suggest for the next study. The feedback that came from principals was what next steps with the study would be in regards to accountability. Although the purpose of this portion of the study was to assess the stay interview and the impact it has on the future of retaining teachers there are opportunities on the impact of them as it pertains to accountability and follow through of what is learned from the interviews. Principals learned from their teachers and had

several items that came from the interviews that were easily adjusted and implemented. However, there were some bigger themes that required more time, further clarification and collaboration with educators that would require more time to see the outcome and impact.

Suggestions for Future Research

The research around stay interviews is out there and is easily accessible, however most of research out there references the stay interview in the corporate world and other organizations outside of education. Suggestions for future studies would be to explore the research that is coming out of the American Association of School Personnel Administrators in relation to the most recent publication of the 5 Shifts to Address the National Educator Shortage. Shift 5 refers to delivering exceptional employment experiences for our educators. Among the recommendations for actions in the shift is the implementation of stay interviews in schools across the country to understand why people are thinking of leaving and what makes them stay. It would be beneficial for future research of this topic to learn from surrounding districts within your state how the stay interview may be impacting retention at a larger level and what common themes or findings are emerging that we can begin to address. Education is a unique and very special professional and careful analysis of data from surrounding school districts would be beneficial to the study as a whole, and provide another lens on the continued efforts of retaining educators across the state. As districts we must continue to hold at a high value the power of collaboration with other districts within our regions. Professional groups must commit to sharing what is working for them in relation to retention and what experiences they have with stay interviews.

Another suggestion for future research would be stay interviews conducted with our classified staff in the school district. Oftentimes a lot of attention is focused on the principals and teachers in the district, as the vehicles to move student achievement and success forward. However, there is an entire population of support staff that the district has that also play a role in student achievement and success. The suggestion for future studies would be to train support staff administration and supervisors to conduct stay interviews. Oftentimes these important groups of people do important work behind the scenes and can be overlooked or underappreciated. These unsung heroes also are important factors when it comes to impact on students and their continuous improvement. Districts across the state struggle to staff fully the support staff. There is not a reason why conducting stay interviews with these staff would not have the same impact on retention as our certified teachers.

Retrospective Reflection

As a former principal of eight years and now as a director of human resources working with principals I understand all too well the demand of the principalship. My entire career I have been fortunate to work with some amazing administrators, teachers, and support staff who have motivated me and inspired me to always want to improve and get better. As I find with most experiences I get the opportunity to lead, I tend to always walk away with quite a bit of learning myself. During these focus group sessions I always left feeling rejuvenated, inspired, and motivated from these principals. In many ways, I felt like the focus group and interviews with participants served as a stay interview for myself and forced me to reevaluate my values, passions, and drive as well as serve as a reminder of the importance of conversations and relationships with staff.

It often seems like that in life, it takes a significant event or crisis to remind humankind of what we hold as most important, and what values really matter when it comes to life. I often found myself reflecting on the fact that we should not need a teacher shortage to remind us that meeting one-on-one with teachers to check in on there well-being is impactful, or that involving everyone in shared vision, which inevitably leads to greater collective success, and that creating healthy, positive cultures where employees can succeed and flourish should just be the norm. I find myself grateful, and in some ways, believing that perhaps they are essential for us to re-emphasize the qualities of empathy, compassion, care, and love for this incredible profession we are fortunate to be a part of everyday.

As I conclude my research I am confident that the work I've done with stay interviews will remain an ongoing focus and strategy, not only for retaining educators but also as a consistent reminder of the importance of meaningful and caring conversations with educators. My goal for the future is to continue to work with principals on stay interviews as well as begin to take this process to the classified staff to get insight and input from that very important group of people.

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Appendix A: Initial Email to Participants

Dear_____,

I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of

Nebraska Omaha.

I will be conducting a research study surrounding how stay interviews impact the future

of retaining quality educators and describing the stay interview process from the

perspective of the building principals.

The purpose of the study is to explore and learn from principals' who have participated in

conducting several stay interviews with their staff. My research study will focus on your

experiences as an elementary principal with the stay interview process. Through your

interest in furthering your knowledge of stay interviews, participating in a focus group

that conducted stay interviews you were identified as a potential research candidate for

this research study.

Should you choose to participate in this study, I will ask you to engage in an interview,

approximately one hour in length via Zoom, and to review the transcription of your

interview for accuracy. The interview will be semi-structured in nature; guiding questions

will be used flexibly to facilitate discussion. Please know that confidentiality is a priority

throughout this study, research materials will remain secured, and your identity will not

be shared at any time. The interviews will be recorded, transcribed, and analyzed. The

recordings will be destroyed following transcription.

If you are willing to voluntarily participate in this study, please reply to this email to

provide your consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with questions. I truly appreciate your consideration

in participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Andrew Bell

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interview Questions

Semi-Structured Interview Questions

The emphasis of this study is to answer the following research question: How does the stay interview impact the future of retaining educators? Describing the stay interview process from the perspective of the building principal. In an effort to answer the research question, each participant was given the opportunity to answer the following questions.

1. Can you describe the process you followed for conducting the stay interviews with your staff?

2. How did you prepare yourself and your team for the stay interviews to ensure open and honest communication?

3. What were some of the key themes or concerns that emerged from the stay interviews with your staff?

4. How did conducting stay interviews change your perspective on staff retention and satisfaction?

5. Can you share a specific instance where feedback from a stay interview led to a tangible change or improvement in your school?

6. How did staff members react to the concept and execution of stay interviews? Did you notice any changes in morale or engagement following the interviews?

7. What challenges did you encounter during the stay interview process, and how did you address them?

8. In what ways have stay interviews influenced your leadership style or approach to managing your team?

9. Looking back, is there anything you would change about how the stay interviews were conducted or how the information was utilized?

10. What advice would you give to other principals or school leaders who are

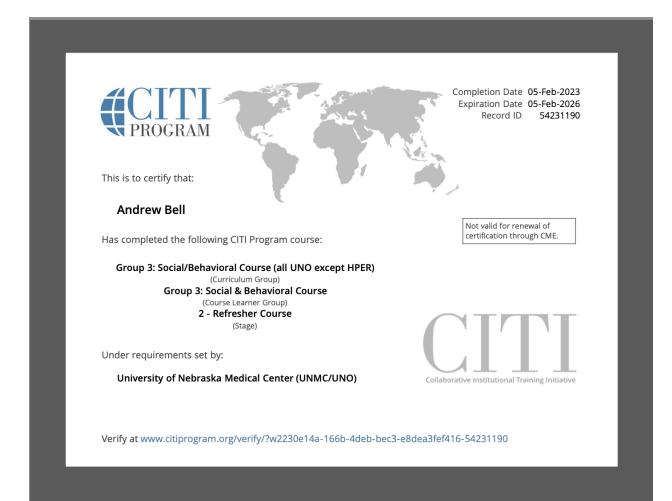considering implementing stay interviews with their staff?

Appendix C: Stay Interview Questions Used by Principals

Stay Interview Response Sheet

*Educator's Name:*_____

*School:*_____

*Date:*_____

1. **What do you look forward to each day when you commute to work? (tell me more about, who do you look forward to working with the most?)**

   -Give me an example

   -Tell me more about….

   -Who do you look forward to working with the most?

2. *What are you learning here, and what do you want to learn?*

   -What other grade levels or positions look attractive to you?

   -What skills do you think are acquired from those jobs?

   -What skills would you have to build to attain those jobs or some responsibilities of those jobs?

3. *Why do you stay here?*

   -Tell me why this is so important to you?

-Is that the only reason you stay or are there others?

-If you narrowed your reasons to stay to just one, what would it be?

4. **When was the last time you thought about leaving us, and what prompted it?**

-Tell me more about how that happened? Who said what?

-What's the single best thing I can do to make that better for you?

-How important is that to you now on a scale of 1-10

5. **What can I do to make your job better for you?**

-Do I tell you when you do something well?

-Do I say and do things to help you do your job better?

-What are three ways I can be a better principal for you?

Appendix D: CITI Certificate

Completion Date 05-Feb-2023
Expiration Date 05-Feb-2026
Record ID   54231190

This is to certify that:

Andrew Bell

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
certification through CME.

Group 3: Social/Behavioral Course (all UNO except HPER)
(Curriculum Group)
Group 3: Social & Behavioral Course
(Course Learner Group)
2 - Refresher Course
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Nebraska Medical Center (UNMC/UNO)

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w2230e14a-166b-4deb-bec3-e8dea3fef416-54231190

Appendix E: Institutional Review Board Approval

University of Nebraska Medical Center

NEBRASKA'S HEALTH SCIENCE CENTER

Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)

May 8, 2024

Andrew Bell, Ed.D
Education
UNO - VIA COURIER

IRB # 0279-24-EX

TITLE OF PROPOSAL: How does a "stay interview" impact the future of retaining educators?

Exempt under 45 CFR 46:104(d), category 2

The Office of Regulatory Affairs (ORA) has reviewed your application for *Exempt Research* on the above-titled research project and has given approval. You are therefore authorized to begin the research.

It is understood this project will be conducted in full accordance with all applicable HRPP Policies. It is also understood that the ORA will be immediately notified of any proposed changes for your research project that
A. affect the risk-benefit relationship of the research
B. pose new risks which are greater than minimal
C. constitute a new risk to privacy or confidentiality
D. involve sensitive topics (including but not limited to personal aspects of the subject s behavior, life experiences or attitudes)
E. involve deception
F. target a vulnerable population
G. include prisoners or children
H. otherwise suggest loss of the exempt status of the research.

You are encouraged to contact the ORA to discuss whether changes to exempt research requires review by ORA.

Please be advised you will be asked to update the status of your research yearly by responding to an email from the Office of Regulatory Affairs. If you do not respond, your project will be considered completed.

Sincerely,

Signed on: 2024-05-08 14:43:58.793

Gail Kotulak, BS, CIP
IRB Analyst III