HOW DO PRINCIPALS CREATE A WORKING ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT

TEACHER RETENTION?

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the profound mark mentors can leave on individuals and future generations. I am here because of the assistance of others. Throughout my life, mentors have invested tremendous support in me, guiding me to make decisions that have allowed me to accomplish heights I never imagined. Indeed, this dissertation is a case in point. My dissertation opens and closes with the advice of mentors, as a testament of their ongoing impact on my work. My relationship with a range of mentors – coaches, colleagues, and professors – has allowed me to build my confidence to persist through challenges and create an impact in the life of others. In turn, I am committed to a career centered on providing support and guidance for others.
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Finally, I want to thank all the principals and teachers who gave their time to support my dissertation. From the beginning, my hope was to honor their work while finding a way to help our education system develop. If it is not embedded in the realities of the work, this goal is not possible. Without everyone’s thoughtful contributions, this dissertation would not offer the nuance and insights that I hope readers glean from it.
ABSTRACT

HOW DO PRINCIPALS CREATE A WORKING ENVIRONMENT TO SUPPORT TEACHER RETENTION?

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The high rate of turnover for K-12 teachers, especially those working in urban schools, is well documented. Accompanying this research is a range of interventions to limit teacher movement and thus create more cohesive and effective schools. While the role of the principal is recognized as a critical element in teacher retention, few studies explore how principals see their roles in impacting teacher retention. To examine this question and propose practical solutions to better support teachers and principals, this study examines a range of structures in schools that principals might use to shape their school’s culture and provide better supports for their teachers.

Through a survey, case study, and interviews, the study assesses the working conditions in schools and its implications for teacher retention in a large urban school district. In doing so, the study uses a mixed-methods approach to analyze the intersection of the nature of the teaching occupation, working conditions of schools, causes of teacher turnover, and the principal’s role. The findings that emerge from the data offers a fresh perspective to consider the ways in which principals can consider their influence, involvement, and position to support teachers and influence the working environment of a school.
The recommendations from the study seek to honor the complexities inherent in a school organization, given the tremendous range of responsibilities bestowed upon teachers and principals. They are relevant to a range of stakeholders in K-12 educational communities, including researchers, policymakers, and practitioners.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

In June 2013, I was appointed as a high school principal. In preparing for this position as a first-time principal, I sought advice from several mentors about how to create a successful transition. In a discussion with one mentor, I shared a litany of ideas about where to begin my work that ranged from fundraising to connecting with students to supporting teachers to partnering with families. After listening to me rattle off a diverse set of ideas, one mentor told me to slow down; instead, he advised, focus on building relationships within the school. He told me to seek to “symbolize” the school. Following this advice, I first concentrated my efforts on embedding myself as a part of the fabric of the school as quickly as possible and allow the details to emerge in time. In doing so, I focused my transition on the environment of the school and celebrating all aspects of the school community.

As I deconstruct this strategy, I recognize a similar pattern over other parts of my professional career. Entering the classroom as a teacher, my work focused on engagement by employing the Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Deci and Ryan describe the necessity of developing structures that foster intrinsic motivation to instill a sense of purpose and self-direction in the work that took place in my classroom. As Ryan and Powelson (1992) describe, “The old adage ‘you can lead a horse to water…’ captures the dilemma teachers face daily in their mission. The goal of schooling is first and foremost to create thirsty horses and, second, to measure their intake.” (p. 63). In this spirit, I aimed to build a community of learners through
developing a culture that focused on student interest and engagement to support the academic and social growth of my students.

My work as a classroom teacher developed through my study of what structures best support learning. In particular, Freire (2000/1970) describes a “naming” process that is rooted in the individual making sense of a concept (p. 137). For this to happen, a reciprocal interaction occurs in a social setting, which is built on an environment rooted in equity, listening, and understanding. Incorporating these principles into my practice, my ability to support an environment that fostered learning expanded.

When I returned to graduate school in 2010, my understanding of the context of schools expanded beyond the classroom to recognize school not just as a series of disconnected classrooms but as a dynamic and complex organization. Lortie’s (1975) research on what influences a teacher’s work provided me a new lens to understand why schools operate in the fashion they do. His analysis describes why teachers are positioned in schools the way they are and what causes the occupation to remain static. While Lortie describes teachers as highly individualistic, he points to a variety of features of the culture of schools – such as professional development, classroom practices, and the relationship to students – that lead teachers to respond the way they do. Understanding these factors provided me insight into the opportunities and challenges associated with instilling a supporting learning environment in a school’s culture.

During my first year as a principal, I sought to continue to grow and work to implement these principles. I aimed to develop a school community that promoted meaningful learning experiences for students and faculty with an awareness to the organizational structures embedded in schools. To best support this growth, I often
utilized Haifitz and Linsky’s (2002) framework to differentiate my approach to my school’s challenges as technical or adaptive; depending on the nature of the problem, I evaluated whether or not it called for a logistical (technical) or innovative (adaptive) solutions. Through this approach, I was able to focus on nurturing a school community that was responsive to the needs of all its members, allowing people to feel confident to make decisions that will positively impact the school. My goal remained to support growth and continued learning for all members of the school community.

I consider my stance as both a researcher and practitioner as I open this dissertation, and I recognize the commonality across my different learning experiences to frame the importance of the environment. When assuming the different roles from student to teacher to principal, I continually return to the role of the environment to best support the work that is going on. I aspire to develop, as Dr. Torch Lytle once described to me, “Schools as a place where children enjoy coming to learn and teachers enjoy coming to work.” In this spirit, this dissertation will study the role of a principal in developing a work environment to support retention in a large urban school district; in doing so, I will examine the work of principals, provide insights into the culture of schools, and, ultimately, make recommendations to better understand the work required of schools to improve the working environment for teachers and educational experience for students.

Problem Statement

At the nexus of school-based practice, policy, and research, two ideas remain at the forefront for inquiry. One strand focuses on the challenges of framing the role of the principal, as the work of a principal is complex and multi-faceted. A separate line of
research examines the challenges in retaining teachers and high turnover in the profession. While the studies are often completed in isolation, commonalities exist in the ways in which the school environment influences the work of principals and teachers. In both cases, challenges lie in making sense of what supports and structures principals and teachers need, and recommendations emerge from a variety of sources about how to best situate people in schools to enable student success.

The demands on a principal are dynamic and diverse. As the school leader, a principal must ensure students are in a safe and academic setting, while responding to many constituencies ranging from the students in their school to regulations from the Federal government. Recent scholarship points to the consequences of the high demands on principals without proper support, framing the work of the principal. Rousmaniere (2013) comments, “Modern principals came to have less to do with student learning and more to do with upholding administrative structures and responding to public pressure” (p. 5). Finn and Northern (2014) also address this challenge: “Succeeding as a school principal has turned into a near impossible task” (p. 5). As the responsibilities, above and beyond instruction, amass for principals, the work of a principal becomes increasingly complex and difficult.

Other scholarship indicates a high rate of dissatisfaction and turnover in the teaching field. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Teachers, Parents, and the Economy, released in March 2012, found that the percentage of teachers satisfied with their jobs is rapidly decreasing and the percentage of teachers who are “fairly or very likely” to leave the job has risen to 29%, nearly doubling since 2009 (p. 7). Ingersoll and Merrill (2013) report that there are more first year teachers in the classroom than ever
before (around 200,000 per year), and more first year teachers leaving the classroom than ever before (nearly 26,000 per year); within five years, between 40-50% of teachers will leave the occupation (p. 22). This trend of growing teacher turnover destabilizes schools, further complicating the culture of schools.

Some degree of employee turnover is necessary for the growth and development of a school. New employees bring fresh ideas and energy, and, without change, people can become stagnant in their positions. However, too much movement damages an organization’s culture, creates a financial strain, and, in the case of a school, disrupts the instructional continuity and learning experience for the students.

While there is not a set number to constitute what is appropriate teacher turnover, Ingersoll (2001) provides a benchmark, as he reports that the national yearly average of employee turnover across all occupations is 11%. In comparison, Ingersoll (2001) finds in 1994-5, there was a 14.3% teacher turnover rate. Since then, the rate has continued to rise. For the 2000-1 school year, the rate was 15.7% (Ingersoll, 2004), and in 2004-5, the rate rose to 16.9%, which amounted to 621,400 teachers leaving their schools (Marvel et al., 2006). When these rates are coupled with the immense size of the K-12 teaching force, the numbers are staggering.

Employee turnover in an organization is often both a cause and consequence of a malfunctioning organization. High rates of turnover create a detrimental cycle within schools, as a school is unable to foster continuity within its faculty. A supportive community is not developed. This cycle is particularly troubling because research has shown that schools are most effective when they develop a strong sense of community (Grant, 1988). Moreover, this cycle generates a counter-productive culture that
reinforces malcontent through the lack of cohesion. Therefore, as organizations and workplaces, schools are unable to develop into supportive and fulfilling locations in which people find satisfaction. Employee turnover also leads to higher levels of stress in a school, which is detrimental for the psychological well being of the teachers and further perpetuates a progression of turnover (Conley & You, 2009). Thus, in order for a school to function at its potential, it is critical that the culture in the workplace exists with trust, respect, and cohesion. Whenever teacher turnover exists in schools at high rates, this positive culture cannot develop.

Discontinuity also impacts the quality of instruction in a school. Teachers are responsible for delivering instruction and creating environments for children to learn. If they are not effective, then children cannot learn, and schools are not fulfilling their mission. When a teacher leaves, s/he is often replaced by a teacher with less than three years’ experience, and newer teachers are not as effective as experienced teachers (Johnson et al., 2005). Ronfeldt, Lankford, Loeb, and Wyckoff (2011) found “a significant and negative effect on student achievement in both math and ELA [English Language Arts]” when studying the turnover effects of new teachers in specific classrooms (p. 17). This trend is further exacerbated in high poverty communities, in which teacher turnover grows at a higher rate. While yearly turnover rates average 12.8% in low poverty communities, schools in high poverty communities have an average turnover rate of 22% (Ingersoll, 2004). With generally less experienced and less effective teachers continuing to enter high poverty schools, inequity among these schools widens. With high rates of turnover, especially in high poverty communities, learning is negatively affected, and schools are unable to work to their potential.
High annual rates of turnover come with economic consequences as well. Additional efforts must emerge from a human-resources department to process departing teachers while also recruiting, hiring, and enrolling new teachers. Once a new teacher is hired, the school and/or school district must then repeat the induction and professional development programming so that the teacher is prepared for the organizational and instructional models in a school. Johnson, Berg, and Donaldson (2005) report that when these factors are combined, the total cost of teacher turnover can reach 200% of a teacher’s salary. Recently, the Alliance for Excellent Education (2014) estimated that, in sum, states spend up to $2.2 billion per year on teacher turnover. The impact of teacher turnover extends beyond the schools, and turnover can provide a significant financial strain on school districts.

The consequences of teacher turnover are evident in a variety of the functions of schools, going beyond classrooms to adversely impacting a school’s budget and culture. Thus, to address the high rates of teacher turnover, researchers espouse a bevy of suggestions to make teaching a more appealing and sustainable occupation. One critical component emerged from Ladd’s (2011) study in which she highlights the importance of school leadership; she writes, “The higher the perceived quality of school leadership, the less likely teachers are either to plan to leave or actually to leave the school” (p. 256). The connection between school leadership and teacher retention has been affirmed in many other studies (e.g. Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011; Grissom, 2011; Allensworth, Ponisciak, and Mazzeo, 2009; Ingersoll, 2001). Research has further shown that principals wield great influence in schools in both formal and informal ways (Grissom & Loeb, 2011; Lortie, 2009; Ingersoll, 2003). Their practices
can profoundly shape working conditions for teachers. This literature has emerged from studies that analyze relationships as reported by teachers on wide-scale national surveys, and these conclusions are also derived from qualitative research that focuses more deeply on case studies and teacher interviews.

However, few studies have elicited the principal’s perspective to understand how to address the high rates of teacher turnover that schools face. While many research studies have illustrated the power of a principal in an individual school to shape a school’s culture and learning environment, and many studies have highlighted why teachers leave schools, there is limited scholarship about how principals understand and address the challenges of teacher turnover. In fact, one recent study by The New Teacher Project reports that, according to teachers, principals “often don’t even try” to retain high performing teachers (TNTP, 2012, p. 4). The recommendations for future research of Boyd et al.’s (2011) study also highlight this gap. They assert that it remains “necessary to investigate…what in particular the administration does or does not do that influences a teacher to stay or leave” (p. 329).

To acquire a complete picture of the role a principal plays in teacher turnover, it is necessary to explore the intersection of the nature of the teaching job, teacher turnover, and the power of a principal. In describing these topics, this dissertation will investigate a gap in the field exploring the principal’s viewpoint on teacher retention. It will provide a different perspective with which to consider the complexity of the teaching occupation, turnover, and the role of a principal. Consequently, an alternative way to understand all three fields will emerge alongside recommendations to consider for improving the
complex work of principals in addressing the unique challenges that emerge in all schools.

**Significance of study**

This dissertation will study how principals conceptualize their work and address teacher retention, which includes recruitment, hiring, development, and turnover. As stated above, recent scholarship points to the missing principal perspective in understanding the large amount of teacher turnover. To address the absence of this viewpoint, this dissertation will examine the work of principals in the School District of Philadelphia (SDP), a large urban public school district by: (1) surveying high school principals, (2) interviewing five principals; and (3) examining two schools by conducting multiple interviews with the principals, interviewing several teachers, analyzing school documents, and reviewing retention data. This multi-faceted approach will offer data to conduct a deeper analysis of the work of principals, teacher retention, and school culture. It will incorporate both principal and teacher perspectives to inform the ways in which teachers understand the influence and impact of principals. This study is not designed to critique or judge the work of the principals and schools that are engaging in the work; instead, its aim is to use both quantitative and qualitative to take a descriptive approach to uncover what is going on in schools with regard to how principals understand teacher retention.

To construct this study, this dissertation offers a new framework to understand this work. Teacher turnover does not exist in a vacuum. Examining how principals understand teacher retention encompasses multiple factors and can contribute to multiple fields of study in education. It is influenced by the nature of the teaching occupation, the
working conditions in a school, and the power a principal has to stimulate change in a school. To create a comprehensive and clear model to explore the ways we can more broadly conceptualize this field, it is necessary to identify commonalities across the literature to more appropriately frame the work of teachers and principals and what happens when we seek to understand their impact on each other. Therefore, this dissertation will build off the advice Dr. Lytle gave me, and I organized the literature and findings in two broad categories: (1) Professional Responsibilities (interacting with students), examining instruction, classroom management, and professional learning, and (2) Workplace Dynamics (interacting with adults), exploring collegiality, career ladder, and management structure. This framework offers a lens to interpret the data in this study and to inform future research studies.

Through investigating the extent to which principals and teachers perceive the ability for principals to shape the working conditions for teachers, this study aims to develop a more nuanced solution to the high rates of teacher turnover. Many solutions to address teacher turnover merely resolve technical problems and do not address the foundational issues that lead to teacher dissatisfaction. For instance, a frustration for some teachers is feeling isolated; therefore, in response, a solution arose to create common planning time to provide teachers the opportunity to collaborate and breakdown barriers between classrooms. However, this initiative often comes without the additional necessary changes to allow teachers to collaborate in meaningful ways by altering the nature of their teaching practice. Consequently, teachers find their time spent with other adults only adding to their dissatisfaction in their job (Hargreaves, 2010). In an effort to provide more effective solutions, this dissertation will seek to frame the challenges with
adaptive solutions to address not only surface level imperfections but also identify the root limitations that are inherent in the structure in a school organization.

Furthermore, SDP’s context, albeit challenging, is not unique. SDP was in a state of tremendous transition during this study: a new leadership was appointed, school closings, and teacher layoffs were all taking place. The effort to “rightsize” school districts emerge from a need to identify innovative solutions that aim to improve opportunities for students and build upon successful models of school reform. However, the process can be painful for schools and communities experiencing these efforts. The data provides a qualitative snapshot of these reform movements and their impact on principals and teachers. Through sharing the insights of practitioners in the midst of the reform efforts and drawing out themes in their responses, this dissertation seeks to offer relevant and practical insights into how we can better understand the ways in which principals can influence school culture and retain teachers given these challenging times. Urban school districts throughout the country are facing similar challenges, and this dissertation reflects these commonalities.

The significance of this dissertation is intended to further extend to provide insight into the work of school leaders. While its genesis lies in teacher retention, the themes that emerge from the data open up broader implications to understand the complexity of a principal’s job. Through analyzing the ways in which principals understand teacher retention, this data will support improved practices in elementary and secondary schools, principal preparation programs, as well as education policy. The recommendations that will come as a result of this study may inform both theory and
practice and offer concrete steps designed to honor the complexity of teaching, leading, and learning that takes place in school.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The principal position emerged as schools “modernized” away from one-room schoolhouses to become more complex and efficient organizations. As American culture developed at the turn of the 20th Century and transitioned into a more industrial society, schools progressed from isolated institutions to more sophisticated systems. Consequently, the need for administration to coordinate across classrooms and among schools arose, and the principal position emerged. This job, from its inception, was overburdened and given conflicting tasks. Rousmaniere (2013), who details the history of the principal position, highlights this challenge:

Located between the school and the district, and serving both, the principal has historically been a middle manager who translates educational policy from the central office to the classroom. Assigned both to promote large-scale initiatives and to solve immediate day-to-day problems, the principal has always carried multiple and often contradictory responsibilities, wearing many hats, and moving swiftly between multiple roles in the course of one day. This mobile, multitasking role between multiple roles has always described the work of the principal, even as the nature of those tasks has radically changed (p. 3).

Principals are faced with a tremendous task to respond to a plethora of stakeholders that range from students to superintendents, teachers to test-makers, and parents to politicians. And, while these responsibilities are couched in improving the education for students, they are often positioned in competing fashions. Therefore, principals are faced with a role that is by nature complex and paradoxical. It requires principals to take into account a variety of competing demands and make decisions based on the best interest of the organization that meets the fulfills public demand while creating a dynamic education for students and constructive working environment for teachers.
Alongside the advent of the principal position, as the structure of school
developed to become a more efficient system and reformers sought to provide more
opportunities for children, the work of teachers was shaped by the culture that developed
within schools. Teachers transitioned from generalists for a variety of ages in a one-room
schoolhouse; instead, they became specialists focusing on specific ages and/or precise
content areas. The need for teachers expanded, which shaped the need for principals to
oversee and influence the work of teachers. Therefore, an effort was made to standardize
and professionalize the teaching occupation. Albeit with positive intentions, this
movement further increased the complexity of the work of teachers into a “special but
shadowed” position in which teachers remained revered but were not trusted by the
public (Lortie, 1975, p. 10). The teaching occupation was – and remains to be – shaped
by a range of influences, such as the way teachers enter the occupation, their position in
schools and their options for advancement. As a result, an ideology developed to
promote a culture of stagnation that Lortie characterized as conservative, individualistic,
and focused on the present.

As the principal and teacher roles developed in conjunction, their juxtaposition
further contributed to the paradoxical nature of the principal position and the principal’s
ability to influence a school. When not aligned, the competing demands and varied
stakeholders can serve to stifle a principal’s ability to shift the direction of a school.
Research has illustrated a picture in which principals are unable to refute their
superintendent or control their teachers, leaving principals with little ability to catalyze
change in a school (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993). In this vein, principals are seen as middle
managers with little autonomy or authority to promote change in a school.
However, there are characteristics that are inherent to the principal’s role that provide a great deal of influence in the school. First, the principal holds a public position and with that spotlight comes the power to represent the school and provides a principal the opportunity to create change (Lortie, 2009). This type of influence is also felt within the school, in which faculty, staff, and students recognize the principal as an authority figure, and therefore, seek favor in the principal in exchange for approval and additional benefits (Lortie, 1975). Moreover, a recent survey depicts the principals in a similar light, as they recognize their authority in a school. The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership, released in February 2013, found “Nine in ten (89%) agree that, ultimately, the principal should be held accountable for everything that happens to the children in his or her school” (p. 27). Taken together, this research portrays the principal as an influential position based on the perception and responsibilities of the position. In spite of some of the structural challenges that principals face that are beyond their control, a principal wields power from the perception of the position. The principal position is seen as an authority in a school, and with that awareness, principals have the ability to shape the culture of a school.

In addition to the way the position is perceived, there are also several operational features of a principal’s job that provide power to create change in a school. Grissom and Loeb (2011) analyze the effectiveness of principals, and they create five categories, with 42 total tasks, to frame a principal’s work: instructional management, internal relations, organizational management, administration, and external relations. A key finding from their study reveals the importance of organizational management for principals to impact student achievement and the culture of a school. Grissom and Loeb point to the
importance of a principal overseeing a school’s budget and ensuring the needs of the physical conditions of the building are met. Their conclusions demonstrate the ways in which a principal can build upon his/her job to influence the direction of a school.

In addition to larger operational decisions, principals have the ability to influence the daily functions of a school. Ingersoll (2003) points to a variety of levers that impact the work environment for a teacher. For example, while some may argue to the limited authority of a principal over a teacher, the principal has discretion over a teacher’s roster, course assignment, classroom location, and non-teaching duties. Furthermore, principals control additional resources to provide for classroom materials, professional development, as well as funding for extra-curricular activities. Ingersoll’s research finds that these factors, often seen as “perks,” provide principals “discretion over key resources on which teachers are dependent and over key policies and issues that directly affect the jobs of teachers” (p. 126-7). As discussed above, these factors further incentivize teachers not to attempt to undermine a principal’s authority.

These findings provide evidence of the ability for a principal to change a school, given the principal focuses on the appropriate areas. To be sure, schools are complex organizations that are influenced by a myriad of factors that are out of the principal’s purview: superintendents and school boards create policies; communities influence a school’s performance; the culture of teaching is static and resistant to change. These influences provide credence to the perspective that principals are mere middle managers with limited power. Nevertheless, there is a strong body of literature that promotes the ability of a principal to affect change in a school. Bryk and Schneider (2002) describe this complexity: “Even the school principal – the single most influential actor in a given
school community – remains dependent on both parents and teachers.” This dissertation will further build upon this framework and is intended to contribute to the wider body of literature that situates the work of the principal as both complex and critical for the success of a school.

In particular, this dissertation focuses on the ways in which a principal can influence the working environment for teachers to reduce teacher turnover. To ascertain the complete picture of this issue, I will draw upon the research of the nature of the teaching occupation, the causes of teacher turnover, and the power of a principal. I will synthesize the research in an effort to recognize the intersection of the various fields and provide a more critical analysis of this topic.

To structure the research, I will continue to elaborate on Dr. Lytle’s simple notion of school leadership: “A principal’s job is to create the school as a place where children enjoy coming to learn and teachers enjoy coming to work.” In doing so, I have created Figure 1 to divide the work of teachers into two categories based on their professional responsibilities with students, including instruction, classroom management, and professional learning and the workplace dynamics with adults, including collegiality, management structure, and career ladder.
**Figure 1.** Framework to understand the foundation of a principal’s influence

**Professional Responsibilities: Instruction**

The process of developing curriculum and delivering instruction is a fundamental component of a teacher’s identity and the work they engage in (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 136). In framing the occupation of teachers, the work and rewards of teaching emerge in large part out of teachers’ abilities to effectively deliver instruction to students. However, the degree to which teachers are genuinely able to control the content and means by which they teach is constantly debated. Jackson (1968) describes the importance of “professional autonomy” for teachers to avoid inflexible curricular mandates without fear of losing their sense of efficacy in the classroom (p. 129).
Therefore, determining what one teaches and how the instruction is designed for the students become tied up in one’s ability to succeed in the work. While teachers will respond in different ways to different curricular supports, the inseparable role of curriculum and instruction as seminal in a teacher’s work is clear.

Similarly, the ability for a principal to influence a teacher’s practice is regularly examined. In Marzano, Water, and McNulty’s (2005) meta-analysis of leadership practices they find a correlation between principal “monitoring/evaluating” a teacher’s practice to student achievement (p. 63). In doing so, principals remain attuned to classroom instruction and provide regular feedback. Similarly, following a review of 200 Chicago schools, Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu, and Easton (2010) report, “[Principals] can affect the collective knowledge and skill that teachers bring into the classroom… and the technical resources that they have to advance student learning” (p. 62). Nonetheless, this interaction does not come without challenges. Research has continuously demonstrated the impact of a principal on supporting teacher practice, yet it must be done with thoughtful intentionality to best support teachers.

This work – for both the teacher and principal – becomes complicated given the idiosyncratic nature of teaching. As such, the prospect of determining “best practices” for teachers is not a simple task. Because students may respond in different ways to one’s instruction, developing static models for teachers often meets resistance. As a result, “the teacher’s craft, then, is marked by concrete models for emulation, unclear lines of influence, multiple and controversial criteria, ambiguity about assessment timing, and instability in the product” (Lortie, 1975, p. 136). Consequently, while instruction serves at the core of teaching, teachers struggle to define their work in ways without
ambiguity. The indefinite nature of teaching limits the profession’s ability to create clear standards, and it hinders a school’s capacity to create uniform expectations for teachers. Paradoxically, there are, therefore, regular inquiries into ways to make a teacher’s instructional practice replicable. The open-endedness creates further opportunities for a perceived need to further rationalize teaching in hopes of changing the nature of the job occupation (Rowan, 1990, p. 54). Over time, the data show a stronger acceptance of a standardized view in teaching and learning, which Cohn and Kottkamp (1986) suggest is in response to the movement to create stronger accountability measures for teachers (p. 50). Since their publication nearly thirty years ago, the instructional work of teachers continues to be further defined in standardized ways amidst a great deal of debate. Nevertheless, in understanding the nature of the instructional work of teachers, the elusiveness of instructional consistency serves to create more questions than answers, further extending the difficulty in positioning and supporting the instructional practice of teachers.

This lack of clarity results in a challenge in keeping teachers in the classroom. With difficulty in defining central aspects of instruction and a resistance to over-prescribing one method, teachers are caught in the middle of a struggle to define a task without a clear definition. Principals are able to mitigate this conflict with greater teacher input to help shape an instructional model in a school. For instance, when ordering new instructional materials, principals can confer with teachers to share the control over curricular materials (Tossman, 2012, p. 165). However, as policymakers push for further standardization, this flexibility may be limited and resistance in the teaching force continues to mount. Darling-Hammond’s (2007) research illustrates the fear veteran
teachers have for the future teaching force as the amount of “record keeping” will increase in lieu of a teacher’s “imagination” (p. 21). She continues, “Detailed prescriptions for practice, it turns out, not only constrain teacher decision making, they also undermine the knowledge based on the profession and its ability to recruit and keep talented people” (p. 21). As such, while the characteristics of the instructional part of the teaching occupation is imperfect, this research points to the danger of further tightening the reins on teachers; increased turnover is resulting from increased mandates on teachers for what and how they teach.

With the increase in mandates on teachers to limit the idiosyncratic nature of their instructional practice, a demand has also been placed on principals to oversee the structure of a teacher’s instructional practice. In this role, a principal assumes a great power because they are charged with evaluating a teacher’s compliance with a program and effectiveness as an instructor (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 112). Some may argue that this may position principals in a middle management role and reduce their power because they, too, are required to implement a program that they may not have selected or feel is meaningful. However, this point is inconsequential because whether or not principals feel empowered by the system, they are still placed in positions of authority at their schools. Lortie (2009) describes, “Principals, whatever their misgivings, have no choice in this matter – they must complete and submit formal evaluations; private reservations must be set aside and formal procedures carried out” (p. 126). Regardless of a principal’s acceptance, ambivalence, or resentment of a program, the fact remains that teachers continue to experience a “sense of vulnerability” to the principal as a result of his/her ability to observe and evaluate (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 112-3).
Therefore, in considering the role of a principal in a school, it is evident that his/her power expands with the use of observations and evaluations over a teacher’s instructional performance. This obstacle creates an impediment to nurturing a trusting and open relationship. To minimize this obstacle, principals can take several steps. As discussed earlier, principals can use their ability to provide the appropriate instructional resources for teachers to bolster trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 28). Additionally, Nelson and Sassi (2005) propose using detailed accounts of classroom interactions to support teachers in examining their practice. In doing so, principals “can help teachers continue learning in the context of their instructional practice” (p. 58). Given the inherent complicated nature of the principal’s ability to influence a teacher’s practice, principals must maintain an awareness of their power as they develop plans to support teachers.

Teaching and learning are situated as the core responsibilities in a school, yet they lie at the center of the paradoxical nature of schools. While there are larger principles that point to effective practices, an effective classroom can take a variety of forms. As such, principals must remain flexible to support teachers in their practice through a close evaluation of classroom data. In doing so, principals can maintain an influence of overseeing classroom practice without losing sight of the need for teacher autonomy in their classroom. Teachers are positioned to resist principal intrusion, yet when handled appropriately, principals can wield great influence in a teacher’s classroom.

*Professional Responsibilities: Classroom Management*

Waller (1932) describes schools as a “curious mélange” of children and adults (p. 107). Schools are places where children greatly outnumber adults, and while it is clear
that adults are the people in control, this hierarchy from principal to teacher to student is not simple or neat. When asked what brings people to teaching, the chance to influence and “reach” children is the overwhelmingly popular answer (Lortie, 1975; Kottkamp, Provenzo, & Cohn, 1986; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993). Children and the relationships they build with teachers have tremendous influence in the culture of a school, and they greatly influence the work and motivation of teachers. Given the highly motivating role that this relationship plays for teachers, principals have the capacity to be a strong influence to enhance or undermine a teacher’s efficacy in the classroom based on the support they provide with the power to make the final decision.

Further adding to the complexity is the compulsory nature of schools. Children are required by law to attend, and teachers are required to teach the children in front of them. With this control placed on both groups, a “dual ‘captivity’ in the relationship between teachers and students” is formed (Lortie, 1975, p. 4). These challenges are further exacerbated in classrooms with “unwilling students” in which teachers must find a way to first control, then, hopefully, teach the children (Cohen, 1989, p. 36). With this “mélange,” adults in schools are surrounded by children all day, shaping their experiences.

As a result of the challenges that emerge with the responsibility of educating and caring for so many children, the first priority that teachers are given is to maintain control. This need for control is often elevated above instruction. Waller (1932) points to the characterization of an “efficient” teacher as one who “keeps order…even if his instruction fails of any considerable effect upon the student mind” (p. 32). This legacy persists, as Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) point to the widely taught norm of “Don’t smile
until Christmas” as a means to “establish strong behavioral control before [teachers] are able to teach” (p. 17). First and foremost, teachers are taught that good teachers are those who establish authority, and this control is necessary as a prerequisite to anything else in a classroom. With this culture pervading the work of teachers, their job is shaped to prioritize controlling, before instructing, educating, relating to, or “reaching” students.

Often the rules of a school are created without the input of teachers and enforcing the rules can be a time-consuming part of a teacher’s work (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 145). Teachers are expected to enforce the rules of the school, as their quality and efficacy as teachers remain connected to their ability to maintain order in the classroom. A teacher who does not follow the rules may be labeled as weak, and this can impact his/her performance review (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 131). Teachers are expected to maintain control and order in their classrooms; however, they are often given little input or power over the rules and consequences, and yet when disruptions take place, they are deemed as ineffective.

While teachers are charged with establishing a high level of control, it often turns into a very shallow degree of power due to the principal’s authority. When a discipline issue emerges out a classroom, principals, not the teachers, make the final decision over how to respond. Principals often have a great deal of latitude in making their decision, and their decision is final (Ingersoll, 2003; Lortie, 1975). This structure puts the teacher in a challenging position when working with children. Teachers are expected to build strong relationships with students, as they must interact on a daily basis. When principals undermine this relationship, the emotional support for the student is impacted with the teacher forced to suffer the consequences (Sarason, 1982, p. 165). Teachers are expected
to become authorities, albeit without the necessary power to wield the final consequence. Not surprisingly, this role as an authority figure inhibits a teacher’s ability to connect with his/her students. Goodlad’s (1984) research shows, “…students in classes where teachers were judged to be authoritarian were likely to feel less satisfied” (p. 111). With this, a cycle of frustration and disaffection is likely to be created. When the focus of a teacher’s classroom moves to control and the students respond with increased resistance, teachers are likely to feel even further disconnected from their initial goals and beliefs about teaching.

This trend is even more apparent in schools with students of low socio-economic status, where poverty and other factors impact the experience of a teacher. This greater focus on classroom discipline leads to increased teacher turnover in schools, and this problem has been studied from a variety of perspectives. Kottkamp (1990) found that teachers are more satisfied when they are able to teach students they want to teach, and it is unlikely for teachers to select to teach in schools with a high population of students coming from poverty (p. 102). McLaughlin and Tolbert (2001) describe teacher frustration over students with less home stability and the resulting constant “classroom ‘churn’” that limits a teacher’s ability to engage students in a continuous unit like a writing project or exploring a novel (p. 17). Loeb, Darling-Hammond, and Luczak (2005) report that teacher disaffection is doubled in high poverty schools where teachers cite discipline and student motivation as the primary causes for their decision to leave (p. 47). Taken together, these studies show that a component of teacher turnover is related to the ways in which teachers are positioned to control a classroom. When a child’s home-
life lacks stability and when students are perceived as lacking motivation and a focus for academic work, teachers are more likely to leave a school.

While discipline plays a role in teacher turnover, the principal can play an influential role in determining the manner in which discipline is addressed in a school. Because principals often have the final authority, they also have the ability to set a school culture based on these decisions. Sarason (1982) points to the ability of principals to examine “the culture of the school contributing to the types and frequency of rule breaking behavior” as a means to most appropriately address misbehavior (p. 182). In doing so, principals can take a more measured and supportive way to create a positive school culture. As Goodlad (1984) points out, “Even problems with students ranked low [as a reason for teachers to leave] … it was personal frustration and dissatisfaction in the teaching situation that appeared to bother most teachers” (p. 172). Thus, it becomes less about what the kids do and how they behave than about how a school responds to the situation. Principals are in a position to address this response and create ways to address disciplinary issues. Furthermore, in exploring what matters most to teachers, Ingersoll (2003) discovered “the impact of teacher control over social issues, such as disciplinary and tracking decisions, was far greater than that of instructional control” in determining the cause for a teacher’s decision to stay or leave a school (p. 204-5). When principals are able to provide teachers with this control in a school through greater input, teacher turnover is likely to decrease. In addition, through this comfort level, teachers can refocus on relationships and supporting students in ways that likely drew them to the occupation in the first place.
In understanding the work of teachers, the principal has the ability to influence the ways teachers are positioned and work with children on a daily basis. Because their interaction with children and the impact it has on their job plays a critical role, principals must be aware of how they address these issues in ways that support, rather than undermine, teachers.

*Professional Responsibilities: Professional Learning*

An additional aspect of a teacher’s instructional practice is the way a teacher is supported in developing. Teachers are positioned and schools are structured in several ways that do not allow meaningful ways for professional growth. The MetLife Survey (2012) reports “teachers with low job satisfaction are less likely to say that their school or district provides adequate opportunities for professional development” (p. 19). Therefore, in considering implications for teacher turnover, it’s clear that teachers are not receiving adequate opportunities for professional development and this lack impacts their job satisfaction and likelihood for retention.

Teachers are expected to be authorities. Their work places them at the front of the room and in charge of many aspects of the classroom from the seating arrangement to assessment measures, and this “domination” of the classroom informs the teacher and the students that the teacher is the expert (Goodlad, 1984, p. 123). This dynamic is further evident in the tradition of schools that “teachers teach, and students learn.” Teachers develop “a pattern of practice…in a professional culture that casts teacher as expert and student as recipient of knowledge” (McLaughlin & Tolbert, 2001, p. 19). Consequently, it is difficult to ask teachers to alter their focus on their learning. Teachers are familiar and comfortable with remaining as the transmitters of knowledge and are not positioned
to assume the stance of an active learner (McLaughlin & Tolbert, 2001, p. 21). Based on the nature of the way teachers are positioned in schools, they are not necessarily situated to seek out different ways of teaching.

Additionally, even when teachers seek to engage in meaningful learning opportunities, they don’t have the time do so (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 152). The structures of school do not provide teachers with adequate opportunities for learning. As stated above, teachers are told their job is to teach, not learn, and their daily schedule reflects this. As Sizer (2004) lays out in great detail in the “Prologue” to Horace’s Compromise, teachers have little time for any other professional obligations – such as planning and grading – due to their day being filled up by teaching and work with students. Elmore (2004) describes, “The work day of teachers is still designed around the expectations that teachers’ work is composed exclusively of delivering content to students, not, among other things, to cultivate knowledge and skill about how to improve their work” (p. 92). Consequently, schools are not designed to foster teacher inquiry or meaningful development (Lortie, 1975, p. 56). Through no fault of the individual teacher, these characteristics of the teaching profession paint a bleak picture for teacher development. Teaching is a conservative practice with little systemic opportunity for meaningful innovation. Teachers are positioned and told they are the experts and their days are filled with teaching; within this structure, finding meaningful opportunities for learning and growth are challenging.

Without opportunities contextualized in the school day for learning, professional development for teachers is often placed outside the school day. Allensworth et al. (2009) found that professional development was often not connected to the teachers’
work and, therefore, could not be connected to “teacher stability” in the schools (p. 25).

In addition, Little (1999) reports that the “episodic” training teachers receive leads to “little satisfaction” (p. 234). Consequently, teachers continue to teach in the way they are used to teaching, further stymying innovation in schools. As the school system stays the same, teachers are further isolated from one another and stifled with few opportunities for growth.

To address this limiting reality in schools, principals can work to re-create a professional culture, recognizing the relationship between student and teacher learning. Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton and Kleiner (2000) advocate to design schools as “learning organizations” in which meaningful growth is sustained across a school community. To create this change, they encourage principals to become “lead learner…steward of the learning process as a whole” (p. 15). Through this perspective, principals are able to shift the mindset to integrate teacher into the learning process alongside students. Consequently, a school will become a more dynamic community with principals opening up learning in novel and meaningful ways for teachers.

An additional aspect of the isolating structure of teaching is that opportunity to collaborate can become challenging. Teachers recognize the its value and express its connection to their job satisfaction. Lortie’s (1975) work revealed that teacher collaboration was often informal and geared to sharing “useful ‘tricks of the trade’ ” (p. 195). However, the purpose of the collaboration was not focused on reducing isolation for teachers, but on passing along a piece of friendly advice. It did not seek to codify parts of teaching in hopes of creating a broader professional community (p. 195). The nature of this collaboration was based in response to the teachers’ needs, and they
coordinated efforts without a formal organizational structure supporting professional growth.

In response to the value of collaboration, over the past decade, work to initiate professional communities within schools has intensified. This reform has focused on providing teachers time built into the day to create professional learning communities (PLC). The aim of PLCs is to serve as a vehicle of change to promote professional learning through exchanging ideas and breaking down the walls that separate teachers. McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) found that teachers must be provided flexibility to collaborate with teachers across different grade levels and/or departments, depending on the nature of the work, and to not limit informal conversations (p. 121). In addition, the focus must be on collective innovation. “In such communities, teachers together address the challenges of their student body and explore ways of improving practice to advance learning. This collective inquiry generates knowledge of practice” (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, p. 63). In this respect, teacher professional development becomes a supportive structure for teachers when not only is the isolation broken down, but also, and more importantly, the focus of the work shifts to a collective learning about the students and their work.

However, given the ingrained culture of teaching that isolated teachers for decades, Hargreaves (2010) describes, when teachers work together, it may not lead to any changes in a school community or with teachers’ satisfaction with their job. Hargreaves posits that little to no change occurs when collaboration is mandated and teachers are given few opportunities to control their work. He describes what has become a “contrived collaboration” in which teachers appear to work together because they are
sitting in a room together; however, they are not collaborating (p. 148). Instead, each teacher is completing individual tasks, such as grading papers or lesson planning. When this occurred, Hargreaves found that teachers grew to resent the time set aside for teacher meeting and further isolated teachers.

Nonetheless, as PLCs become more ingrained into the culture of teaching, recent scholarship points to a greater impact for PLCs. Ronfeldt, Farmer, McQueen, and Grissom’s (2015) research in Miami-Dade County Public Schools find PLCs are beginning to shift the culture of teaching, as it is incorporated into the teachers’ regular work. Eighty-four percent of teachers reported being part of “a team or group of colleagues that works together on instruction” (p. 494). As they drilled down into the meeting, Ronfeldt et al. found that those teachers who participated in “quality collaboration demonstrated better achievement gains than peers who engaged in worse quality collaboration, even after controlling for the effects of school-level collaboration” (p. 507). Furthermore, as curriculum and assessments become standardized by the state, schools are forced to take a unified approach to preparing students for the assessment. Ronfeldt et al.’s study also revealed that when teachers collaborated around the assessment, it “was more often predictive of test score gains than collaboration in other instructional areas.” (p. 507). Taken together, this research illustrates a marked improvement in the impact of PLCs and teacher collaboration to address the structural limitations that Lortie laid out.

To address the scope of professional development in a school, the principal can take steps to increase opportunities for meaningful professional development for teachers. With the growth of PLCs, many principals are using their influence over scheduling and
building opportunities into the schedule for teacher collaboration. Specifically, based on their extensive work in Chicago schools, Bryk, et al. (2010) describe “deliberate actions” that a principal can take to improve professional learning in a school (p. 62). For instance, they highlight the need for principals to increase the “school’s professional capacity” through the systems they create to improve student learning (p. 62). In addition, they highlight a series of “low-risk collaborations” that a principal can allow to take place that would invite teachers to lead the professional development “to foster a deeper commitment among faculty and commitments for building initiatives” (p. 208). Creating a stronger learning community in a school, can also work to begin to alter the culture of teacher as expert in a school to foster a more learning-centric environment for all members of the school community. When principals have the ability to impact change in a teacher’s practice through collaboration, teacher retention is likely to be enhanced (Shen et al., 2012; Allensworth et al., 2009).

Professional development for teachers has long remained a process that stifles teachers and reinforces a stagnant culture in schools. Consequently, teachers have felt alienated from their schools and disconnected from a larger community. Through focusing closely on the ways professional development is structured and offered in schools, the principal can make strides to address the structural and cultural challenges that teachers face. With a thoughtful and strategic plan, principals and teachers can create more dynamic learning communities that involve teachers in learning about their instructional practice and improving the culture of a school.
Workplace Dynamics: Management Structure

The leadership approach and management strategies of a principal will greatly influence the working environment in a school. Principals both set a tone for the ways in which other members of the school community participate in decision-making and develop structures to provide other people leadership opportunities. Halverson (2003) describes this process as “Leaders influence the development of social networks not only through direct participation, but also indirectly through the formation of task networks shaped by the design and implementation of artifacts” (p. 5). In doing so, principals build the conditions for participation for others. Spillane and Diamond (2007) explain, “From a distributed perspective, leadership is stretched over the work of multiple leaders… This means that groups of leaders potentially have cognitive properties that are greater than the sum of their individual parts” (p. 8). As principals lead their schools, they are able to strategically integrate teachers into the decision making process of the school and create a more inclusive working environment, rooted in shared leadership.

Nonetheless, this task is not simple for principals, as teachers feel passionate about their work in their classrooms. They are motivated to work with students, they seek autonomy around curriculum, and they wish to have a say in the discipline structures that impact their work. And, oftentimes, teachers seek to offer input about their classroom as it relates to the direction and organization of the school as if they were a formal part of the leadership team. When this advisory role does not take place, teachers may lack “a sense of ownership in school” (Sizer, 2004, p. 184). As a result, teachers may feel disconnected from the larger organization outside of their classrooms. However, while this input is important to teachers, it is also counter to another aspect of
their work, for it breaks the norms of individual autonomy. It requires teachers to open their work up for others to see and perhaps critique, thus leaving the safety of their classrooms (Johnson, 1990, p. 143). This paradoxical component of a teacher’s work provides challenges for teachers to find a comfortable balance between the protection of their classrooms’ autonomy and their connection to the larger school community.

Furthermore, assessing these functions of a teacher’s work is a critical element in understanding causes for teacher turnover. School leadership and the ways in which teachers are engaged in this process play a crucial role for teacher retention. Looking broadly at the impact of school leadership, Boyd et al. (2011) found that dissatisfaction with the administration was the highest reason for teachers leaving a school (p. 319). More specifically examining teacher input, Allensworth et al.’s (2009) study discerned: “Most important for teacher stability is the degree to which teachers feel they have influence over school decisions…Stability rates were at least five percentage points higher in schools with substantial teacher influence, compared to schools where teachers had little influence over their work environment” (p. 26). Thus, while teachers may not be interested in moving to school leadership, it is critical to achieving a stable school environment that their input is regarded, and they feel acknowledged as the school shapes curricula, policies, and operational procedures.

Consequently, this need for teachers to influence decision-making provides the principal a great deal of power to create an environment that supports teachers. Based on how principals approach their faculty, they can generate support for school programs. In taking a stance that maintains an “inclusive-facilitative orientation,” effective principals can bring people together and respond to situations by gathering input from others (Bryk
et al., 2009, p. 64). When principals are able to garner contributions from others and participation in school decision making increases, this situation creates greater commitment and action to improving a school community (Lortie, 2009, p. 87). When principals distribute leadership, they are able to expand their power by raising that of the teachers. Ingersoll (2003) describes, “If teachers are given the opportunity to influence school decision making, the result is more communication with, and support from, administrators, or at least the perception of it by teachers…the data suggests that it is both possible and beneficial to have empowered teachers and an empowered principal in the same setting” (p. 245). Principals have the power to engage teachers in conversations about the direction and vision for a school community. When they become responsive to the teachers, they are likely to improve the school culture and working environment for teachers and create a more positive learning environment for all participants.

Additionally, teachers are often isolated by the organization of schools from addressing school-wide problems or from developing on-going and meaningful discussions about improving their work (Goodlad, 1984, p. 187). On the contrary, when teachers are asked to provide too much to whole-school reform, teachers may become overwhelmed. Little and Bartlett (2002) detail a case-study of a school reform in which the demands outside of the classroom become too burdensome for teachers. The consequence was a “bubble” of innovation, but ultimately teacher “burn out” ensued and long-term change was not sustainable (p. 349). As a result of these various limitations observed in teacher collaboration, teacher isolation is often reinforced within the nature of the job.

Therefore, assuming a stance of distributed leadership is critical for a principal to
address these factors to foster an inclusive school environment and better retain teachers. In his project of distributed leadership in Philadelphia schools, DeFlaminis (2011) identified the principal’s commitment as “essential to the success of a distributed leadership schools” (p. 23). Additionally, “[teacher leaders] were creative, hardworking, and relentless” in implementing a shared culture of leadership (p. 28). Accompanying the research on distributed leadership and the working conditions in schools, this project illustrates the ability of a principal to influence the culture of a school through sharing leadership and developing the capabilities of teacher leaders to impact the direction and environment in a school.

**Workplace Dynamics: Collegiality**

Teachers do not spend their time in a solitary state, but their jobs are not intended to work with other adults. The structural design of schools was created to grant the responsibility of a classroom to one teacher. To create a rational and efficient system, students were divided by age, and, in later grades, by course subject, and one teacher would specialize in one area to deliver instruction (Tyack, 1974). The legacy of this system has developed into a structure in which teachers are isolated from their colleagues and are left to their own accord. Lortie (1975) uses the image of an “egg-crate” to describe the nature of how teachers work in the same building but are separated from one another (p. 14). In the classroom, teachers are alone with the students. Nevertheless, teachers remain connected on an organizational level, and their work cannot be separated from each other’s work (Louis & Smith, 1990). The relationship between isolation and interdependence for teachers provides opportunities and challenges for collegiality in
schools and has implications for the ways in which principals have power in a school as well as for teacher turnover.

One constructive way this individualistic trait impacts teachers is by granting teachers a great deal of autonomy. Some teachers and researchers do not view teachers as isolated from one another; instead, they assent the common good benefits of professional autonomy (Jackson, 1968, p. 133). In this regard, teachers do not seek to remove themselves from colleagues, nor do they reject help from others. Teachers are able to foster a classroom environment based on their abilities and interests. This autonomy provides teachers with the independence to adapt their practices according to their judgments and according to the needs of their students.

This positive perspective on the position of teachers in schools also contributes to a teacher’s efficacy in the classroom. The individuality of teaching provides teachers immediate information about the quality of their work. Because teachers recognize the success of their work as tied to the work in their classroom, they often “literally and figuratively shut out external influences that might interfere with their primary domain – the classroom” (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 170). In this vein, teachers seek out the isolation their classroom provides so that they can find success. Void of interruptions, teachers are able to utilize their autonomy to find satisfaction in their work.

However, while teachers identify certain aspects of their isolation as advantageous, they also recognize that a lack of collegiality creates a separation that hinders their ability to be successful. This perspective focuses on the structures in schools that do not facilitate opportunities for teachers to gain support from others. Because teachers are expected to exist in relative isolation from other adults, a culture of
individualism is fostered in schools. As a result, teachers generally feel unable to seek out assistance from others. Ingersoll (2003) refers to this inability as the “double bind” teachers experience based on the tension between autonomy and seclusion (p. 174). Consequently, teachers often do not seek out help, and there is an assumption that teachers will independently solve problems that may be better addressed with support from multiple people.

In addition, the focus away from collaboration stifles the occupation’s ability to build a collective knowledge base. While teachers celebrate their autonomy as a means to discover success in their practice, this also further isolates teachers from one another. Teachers often develop techniques and strategies based on personal beliefs and not professional standards or scientific evaluation (Rowan, 1990, p. 40). Teachers do not regularly rely on outside sources to support their teaching. Because of their isolation within schools, they learn to rely on themselves.

Through understanding this individualistic ethos in the occupation, principals can create opportunities that motivate and connect with their teachers. Principals can combat teachers’ feelings of isolation by supporting and trusting the autonomy granted to teachers, while also embracing their efforts. As the work of teachers is conducted in private away from the school community, a principal must find ways to support each teacher in a private and individual way to foster a trusting relationship (Lortie, 2009, p. 84). Principals who position themselves as “interested, caring [and] supportive” can foster an environment that does not lead teachers to perceive their work as isolating (Blase & Blase, 2004, p. 121). Principals who are effective in this way often utilize one-on-one conversations to develop this culture. Tossman (2012) highlights a principal’s
ability to be “responsive to [teachers’] requests [and] providing pedagogical autonomy” as “common practice” for effective principals; consequently, he found when this responsiveness took place, teachers had a “desire to stay at their school” (p. 159). In this regard, principals must maintain an awareness of the ways in which teachers are positioned in the school and utilize this as an aspect of the support they provide to teachers.

Nevertheless, while the work of teachers is individual, there is an interdependence as schools exist and are evaluated as organizations. In many ways, the sum of a school is greater than the collection of its individual classrooms based on the organizational complexity of a school. Louis and Smith (1990) describe the work of teachers as “inherently dependent on one another” due to the ways in which the public holds schools – not individual classrooms – accountable for learning (p. 31). Consequently, teachers are often not evaluated on their own merits, and, despite their independence, they are actually interdependent with their colleagues. Coupled with feelings of isolation and the limitations of support, teachers can benefit from working together.

In addressing ways to stymie teacher turnover, many researchers point to the need to create a more collegial school environment. In their examination of teacher satisfaction, Shen, Leslie, Spybrook, and Ma (2012) find that staff collaboration is critical to job satisfaction. They encourage administrators and policymakers to focus on school processes that will enhance a teacher’s experience in a school and that collaboration and a collegial working environment are essential components (p. 223). Furthermore, in studying the Chicago Public Schools, Allensworth et al. (2009) find that in a school in which teachers share a sense of commitment and common vision, retention is higher.
They point to “collective responsibility and perceptions of innovations” as key factors in reducing teacher mobility (p. 25). Taken alongside with the qualities of the teaching occupation and the power of the principal, this focus on teacher collaboration provides insights that deepen the understanding of the work of teachers. While independence is a reality of the work, if steps are not taken to create a sense of collective responsibility in a school, then teachers are less likely to remain in the school.

As more and more research reaffirms the importance of teacher collaboration, challenges to creating meaningful structures for teachers to work together emerge. The focus for teachers is their classroom. They seek ways to improve their teaching, and they wish to spend time on matters that will directly impact their work with students. Teachers prioritize their classroom work; the organization is secondary (Lortie, 1975, p. 175). With this mindset, creating meaningful structures for teachers to work together is a conundrum.

With this challenge, a principal must be mindful to thoughtfully create a structure that recognizes the reality of teacher individualism and the benefits of autonomy, while identifying ways for teachers to become connected to the larger school and have meaningful opportunities for collaboration. A critical opportunity for a principal exists in creating a school mission that weighs these competing realities in a school. A principal cannot rely too heavily on shared norms because this dependence ignores the reality of teacher independence; a principal also must not create an inchoate plan for school improvement that neglects the existence of the school as an organization. Therefore, as Lortie (2009) describes, “Balance requires finding ways to integrate common themes in the mission with specific, identifiable contributions from dispersed and (to varying
degrees) diverse subunits” (p. 80). In this way, the principal’s responsibility is to lead by
design, while recognizing his/her role as a participant in the school (Senge, 2006, p. 321).
The principal has the ability to strongly influence a school culture that recognizes the
work of teachers as individuals while creating structures for collective accountability and
improved retention.

*Workplace Dynamics: Career Ladder*

From instruction to control to collaboration, teachers juggle many demands, all
while working with children throughout the day. It is, therefore, difficult to determine
what qualities are important in recruiting and preparing teachers. As a result of the
challenge to determine what is necessary for the job, teaching has an “eased entry”
(Lortie, 1975, p. 40), as it “does not require as much preparation as some professions,
crafts, or other skilled fields” (p. 60). With an eased entry into the occupation, teachers
begin their career without a consensus in the field about what their preparation should
consist of. Yet, the ways in which teachers enter the occupation and how they are
prepared for it greatly impacts their experience and persistence in the career.

One component of how teachers enter the profession involves the need for
certification. As the need for teachers continues, one solution has been to create
alternative certification programs in which teachers can enter the field without taking the
required college coursework to become teachers. Over the past two decades, the numbers
of teachers entering the field without a certification has expanded (Darling-Hammond,
However, as teachers enter the field without certification, they are also leaving at higher
rates than certified teachers. As a result, a cycle of teachers without traditional training and certification enter the classroom and then leave at high rates, creating a cycle of attrition in schools (Loeb, Darling-Hammond, & Luczak, 2005, p. 48). These data points speak to the importance of certification for teachers so as not to intensify an already detrimental trend.

On the other hand, research also illustrates the lack of uniformity in traditional teacher preparation programs, which also creates challenges to supporting and retaining teachers. A traditional program utilizes an apprenticeship model that allows an entering teacher to work with a supervising teacher. However, the quality of this experience is dependent on the quality of the teacher one is working with and may not lead to effectively preparing teachers (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 23). Despite this focus on the student-teaching experience as a factor in attrition, a pre-service teacher’s coursework also impacts a new teacher’s retention. Ingersoll, Merrill, and May (2012) find, “Pedagogy was strongly related to teacher attrition. Beginning teachers who had taken more courses in teaching methods and strategies, learning theory or child psychology, or materials selection were significantly less likely to depart” (p. 33). Thus, while a traditionally certified teacher’s apprenticeship may have its limitations, a focus on preparing teachers with instructional, pedagogical, and developmental theory is beneficial for a teacher’s persistence in the field.

Regardless of one’s path to the field, when teachers enter the field, they are given complete responsibility just as any other teacher has. In comparison to other fields, Lortie (1975) describes the “abruptness with which full responsibility is assumed” as unique to teaching (p. 59). In terms of obligations assumed as a classroom teacher, there
is no difference between a teacher’s first year and 30th year. The individualistic ethos of the occupation hinders one’s entry, for there is little common technical language that new teachers receive; they are positioned to “sink or swim” (Lortie, 1975, p. 71). This finding continues today, as Kauffman (2005) reports that many new teachers – especially Social Studies and Science teachers, which are less standardized-tested subjects – do not receive professional development around the curriculum (p. 16). As a result, teachers receive the message that they have “learn[ed] most of what they need to know about how to teach before they enter the classroom – despite massive evidence to the contrary – and that most of what they learn after they begin falls into the amorphous category of ‘experience’” (Elmore, 2004, p. 92). Thus, regardless of one’s preparation program, “learning-while-doing” continues to be the primary structure to accustom teachers to their work (Lortie, 1975, p. 60). Consequently, new teachers are provided with little scaffolding as they enter the field. And, it is now widely reported that within five years, 50% of teachers will leave the occupation (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004, p. 682; TNTP, 2012, p. 8).

As a result of hasty immersion into the teaching field and high turnover statistics, efforts have been made to provide teachers with greater support. Induction programs for new teachers are being implemented to provide this support. However, as Smith and Ingersoll (2004) report, not all induction programs are created equal or have the intended impact of keeping teachers in the field. When induction programs are multi-faceted with mentorship programs, planning time with other teachers, seminars to attend, and attention from administrators, teachers are more likely to continue in the field (p. 706). Additionally, Johnson and Kardos (2004) describe the importance of the “professional
culture” among colleagues in a school to provide new teachers with an array of signals and strategies to become successful teachers (p. 140). Both of these research studies offer evidence to the importance of providing appropriate resources to novice teachers without presenting a formula of what will work for every teacher. Such a custom-fit approach acknowledges the distinctive qualities of individual teachers while identifying ways to make the occupation more sustainable.

The implications presented in these studies are also within the influence of a principal. Being sensitive to a new teacher’s schedule, providing personal attention, and positioning appropriate mentors within the school can address many of the challenges that exist for a new teacher’s positive transition to school. Creating these structures will also contribute to fostering an accommodating school culture, as laid out by Johnson and Kardos’ research. In addition, Pogodzinski, Youngs, Frank, and Belman (2012) describe the importance of the relationship between new teachers and the administration, as the more positive the administrative culture in a school is, the more likely a teacher is to stay at the school (p. 252). A receptive principal who acknowledges the challenges of new teachers and creates a nurturing school environment can greatly impact the experience and retention rates of new teachers.

After teachers persist through their entry into the field, the occupation provides a new limitation in that the career trajectory is un-staged. This lack potentially leads to reduced “ambition and identification” for many teachers (Lortie, 1975, p. 85). Because the occupation does not provide formal promotions or added responsibilities, rewards are often granted through seniority, not merit (Lortie, 1975, p. 84). Consequently, in order for teachers to see a promotion in education, they view their opportunities as leaving the
classroom (Sizer, 2004, p. 186). These movements out of the classroom can be an exit from the classroom to administration, or they may be added leadership responsibilities in conjunction with a reduced teaching role. The latter can often happen by making a teacher a department chair (in a high school), content specialist (in a middle school), or a lead teacher (in an elementary school). Nevertheless, Johnson (1990) describes that teachers are often distrusting of these positions and are only willing to accept such roles because they are not permanent (p. 132). In addition, teachers are often skeptical due to their distrust of the means by which they are judged, and they hesitate to accept hierarchal models in the occupation (p. 132-3). With an un-staged career, limited opportunities for advancement, and skeptical of promotion models, the opportunities for teachers to innovate, re-invent themselves, and find deeper satisfaction in their job may be limited.

In this regard, a principal has a challenge and an opportunity to meaningfully find ways to support veteran teachers along with new teachers. While the ethos of teachers that Johnson (1990) describes – that of being skeptical of promotions and hierarchies – is consistent with the framework that Lortie and others assert, options remain for a principal. With the final say in course assignment, principals wield a great power to position teachers in ways that will – or will not – motivate them (Lortie, 1975, p. 197). Teaching assignments can become divisive for teachers and damage the culture of a school (McLauaglin & Talbert, 2001, p. 73). Therefore, by engaging teachers in this process and ensuring that teachers trust the process, principals can make strides to support teachers. In addition, principals are provided opportunities to promote teachers to special committees at both the school level and the district level; this lever can also be
used to provide new opportunities for teachers, in spite of the skepticism that may come from others (Lortie, 2009, p. 90).

In the early 1990s, Missouri created a career ladder program in which teachers could develop their practice in a systematic way with a reward structure to support and incentivize it. They had three options: personal professional development, faculty collaboration, or school-community involvement (Ebmeir & Hart, 1992, p. 264). In their evaluation of the program, Ebmeir and Hart (1992) reported “teacher morale, teacher commitment, and teacher satisfaction” were all found to have had significant improvement (p. 272). While this program was created at the state level, all programs are feasible for a school principal to create at the site-level to better support teacher retention through instituting a career ladder type program to support the professional growth of teachers. Through these different means and having an awareness of the culture of teachers, principals are able to impact the occupation of teachers over the long-term trajectory and are likely to improve teacher retention.

In addition to the limited structures for advancement in the occupation, teachers also confront a lack of prestige and limited social recognition for their work. Based on the challenges of the profession, the perception of peers, and the response from the public, teachers often resist seeing teaching as a long-term occupation (Waller, 1932, p. 422). Sizer (2004) characterizes the modern status of teachers, reinforcing Waller’s claim, as he writes that teachers “take both the slights to which the culture subjects them and the overload of obligations that greets them every day at school” (p. 180). To be sure, teachers are not explicitly abused or mistreated; however, the work is not rewarded – financially or socially – in the same ways that other professions that also require a
graduate level education are (Lortie, 1975, p. 10). Consequently, the ways in which teachers are compensated, what teachers view as important, how the rewards impact teachers’ motivation and retention, as well as what principals can do to appropriately reward teachers play important roles in understanding the work of teachers and how teachers can be better supported.

Most visibly, the salary for teachers provides both a tangible and symbolic reward for teachers. Consistent with the largely un-staged career of teachers, the salary is front-loaded. Relative to their maximum earning potential, teachers begin their careers earning a high rate and then slowly and incrementally increase it over the rest of their careers (Lortie, 1975, p. 84). Therefore, as with their responsibilities for the classroom, the pay for teachers does not considerably change based on their work in the classroom.

In exploring the impact of the payment structure on teachers, it is clear that a lower salary does have an impact on teacher retention; across different school types – large and small, public and private, rural and urban – salary is cited by teachers as a reason for their decision to leave (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 521). However, it is also evident that salary is not the only issue for teachers; other factors – such as personal reasons, limited roles in a school’s decision making, or job dissatisfaction – play considerable roles in a teacher’s decision to leave a school (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 522). In evaluating the impact of a program to use grant money to increase teacher salary, Little and Bartlett (2002) found increasing salary does little when organizational aspects of a teacher’s job are not addressed (p. 349). In this regard, salary, taken on its own, is insufficient to fully understand the necessary rewards and motivators for teachers.
An additional component to salary is recognizing the symbolic view of a salary for teachers. For some teachers, the challenge with the salary is not what it amounts to, but, rather, what it is in comparison to salaries in other professions. Especially when seeking to attract and retain teachers, it becomes a central issue. Based on their research with teachers and analysis of national surveys, Cohn and Kottkamp (1993) write, “Raising salaries to levels comparable to other white-collar occupations requiring similar education has consistently ranked first among mechanisms for retaining good teachers and attracting bright and committed teachers to the occupation” (p. 68). Similarly, Goodlad (1984) notes that the lack of growth in comparison to other jobs was a major source of frustration for teachers who decided to leave (p. 196). The comparisons for teachers also extended to the lack of pay. Goodlad further points out, “The fact that they sometimes are paid less than the bus drivers who bring their students to school may become a considerable source of dissatisfaction as well” (p. 172). This comparison is not meant to slight the contributions of others in a school community. Instead, it highlights the level of reward and recognition that some feel should be bestowed upon teachers. Considering the influence and value teachers provide to society, many teachers may find their pay and its relationship to other occupations a potent illustration of the dissatisfaction they find with the reward structure.

Even so, the pay scale for teachers is not a hidden aspect that teachers are unaware of as they enter the job. Therefore, it is fair to consider other motivators that may attract teachers to the work. As stated earlier, the opportunity to “reach” students has been found to be a central and intrinsic incentive for teachers (Lortie, 1975; Kottkamp, Provenzo, & Cohn, 1986; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993). Therefore, what teachers
often seek is a respectable wage in lieu of recognition and advancement. As a result, teachers are quick to mute personal ambition and do not seek out “public recognition or prizes for individual success” (Johnson, 1990, p. 128). In fact, teachers who do not seem motivated to support students and instead seem more interested in personal and extrinsic rewards and monetary compensation are often criticized by colleagues as “paycheck teachers” as they seem to work “only for the paycheck” (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 71). Coupled with the research that places salary as an ancillary reason for teachers to leave, it is apparent that while money plays a role for teachers, it is largely resisted as a significant part of the culture of teachers.

Not surprisingly, therefore, utilizing initiatives that use financial incentives to motivate teachers has great limitations because it ignores the belief systems of teachers. Inherent in merit-based programs that build upon a corporate model for organizational performance, are assumptions that are adverse to the most basic beliefs of teachers (Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993, p. 80). For one, they encourage individual success. This priority not only goes against the resistance to personal recognition, but it also further isolates teachers as they compete against one another for rewards (Murnane & Cohen, 1986, p. 6). On the contrary, collaboration and teamwork have been reported as intrinsic motivators that further sustain and support teachers (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, p. 68). Further complicating the use of merit-pay is the imprecise nature of teaching. When teachers are unable to receive guidelines of exactly what constitutes a reward, they are less likely to commit to the system or honestly seek support to improve their teaching practice (Murnane & Cohen, 1986, p. 8). Therefore, many believe that merit-based pay programs are antithetical to the intrapersonal nature in which teachers find success.
And, while an emphasis and acceptance of standardized tests has emerged, new research affirms the limitations of merit-based pay for teachers. Yuan et al. (2013) report on the impact of three incentive pay systems, “our analyses did not find that any of three programs had affected teachers’ reported instructional practices, numbers of hours worked, or collegiality, except that [one] treatment group teachers reported greater emphasis on test preparation and collaboration among colleagues” (p. 16). This study supports the futility in this form of developing and motivating teachers to improve their practice, even as the context for teachers develops. As Rowan (1990) notes, “The talented teacher succeeds because of personal, not intellectual, resources and seeks expressive rather than rational satisfaction from the job” (p. 54-5). Thus, while incentives from merit-based pay programs seek to increase rewards to provide teachers additional motivation, in all likelihood they will further intensify qualities that drive teachers away from teaching as well reduce the central characteristics that teachers find critical to their teaching.

Based on this information, principals can find opportunities to support teachers and build upon the rewards that connect with the ethos of teaching. Primarily, teachers highlight several characteristics of an organizational structure in addition to salary as a cause for turnover (Ingersoll, 2001, p. 522). For instance, while teachers do not seek only extra resources, they do wish to have what is required. Principals are responsible for managing the resources in a building and meeting daily operational needs can greatly support teachers (Bryk et al., 2010, p. 209). Furthermore, while systematic merit-pay is not a meaningful solution, principals can use resources – especially scarce ones, such as new technology or supplemental texts – as rewards for certain teachers (Lortie, 2009, p.
However, if a principal becomes too reliant on this method, there will be backlash from the faculty based on the perception of the degree to which the rewards are not “rationalized, standardized, and fair” (Ingersoll, 2003, p. 127).

Above all else, in considering the career growth and rewards for teachers, the central way to do so is through building upon the primary motivators for teachers, and working closely and building relationships with them (Lortie, 2009, p. 88). As teachers seek to create schools that nurture and create a true sense of a learning community through fostering positive relationships with teachers, principals can deepen this belief into a school. In doing so, they can create an encouraging environment that further inculcates a culture that intrinsically motivates teachers to strive for the rewards that are most meaningful for their work.

In attempt to provide clarity to the complexity of schools, I chose six categories to understand the work in a school (See Figure 1). However, to recognize the effectiveness of a school, the work cannot be sub-divided. Instead, a “cohesive system” must be developed to promote an efficient and responsive school (Wallace Foundation, 2006, p. 9). Schools do not exist in discrete functions. For instance, the working environment that a principal seeks to create influences the instructional practices in a school and the ways in which teachers engage as learners will impact their career growth. The aim of this literature review is to frame the inherent challenges that emerge in schools through existing research, highlighting scholarship on the nature of the teaching occupation, the influence of a principal, and causes of teacher turnover. The intersections of these areas offer a perspective to better understand schools, and in doing so, recognize the structures
of a school as well as its impact on teacher retention.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of a principal in developing a work environment that supports teacher retention in a large urban school district. While many studies uncover the increasing trends of teachers leaving the profession and many studies depict the impact a principal has in a school, there is a void in research that examines this intersection (Boyd et al., 2011). In addition, through incorporating the context of School District of Philadelphia to the methodology, this study aims to provide a more nuanced picture of the schools to appropriately recognize the complex circumstance impacting a range schools and teachers’ classrooms. Taken together, this study offers a unique perspective into a research field with scant research through grounding the research in the realities influencing the working conditions for teachers in an urban district.

Therefore, the study aims to closely examine this relationship by examining the following research questions:

1. What influence do principals have to shape a work environment that fosters a positive learning environment through the recruitment and hiring of teachers, differentiated support of teachers, and identifying effective teachers to assume leadership roles?

1A. In what ways do principals seek to create flexible and innovative organizations?

1B. What are principals doing to recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain teachers?

1C. What are principals doing to support and, when necessary, release ineffective teachers?
2. How do principals conceptualize teacher retention?

2A. What characteristics of the teaching occupation do principals connect to teacher retention?

2B. How do principals understand the impact of teacher turnover?

3. How do teachers perceive the role of a principal in shaping the work environment?

3A. What do teachers identify as the role of a principal in supporting their retention?

To conduct this inquiry, this study elicits data from a range of perspectives and sources, and uses a variety of techniques. Given the goals and framework of this study, I used a mixed methods approach to provide a responsive and multi-faceted design. Following a description for the rationale of this mixed methods research design, this chapter will describe the research design and context of research sites. Finally, this chapter will describe the coding techniques.

Mixed-Methods Design Rationale

Greene (2007) describes the purpose of the mixed-methods design as a way to “invite multiple ways of knowing into the same study so that it may be deeply and generatively enriched” (p. 27). Similarly, the study is rooted in a belief that research must remain an iterative process that is flexible and responsive to the context. Furthermore, this method fits the purpose of this research because it is designed to provide a description and insight into the current realities of public education, creating opportunities to recognize the complexity and challenges that current school-based
practitioners are facing. Thus, the mixed methods approach provides a research framework to develop a rich and nuanced design that mirrors the complexity of the research topic.

The methodology for this study is designed to remain nimble to recognize the complexity of the situation. While it is not situated in one methodological tradition, its design responds to the research questions and the resulting inquiry that emerges. Scholarship on mixed methods studies points to their ability to ensure more flexibility through the research process (Charmaz, 2012). Furthermore, when conducted appropriately the findings are able to demonstrate stronger convergence, as the various research designs become linked (Greene, 2007). This study aims to continue this tradition through blending research designs that have been traditionally siloed to develop a more comprehensive and relevant study.

To represent a more diverse sample, this study begins with a survey that provides a broader sense of principal’s impressions to the research questions. The survey is not utilized to create a static or positivist view of the role of principals or the ways in which they understand the phenomena of teacher retention. Instead, it seeks to gauge a broader perspective by employing quantitative data to set the stage for a more specific and rich description of a smaller sample size (Creswell, 2008; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). This function of a survey presents another perspective to consider and compare the data that emerges from the qualitative data.

The majority of the data in this study emerges from the case studies of Hamlet and Ellison – two neighborhood high schools in the School District of Philadelphia. While building upon the survey and being balanced by the counter-narrative interviews,
the data in these studies offers a diverse glimpse into the research questions and “to identify the phenomenon in situ” (Freebody, 2003, p. 42). To construct the case study, the study incorporates an assortment of data, including principal interviews, teacher interviews, school documents, and school archival records to enrich the description of each school (Yin, 1994). Furthermore this variety of data provides greater legitimacy into the nature of the conclusions drawn from the case studies (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013). The descriptive and context-specific nature of the case studies has the potential to offer powerful insights into the ways in which teacher turnover is impacted by principals.

In addition to the case study interviews, further principal interviews are conducted to provide additional data. Interviews offer rich qualitative data, as individuals can share their experiences to provide critical insights (Yin, 1994). However, there are limitations, as the respondents are able to shape their answers in ways that may not share the complete picture (Freebody, 2003). Nevertheless, this study sought to address this challenge by incorporating many questions that asked for descriptions and scenarios to open instances for corroboration with other respondents based on the situations that were shared (Freebody, 2003). Furthermore, the variety of teachers and principals interviewed was designed to avoid a narrow view of the research questions through strategically asking individuals in different stages in their careers with varied experiences that would shape their perspectives (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). The range of interviews serve to deepen the inquiry through providing intimate knowledge of the topic, while ensuring a variety of perspectives are informing the topic.
Throughout my data collection, my position as a researcher also impacts the responses. When requesting school documents and interviewing principals and teachers, I utilized my ability to cross boundaries as both an insider and an outsider to help build rapport and trust to create a more comfortable interview. For instance, when interviewing principals, I positioned myself as an aspiring principal, seeking wisdom to become a more effective principal in the future. When interviewing teachers, on the other hand, I identified myself as a teacher, who understood the challenges of teachers. While I never misrepresented my experiences or research objectives, I did adapt my stance depending on my audience to support my data collection (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). In framing my data collection strategies and framework, my position as a researcher coupled with my background as a practitioner impacted the nature of the responses I received and the access I was afforded during my entire data collection process.

Ultimately, the goal in developing and explicating this study’s methodology is to offer the ways in which the data will converge to offer both a reliable and valid set of data and analysis. While the focus of the study remains on the beliefs and actions of the principal, this study intentionally includes other perspectives through the teacher interviews and document review to consider the school culture and work environment. This variety in perspectives and methods for collecting data provides fruitful data to extract patterns and themes. In the next chapter, the data is aligned to the conceptual model presented in the literature review. My intent is not only to root the data in previous scholarship, but also to organize it in a transparent manner so as to see clear patterns emerge across the survey, interviews, and document analysis. This process and
convergence increases the validity in the study (Creswell, 2008; Greene, 2007; Yin, 1994). Furthermore, through explaining the context of the study and research design along with sharing all the protocols as appendices, the audience is able to recognize the chain of evidence to follow for verification and reliability purposes (Yin, 1994).

Study Design

This study is designed in three distinct phases from different levels of the school district. Therefore, in explaining the research method for each phase, the particular context at each level will also be included to better represent the challenges and realities facing the district and schools. The first phase is a quantitative analysis of School District of Philadelphia survey of all working principals. The second phase uses case study techniques of two high schools – Hamlet and Ellison. These schools have many similarities. My process included multiple interviews with the principal, interviewing several teachers, and examining school documents. The final phase is a qualitative analysis of three in-depth interviews conducted with other SDP principals from schools that share some commonalities with the two case study schools so as to provide a counter-narrative to the case study data. While all sites and participants are part of the School District of Philadelphia, all names have been changed to protect the individual identities of the schools and the participants. Independently, each phase offers valuable insights to the research questions. Collectively, this blend of research techniques offers an innovative and unique design to explore the complexity of the ways in which principals foster a supportive work environment for teachers.
Phase I: Examining the District: Survey of Principals

At the beginning of the 2012-3 school year, the School District of Philadelphia appointed a new superintendent. This came after the previous superintendent promptly resigned in the summer of 2011 and a year with an interim leader. Dr. William Hite was charged with stabilizing a district in fiscal and organizational disarray and spearheading an instructional transition to the new Common Core State Standards that accompanied a shift in the high-stakes tests facing schools. As such, the School Reform Commission introduced him as a “proven transformative leader.” Dr. Hite was lauded for his experience in a previous district for “[leading] schools with vision and innovation under financial challenges that might have broken a weaker superintendent.”

At Dr. Hite’s entry, the rightsizing agenda of the SDP was well underway. In the few years leading up to the 2012-3 school year, SDP had an expansion of charter schools diverting funds from traditional schools. With reduced enrollment and resources, some schools were closed, and a process was initiated to close many more. In addition, massive layoffs had taken place with thousands of employees laid off in the previous years, and it was believed that more lay offs were imminent. Finally, the organizational structure of the district was in flux; SDP had classified schools in different levels to reflect tiered levels of oversight. However, without the necessary resources to differentiate support, the reforms of Dr. Hite’s predecessor were unsustainable.

SDP also transitioned to a new state test based on the Common Core State Standards, which promised to assess a deeper level of understanding by students. In particular, the structure of testing was completely revamped in high schools by the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Previously, a one-time generalized reading,
math, and science exam was administered in March of the student’s 11\textsuperscript{th} grade year that had no direct impact on the individual student’s academic standing. Now, for the first time, high school students were required to pass end of course exams in Biology, Algebra I, and Literature; for the Class of 2017, students would not be permitted to graduate without passing all three exams. During the 2012-3 school year, standardized exams were given in January and May to all students that had previously enrolled in those courses. The transition to align high-stakes tests with Common Core State Standards were believed to bring about more rigorous expectations for students and schools and required a shift in the current model of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to prepare students for the exams. SDP, however, was not able to properly revise its curriculum or provide adequate professional development for teachers.

Given these shifts, the initial will broadly look at how principals conceptualize teacher retention and its impact on their school. The survey was developed in collaboration SDP’s Office of Research and Evaluation. SDP requested that I not distribute an additional survey to principals at the same time of their annual survey and offered to insert questions around topics of control and the impact of teacher retention and then share the responses with me. The office distributed the survey to all administrators in the SDP, which included principals and assistant principals as well as assistant superintendents and central office staff, and shared the data to support this study. A total of 152 surveys were returned with 54 principal responses. There were nearly 200 principals during the 2013-14 school year. The survey was distributed via email. Sample survey questions are included in the appendix. This data provides insights
to the broad perspective of principals to frame a larger understanding of how principals consider the impact of teacher retention. The survey collected data in a variety of areas:

1. School Type: This section gathered data to determine the school’s SDP classification. Based on achievement and school safety data, schools were divided prior to the 2012-3 school year into three tiers of autonomy: Full Autonomy, Support, or Intervention. Based on school’s classification, it received varied levels of support and flexibility to design the school’s policies, curricula, and instructional strategies.

2. Professional Experience: This section gathered data about each respondent’s overall experience in education, tenure as a teacher, overall experience as a principal, and length of service in current school as a principal.

3. Demographics: This section gathered data about each respondent’s ethnicity, age, and gender.

4. Degree of Control: This section provided a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree" for participants to respond to the following statement: My success or failure as a principal is due primarily to factors beyond my control.

5. Impact of Teacher Turnover: This section provided a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much” for participants to respond to the following statement: Teacher turnover impacts my school's success.

6. Teacher Retention and School Success: This section provided a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “not at all” to “very much” for participants to respond to the following statement: Teacher retention is essential to my school's success.
The survey aimed to gather a broad perspective about the ways in which principals understand teacher retention. These data provide an initial foray to understand how principals conceptualize their influence in their school and the impact it has on teacher turnover. The school type, professional experience, and demographic data provide initial opportunities to compare data and analyze the impact different variables have on a principal’s ability to influence a school as well as their perceptions of teacher retention. However, because the survey was distributed to such a wide range of administrators, it does not account for the array of other organizational variables within the schools that may influence responses. This limitation in the data hinders the ability to recognize the nuances that exist between the schools based on these differences. Nevertheless, as a result of this survey, the data reveals some initial patterns across school types and experience in the ways in which principals work to support and retain teachers. This breadth of perspectives offers this dissertation an opportunity to look across different factors to begin to examine how principals conceptualize their work and teacher retention.

Phase II: School-level Examination: Case Study Research

In addition to the breadth of the initial survey, this study explored how principals understand their position and teacher retention by conducting case study research at two similar SDP high schools, Ralph Ellison High School (“Ellison”) and Hamlet High School (“Hamlet”). Because this dissertation seeks to explore the role and impact of the principal, it is necessary to consider as many demographic, academic, and organizational factors as possible. Most notably, the schools share similar enrollment size without
having any admissions criteria. Both principals were experienced principals, but they were in their first year at the helm of the school. I had a previous familiarity with both principals, and they agreed to allow me to conduct my study in their school. In addition, both schools were founded as middle schools nearly a century ago and were converted to become smaller high schools in their communities; consequently, they do not carry the historical reputation that other larger high schools do. Finally, given the rightsizing agenda, both schools were acutely aware of potentially significant changes to their school, as rumors swirled of either closing altogether or merging with another school.

The most significant difference between the schools is the demographics of the student body. Hamlet was in a period of transition with a large influx of immigrant, particularly Asian, students; Ellison’s student body was comprised of nearly all African American students. In addition, the previous superintendent identified Ellison for turnaround in the spring of 2012. Everyone was forced to reapply for their position, and they were mandated to turnover half their faculty. However, the funding to support the dramatic transition did not materialize, and the school was left with many new teachers without the promised resources and support. While the schools share commonalities, the descriptions that emerge from the interviews illustrate critical differences in school cultures. Table 1 provides a more complete detailing of the commonalities and differences between Ellison and Hamlet.
Table 1

Comparing Hamlet HS and Ellison HS

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<td>Number of Students</td>
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<td>517</td>
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<td>Student Demographics</td>
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<tr>
<td>% Economically Disadvantaged</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Special Education</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% English Language Learners</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Pa Adequate Yearly Progress</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient/Advanced in Reading</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Proficient/Advanced in Math</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>4.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approved Career &amp; Technical Education Programs</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal experience at school</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Included in “Promise Academy” reform</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher attendance</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active community partnerships</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Data obtained from School District of Philadelphia website.

Description of Hamlet HS

“I think our mission has been, from preparing students for college, to preparing young people for life in America, teaching them skills that would allow them to achieve the American dream via college or the workplace.” ~Mr. Suber

Across the interviews at Hamlet High School, themes of community and hope emerged. One teacher regularly referred to Hamlet as a “family” in describing the school and the culture felt at the school. Mr. Sokhem, the school principal, takes pride in the “ownership” everyone assumes, “where everyone knows everyone.” The diversity of the
school was praised throughout the interviews. In addition, many teachers commended the students and their openness across different cultures and experiences. In responding to question to describe the school’s mission and strengths, teachers celebrated the multi-cultural student body and everyone’s dedication to make the school successful.

While Mr. Sokhem was concluding his first year as the principal, he intimately knew the school, as he attended the school when he was a student. He credits the school with a great deal of his accomplishments, and he seeks to continue the school’s success. In evaluating the conditions that bolster the school, Mr. Sokhem acknowledges the collective efforts of the faculty. He believes that “everybody work[s] as a team.” As such, he sees his role to increase community partnerships with the school and to continue to support an inclusive school culture.

The teachers share a similar pride in the school. One teacher described the school as the “preeminent comprehensive high school in Philadelphia” based on the school’s ability to reach a diverse population and continue to respond to the needs of its students. Across the interviews, the optimism in the school’s ability to reach its students was clear. Several teachers also attribute this quality to the stability in the faculty. “The staff really is the backbone that keeps the school going from year to year,” commented one teacher. “You knew that the fellow teachers you had were gonna stick with you and you could ride out that administrator until someone else came along.” Given the movement of administrators and policies that impact schools in urban communities, this comment provides insight to the ways in which the Hamlet community has insulated itself from change. Nonetheless, looking across the interviews and artifacts shared at Hamlet, images of unity and possibility exist at the core of the school’s culture.
Description of Ellison HS

“But when I think, my God, what is the career arch of a teacher in a school district in Philadelphia in the year 2013? I don't know. I just don't know, because there's always crisis funding. I have teacher colleagues—I'm in my fourth year. You know, third year teachers have been laid off twice in three years. I've had to re-interview for my job back twice in four years. I've never been laid off, but I got this close both times.” ~Mr. Bryant

The quintessential theme emerging from Ellison was instability. Between my first and second interview with Mr. Lloyd, the Ellison principal, he learned that he had been removed from his position. By chance, the day I was scheduled to conduct my interviews was the day after the faculty was informed he was not returning. Furthermore, Mr. Lloyd estimated that two-thirds of the faculty would not be returning the following year due to seniority-based layoffs and the expiration of a large grant that funded several teaching positions. This massive overhaul was coming off a previous displacement to remove half of the school’s faculty in a reform attempt by the previous superintendent.

Nevertheless, images of optimism regarding the school’s direction were expressed throughout the interviews. Mr. Lloyd, who like Mr. Sokhem, grew up in the school’s community recognized the community partnerships as critical components for the school’s success. Similarly, several teachers credit the positive contributions of the community, given the location of the school in proximity to a large university as well as the students’ neighborhood, to help the school grow.

In addition, the teachers felt confident in the students’ ability to excel. One teacher credited the small school with the opportunity to know the students beyond their test scores and recognize a larger potential. One teacher, who was informed that he
would be laid off, lamented his loss based on the relationships with the students, not a loss of income.

Still, without the stability to develop a cohesive school culture there was a limited sense of possibility. Teachers pointed to a lack of faculty development and an inability to build relationships with the students as a severe limitation to the school’s success. A teacher who grew up and still lives in the Ellison community sees the school district as the cause of the instability; she commented, “once we get going and as soon as we get it where it needs to be, the School District changes principal.”

To develop a robust case study of each school, four rounds of data collection were completed at each school. All interviews took place in June 2013. To accomplish them, I met with the principals in their office after school. I, then, spent a day in both schools interviewing teachers. Finally, I returned for a final interview with the principal. During all visits, I was able to gather documents that provided additional context for the study. Sample interview questions and protocols are included in the Appendix.

**Round 1: Principal Interview 1**

The case study begins with a 45-60 minute interview with each principal. The purpose of this interview is to reveal how the principal conceptualizes different factors that contribute to teacher retention and what actions the principal takes to support teacher retention. The interviews were structured around the six components presented in this study’s conceptual model.

**Round 2: Teacher Interviews**
At each school, between 5-8 teachers were interviewed. Each teacher interview lasted between 15-25 minutes. The purpose of these interviews was to discern how the teachers understood the actions of their principals and what the teachers perceived as critical aspects of teacher retention. To ensure a balance and range of perspectives, four categories of teachers were included: 1-5 years experience, over 20 years experience, member of the teacher’s union building committee, or included on the principal’s leadership team. Representation from each of the categories was included in the study. Like the construct of the principal interviews, this interview was structured around the six components of this study’s conceptual model.

**Round 3: Principal Interview 2**

Data was also collected at the conclusion of the school year through an additional 20-30 minute interview with each principal. The purpose of this interview is to gain insights into the retention and turnover for the upcoming 2013-2014 school year. Between April and June, schools in SDP conduct their hiring process. Both schools hire their teachers directly through a committee of the principal and teachers, unlike some schools in which teachers select schools through a process that is based on seniority and available positions. In addition, at the time of the interviews, principals knew which teachers were not returning. The interviews provided the opportunity for the principal to reflect upon decisions that were made and ways to make changes in the future.

**Round 4: Document Review**

Throughout the school visits, documents that informed the study were collected. These included teacher rosters and school schedules to examine teacher retention data.
Additionally, documents, such as school handbooks, professional development agendas, and faculty committee flyers, were obtained.

**Phase III: Principals in different school contexts: Counter-example Interviews**

To provide an additional layer of data, principals in three SDP high schools with different organizational characteristics from those of Ellison and Hamlet were interviewed. This data provided opportunities to compare those perspectives with the data from Ellison and Hamlet to further explore the role of the principal as well as consider the impact of different organizational features in relation to the principal’s impact. The three schools and their features in relationship to Hamlet and Ellison are listed below.

1. **Region High School** (“Region”) is an open enrollment, neighborhood school with a very diverse student body – with 33% African American, 25% Asian, 20% Caucasian, 20% Latino, and 2% other. However, it is a very large school with 3,000 students and a stronger academic record based on state test scores. Region is also a fixture in its community with a distinguished reputation and a principal, Ms. Scott, who has served at the school for nearly a decade. Ms. Scott attributes a strength in her school to the relationships and community in the school. She describes, “we have at least 50 different languages and our kids truly understand cultural sensitivity is really important. And kids are very, very comfortable.” Region’s neighborhood status and diverse student body provided a relevant comparison for Ellison and Hamlet.

2. **Adams High School** (“Adams”) is a highly selective magnet school with around 2,300 students. It is over 200 years old, and it serves a diverse student body.
Adams’ test scores are among the top in the state. Some teachers that join the faculty at Adams are still appointed through the selection process that takes place at the school district level, not at the school. Adams had a new principal, Mr. Geraghty, this year. Mr. Geraghty characterized the school’s goals for its students: “We not only want them to be gifted academically, we want to prepare them to be leaders in the world.”

While many of the characteristics of Adams do not reflect either Hamlet or Ellison, the commonality of a first year principal offered an interesting overlap to examine.

3. Dewey High School (“Dewey”) is a relatively new school; it is less than 10 years old. It is a special admit high school with rigorous admissions standards and has an enrollment less than 500 students. Dewey students score very well on state tests, and their student body is 80% African American and Caucasian with the remainder identified as Latino, Asian, and other. The school was founded in partnership with a local museum, and this community partnership greatly supports the school. Mr. Torrey, Dewey’s principal, described the priority, his school places on connecting with students, as teachers “don’t say I teach English, I teach Science, they say I teach kids English, I teach kids Science.”

The relationship of the similarities in size and relationship to a community partner and differences of selectivity and student demographics provided another intriguing lens to better analyze Ellison and Hamlet.
In sum, these counter-examples provided comparisons to better analyze the ways in which principals understood teacher retention and their impact regarding teachers’ longevity in a school.

Table 2

List of interview participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Relevant Experience</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Geraghty</td>
<td>Adams HS</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1st year at Adams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Lloyd</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1st year at Ellison</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Sokhem</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>1st year at Hamlet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Torrey</td>
<td>Dewey HS</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5-10 years at Dewey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Scott</td>
<td>Region HS</td>
<td>Principal</td>
<td>5-10 years at Region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Ford</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Union Building Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Hull</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1-5 years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Little</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Member of Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Paul</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Member of Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Suber</td>
<td>Hamlet HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>20+ years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Bryant</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Union Building Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Francis</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>10-20 years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Miller</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1-5 years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>1-5 years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Rodgers</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>20+ years experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Schilling</td>
<td>Ellison HS</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>Leadership Team</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Section 4: Coding Process

In maintaining a responsive approach to my research, my coding process involved several stages of close reading and sorting into different categories. During each interview, I kept notes to highlight key ideas and then captured my initial reactions following each meeting. Next, I read the transcribed interviews and conducted a similar process in which I highlighted key phrases, added notes, and wrote about big ideas from
each interview. I, then, coded the data to align to my initial conceptual model. However, following the advice of my committee members during my proposal, and in collaboration with Professor Quinn, I developed a new framework that provided a more nuanced and aligned model. With this framework, I again reviewed my data and sorted the data to prepare my data for presentation and analysis. My process and discoveries were not preset, and I learned a great deal through this constructive coding process.

The subsequent findings and analysis chapters in this study provide the data and insights that emerges from the various forms of data collection. Just as the factors that influence the SDP are varied and require flexibility, the mixed methods methodology of this study is designed to remain nimble. Similarly, Greene (2007) addresses the challenges for today’s research and points to the futility in seeking to avoid the “tangled web of factors, influences, and experiences that cross the neat disciplinary lines of the academy” (p. 199). Likewise, this methodology and subsequent examination seeks to reflect the nuanced nature of the research topic in blending traditional research methods and analysis.
Chapter 4: Findings - Examining Professional Responsibilities and Workplace Dynamics

The core purpose of a school is to educate children. Teachers are positioned to provide learning experiences for students, and administrators are tasked with overseeing the school to ensure this education takes place in a safe place. While the ideal manner in which this occurs is up for debate, the common elements of learning and safety are universal. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of a school not only emerges out of the individual abilities of the teachers and administrators, but also out of the culture created in their interactions. This school environment plays a large role in the outcome of the students and the success of a school, and it is, therefore, critical to recognize its role in a school’s ability to educate children.

This study aimed to examine the relationship between teachers and administrators, and the culture that develops to better recognize how principals might create working conditions that better support teacher retention. Through conducting teacher and principal interviews, analyzing principal-survey responses, and examining school artifacts, I sought to uncover the nuances that exist in the dynamic organization of a school. In particular, I paid close attention to the impact principals’ decisions have on the ethos of teaching as laid out by Lortie, Ingersoll, and others in that line of research. This interaction provides critical insight into the realities of the teaching occupation and the ways a principal might improve the working environment for teachers to promote retention.

To build off existing literature, I extended the framework presented in chapter two, based on a teacher’s professional responsibilities and the workplace dynamics in a
school to analyze the research collected for this study. As such, this chapter is organized into three sections. The first section presents the principal-survey data and the trends that emerge from this data. The second section explores a teacher’s professional responsibilities, examining instructional practice, classroom management, and professional learning. The third section discusses the workplace dynamics that exist in a school, by investigating management structures, collegiality, and the career ladder for teachers.

In writing these sections, I seek to continue to honor the complexity inherent in schools by recognizing the limitations and benefits of the characteristics that are examined. In acknowledging multiple perspectives, my aim is to suggest the possibilities for improvement that exist in a school depending on the implementation of the school vision rather than to narrow a prescribed set of best practices. Furthermore, in exploring the data, I present both the findings and the implications as they connect back to teacher retention throughout each section. This chapter emerges from a position of inquiry; it is my intention to reflect this stance as I expound upon the data my research created.

Survey Findings

The principal survey provides data to consider a range of principal perspectives on issues of retention and principal control. Because the survey captures a range of data, including school type, experience, time allotment to different tasks, and views on retention and control, I am able to create a variety of correlations to consider the relationship across different areas. In particular, I will focus on the three responses to turnover, control, and retention as well as professional experience and time spent on instructional leadership. The four trends presented are intended to stimulate new ideas
and suggest connections. Given the limited sample size, I do not suppose to make larger generalizations from the data. Nonetheless, the relationships create avenues to better understand the perspectives of principals and integrate these ideas alongside the interview data to paint a more complete picture of how principals consider framing teacher retention.

Table 3.1

*Survey Demographics - Personal*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Responses (n=54)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latino</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-racial</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>&gt;34</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
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<tr>
<td>45-45</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65+</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not respond</td>
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<tr>
<td>Highest Attained Degree</td>
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<td>Master’s</td>
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<td>Doctorate</td>
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Table 3.2

*Survey Demographics - Professional*

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<td>&gt;9</td>
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<td>10-19</td>
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<td>20-29</td>
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<td>30-39</td>
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<td>40-49</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Total Years in Administration</td>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient Data</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years in Current Position</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
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<td>2-5</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>21-25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26+</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>School Classification</td>
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<td>Full Autonomy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
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<td>Intervention</td>
<td>15</td>
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</table>
Table 4

Summary of Time Allocation

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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>0-5 hours per week</th>
<th>6-10 hours per week</th>
<th>11-20 hours per week</th>
<th>21-30 hours per week</th>
<th>31+ hours per week</th>
<th>Insufficient Data</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Discipline</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Parent Relationships</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Operations</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5

Summary of Survey Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My success or failure as a principal is due primarily to factors beyond my control</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>0.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher turnover impacts my school’s success</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>1.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher retention is essential to my school’s success</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>1.16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Relationship between retention and principal’s view of success

A central theme in this dissertation is the importance of teacher retention for a school’s success. To further illuminate this dynamic, correlating this trend alongside how principals view their ability to influence a school provides an interesting glimpse into how principals might shape a school. In considering these two issues, one might expect principals who have greater control in their schools to place a higher importance on teacher retention. This notion is consistent with the idea that principals who recognize their greater influence in a school will prioritize stability and retaining teachers.
However, the data suggests a weak correlation (0.29) between principals sense of the impact of their leadership and teacher retention.

While inconsistencies in the relationship between teacher retention and control do not provide a clear trend, an interesting trend emerged in the data with the 11 principals who believed that teacher retention has “somewhat” or “little” impact on their schools’ success. None of these principals indicated that their success or failure was due to factors in their control. These are consistent viewpoints; if they do not recognize an ability to influence the school, then they will also likely have a reduced belief in the importance of teacher retention. These principals portray a passive view in the role of the principal in shaping a school environment and creating a supportive organizational culture.

Relationship between principal tenure and the importance of teacher retention

An additional relationship to explore in the survey data is the relationship between principal tenure at a school alongside the importance of retention. As past research explains and this study confirms, relationships play an important role in school communities. Hence, it would seem logical that principals with longer tenure would be more likely to value teacher retention than principals who have shorter tenures in a school. However, the data does not suggest this assertion, as the correlation coefficient between the data sets is very weak at 0.16.

In examining the data, the weak relationship seems to be related to a strong belief in teacher retention held by most principals, regardless of their length of service at their current schools. Nonetheless, the seven principals with nine years or more tenure at their schools all believe that teacher retention is essential for their schools’ success. Clearly,
these principals are rooted in schools, and they view teacher retention in similar ways. This trend suggests that they value stability, relationships, and community in schools.

Principal’s role as an instructional leader and the impact of teacher retention

Principals have a tremendous range of responsibilities. Through examining the ways in which they divide their time, we can get a better sense of their priorities. In particular, as principals place greater emphasis on instruction, it might be expected that their belief in the impact of teacher turnover increases. Spending time in classrooms completing observations and planning and delivering professional development is an investment a principal makes in teacher efficacy, and one might expect to see an increased belief in maintain a stable teaching force. However, the data reveals a different story. With a correlational coefficient of -0.58, the principals demonstrate the opposite as the value they place on turnover decreases as their time on instructional support increases.

In probing this data set more closely, this surprising trend is further corroborated between principals sense of the impact of their leadership and teacher retention. There are eight principals who reported that they spend 30 or more hours per week on supporting instructional practice. None of these principals believe that turnover has a strong impact on the success of the school. On the contrary, a third of the principals who spend less than 15 hours per week supporting classroom instruction identify teacher turnover as having a significant impact on their schools’ success. In considering this viewpoint, it is likely that teachers who receive less support and oversight are seen by principals as more integral. Principals who are overly involved in the instructional
program might see their role to integrate a teacher into their school community with greater ease than a principal who is less involved. Given these trends, this correlation raises interesting questions about the connections between the role of the principal as an instructional leader and how principals frame teacher induction, support, and turnover.

Relationship between school classification and the principal’s view of retention

To best support schools, the School District of Philadelphia created three classification levels – full autonomy, support, and intervention – for schools based on their previous academic achievement and school culture. Based on this decision, it is relevant to examine whether or not there is a significant difference in the principals’ viewpoints across the three survey questions. For instance, principals placed in the intervention classification might be most likely to value teacher retention as research has demonstrated the negative impact of turnover on a school’s ability to succeed. Another expectation might be that principals in full autonomy schools might see their ability to control the success of a school as higher given the school’s past success. However, when running an ANOVA on all three data sets, none of the results revealed a statistically significant difference across the classifications. Albeit with a limited scope, this analysis suggests a potential flaw in this management structure if school beliefs are not aligned across the different topics.

Based on their school classification, SDP made impactful management decisions over schools. The most drastic reform came through Promise Academies, in which teacher turnover was a central component of the strategy. However, the largest p-value of 0.62 emerged in the statement about the impact of teacher turnover on a school,
demonstrating a lack of consensus in the groups regarding beliefs about the impact of teacher turnover. The belief in using turnover as a means to improve school performance is seen as highly controversial by the principals in this survey. Given this instability yet its prevalence in the district as a means to bolster student achievement, the data from the principals in this survey point to a need for SDP to revisit this strategy.

Examining Professional Responsibilities

To organize the data, I developed a continuum on which I plotted the involvement of a principal with respect to a teacher’s professional responsibilities. The continuum (Figure 2) ranges from a focus on a stance of delegating to taking a targeted approach to becoming integrated with a teacher’s professional responsibilities; these involvements include supporting instructional practice, classroom management, and professional learning. For example, a principal might assign professional development (PD) to a lead teacher; a principal might direct one specific aspect of PD; or, a principal might become enmeshed in all aspects of PD. Effective principals recognize the value of each level of involvement with varied outcomes based on the strategy. The continuum is designed to recognize the multiple ways a principal might manage similar aspects as well as to consider the diverse methods of a teacher’s work. It’s intent is to provide a way to situate a principal’s participation and influence across the varied duties of a teacher. Depending on the principal’s intentionality and a teacher’s affiliation in each area, there are benefits and limitations to each stance on the working environment of a school and its relationship to teacher retention.
A principal who supports teachers by taking a stance of delegating priorities creates opportunities for influence to come from other places. Often, when allowing others to actively lead, principals provide little oversight. This delegation emerges in formal ways through assistant principals and teacher leaders. It may also occur in less purposeful ways when initiatives are developed outside of the principal’s purview. As this section will detail, there are a variety of causes for these decisions and associated outcomes.

In its most positive light, principals utilize this hands-off stance to empower teachers to guide their colleagues and build greater leadership capacity. In this context,
principals provide opportunities for teachers to capitalize on their expertise and passions, thereby improving the educational environment for both students and teachers. 

Alongside this practice, principals are able to focus their attention on other initiatives and administrative responsibilities without becoming mired in every detail. In this fashion, principals can create a culture that enables them to spread their influence to others in the school, while maintaining a sense of the progress and success over a range of happenings.

On the other hand, principals who do not effectively assume this stance can lose a great deal of control over their schools. Principals who are not actively engaged in their schools’ operations can have their influence undermined. Consequently, a school’s ability to impact student outcomes may lessen in a variety of ways without common frameworks or practices supporting teachers. Furthermore, a principal’s influence may become marginalized as other leaders in a school emerge as central voices for critical matters in the school. This counter-productive outcome will lead to a diminished role for principals as the continuity of the school and their influence become undermined.

IA.1 – Delegating Instructional Support

A central component of the ethos of teachers is the importance of having the professional judgment to organize their classroom and instructional practices without an overbearing administration. Accordingly, teachers are the experts of their classrooms and they seek an administrator that recognizes this quality. Therefore, teachers often praise a principal who delegates instructional practice to the teachers without interfering. At Hamlet HS, teachers echoed this sentiment. “I think the principal is the instructional leader,” stated Mr. Ford, a veteran teacher who also serves as the school’s union building representative. “If they’re doing it effectively, [the principal] is helping to create the
climate in the school where the teachers are able to take care of the business of the teaching.” Mr. Ford’s comment illustrates a telling paradox – principals are recognized as the instructional leader, and in doing so, they should maintain a removed level of involvement out of respect for the teacher’s ability to do his or her job. Given this backdrop, it is interesting to consider the ways in which a principal might influence the instructional practices in a school.

Similarly, Mr. Suber, a teacher with more than 20 years experience at Hamlet, recognizes the role of the principal assuming a less direct involvement with instruction. He identifies the role of an effective principal as providing the necessary resources. Recently, Mr. Suber transitioned to a teaching assignment with more classes of English Language Learners. To assist his practice, Mr. Suber received upgraded technology and new textbooks. Mr. Suber recognizes this support as a sign of trust. He commented, “Sometimes teachers look in the mirror and say, ‘Do I trust myself everyday to come in and do a good job?’ But with these materials being provided, that only strengthens the job qualities that I have and lends itself to help the students more.” Mr. Suber associates confidence and support with additional and upgraded materials. Interestingly, as he took on this new role, he did not seek additional professional development or instructional coaching; instead, he welcomed resources to improve his practice. This mindset further speaks to the ways in which teachers position themselves as individualistic in developing their practice and not needing principal support around instruction.

Mr. Sokhem, the Hamlet principal, sees his influence in the school’s instructional program in a similar vein. He asserts that because “every teacher’s need is different,” he must reach out for a range of supports. Consequently, he utilizes the school district’s
central office for “resources coming from different departments to come support teachers in a different way.” Mr. Sokhem delegates his influence, recognizing his inability to provide the necessary supports based on the range of needs of his teachers. Assuming a position like this suggests that the principal recognizes the idiosyncratic nature of a teacher’s work while also further reinforcing this culture in a school. Albeit removed from the instructional practice of teachers, this strategy also creates a program to support the needs of teachers with experts from the school district staff.

In addition to using methods like Mr. Sokhem’s delegation to support outside the building, principals can also build upon the expertise of their faculty. For example, during his transition as principal of Ellison HS, Mr. Lloyd relied on teacher leaders to provide instructional support. He described that much of his focus was geared to school climate and discipline, and this attention moved him away from providing attention to instruction. He explained his rationale for prioritizing school climate over instruction: “I think one of the big detractors to achievement is by leaning on the crutch of climate. So climate’s got to be dealt with before you can get to instruction.” He explained that in a comprehensive school with constant teacher turnover, the necessary consistency and discipline that are necessary are often absent for a meaningful learning environment.

Several teachers endorsed Mr. Lloyd’s position; they pointed to slightly varied reasons, but they all shared a common approval of Mr. Lloyd’s delegation. Mr. Bryant, Ellison HS’s union building representative, pointed to the shift from the previous principal, who he described as “an extreme leader of instruction every minute of every day.” In contrast, he described Mr. Lloyd as “trusting us as professionals” with respect to
classroom practice. Mr. Bryant approved of Mr. Lloyd’s detached stance over a principal who connected to having more of an integrated approach to instructional practice.

Ms. Schilling, a department chair at Ellison, addressed the importance of instructional leaders in a school who were also content area specialists. In this regard, she did not view Mr. Lloyd as the school’s instructional leader. She described “expertise” as a necessary condition for an instructional leader. She added that it also important for teachers to feel comfortable to raise challenges. Ms. Schilling adds a humanistic characteristic in considering the role of an effective instructional leader; as teachers bring their challenges, leaders must be trustworthy and able to open up to become vulnerable. Because principals also serve as evaluators of teachers, the opportunity for delegating instructional leadership to teachers who are also experts in the area offers greater connections for teachers to develop their practice.

Another perspective about Mr. Lloyd’s role as the Ellison’s instructional leader was raised by Mr. Smith, a teacher with fewer than five years experience, who shared that he only received instructional feedback during a lesson on one occasion. He did not blame Mr. Lloyd for the lack of instructional support. He simply added, “There’s so many teachers, and they have all this other stuff to do.” Mr. Smith empathized with Mr. Lloyd’s challenges around providing additional feedback, and even with the void that existed, he did not express disappointment in the lack of instructional support.

In a different context, Mr. Geraghty, principal of Adams HS, described his rationale for delegating instructional leadership. As Mr. Smith attributed to Mr. Lloyd, Mr. Geraghty also sees a range of other responsibilities as the cause for not delving into instruction. He says, “The way our school is set up, the assistant principals are the ones
who are in charge of academics, and the [principal] of the school is in charge of logistical things, large events.” Mr. Geraghty’s assertion raises an insightful point to the role of a principal in overseeing the organization of a school, for while teaching and learning are situated as the primary purpose, the responsibilities are vast. His decision to delegate instruction speaks to the different ways a principal may choose to best manage the growth of a school. The comments of these principals and teachers seem to suggest that there is unanimity of opinion about the instructional capacity of the principal.

IA.2 – Delegating Classroom Management

For teachers to find success with their students, they must identify effective ways to manage their classroom. In assuming a delegating role, Ms. Scott, principal of Region HS, charges her over 150 teachers to lead their classes through love, not discipline. She recounts telling teachers: “If you want children to do the right thing, then make sure you build that strong relationship. I said there’s something to say about human touch. I really find that once you’ve touched a child, the child can’t hurt you.” As such, Ms. Scott does not see her position as directly involved with classroom management. She establishes her influence as she sets a clear expectation for teachers to connect with students as a means to preempt any challenges.

Mr. Miller, an Ellison teacher, also recognizes the importance of teachers addressing discipline issues in the classroom. Like Ms. Scott posits, he sees the teacher-student relationship as an essential factor for classroom management. He believes it is critical that when discipline is appropriate, it must be immediate and come from him. He believes it is ineffective to have someone address the issue who was not there and does not understand the context of the issue. He explains that this stance also comes because
of past experiences in which he sought help and it was either mishandled or not handled at all. Mr. Miller’s perspective provides insight into the unproductive role a principal would play in seeking to take a role beyond delegating when considering the teacher’s status in the classroom.

Mr. Francis, a veteran teacher at Ellison, also hesitates to reach out to administrators for additional assistance when addressing classroom management issues. However, unlike Mr. Miller who addresses the importance of his relationship with the students, Mr. Francis’ approach is to guard himself from the administration. He shared, “When you have a disruption in the class – to not look like something’s wrong with you when you can’t handle something and you need someone taken out.” This perspective addresses a mistrust that exists between teachers and administrators and connects to the nature of teachers to seek separation in their classroom. Often, teachers do not want support in their classroom so that they do not appear ineffective to their evaluators. In some respects when principals delegate classroom management to the teachers, they are able to honor the teachers’ desires; however, in doing so, they maintain a distance from their teachers’ daily actions.

Mr. Sokhem and Mr. Lloyd also recognize the limitations of principals becoming overly involved in classroom management. Mr. Sokhem comments that when teachers need support, they can always call for additional support, and if he is unable to go to the room, he will send someone. However, he sees this as a shortsighted response. He says, “For the simple fact that once I step in, and they haven't done anything yet, they tend to lose the authority figure in front of their kids.” To maintain their status in the classroom, Mr. Sokhem encourages his teachers to address any issues without his assistance. Mr.
Lloyd echoed Mr. Sokhem’s ideas about the importance of teachers handling classroom issues to maintain their position in the classroom. He added that there is a danger of principals enabling teachers to “use the crutch of I’ll call so-and-so.” This comment seems to corroborate Mr. Francis’ concern about the vulnerability a teacher demonstrates in reaching out to the principal for discipline assistance in the classroom. In concert with the teachers, both principals spoke to the importance of principals maintaining distance from directly addressing classroom issues with teachers. The classroom is the teacher’s responsibility, and it can serve as a counter-productive measure for both the students and the teachers for a principal to become overly involved.

At both Hamlet HS and Ellison HS, discipline rooms are in place to support classroom management by providing a place for disruptive students. Teachers oversee these rooms, and many attribute the immediate consequence of removal as well as a respite from the disruption as a sign of their efficacy. Mr. Suber, at Hamlet, and Mr. Smith, at Ellison, both attribute this space as a support for their classroom management. They also recognize their colleagues in helping to ensure the program is effectively managed. However, Mr. Little, a department chairperson at Hamlet, does not see the room as a benefit. He believes it is a short-sighted solution simply “just to get rid of the problem.” Instead, he advocates for a system that more actively addresses the “root causes” of the disruption to better support the student. These insights from the teachers illustrate an appreciation of the collegial system that is set up in the school, and the dissention about the impact of the program. Interestingly, neither Mr. Lloyd nor Mr. Sokhem discussed the benefits or downsides of the discipline room when discussing classroom management and the ways in which they support teachers’ classroom
management. In this way, their delegation of responsibility removes them from the situation and the system, detaching themselves from the teachers and their disagreements.

While the range of images above portrays a form of delegation that separates teachers and principals, data did emerge that points to a more collaborative relationship than these interviews suggest between teachers and administrators to support classroom management. Complimenting Ingersoll’s (2003) findings, there was discussion about the importance of teachers having a voice in the discipline procedures in the school. Mr. Paul, a member of Hamlet’s leadership team, spoke to an interest in assuming a greater role in the school’s regulations. He characterized the current policies as “a little old school” and believed “they need to be updated.” Mr. Paul is seeking to become a stronger partner with his principal to create a stronger program that better responds to the students’ and teachers’ needs.

At Region HS, Ms. Scott, the principal, described a structure to delegate her influence to her teachers that would serve as a model to support the needs of Mr. Paul. Ms. Scott places a high value on teacher voices; she seeks to empower her teachers to assume influence over the policies: “[Teachers] have their own discipline committee. This is one of the things they created that I didn’t. They’ll sit down and say, ‘okay, this is what we want to do.’ ” Ms. Scott’s open stance allowing her teachers to shape the school’s discipline structure provides a valuable model for considering ways to delegate. She does not assume a removed approach that neither blocks nor bolsters her teachers. Instead, she accepts their input as a way to affect the school.

1A.3 – Delegating Professional Learning
Identifying learning experiences that will change a teacher’s practice is a challenging task. Given their heavy teaching load and limited opportunities for reflection and refinement, teachers often do not readily seek new structures to improve their teaching. Nevertheless, professional development is a critical aspect of their professional responsibility and necessary for developing structures to support growth.

Across the data, a need for teachers to have flexibility and be trusted to identify the structures and pathways for their professional learning is clear. Mr. Paul framed this principle: “[Teachers] don’t want to be treated like students. You know, what are you doing, where are you at? You know, they want a principal that says, ‘Okay, here’s your common planning time, you do what you want to do.’ They don’t want to be micromanaged.” Mr. Paul sees this idea being followed at Hamlet and credits Mr. Sokhem with effectively reinforcing this culture. Mr. Sokhem also expresses the importance of valuing the teachers’ space, providing “the opportunity for teachers to compare their practice and learn from one another.” Specifically, he expressed that given the curriculum mandates from the school district’s central office and newly implemented Common Core State Standards, it was his responsibility to give teachers the time to work in areas that they see as a need. In addition, he sees the role of teacher collaboration as a time for teachers to “[sharpen] their teaching tools.” Mr. Sokhem capitalized on his influence to not control common planning time by delegating the responsibility for professional learning to his faculty to share practices and implement new mandates together.

Similarly, Ms. Scott’s culture of teacher empowerment extends to professional development. Just as Ms. Scott is open for input around school climate, she also seeks to
enable analogous committees that provide for teacher growth. She explains them as “think tanks” in which teachers work together and improve their practice. In doing so, she seeks to counter a static teacher culture. She says, “They can do anything in the name of children that’s going to help them.” Through delegating in this fashion, allowing teachers to collectively identify and solve problems, Ms. Scott creates avenues for teachers not only to take risks, but also to have support in implementing and adjusting their new professional endeavors.

There is also a difference in the structure between Region HS’s “think tanks” and Common Planning Time in other schools, like Hamlet HS, as Region HS’s structure is not mandated and emerges out of the needs of the teachers. Given the influence of the principal, this distinction raises questions around a program’s impact when it is mandated in contrast to when it organically surfaces. Nonetheless, in both cases, trust is a key component to ensure the efficacy of the delegation.

In addition to collaboration, much professional development takes place in these meetings with the entire faculty. Opportunities for leadership emerge in designing, developing, and orchestrating these meetings, and some principals choose to delegate responsibility for directing this process. Mr. Lloyd find that delegating these meetings to teachers is a way to foster a more “engaging” atmosphere for teachers. He describes the structure of the “teacher-led, teacher-driven” professional development: “It’s not a one-way communication. Just like the kids, nobody wants to be talked to for six hours. So, we make it engaging, we work in teams, small groups, we give breaks and make sure it’s implementable in the room, the classroom.” When probed for instances of principal support with instructional practice or professional development in the school, no Ellison
teachers discussed such sessions that took place or opportunities for principal leadership in the sessions. The absence of such references speaks to the effectiveness of the sessions and the impact they made on the teachers’ practice. Mr. Smith did reiterate the role for teachers to lead the sessions; he stated, “I think that’s kind of on the job of the teacher. I don’t really think that’s a responsibility of the principal.” This comment is consistent with Mr. Lloyd’s framework for teacher-driven PD. Taken together, Mr. Smith’s abdication of principal responsibility along with the absence of comments from other teachers offer insights into the role and influence of the professional development in Ellison’s context.

At Hamlet, Mr. Sokhem’s portrayal of professional learning opportunities reveals a similar culture of delegation for professional development. Mr. Sokhem views the work of teaching and engaging teachers in a different way from Mr. Lloyd, as he describes teaching as a discrete set of skills and tools rather than an engaging activity. However, in a similar fashion to instructional practice, Mr. Sokhem remains at a distance from professional development as he does not feel confident in his ability to reach all his teachers. Nonetheless, Mr. Sokhem’s framework for teaching is validated by Mr. Ford, who described the role of the principal in professional development as a way “to help you put the tools in your toolbox that allow you to go into the classroom and use those different techniques and strategies the best way they fit into your curriculum and teaching style and the needs of your students.” Mr. Sokhem describes two ways that he seeks to accomplish this goal: One strategy is to use the “teacher leader” because this person “is the specialist in the field of teaching and it is her job, as it is defined in the job description, for her to provide PDs.” Additionally, Mr. Sokhem seeks to bring in
consultants to serve as “specialists.” However, with reduced budgets, Mr. Sokhem often finds that he is not able to purchase this consulting service. Mr. Sokhem views the process of teaching and learning as a distinct field with someone in the building serving as the expert. Framing the work of teaching in this manner is consistent with a stance of delegation for it sees teaching as a discrete instrument rather than enmeshed as a part of the school’s culture.

Another structure for delegating principal influence for teacher professional development is for teachers to go outside of the school. Mr. Hull, a new teacher at Hamlet with only one previous year of teaching, finds “most of the valuable PDs I’ve gone to have been outside of the school.” He added that the impression he receives from others in those trainings is that many others prefer this method as well. Furthermore, while the work is taking place outside of the school, Mr. Hull describes the ability of a principal to press teachers in this direction. He stated, “if the principal is scheduling or organizing or letting us know that there are these PDs and instead of going to a school PD, the English department should be going to this one, science department should be going to that one, I think that could help because then we’d feel like oh, we’re being pressed to actually go to a place and learn something and bring it back to the school.”

Mr. Hull’s comment provides an astute way to consider the empowering impact of delegating professional learning. In this way, teachers are acknowledged for their continued learning and are invited to support other colleagues through sharing practices.

Mr. Geraghty recognizes this benefit, as well. He described an instance in which he permitted a teacher to attend a training in Washington DC because the teacher “want[ed] to continue their education” and it would be “a benefit for our students.” Both
Mr. Hull and Mr. Geraghty demonstrate a model for principals to influence meaningful learning experiences for teachers that also contribute to a positive working environment for teachers.

1A.4 – Impact on Teacher Retention

Principals are the leaders of the building, and this role elicits an expectation of shaping a program that promotes teaching and learning and providing oversight to support its implementation. Therefore, delegating these responsibilities sometimes comes with great peril to undermine a principal’s ability to effectively support teachers. Delegating responsibility naturally moves the principal out of the forefront and diminishes the influence s/he can have on a school community. This movement will impact teachers and their likelihood to stay or leave a school in different ways. The intentionality and context in which this decision is made determines the positive or negative impact it has on teacher retention. The impact of a principal’s delegating responsibility is most evident in the ways in which it interacts the individualistic ethos of the teaching occupation. Consequently, a teacher’s satisfaction and connection to a school hinges on whether or not a teacher feels isolated or empowered by a principal’s absence in their professional responsibilities.

To promote teacher retention, supporting the autonomy of teachers is critical. These characteristics emerged in the data in several ways. Many teachers described the importance of being treated as a “professional.” Fundamental to this stance is the element of independence and discretion to manage their classroom how they see fit. In doing so, principals also reinforce a teacher’s ability to work with their students in meaningful ways. In supporting teacher autonomy, principals recognize the magnitude of a teacher’s motivation to “reach” their students. In addition, teachers also discussed the
importance of the principal serving as a resource provider to enhance their efficacy in their classroom. Taken together, principals should be able to promote an environment of self-sufficiency to create a stronger professional culture, stimulating greater teacher retention.

On the other hand, this culture magnifies loss when teachers leave, for sometimes the independence leads to a reduction in collaboration. When an aspect of school programming becomes siloed to one teacher’s practice and the teacher leaves, it leaves a school at a greater loss. At Dewey HS, Mr. Torrey described the impact of the loss of a teacher who ran an important club; he shared, “People develop into their roles…Every time people leave, you have niches to fill – that’s hard.” This comment highlights the inherent challenges of teacher delegation on a school community. While teacher autonomy is necessary, the flipside of this structure is a loss of individual skill without building organizational capacity. In delegating, principals must maintain an awareness of the dangers of losing individual talent without instituting systems to ensure others are able to continue strong programming.

In furthering teacher autonomy, principals also must maintain awareness of their influence as they contract their role. Principal oversight of an instructional program and active support in classroom management can serve as important roles for a principal to build a positive school environment. However, in delegating too much responsibility, they risk losing their presence with teachers. When teachers provided a vague image of principal support, they described a reinforced view of the conservative nature of teacher practice. Reflecting on Mr. Sokhem’s delegating style, Mr. Paul recognizes, he “doesn’t want to rock the boat… But I think he needs to be a little bit more assertive.”
sentiment highlights the challenge that principals face in delegating authority while also holding their authority on the school culture. With a weakened leadership position, a school environment runs the risk of losing a unified direction. When this takes place, teacher turnover increases.

Given this challenge, Region HS serves to highlight of ways in which a principal can effectively delegate while also fostering a unified school culture. Through the use of “think tanks,” teachers at Region HS are empowered to collectively take the lead on areas they feel are important to improving the school. Ms. Scott recognizes this as a means to flatten the hierarchy in the school as “it starts to break down the us versus them.” In doing so, she believes, “once a person knows that they have power to change or create, they tend to want to stay in that.” Rather than diminishing her authority, Ms. Scott effectively decoupled control to promote a stronger sense of power and community throughout her faculty. When a school develops a culture of shared responsibility, teachers become more engaged in the organization and are less likely to leave the school.

Given the range of responsibilities, the work of leading a school is impossible to accomplish without delegating aspects of the work. To effectively build a positive culture, principals must remain attentive to the importance of teacher autonomy without losing a sense of shared responsibility across the school. In balancing what may exist as competing demands, principals can effectively influence a school community, promoting a more empowered faculty that is more likely to stay at the school.
In assuming a stance that targets support for teachers, principals seek to influence a school community through taking a limited stance in a specific area of teachers’ responsibilities. This position emerges in two forms. It is evident when a principal identifies a specific area to address and actively leads a program to address this void. It may also manifest itself in an undefined way, in which a principal is loosely affiliated with a system in the school. When targeting support, principals take a more active position than when delegating tasks, but their influence is not as intertwined as when they are developing systems.

A targeted stance provides principals the opportunity to build off their strengths in assuming control of a specific program. Often, this initiative emerges from the principals’ passions and expertise and in response to a void in the school. While it is not feasible for principals to oversee every program in a school, directing selected programs creates avenues for principals to stay more connected to the daily operations of a school and become engaged in projects they find stimulating.

Another attribute that may emerge when a principal assumes a targeted stance is a loose affiliation with a program. In this regard, the principal remains involved in a limited aspect of the program, albeit with an inchoate connection. This position often emerges from a principal’s lack of clarity around an issue and triggers ambiguity as there is no clear direction either in direction or outcome. Teachers, in turn, often become disconnected and frustrated in this leadership stance because there is not a clear path. In this nebulous form, principals must be aware to address issues so that they do not slip off the radar, becoming untenable for others to address.
In either instance of targeting influence, principals address narrow voids in the school. When mismanaged, undeveloped and unclear messages are disseminated. When properly addressed, principals are able to deepen their impact in a school, even if the impact is not broad.

1B.1 – Targeting Instructional Practice

Mr. Sokhem attributes his experience as an English Language Learner (ELL) in the School District of Philadelphia as a primary motivator for his work as a principal. While he opened up about his limitations as an instructional leader in the context of the new Common Core State Standards, he does recognize his ability to connect with students who are new to America and teachers who are providing instruction. As Hamlet HS has over 50% students who are English Language Learners, he influences his faculty with his ability to target instruction in this area. Mr. Little, a department chairperson at Hamlet, recognizes Mr. Sokhem’s strength in this regard and believes his instructional leadership is most effectively focused on the ELL program. Specifically, Mr. Suber shares his comfort in seeking out support from Mr. Sokhem. He inquires, “[Mr. Sokhem] this is what I’m doing with my class; is this appropriate? Would it be comfortable if I give the kids this task to complete?” Positively responding to Mr. Sokhem’s instructional leadership, Mr. Suber opens up his practice for insights to learn strategies to improve his ability to reach his students. Taken together, these reports provide evidence to the effectiveness of Mr. Sokhem’s ability to influence teachers through targeting a specific area of instruction.
Whereas Mr. Sokhem serves as a strong instructional leader in targeting support for teachers of English Language Learners, his ability in other areas of classroom support comes with much less precision. In declaring himself as “one of those principals that don’t like to stay in my office all of the time,” he discusses his strategy for classroom visits when he is not conducting a formal observation and lacks a clear instructional purpose. “I’m in their classroom,” he states. “I walk in, I walk out, sometime I chitchat with the students, that's how I observe teachers.” Mr. Hull provides a similar description of this procedure: “[Mr. Sokhem] would come in sometimes and just hang out in the doorway and leave. I don’t know, he didn’t really say anything, so I’m assuming he’s all right with what I’m doing.” In this respect, Mr. Sokhem takes an active role in instructional leadership; however, it lacks purpose. Instead of providing clarity and supporting teachers, it further reinforces a static view of teaching without feedback to either build upon a teacher’s strengths or acknowledge a limitation by suggesting an alternative strategy. Mr. Sokhem’s targeted areas of instructional support highlight alternative aspects of the position and demonstrate the various ways in which it can be utilized to promote or undermine a principal’s influence.

At Ellison, Mr. Lloyd provides a different aspect of this stance. He spoke in great detail about building an aquaponics program through a partnership. He described how it “hits my own little buzzes” through integrating biology and technology and the invigoration that emerged from the work. Mr. Lloyd sought to create a program that provided an authentic learning experience for his students through managing all phases of the aquaponics program where students were to learn about biology and chemistry. He recognized the program’s connection with the school’s healthcare program and believed
this partnership would promote a deeper understanding. Ultimately, this initiative would create a more hands-on and relevant experience for the students learning. In describing the program, Mr. Lloyd spoke with great clarity and excitement. He had a clear vision for the program and believed in its potential to create positive learning experiences for Ellison students. In spite of Mr. Lloyd’s excitement, when prompted about the school’s vision, direction, and instructional program only one teacher made a reference to the program, and this comment was vague; the teacher commented that he had only heard about the partnership and did not share any specifics of the program. It is certainly possible that other teachers may have been involved in the program, but it is notable that members of the leadership team were not aware of the program, given the weight of support that Mr. Lloyd provided the program. Such responses highlight the limitations of leading through a targeted approach, for if a principal receives no support from others, it is difficult to move a faculty in a direction without their involvement.

Another model for supporting instruction in this manner emerges from Mr. Geraghty, the Adams HS principal. While he described delegating all academic affairs to his assistant principals, he shared his decision to join the technology team that met weekly. He explained that he viewed this as a critical component of the school, through which he sought more influence, as it was a key place for instructional innovation. At times, this led to a more autocratic stance based on his interest of stewarding new technology towards certain curricula. He also acknowledged that his actions in this specific area likely frustrated certain teachers while simultaneously pleasing those who benefited from his decision. Simply put, “Your goal is to make as many people happy as you can on a daily basis,” he commented. Consequently, this narrow focus provides
principals the ability to directly impact individual teachers based on the principals involvement in the details of their schools. Given the individualistic nature that teaching reinforces, this influence can provide principals with a powerful lever given the fields they choose to target.

1B.2 – Delegating Classroom Management

Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Sokhem provide similar frameworks for targeting support for teachers in classroom management. Primarily, they both recognize the importance of their involvement in setting a strong culture for learning in their schools. However, they both describe reactive stances to supporting classrooms. Even with their recognition to the necessity of maintaining an appropriate distance so as to not undermine the authority of a teacher, they each draw vague lines to support classroom management. Mr. Lloyd describes his approach by citing his propensity to “look into the window” and make a judgment “based on what the teacher is like and the severity of the day.” Without question, principals differentiate decisions based on a variety of factors and should be trusted to assess each situation on its merit; however, the vagaries of Mr. Lloyd’s approach leave feeling uncertain.

Like Mr. Lloyd, Mr. Sokhem believes that adolescents are disposed to “test the water,” so he reasons, a school must be flexible in addressing students and interpreting rules. Nevertheless, Mr. Sokhem declares there is a “line in the sand” that students may approach but cannot cross, but what that line is has not been made clear. Mr. Hull, one of the teachers, reports his discomfort with this stance. Although he recognizes the value to his classroom management in being able to loosen his policy on school rules, like banning cell phones and hoodies, he is not comfortable that this will not lead to
consequences with Mr. Sokhem. He reports his apprehension about allowing the violations occur for fear of “getting in trouble for letting this go on.” Therefore, he seeks “to make sure my room is free from any violations.” Mr. Hull’s position on classroom management does not seem aligned with Mr. Sokhem’s stance on allowing students space to test the code of conduct while ensuring they are not crossing the line. However, because his vision is not clearly expressed to teachers, it leads to discomfort and inconsistency in interpreting the rules of the school.

To be sure, this analysis of Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Sokhem’s targeted stance on classroom management is not meant to underestimate the complexity of creating a set of expectations that appropriately suits a school full of teenagers. It is likewise not intended to simplify the role of the principal or to suggest that effective principals must spell out every rule and procedure to ensure consistency. Instead, it illuminates the challenge a principal faces to effectively influence teachers in meaningful ways by recognizing the importance of clarifying one’s position, even if that position provides flexibility for teacher interpretation.

1B.3 – Targeting Professional Learning

Mr. Sokhem’s passion for fostering a school community that welcomes students of all cultures resonated in his discussion of professional learning as well. With both clarity and frustration, he described his interest in exploring “cultural sensitivity” with the faculty as an issue that’s “been burning in my head.” He identified the need emerging from teachers who are not able to meet the needs of the diverse student body as they “seem to think that if [the students] don’t speak English, you speak louder and slower,
they will understand.” Mr. Sokhem has not yet broached this topic with his faculty, but he does see it as a critical need. As he seeks to influence the faculty and move the direction of the school in a way that meets the needs of the students and is in accordance with his vision, this topic seems critical. Furthermore, as he struggles to find a way to provide instructional support in some areas, leading this type of professional development could serve to strengthen his ability to take greater responsibility for the professional learning at Hamlet HS.

1B.4 – Impact on Teacher Retention

In targeting their influence in specific areas, principals address narrow issues to support the development of the school. This work often provides principals the chance to build on their strengths, bringing expertise to their school in an area that they may identify as a void. In other instances, the work emerges not from a place of expertise but because the principal believes the topic must be given more attention. As principals pursue these areas, they must remain sensitive to not alienating teachers who feel disconnected to the area. Teachers bring a passion for their discipline or grade level and seek principal support to bolster their program. However, principals cannot delve into every aspect of a school, and they must be mindful to strategically enter different areas to support teachers. When unsuccessfully done, principals will reinforce an individualistic and conservative practice, damaging school culture, and potentially increasing turnover.

In deciding issues for focus, a principal must weigh his or her passion with the organizational need and capacity and try to maintain a balance that enables leadership and confidence among teachers. This is very hard to do as shown in actions that both of these principals took. By his own admission, Mr. Lloyd’s attempts to bring the
aquaponics program to Ellison HS were based on his passion. However, it never received support from teachers, which stymied its ultimate success. Mr. Sokhem’s focus on multicultural education and supporting English language learners is based on his experiences and fuels his passion to lead. In targeting this area of the school, he provided expertise and resources to his teachers, which several teachers recognized; however, this came at the expense of other parts of the school experiencing less support. This outcome is inevitable as a principal cannot be everything for every teacher, yet the ambiguity that lingered in his instructional support left others feeling unsupported.

Finally, Mr. Geraghty’s attention to the technology team did not emerge from his passion or expertise; instead, it emerged based on a need in the school. This distinction is critical, as it removes a personal affiliation to the area, transitioning to a need of the school organization. This suggestion is not meant to dissuade principals from driving areas they are passionate about, but it does point to the importance of having the professional capacity to implement an initiative as well as the necessary communication skills that comes with a principal’s actions to manifest a vision.

Principals’ ability to influence the school culture through their targeted initiatives will further impact the ethos of teaching. When actions become disconnected from the teachers, they risk further separating teachers in the school. In doing so, teachers revert back to their individual classrooms and projects, leading to a more idiosyncratic practice. A culture of individualism is reinforced without a unified direction, and teachers will likely find few opportunities for sustainable change in their practice. On the other hand, when a principal identifies a specific area to develop in the school that is in sync with the school’s direction, teachers will be more deeply engaged in the school community. As
teachers move out of an isolated state to a position in which the collective vision of a school is recognized, the likelihood for retention is increased.

The opportunity for a principal to target a specific initiative brings tremendous opportunity for a principal. In a position with so many demands, identifying an area to closely manage and oversee its follow-through in the school provides the occasion to more deeply impact the organization with a narrow focus. In doing so, however, principals must maintain an awareness of the limitations that come with this stance. Most importantly, the issue must emerge from a need in the school, not simply a passion of the principal. Additionally, if a principal’s attention moves to a topic without support, then it will be fraught. Even with support in the school, a principal must also recognize the need to not lose touch with other parts of the school to ensure a balanced focus throughout the school. Through a strategic approach in this leadership style, principals can foster a more cohesive and effective working environment for teachers, increasing teacher retention.

IC: Integrate

Principals, who integrate their influence throughout their schools, develop comprehensive approaches to supporting teachers in their various responsibilities. While they are likely not involved in every logistical aspect, principals are involved in the design and execution of the system within the school. In recognizing this influence, principals and teachers often describe the presence of a principal to identify a larger aura that a principal assumes throughout a school.

When successfully establishing an integrated stance, a principal creates a system that perpetuates itself, providing for sustainable structures. In doing so, a principal is
able to share responsibility with others, and through this involvement, build greater consensus around the benefit of the program. Consequently, a principal’s influence will spread as others are not only participating but also taking responsibility for its success. The nature of this type of empowerment distinguishes itself from a delegating stance because of the principal’s direct involvement and affirmation of the program. In an integrated stance, the principal’s presence is recognized throughout the culture of the school.

While there are powerful upsides to an integrated stance, it also runs the risk of becoming counter-productive for a school culture. When systems become too complex, they become overwhelming and teachers and principals become fatigued. In addition, autonomy is a critical aspect of the teaching occupation. Creating shared expectations can be met with resistance or can ignore the realities of the teaching occupation and fail. Whereas the principal may attain a strong positive influence from this stance, the risk also exists for a principal to alienate teachers.

IC.1 – Integrating Instructional Practice

Ms. Scott connects a central part of her work in maintaining a connection to her teachers and their work in the classroom. She believes part of her responsibility in supporting their instruction is “never forget[ting] that I’m a teacher.” While her school is among the largest in the School District of Philadelphia, she seeks to maintain an integrated stance in their instructional practice by staying attuned to their work. She describes, “I know just when my teachers are going to shoot me, you know…And that helps me a lot. I know those days.” This mindset provides her the flexibility to recognize other perspectives and better support her teachers. In doing so, Ms. Scott does
not seek to micromanage the work of teachers; instead, she intends to understand their day-to-day work and support their practice through this connection.

Mr. Smith, at Ellison HS, shares that this type of presence would be beneficial for his effectiveness as a teacher. In describing the nature of instructional support that he seeks, it seems that he shared Ms. Scott’s approach: “You need to be around a classroom to see it,” he stated. “When you see something positive that a teacher does, give them a shout out, just verbal praise that I think would make people, it just makes them feel good to get recognized.” While the goal of this view of instructional support is to provide encouragement, not constructive feedback, this perspective highlights the importance of a principal having a presence in classrooms and being visible for teachers so as to validate their practice. This distinction separates a principal’s influence from the other two stances as it places the principal in the classroom.

Similar to Mr. Smith, other Ellison teachers commented on the importance of meaningful feedback from principals. Mr. Miller said that he would exchange privacy in his classroom for guidance with his teaching practice. He identified “support” as a critical component for a teacher-principal relationship; when it is nurtured, teachers will be open to sharing challenges with the belief the principal “can help you.” In his comments, Mr. Bryant considers the importance of trust and of ensuring that principals do not enter classrooms as a “gotcha surprise.” Mr. Bryant also identified a meaningful feedback as a critical feature of this support. He recalls a positive experience with a past principal: “The feedback was robust. I mean, it was a legit—it wasn't like checkboxes, excellent, okay, needs improvement. I mean, she wrote comments and they were—I mean, I can't remember exactly, but I have it back there. But, you know, there was a
number of sections.” This description offers insight into the ways in which a principal can provide influence over a teacher’s practice. Given a trusting relationship with teachers, principals can enter classrooms to provide detailed feedback to impact the ways in which a teacher delivers instruction. Without creating these conditions through shared criteria and a regular presence in classrooms, this degree of influence is not possible.

To maintain an integrated stance, principals identify the importance of shared expectations. Mr. Lloyd describes his efforts to begin the process to create common instructional practices. He explains that alongside the instructional leaders in the school, he began “talking about common assessments, talking about common delivery structure of instruction, common formative assessments.” To accomplish this goal, he recognized the importance of including the teachers in the process and ensuring that it becomes incorporated in teacher planning and practice. Mr. Lloyd acknowledges that this process at Ellison was just beginning, which could provide a reason as to why no teachers discussed this effort. Nonetheless, it is clear that his objective in working with the instructional leaders this way is to increase his influence over the instructional practices at Ellison to foster continuity across classrooms, providing a more unified learning experience for students and to offer additional support for teachers.

Mr. Torrey provides a counter strategy to Mr. Lloyd’s approach to creating unity in instructional practices. He discusses the importance of maintaining links throughout classrooms to remain integrated in the instructional program. At Dewey HS, he points to a collective decision not to “standardize curriculum or standardize content;” instead, “what we did was create a common structure and common system.” In this way, without losing influence over the instructional program, Mr. Torrey seeks to maintain teacher
autonomy in the classroom to create a common foundation for instruction without mandating particular resources. In addition, as he recognizes the importance of maintaining an adaptive position to support teachers, he acknowledges the benefit of continuing to revise the systems as the faculty evolves. Mr. Torrey aims to become enmeshed in the school’s instructional practice while also understanding the importance of granting teacher flexibility in their classrooms and including other voices in developing the common instructional structures.

1C.2 – Integrating Classroom Management

As with instructional practice, the importance of principal presence is critical to maintaining a positive school culture and supporting teachers with classroom management. Mr. Miller, at Ellison, recalls the principal of his high school as well as the principal of a previous school he worked at as being highly visible throughout the school day. He describes the principal as “in the hallway every single time the bell rang. If the kids were going to be in the hallway, he was in the hallway making sure they saw him, talking to them.” With this foundation, he believes the basis for a positive school culture was established and teachers were able to be more effective teachers. Instead, at Ellison, to his astonishment, he found that students did not know who Mr. Lloyd was. He added that Mr. Lloyd is pulled in many directions by the SDP Central Office and he does not blame Mr. Lloyd for his absence at the school. Nonetheless, Mr. Miller’s assertion that a principal must become an active and involved part of the school culture to improve classroom management is clear.
On several occasions, Mr. Lloyd acknowledged the importance of ensuring discipline is addressed as a pre-requisite for instruction to take place. He, therefore, emphasized the importance of a “single school culture.” To create this environment, Mr. Lloyd initiated a process that included bringing teachers and students in to collaborate to set the expectations for Ellison. After a long process, the group identified being responsible, respectful, prepared, and prompt as central factors to a single school culture. According to Mr. Lloyd, fliers about that were shared throughout the school. He provided a flier during the interview. However, no teachers verified this process or the outcome during their interviews. Additionally, members of Ellison’s leadership team expressed different views of classroom management. Ms. Rodgers expressed, “My feelings are some teachers just don't have classroom management. And my feelings are either you have it or you don't.” Similarly, Ms. Schilling explained, “Teachers have input in their own classroom. Classroom management, you know, you are expected to maintain peace in your classroom, have the kids sit down so they can listen.” These two viewpoints emphasize a belief in an individualized and static view of school culture. Their beliefs counter a culture in which a shared set of expectations will collectively support classrooms. Mr. Lloyd’s attempts to influence teachers through an integrated approach could not take hold without a strong enough presence and a belief system that seeks to maintain a conservative and individualistic culture in the school.

Principals Ms. Scott and Mr. Geraghty offer a different model for maintaining an integrated approach to classroom management through focusing on the larger picture without attempting to manage the logistics of a discipline system. Consistent with her delegation to the teachers, Ms. Scott maintains an influence with her teachers as she
emphasizes the importance of “building strong relationships and keeping the bar high.” In doing so, she inserts her belief system so teachers can respond. Mr. Geraghty situates his influence over discipline in the clarity and simplicity of the rules. He states, “Our rules are very clear and the staff understands them, and so do the students because we have it in writing, multiple places and we’re very clear about what’s going on.” Nonetheless, he also recognizes that the rules are not absolute and that with over 100 teachers, it is impossible to create policies that everyone institutes in the same ways. In stressing the importance of framing clear and simple expectations that provide individual structure, Ms. Scott and Mr. Geraghty seek to develop systems to maintain their connectivity to classroom management without overwhelming teachers or stifling their need for autonomy.

1C.3 – Integrating Professional Learning

Ms. Scott has fostered a staff community in which teacher collaboration regularly occurs, and teachers are empowered to connect with one another to improve practice. In addition, she aims to provide additional learning opportunities for teachers. “I have done more PD than any school in this whole city,” she boastfully says. “I bet if you take all the PD combined I’ve done more. And then we bring people from the outside to work with people.” While there was no simple way to quantify or verify Ms. Scott’s assertion, her description of Region HS’s professional culture demonstrates her influence over it. As she positions relationships as a critical aspect of learning, she seeks to delegate responsibility throughout her school, and her presence throughout the school culture is evident.
Mr. Torrey’s description of professional learning demonstrates his influence on all teachers as he standardizes certain aspects of professional practice. He states, “We’re very good at teaching teachers what the [Dewey] way of teaching is…and supporting them through that and doing all of those things. That comes at the cost of, I can lesson plan any way I want, I can do whatever I want.” With instructional practices structured to create continuity, the professional development follows suit, and teachers are provided structures to ensure they are supported in meeting expectations. And, in a similar construct, teachers at Dewey HS lose a certain degree of autonomy when engaging in these learning activities. Mr. Torrey’s influence over teacher practice and the school culture is clear based on his ability to create common practices in instruction and professional development.

1C.4 – Impact on Teacher Retention

To effectively lead from an integrated stance, a principal must develop trust. As Ms. Scott demonstrates, developing systems of leadership that stay connected throughout the organization is predicted on a shared understanding of expectations and a shared commitment to implement them. Principals must maintain an active presence in the school to respond to the evolving needs of the faculty and students and, in doing so, build flexible systems to meet multiple demands. Teachers, in turn, can assimilate into a larger system beyond their classroom within clear expectations without giving up autonomy. However, when a system becomes static, teachers will potentially feel limited by the system, damaging their professionalism. An integrated stance offers the potential for a
sustainable system that supports the school on multiple levels to develop a strong working environment, boosting teacher retention.

In considering the impact on teachers, a principal can influence the faculty through responding to input and developing clarity in policies. A principal cannot lead in this way without input from teachers and creating systems that enable teachers to reduce their workload through a shared commitment. As the data describe, teachers do not simply seek affirmation and platitudes on their practice; instead, they seek nuanced and specific feedback to support their growth. This work cannot take place without systems in place that foster these opportunities for development. In doing so, teachers are likely to be able to take a broader view of their practice, reducing their focus on the present and creating a stronger working culture to persist at a school.

In addition, there is evidence to connect this stance to supporting new teachers in a school. At Dewey HS, Mr. Torrey describes the ways in which his faculty integrated new members through teaching them about their school-wide systems. Teacher induction programs are too often limited with decontextualized and standardized support for teachers. In nestling the support at the school level through the systems that are in place, a new teacher is more likely to experience a more effective transition to the school that endures into the future.

The lynchpin for this stance, though, lies in a principal’s ability to adapt to the systems. If a principal becomes inflexible, then the systems that are developed will no longer remain effective for teachers. If a principal loses connection with a system, then the implementation becomes fragmented and inconsistent throughout a school. When these factors take place, teachers will likely withdraw to protect their autonomy. In
maintaining open communication to allow teacher input to guide the on-going progress of school systems, a principal can effectively guide a school in a constructive direction. A principal must ensure that the needs of the teachers are met, and through remaining present with the culture of a school, a principal will best support teachers.

Interestingly, the bulk of the evidence about integrated systems in schools did not emerge from Ellison or Hamlet. In considering the conditions needed for these systems to manifest, it might be difficult for a new principal to assume this stance for the bulk of his/her work. To accomplish this approach, a principal must build trust and learn about the conditions of a school to best respond to the unique context that exists. Over time, a principal can foster these systems through meeting the needs of a school. However, in a short time, it is challenging to create authentic systems with the principal at the helm.

An integrated leadership stance allows for a more inclusive and responsive school culture to emerge. In doing so, the principal must maintain a keen awareness of the daily operations of the school to adapt to on-going challenges. Given the complexity of schools, principals need to maintain open communication with teachers and other stakeholders. When successfully implemented, schools can become communities of shared values and practices that support teachers across classrooms. However, when principals become detached, the systems become disjointed, greater confusion and resentment will emerge, and teachers will likely entrench more deeply into their classrooms. To best promote teacher retention, principals can employ this integrated leadership stance to build shared responsibility across the school community and enlist teachers as partners in forming the collective vision and implementation in the school.
Examining Workplace Dynamics

The dynamics of a school organization are complex. While the mission of schools is to educate children, they also exist as workplaces for adults. Teachers and principals approach their positions from variety of perspectives with a range of goals to influence students. Nonetheless, it cannot be also ignored that working in schools is an occupation. Irrespective to the altruism a teacher or principal may demonstrate, they also receive a variety of extrinsic benefits, most notably a paycheck, in exchange for their services, and this factor impacts their performance in their roles. The quality of their workplace impacts teacher satisfaction and, consequently, impacts retention.

Grissom and Loeb (2011) discuss the range of the principal’s work, and their research points to the importance of organizational leadership for principals to create effective schools. On the other hand, recent reformers have pointed to the importance of instructional leadership as the critical lever to drive school change. While my research does not judge the relative impact of one over the other, my research does illuminate the influence a principal has as an organizational leader. In considering the ways in which a principal can influence teacher retention, it is essential for principals to pay close attention to the workplace dynamics to better support teachers.

To situate the data and my subsequent analysis, I identify three aspects of organizational dynamics (See Figure 3). These factors impact the professional experience of teachers. First, principals create a management structure through which a school vision is shaped and a leadership team can be developed. Second, principals must maintain awareness of the collegiality that exists in a school. Teachers are positioned in a tension between individualism and community that impacts the workplace in a school and
a principal must actively address these factors. Finally, principals support teachers in
different ways depending on their place on the career ladder. Given their experience,
teachers need varied supports and seek alternate rewards, and a principal can impact these
needs with a range of strategies. When managing appropriately, principals have the
influence to shape the dynamics in a school to promote teacher retention.

![Principal Influence on the Workplace Dynamics](image)

**Figure 3.** Framework to consider principal influence on workplace dynamics.

**2A: Management Structure**

With the nebulous definition of what it means to educate a child, individual
schools have the task to more narrowly identify a vision for learning. Leadership for
accomplishing this task lies with the principal, and there are a variety of ways to meet
this initiative. Principals, therefore, can implement a variety of management techniques
to develop a vision. In doing so, principals have the opportunity to distribute leadership
and share the responsibility for the management and direction of the school. A
consequence of principals effectively orchestrating a management structure in which
power is shared is that trust is developed and teachers are likely to feel a greater
affiliation with the school. Through a keen awareness of the ways in which a principal
can welcome teachers into the management of the school, a principal is able to influence
the workplace dynamics in a school.

2A.1 – Shared Vision

Mr. Torrey sees the shared vision in a school as an essential component for the
success of a school. He thinks it is important that “we believe we’re trying to do
something really important.” To accomplish this goal, Mr. Torrey seeks to fuse his entire
school community around their common vision. He adds, “We all drink the Kool-Aid,
right? And, that matters, right?” Albeit hyperbole, this cult-like image portrays a devout
core of teachers, sacrificing aspects of their individual beliefs for a greater purpose.
Nonetheless, the emphasis on common ideals and vision for the school is clearly a
priority at Dewey HS and drives the policies and culture of the school.

At Hamlet, teachers spoke positively about the opportunity to contribute to the
development of the vision of the school and the trust Mr. Sokhem has developed as a
result of this openness. There were many comments that described a culture that fostered
openness from the administration. In particular, Mr. Hull commented that he felt that Mr.
Sokhem has effectively shared his vision with the teachers, referring to him as “a good
captain who most teachers will follow because they have trust in what he’s saying.” As a
result of these efforts, Mr. Paul felt that they “[go] a long way for everybody working together and coming up with a strong school culture.” Mr. Sokhem sees this structure as a critical part of the school environment to support teachers in becoming effective in their work. He commented, “It’s the school belongs to everybody, the community, so they have to take ownership of their professionalism.” Mr. Sokhem’s efforts to create an open school in which teachers feel connected to the vision was recognized by the teachers, and he believed this would improve teaching in the school.

Teachers at Ellison also spoke about the importance of participating with the administration in developing a school vision, and the importance of building a trusting relationship to do so. According to Mr. Bryant, teachers were “absolutely invited to collaborate on the broader vision for this school.” However, Mr. Bryant indicated that the vision was not accepted by the school district at the mid-point of the school year; consequently, his colleagues viewed the year as “just working out the year” without larger planning. Interestingly, neither Mr. Lloyd nor any other teachers discussed this event having taken place.

Further, there was little mention of a unified school vision or school culture at Ellison. As mentioned above, Mr. Lloyd attempted to create a collaborative environment to distribute the responsibility for the expectations in a positive school culture. He described his strategy:

We went through a process in the rooms where we talked about single school culture, meaning we boiled it down to prompt, prepared and responsible and what that means to everybody. So we went through a process with teachers, where teachers defined it, then teachers collaborated around those definitions, then teachers fine-tuned those definitions. And we went through the same process and trained kids to be teacher-leaders, to go through that process in advisories, where they went through their definitions and explained what would be the interventions, what we should do. And by doing those things, it came up with prompt, prepared, respectful and responsible as a school and interventions if you aren’t doing those things. So it was kind of a long process and it’s given us kind of a basis to propel us into next year.
Mr. Lloyd readily shared the flier with me that was created from the work as evidence of the accomplishment. However, during the interviews with the teachers, no one mentioned this process. While some teachers mentioned conversations about participating in discussions about the larger direction of the school, there was no evidence of concrete examples for a shared leadership model.

Mr. Lloyd also described a challenge in maintaining a unified front across the school. In the unsettled environment at Ellison, Mr. Lloyd discussed the challenges of dissonance in a school setting. He highlighted the importance trust and what happens when teachers become fractured. He shared the detrimental impact a “snide remark from someone – quote, unquote – in leadership” can have on a school’s culture. In response to this experience, he feels it is best to keep those he might not trust in closer proximity to ensure they will not share false information or claim to be uninformed of what is going on in the school. To build a shared school vision, Mr. Lloyd identified challenges in fostering an environment in which all voices were recognized and the challenges that can emerge when teachers are not aligned with a school vision.

On the other hand, at Region HS, Ms. Scott offers a provocative contrast given the ways in which she responds to opposition by teachers. Ms. Scott shared how she encourages teachers with disagreements about the school’s vision and policies to challenge her. Even if teachers are “super cocky,” it can actually benefit a principal because “it just makes you stay on your toes...just keeps [you] sharper.” In this vein, Ms. Scott is receptive to conflict and disagreement. She does not seek compliance from her teachers and values the opportunity to refine the school vision and direction with teachers. In comparison to Ellison, Ms. Scott’s tenure at Region HS and faculty stability
likely also contributes to the differences in school cultures. Nonetheless, she recognizes the importance of remaining open to teachers to share their views and allow those insights to guide the direction of the school.

In addition, other principals also discussed their approach to developing a shared vision for a school. Mr. Geraghty expressed the need for teachers to be involved in the “decision-making” of the school beyond their professional responsibilities as teachers. He discussed the importance of teachers supporting having a connection to the policies and direction of the school to promote a feeling that “they are part of something special.” In a similar vein to Hamlet, Mr. Geraghty promotes a unified school culture, recognizing that having a shared vision can help promote this accord in a school.

Mr. Torrey also raised a different perspective on this issue. In discussing his role as a principal, he highlighted the importance of setting the vision of the school. He stated, “You are the person who should be able to figure out how the pieces add up to a unified whole. You are the person who keeps the big picture in mind and has to – again make sure everything sort of comes in line with what your overarching vision.” To be sure, Mr. Torrey did not dismiss the role of teachers in this process; however, he does view this as a central role of the principal. A principal is uniquely tasked with making sure the different departments and programs in a school jive in unison and remain balanced. Teachers have a different responsibility in schools as they assume much more narrow roles. Mr. Torrey makes an important distinction about the role and influence that a principal has in implementing the vision in a school.
2A.2 – Leadership Team

An additional component to framing the management structure in a school is to understand the ways in which a principal builds a leadership team. This team can be in charge of a range of responsibilities from making critical decisions about the direction of the school to completing administrative tasks. Mr. Sokhem affirms the larger purpose of distributing leadership to nurture an involved faculty, supporting decisions to build community and ownership at the school. Mr. Bryant provides a different perspective; he observes the logistical necessity, given the reduced resources in urban schools. He describes, “Principals, I think at almost any school, are always overwhelmed. So it’s, like, yeah. No, I think that the principals are happy to let teachers do as much as they feel like doing.” In considering the images and impact of leadership teams, this section will build upon the ideas of Mr. Sokhem and Mr. Bryant to explore the range of perspectives presented by teachers and administrators.

At Hamlet, the presence of the leadership team plays a critical role in more deeply engaging the faculty. In discussing sharing power, Mr. Sokhem reiterates the importance of community; he shares, “Because they feel a sense of belonging, they're empowered to believe that this is their school, this is their work, this is their second home.” Hamlet teachers also echoed the necessity of this inclusive feeling. Mr. Ford described the importance of teachers “be[ing] given opportunities to be involved” to create more “committed” teachers in the school. Mr. Paul also recognized the benefits of these opportunities; however, he felt it was too often the same teachers who part of the leadership team and sought to “get more of the other teachers involved that can get them better collaboration.” While Mr. Paul was not aware of these opportunities, Mr. Sokhem
was actively seeking out ways to widen the leadership team. Mr. Hull shared an occasion for involvement, when he was asked to attend meetings about how to support incoming students. Mr. Sokhem was able to offer different ways for his faculty to become involved in leadership opportunities and decision making at the school.

While the faculty at Hamlet is unified and inclusive, there were not vibrant descriptions of distributed leadership team at Ellison. Given the churn in the faculty, there was not a veteran core of teachers and, as discussed, Mr. Lloyd did not have a trusting relationship with some members of his faculty. Ms. Schilling expressed frustrations about her inability to effectively serve as a department chair. She identified her leadership role as a way “to help teachers, struggling and otherwise, to become good teachers.” However, she expressed that she was not able to contribute this assistance in the school due to the administration’s lack of support for peer mentoring in the school.

Many other teachers discussed individual conversations with Mr. Lloyd as opportunities to share their insights into the school. However, there was little evidence of formalized structures to contribute to the direction of the school.

Mr. Geraghty raised a different reason for the necessity of distributing leadership as he expressed the futility in not acknowledging the influence of other teachers. He discussed the institutional strength of department chairs at Adams and the powerful role they play in directing the school, with or without his consent. He described, “If you don’t have buy-in from the teacher leaders who run departments, they can make your life miserable…I can over-ride them, but they’re the ones who make the selection.” While Mr. Geraghty did not express an interest in challenging their authority, his comment
raises an interesting contrast to the culture at Ellison, for it demonstrates the stark
difference in the ways in which teachers feel empowered by the cultures of the school.

Given the importance of teacher leaders and allowing teachers to influence the
decision making in a school, a counter-notion was also shared. Some teachers don’t want
to influence the direction of the school, and some teachers don’t want responsibilities
beyond their teaching duties. These teachers thrive in the classroom with their students
and find working with other adults a frustrating part of their job. Mr. Hull, at Hamlet,
expressed that while “it would be a big mistake for an administrator to deny [a teacher’s]
voice be heard…some teachers want to come in, teach five classes and leave.” In this
respect, it is a mistake to make assumptions about the contributions teachers seek to make
in schools. While leadership opportunities are important for some teachers, there are also
teachers who are averse to this part of the occupation. Some teachers engage in their
work through their classroom work and see this role as a way to connect to the larger
direction of the school.

2A.3 – Impact on Teacher Retention

A principal’s ability to lead with a clear school vision and influential leadership
team provides the principal a key lever to develop a strong culture. Through building
trust and a sense of community in a school, teachers are more likely to feel connected to
the school community. To accomplish this environment, communication is essential.
Hamlet HS’s Mr. Ford identifies this quality and its connection to supporting retention.
He describes, “among the things that retains anyone, being a teacher or any other
employees, is employees more than raises and bonuses and anything else, want to feel in
the know.” In creating systems to support a shared sense of purpose and direction, a
principal’s ability to effectively communicate is a critical component to maintaining strong retention. In fact, Mr. Bryant, at Ellison HS, sees this influence as the sole control a principal has. He states, “I think the principal with regard to retention can only do so much. I mean, other than creating a good school climate.” In creating this strong climate, a principal fosters trust across the faculty with a common purpose and shared responsibility driving everyone’s work.

One essential outcome that emerges from this working environment is a sense of belonging in a school. This quality offers teachers a deeper connection to a school that manifests itself as teachers break down barriers that separate them. In reducing individualism in a school, principals can shift the school culture to foster a larger sense of purpose. Adams HS principal Mr. Geraghty describes this impact as "when people think they’re valued and part of a team, they’re more inclined to want to stay somewhere because they’re being heard. They’re not just someone who’s here to walk in and crack a book and teach a class and then pack up and leave." Teachers are motivated by their work with their students, yet their connection to the larger school organization is a central driver for retention. Through creating a dynamic management system that allows for input, principals can build a stronger community and are more likely to retain teachers.

In addition to a sense of community, through this trust, principals can also empower teachers to build a larger commitment to their work. While a simple point, it is important to note the importance of a principal creating a warm environment and offering opportunities for teacher input. Mr. Little, at Hamlet HS, acknowledges, “It’s not a draconian atmosphere; people feel good coming into work here. And you know it’s certainly not that way in every building [in the School District of Philadelphia].” He also
discussed the impact of this working environment: “I’ve had principals that have valued me. And I really work hard for those principals.” Mr. Little’s sentiments highlight the ability for a principal to develop a positive working environment and the impact it will have on the teachers’ mindset and commitment in a school. Through developing a workplace that allows for teacher input and shared leadership, teachers not only stay at a school, but they also become more invested in their teaching.

Furthermore, a responsive management structure provides opportunities for teachers to see beyond the present, reducing a prevailing feature of the teaching occupation. As a leader, a principal can create an inclusive culture that allows teachers to recognize upcoming opportunities. Mr. Suber, veteran teacher at Hamlet, described this impact; he said, “The principal has to lead the troops so to speak. And if the teachers buy into the administrator, it’s a ripple affect…Even if things are bad and there are down days, dark clouds over the school, the teachers will still believe, because they have a leader who they can trust.” Mr. Suber’s comments affirm the impact of trust in a school community as a means to transform a school community. Teachers are more likely to persist through challenging times, working in reinforcing a principal to improve a school. As research illustrates, this shared responsibility is a critical feature to bolster teacher retention in a school.

A principal’s influence in developing a shared leadership structure hinges on the principal’s ability to stay connected to the undertone in a school. Through effective communication and opportunities for input, principals can create a proactive, trusting, and welcoming school culture for teachers. Whereas the data reveal a breakdown at Ellison HS surrounding the ability to create this culture, other schools offered insights to
building a productive culture of shared leadership. Ultimately, a principal’s ability to influence this culture requires a strong presence to the faculty’s response to his/her initiatives. Ms. Scott, principal at Region HS, described her response to this challenge when she sensed her teachers were burnt out: “So what I did was I just did a whole de-stress. We had – I hired two masseuses, I turned one room into a dessert room…I had line dancing, they had an art class. So the whole day was about them. This is why people keep coming.” Ms. Scott’s actions to create a collaborative and responsive working environment mirror her beliefs about retention as her mindfulness to her staff maintains an inviting culture for teachers to thrive.

2B: Collegiality

Adult relationships are also a critical aspect in examining the organizational dynamics of a school. Teachers are positioned alone in classrooms with their students, yet they are members of a larger school community that impacts their job satisfaction. In addition to the leadership structure and overall direction of a school, teachers’ experiences are influenced by their professional experience as an autonomous teacher as well as the interactions they have with colleagues outside the classroom. While the principal’s obligations do not include ensuring that teachers have strong personal relationships with one another outside the classroom, it is critical for a principal to maintain the pulse of the school and be aware of the interpersonal dynamics taking place in the school. In doing so, principals can create structures to promote stronger collegiality in a school through positive teacher interactions and promoting a strong community in the school. These responsibilities can take place in both formal ways as
they shape the professional duties for teachers as well as in more informal ways as they endorse collaboration and participation in the school. Through describing individualism and community, this section will depict images of the ways in which principals can influence the relational dynamics of the adults in a school and the impact these structures might have on teacher retention.

2B.1 – Images of Individualism

Schools are designed for teachers to be detached from other adults throughout the day. The core work of teachers is to interact with students, and with the exception of a respite during lunch and a period off, teachers spend their day with children, not adults. Consequently, schools may come to represent “egg crates” as teachers work in isolation from one another, despite their close proximity to one another. This individualistic structure brings forth two responses. On one hand, teachers feel stymied and isolated; on the other hand, teachers value their autonomy.

In describing his experience at Ellison HS, Mr. Miller expressed his position as isolated. He stated, “This classroom might as well be a huge cubicle and none of us work together.” Perhaps in reference to what some see as a corporate model influencing schools, this critique points to the challenges in thriving in a school community in which teachers are disconnected. Further, in an occupation that heavily relies on relationships, when teachers believe they are separated from others, their experience is diminished in the school. While not a new phenomenon, Mr. Miller’s expression of isolation points to the sterilization of a school community and the disconnection from a school community that teachers may experience.
Alternatively, other teachers value the individual space in a school and perceive this separation as autonomy. In this construct, teachers recognize the individualism as trust from the administration. Mr. Ford, at Hamlet HS, described a strong principal as one “who knows when it’s time to get out of your way and let you do your job and respects you as a professional.” Similarly, Ellison HS’s Mr. Bryant discussed the importance of a principal “not being overbearing” and “let[ting] me do my job.” In framing their perspective on individualism, Mr. Ford and Mr. Bryant describe their interactions with the principal while Mr. Miller expresses a frustration with a disconnection from his peers. Irrespective of this difference, where the teachers place their focus is telling. In pointing to the administrative role in their individualism, Mr. Ford and Mr. Bryant reference the priority of their professional trust without a focus on the peer collegiality as Mr. Miller described. This difference speaks to the significance of trust in their work that teachers feel as well as the importance of principals recognizing the various consequences of teacher individualism.

Mr. Bryant also shares a version of individualism that illustrates how some teachers simply want to exist in a school without collaborating with other adults. In sharing this more nuanced view, he shared, “You know, people go into teaching for a lot of different reasons, you know. Some people go into teaching because they want to be left alone, you know. They don't mind hanging out with the kids, but they don't want a boss talking to them all the time; they don't want to chit-chat with a bunch in their office.” Mr. Bryant’s characterization is not designed to disparage this type of teacher. It points to a critical distinction of the individualistic nature of the teaching occupation. This teacher does not seek autonomy as a professional protection; instead, this teacher
seeks to remain alone because their job satisfaction and feedback emerges from their students. It is damaging to remove a teacher from their passion of working with students.

In examining the professional and collegial support teachers receive in school, a new hybrid model is developing through the use of social media. Whereas Mr. Bryant identified the importance of professional autonomy from his administration, he also spoke of a different mode to avoid isolation. He describes, “I’m always on Twitter. I’m always, like, you know, looking different stuff up…So, thankfully because of the internet…I can collaborate, if you will, at least in some sort of a rudimentary way, with teachers all over the country and even the world.” While Mr. Bryant was the only person to address this new support, it is worth noting as an expanding frontier in connecting teachers to one another. Furthermore, in considering the impact of teacher isolation on a school, the expanding on-line resources for teachers offer new opportunities for teachers to create professional communities both in and out of a school.

In harmony with their teachers, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Sokhem also describe their emphasis on promoting teacher autonomy. Their descriptions position teachers as individuals in their work, and their rationale speaks to the professional distance they seek to provide teachers. Mr. Lloyd describes, “I am an autonomous person. So our teachers have truly a tremendous amount of autonomy...But teachers have a wide latitude in their implementation strategies, so there’s a lot of autonomy here in terms of how they can implement the core curriculum.” In doing so, Mr. Lloyd expresses the need to leave teachers alone to allow them to thrive. Likewise, Mr. Sokhem explains, “They are in charge of knowing the subject they’re teaching, know how to manage the classroom, know how to plan their lesson, know how to deliver their lesson. Know how to get
students engaged. Those are professionals.” The description of teachers as professionals came up throughout Mr. Sokhem’s interviews, and he defines his role in supporting teachers as trusting teachers to successfully do their job. Both principals view teacher individualism not only as a necessary characteristic of teaching but also a structural component that should be reinforced to ensure the autonomy and respect for the work of teachers.

Conversely, Mr. Torrey at Dewey HS prioritizes collaboration and seeks to limit the individualism of teachers in school. As expressed earlier, Mr. Torrey emphasizes unity in his school vision. He downplays teacher autonomy to prioritize shared systems and practices. He states, “We don’t actually look for the Maverick, we don’t look for the person who wants to do whatever the hell he wants to do. We really want people who want to collaborate.” In this vein, Mr. Torrey wants to ensure that teachers in his school also feel comfortable in breaking down professional norms of individualism. Mr. Torrey’s stance does not offer the individual autonomy in the classroom to the same degree as others, like Mr. Sokhem and Mr. Lloyd, and he seeks to ensure that teachers break down aspects of their individualistic practices.

2B.2 – Images of School Community

In addition to the individualism that teachers experience, the need to find ways to connect with one another and build school community is present for teachers. Because teachers do not exist in a vacuum in the school, their relationships with one another impact their experience at the school and contribute to the broader school culture. A theme of camaraderie emerged as of central importance to several teachers. Ms. Schilling at Ellison HS described the value of collaboration because of the moral support
it provides. She continued, “Somebody might have had a bad day, a bad month, and you have somebody who can, you know, kind of talk them through it and let them know it's going to be okay.” Mr. Francis, at Ellison, added that collaboration bolsters the sense of community in a school as it supported a sense that “people had each other’s back.” This shared sense of unity offered teachers a relational community to enhance their workplace experience and develop a stronger sense of affiliation to the school.

In addition to faculty support, this type of support also potentially can influence a faculty to unify in opposition to an administration. Mr. Ford describes his induction to the Hamlet HS family as he recognized the longevity of many teachers in the school. As a result, there was a strong culture of care and collegial support. Also, he described, “if you had an administrator who maybe was a little punitive, you knew that the fellow teachers you had were going to stick with you and you could ride out that administrator until someone else came along.” This form of teacher cooperation exists to protect teachers from what they perceive as a threatening administrator. Mr. Lloyd, at Ellison HS, recognizes this faculty congealing as he describes the peril of teacher collaboration: “When you have a collaborative environment, you need to make sure it’s not a toxic environment. So you can have collaborators that are negative collaborators, that work real well together, but are working antithetical to the mission of the school.” From different vantage points, Mr. Ford and Mr. Lloyd are depicting the same response in teacher connections. When teachers bond, there is a potential for this to take place in opposition to the administration’s mission. If there is a common ground, then teachers can provide a powerful deadlock to an administration’s agenda. Teacher collegiality is critical for a school community, and it must take place alongside, not in opposition to, the principal.
As such, the principal also plays a role in the interpersonal dynamic that influences a school culture. Teachers expressed the need for the principal to build relationships with teachers. Mr. Paul expressed this as an essential part of a principal’s success. He described Mr. Sokhem: “First and foremost is his personality and how he treats the teachers. He’s funny. He’s nice. He’s friendly… And you know, when it’s time to be principal, he’s principal. He knows the line and the faculty knows the line, which is good.” Mr. Francis continued this line when describing Mr. Lloyd’s disposition, stating, “Because you want to actually work with that guy and you don’t feel like you’re working for him.” These comments speak to the necessity of a principal participating in the school community in a way that garners and spurs actions through his/her personality and relationships with teachers.

Similarly, Ms. Scott describes the relationships with her teachers as a critical part of her job. She recognizes this trust as a means to promote her connections with all members of the school’s community. She explains, “And most importantly, everybody is important. Whether you are the cleaning person, you care. And – like I said, I do everything. I will clean the floors. And that’s why people – building those strong relationships with people on an individual basis.” Ms. Scott describes her beliefs for demonstrating the necessity of showing teachers not only their importance but also the care that she provides for them. Through her actions, she is able to support a collaborative school community that recognizes the importance of supporting the adults in a school, as well as focusing on student learning.

To be sure, though, several principals also pointed to the inevitability of frustrating teachers at times. “No matter what, some people’s cup will never be filled, no
matter what I do.” Mr. Geraghty explained. “Some people are going to complain. And that just happens when you have a staff.” And, Ms. Scott described that while she knows she frustrates her staff at times, she also knows the importance of staying attuned to what is going on. She states, “I never, ever take my finger off the pulse of my building. I know when I need to stoke people. I know when they’re angry, when they’ve had enough.” Through this awareness, principals must recognize the challenges in addressing the faculty and ensuring a supportive community, even when conflict arises. To address this disconnect, Mr. Torrey considers himself “the head care-taker” in his school for both the adults and students. A principal has the ability to influence a school through addressing the degree to which teachers feel satisfied. Principals must, therefore, carefully influence systems and school culture to ensure teachers feel part of the larger community.

While the need for camaraderie and relationships are critical for a school dynamic, the challenge remains on how to effectively support this community. As a result, efforts have been made to create common planning periods for all teachers. This structure requires additional resources in a school to have the necessary teachers to support this initiative as well as the appropriate leadership to oversee the meetings. In addition, implementing mandated times for collaboration prompts different challenges in authentically motivating teachers to commit to the process without viewing it as another administrative mandate. These challenges lie at the core of building a collegial community in a school.

At Ellison HS, Mr. Lloyd describes a top-down approach to fostering collaboration. He states, “So the way we implement that, meaning my assistant
principals and I will talk about things that we're looking for, look for that we want to put in the classroom and we'll see across that group, they are just a bit more vocal with one another, a little bit more supportive of one another, so we do see it actually happening.”

In this description, Mr. Lloyd recognizes the supportive consequence of common planning time; however, the priority is placed on influencing classroom practice and seeking to create a more uniform teaching style across the school. In describing the collaboration at Ellison, Mr. Bryant emphasized that there was “no formal collaboration” and that a collegial culture of collaboration existed with the faculty in which “we're always talking to one another, we're always sharing ideas.” These descriptions offer different expectations and attempts at creating meaningful collaborative environments for teachers as the tension between structure and control exist in the nature of their explanations.

Teachers at Ellison HS also reflected upon challenges with common planning time and the lack of impact it had on their practice. Across several interviews, teachers attributed the mandatory and inflexible nature of the structure to its ineffectiveness. Notably, Mr. Francis described its daily nature over the course of a few years as “just kind of a waste.” He pointed to one year when he was scheduled to meet with colleagues at the end of the day, stating “at the end of the day, I was spent, and I didn’t feel like talking about things.” As Hargreaves (2010) points out, this “contrived collaboration” does not bolster a school community. Simply mandating common planning time for all teachers without recognition to other factors can, in turn, further damage a school culture.

To address this challenge, Mr. Torrey also sees the necessity to provide structure in teacher collaboration as a way to build a common school culture. He offers a
distinction around what is mandated to best support teachers. He details his approach:

“So what we have done is rather than sort of standardize curriculum or standardize content, what we did was create a common structure and common system. And you have to work with those common systems and structures.” In doing so, Mr. Torrey believes that the optimal ways to support teacher collaboration to ensure collegial relationships and professional growth takes place are to emphasize larger systems over specific strategies.

Mr. Sokhem and teachers at Hamlet portray a different set of expectations for the structure and purpose of common planning time. To support teacher collaboration, Mr. Paul explains Mr. Sokhem’s approach: “He puts that trust in the faculty to create and implement their own common planning time and what they want to do in that time.” Mr. Sokhem believes that he was too hands-on during the past school year, and he hopes to provide loose guidelines to explore the “Common Core” to offer a structure without controlling the process. In this respect, Mr. Sokhem is able to respect the need for peer support and collaboration while offering some guidelines to ensure the time also impacts the teachers’ professional responsibilities.

Other opportunities for teacher collaboration can emerge in creating a school culture that encourages teacher collaboration without mandating it. Mr. Geraghty sees the futility in seeking to align his teachers due to the size of the faculty. He prioritizes allowing smaller subgroups in departments to allow teachers to connect with one another as “you’re not going to get 20 [teachers] to be on the same page.” In a similar framework, Ms. Scott also seeks to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate on their terms in “think tanks.” As described, these structures emerge when teachers
identify problems to solve. Ms. Scott acknowledges that this strategy is contingent on having teachers who “want to be together to work together.” In this structure, both Mr. Geraghty and Ms. Scott acknowledge the importance of collegial relationships and encourage informal networks to emerge.

2B.3 – Implications on Teacher Retention

Teachers work in their classrooms in isolation. Whether teachers liken their position to “egg-crates” or “cubicles,” a principal must confront this reality without threatening a teacher’s autonomy while developing structures for teachers to connect with one another. There are many ways for teachers to collaborate, and principals need to consider opportunities for teachers to support one another’s work. Consequently, a variety of needs must be met within a single school culture. It is the principal’s responsibility to recognize the conflicting demands, fostering a school community that is responsive to as many people as possible. Collegiality can impact a school in alternative ways; depending on how the relationships are understood and supported by the principal, this dynamic can further perpetuate a static culture or infuse an innovative and engaging school community.

A strong school community can result in stronger retention in a school. A part of Hamlet HS’s association to a family is a recognition to the longevity of many of the faculty. During his introduction to the school, Mr. Ford explained, “That impressed upon me that they were here for a reason: it was for each other and for the students in this community. That felt like something I wanted to be a part of and stay a part of.” More
than a decade into his service at the school, Mr. Ford has no plans to leave the school. Another veteran teacher at Hamlet HS, Mr. Paul, echoed this sentiment: “It’s just a family here. And you get sucked in and you don’t want to leave.” The collegiality at the school has provided both teachers a reason to stay. However, as both teachers described, it has also reinforced a conservative approach in the school. While creating a welcoming environment in the school for teachers is a positive feature, it also threatens a school’s ability to develop a progressive faculty that is willing to make necessary changes and updates.

Therefore, principals must understand this dynamic in a teaching faculty and identify ways to harness this culture in a positive manner. Mr. Lloyd acknowledged this challenge in his work as a principal. He warned against framing all collaboration as beneficial. He stated, “So you have to be very careful that directly saying collaboration equals retention, has to be positive collaboration.” Mr. Lloyd describes the potential fracture between teachers and administrators, and the damage it can have on a school community. From this vantage point, Mr. Lloyd prioritizes a unified school community with the school vision taking precedence over the influence of teacher collaboration.

Ms. Scott offers a different perspective on this dynamic. As she described the “think tanks” that organically emerged throughout Region HS, she celebrates teacher collaboration, especially when it happens outside of her purview. She shared, “When you have folks collaborating outside of me, it starts to break down that us versus them.” In this vein, Ms. Scott seeks to cultivate a culture that empowers teachers to reduce isolation and collaborate in ways that improve the school. Whereas Mr. Lloyd sees the potential for teacher collaboration to undermine school vision, Ms. Scott’s leadership stance
positions this shared leadership as a means to operationalize the school vision. In doing so, she creates a welcoming school community with a flattened leadership hierarchy. The informal networks that arise at Region HS engage teachers in a collegial school community, promoting a culture for greater teacher retention.

While the depiction at Region HS illustrates a strong collaborative culture, images of ineffective collaborative cultures also emerged in the data. As the literature points out, while mandated collaboration will put teachers in the same physical space, it does not automatically lead to improved professional culture. The emerging nature of the networks at Region HS provides insight to a method to improve school retention. The complexity of a school organization challenges a principal to balance the autonomy of teachers alongside the need to build a constructive and shared responsibility in a school. And, as several principals pointed out, this challenge will leave some people unhappy. Certain levels of turnover are necessary in a school as a principal influences a school culture, and a principal must consider the causes and consequences as the transition occurs.

Ultimately, collegiality is critical in a workplace. A principal must remain flexible so as to recognize individuality while fostering networks to emerge and support each other. Through considering the alternative perspectives that teachers and principals bring to their jobs, a range of approaches to supporting teachers and shaping the work of principals can emerge. Principals must embrace a school community not as a threat to their power but as a necessary support to bolster the support for everyone. In doing so, schools can become dynamic organizations in which people are supported, given room to grow, and, subsequently, are more likely to stay.
2C: Career Ladder

The career trajectory for a teacher, given the structure of the occupation, does not provide ample opportunities for teachers to reshape their careers. The features of the job are relatively stable with a given discipline for high school teachers or age range for elementary school teachers. Similarly, the pay scale for a teacher is consistent with step raises over the first decade of a teacher’s career, and then little movement from there. This organizational structure elicits a range of responses for teachers and principals ranging from security in the predictability to frustration in the stagnation. Through examining central motivators for teachers in their work and ways to support teacher growth, principals can better create work environments to help teachers thrive in their work. Therefore, the entry, support, and exit of a teacher should receive careful consideration to recognize the implications on retention for teachers.

2C.1 – Images of Entry

When asked about reasons for becoming a teacher, there was a consistent response: the students. From Mr. Hull, a second year teacher at Hamlet, to Ms. Rodgers, an Ellison teacher in her 30th year, the sentiment to work with and support children was clear. Ms. Rodgers framed her approach as her commitment to the students in her community; she described, “And I do what I do, not because of who's sitting at that desk [the principal’s desk]. I do what I do because of the kids. I could sit on my front porch, the kids will be walking up and down the street. I see them. I live in the neighborhood.” Similarly, when asked about why he believes teachers work at Adams HS, Mr. Geraghty responded, “The kids are the reason.” Across these school environments with teachers
and principals at different levels of experience, the constant presence of the students as a central reason for becoming and remaining a teacher is clear.

Moving beyond this initial rationale of entering the profession, in Philadelphia, additional concerns are raised concerning hiring candidates to a particular school. Given the size of the school district, there are levels of screening that take place before new candidates reach the school level. “I can’t just run out there and grab somebody from industry and say, hey, you want to teach, come in and just interview them,” describes Mr. Lloyd. “So they're going to have to go through the process of the probably six exams or if they're going to on the CTE side, they have to get an exemption and there’s a whole system they have to go through first.” Once candidates are into the school district, many schools have hiring committees to interview and offer positions to interested candidates. Mr. Sokhem explains, “I have a team of teachers who would interview candidate for a certain position and making sure that their philosophy, their teaching philosophy, fit into ours and make a recommendation to human resources to bring them on board to our school.”

However, these processes become obscured at the school level due to a range of factors, including enrollment, certification requirements, and school district timelines. For instance, in the 2012-3 school year during the time of these interviews, SDP did not open the hiring window until the first week of June; consequently, hard to staff schools, like Hamlet and Ellison, were forced to wait for candidates to explore other options before considering their schools. This delayed their timeline into the latter part of June. Mr. Lloyd expressed frustration in this delay, as he observed that teachers “are too busy wrapping up the school year. In addition to that, after their school year is done they go
on vacation. It's hard to get them to come in for the interview.” Additional frustration was expressed at Ellison about the ability to place the appropriate teachers, and the fallout that takes place when teachers are transferred and appointed with little input from the school. Mr. Francis explained his perception of this process:

I think principals are almost powerless to decide who they get to pick because the district is the Big Brother. The district is that left or right hand that tells you have one English position, a science and a math, and we're going to go and call these people in order and you might get to meet one. Who knows. You know have no idea.

Without an effective process, questions of control are raised, and teachers and principals identify challenges in developing efficient and effective hiring practices to their school. Consequently, teacher hiring can become a challenge for all of those involved in trying to build unified school communities.

2C.2 – Images of Professional Growth and Rewards

New Teacher Induction

As teachers enter the occupation, they often enter into an induction process, which provides additional support for beginning teachers. This process is most effective when teachers receive support from multiple sources, including both in school and district-level support (Smith & Ingersoll, 2004). When experienced teachers enter a new school, there must be additional support as teachers become acclimated to the culture of a new school. There were several stark differences when reviewing the data around their induction processes at Hamlet and Ellison high schools.

At Hamlet, where a strong culture of teacher unity exists, several teachers discussed informal mentoring structures. When asked about his experience transitioning into Hamlet during the past school year, Mr. Hull explained, “People approached me and
gave me advice...I think this was just the climate of the school.” He added, “I don’t think [Mr. Sokhem] influenced this.” Mr. Ford, the school’s union leader, and Mr. Paul also recognized a variety of supports throughout the school. Mr. Ford added, “I think we should definitely have more mentoring going on where senior teachers are sort of mentoring and collaborating with younger teachers and kind of helping them.” In considering his role in supporting new teachers at Hamlet, Mr. Sokhem shared, “I have not had any system in place yet simply because the lack of staffing…We don’t have extra teachers who can actually leave the classroom to mentor another teacher.” Interestingly, what Mr. Sokhem identified as a void in the school to “make [new teachers] feel as though they are a part of the Furness family” was actually occurring underneath his radar and even in a time of depleted resources. Taken together, this data set reflects an entrenched teacher culture and its power in supporting new teachers, regardless of the principal’s influence in this matter.

On the other hand, at Ellison, where a veteran teaching force is minimal, there was no evidence of formal or informal support for new teachers. In prioritizing teacher mentoring, Mr. Lloyd said, “Teachers also need teacher mentors; they need buddies. New teachers coming in your school need buddy teachers.” Ellison’s union representative Mr. Bryant, like Mr. Ford, highlighted the impact veteran teachers can have when mentoring new teachers; he also described a reciprocal nature with younger teachers providing “technology PDs, because perhaps the younger teachers should be giving the older teachers the tech PDs.” However, no teachers described mentoring, either formal or informal, taking place at the school. Instead, the teachers shared their negative experiences with people from the outside coming to the school to support their practice.
Mr. Francis shared his positive experiences as a new teacher at a different school with a mentor and shared his skepticism of outside people: “When you have somebody from downtown, you're not sure if they're with you or they're jotting some little things on the side, you know, kind of against you.” Mr. Smith shared his frustration with the support he received, “They give them like the teacher coach, blah, blah, blah.” He, then, shared his belief in the futility in the matter, “No, it’s always, I think it’s sink or swim, that's how I felt, which you know, trial by fire is kind of I think what you kind of need to do.” Like Hamlet, there is a clear disconnect between the administration’s vision and its implementation in the school. However, at Ellison, there is no teacher-created system for teachers to support each other. Without a stable faculty, it is difficult to nurture informal networks of teacher support. Ellison did not have an effective top-down system for teacher induction, nor did it have the infrastructure to create teacher support.

On-going support

Following the induction phase, there is a range of ways to support teachers. Once teachers find a comfortable routine, it is necessary to find additional ways to support their growth to avoid their becoming “stuck in a rut,” as Mr. Paul described the potential for mid-career teacher stagnation. This support extends beyond classroom practice to include a range of ways to validate and reward teachers. Several principals discussed the importance of flexibility and precision in supporting teachers in a variety of ways as they move further into their careers. “You have to be flexible,” said Mr. Lloyd. “And find challenges to give them to help them grow professionally.” Mr. Sokhem extended this idea, as he stated that mid-career teachers should be “support[ed] based on their need or their identified need.” In recognizing the importance of endorsing a range of
opportunities for experienced teachers, Mr. Geraghty commented, “when a teacher comes to me with an idea …and I see a benefit for our students, I fight my darndest to make sure that they’re able to do that…And that kind of builds – people feel valued when you do that.” In considering this array of support for teachers, a variety of approaches were presented by teachers to support their development and retention at their school.

At the most basic level, teachers indicated a desire for appreciation and validation from their principal. Teachers can become isolated very quickly and the need for recognition serves as a simple, albeit powerful, way to support teachers. “Just on a human level, a hello, how are you doing?” said Hamlet’s Mr. Suber. “Conversation, a smile, can I have a second of your time…Offering time is to me is an important way that the administrator values the teacher.” Building upon this notion, other teachers discussed the value of recognition for their hard work, including a “shout-out in a meeting, which feels good” as Ellison’s Mr. Francis described it. Mr. Little, a department chair at Hamlet, shared a story of when a principal wrote a handwritten note to him expressing her appreciation for his contributions to the school after the two disagreed about a situation; in response, Mr. Little said, “And you know what, that did validate me. That felt good to receive that.” Some principals also recognized the importance of recognition as a means to support teachers. Mr. Sokhem expressed, “At this moment, I can tell you the only thing I can offer them is my undying gratitude for working hard.” As teaching can often become a thankless position with teachers seldom receiving outright praise from students, the need for principals to substantiate a teacher’s contributions and efforts should not be understated.
Beyond appreciation, teachers also seek validation through trust and professional autonomy. Teachers described the importance of principals rewarding their commitment to the school with the trust to grow as a teacher and develop their practice without great oversight. Ms. Scott, principal of Region HS, discussed this several times during her interview and sees this approach as essential to teacher support. She described, “What we do have is they are empowered here and that’s the most important thing. They don’t get that anywhere else.” She later added, “Everybody has a gift. Somebody can do something and when you recognize that gift…It’s so important. That’s all you need to reward people.” Mr. Ford and Mr. Bryant, the union representatives at Hamlet and Ellison, also described the importance of this support from principals. Mr. Ford believes, “If you’re showing a commitment to school and a commitment to these students and you’re taking care of the academic piece, you’re trusted. And, I guess maybe, that trust is a reward.” Mr. Bryant extended this notion: “Treating your teachers with respect and kindness and as professionals and giving them at least a good measure of autonomy is as much reward as I ever need. That’s the best reward.” In this sense, principals can support teachers to identify individual strengths and then allow the teachers to build their practice in this area. As Ms. Scott asserts, all teachers can make a unique contribution, and principals must find opportunities to support teacher growth through developing those skills.

The role of trust as a means to support teachers also was described as a means to offer greater responsibility and leadership opportunities to teachers. Ms. Schilling and Mr. Little, department chairs at Ellison and Hamlet, both described the importance of these positions in not only their development but also as means to support other teachers.
Ms. Schilling described a range of tasks she enjoyed as the department chair, including modeling lessons, finding resources, and “just being moral support.” Mr. Little portrayed a similar set of responsibilities and added running department meetings. Ms. Schilling and Mr. Little expressed frustration that they felt under-utilized in their role; while they saw great importance in their position for personal growth as well as school growth, they felt they were not given the latitude to expand their work in meaningful ways. Their disappointment in their lack of recognition speaks to the need for appreciation for all positions in the school.

Teacher leadership positions were also described as a way to create a career ladder for teachers out of the classroom. The opportunity for teachers to take on additional responsibility, oftentimes, in exchange for a reduced teaching load, is a way for teachers to develop their careers. However, this movement is paradoxical, for it moves teachers away from the classroom. Not only does this transition potentially take stronger teachers away from students, but removing teachers from the classroom also positions teachers in administrative roles that may be outside their expertise of teaching. Mr. Sokhem characterizes this opportunity for his teachers “who have aspiration of going higher, who would actually go on to become the teacher leader or department chair, or the academy coordinator…in case they need to move onto administration or other things.” In doing so, Mr. Sokhem sees his work as developing teachers with additional responsibility to leave the classroom.

An additional form of support is to consider the ways in which teachers are rewarded for their work with materials. Mr. Miller expressed his frustration at Ellison for a lack of necessities, as he simply stated, “If you want to reward me at this school, buy
me two boxes of paper because I buy my own paper.” At Hamlet, Mr. Suber shared a different experience, “The support is picking up the phone and having the principal say, yes, [Suber], you need a set of textbooks, Suber, you need a few more computers. Suber, we’re going to give you a smart board. Little things like that help make the day a brighter day.” In his role as a principal, Mr. Geraghty also sought to address this issue to ensure his teachers had the necessary materials, “when they have something of value, I say yes. If teachers need things, I try to figure out a way, even in the worst budget situation ever, to figure out how to get them what they need.” To further bolster teacher support, principals can identify ways to demonstrate appreciation and support for teachers with the necessary resources.

At Ellison HS, Mr. Lloyd identified a need to provide more intensive repairs to the school’s gymnasium, and he recognized this as a way to demonstrate his support for his Physical Education teachers. Mr. Lloyd shared his efforts to work with the facilities office at the SDP central office to secure the renovation. In turn, he observed, “[The] process of seeing an improvement or working towards an improvement in the gymnasium kind of reinvigorated – it re-energized those guys to participate.” Beyond the basic needs in a school, Mr. Lloyd efforts to create larger changes in the school’s facility illustrates for teachers his commitment to their programs and further supports their work.

Rewarding teachers with money is also a means to support teachers. This strategy, however, comes with complexity given the ethos of the teachers and scant resources to create meaningful incentives. Mr. Bryant, at Ellison, illustrates his discomfort with this strategy. He states, “The work that we do is intense and it's very important; it's very real. But, honestly, you know, a living wage and the opportunity to
go to the doctor is really reward enough for me materially.’” On the other hand, Mr. Miller described an experience at a Philadelphia charter school. He explained, “Every teacher there got a $3,000 bonus because they achieved some gap. That's reward.” Different teachers respond in different ways to this incentive, especially as it is challenging to dole out monetary incentives in equitable and fair ways.

Hamlet’s Mr. Ford shared a more nuanced viewpoint of rewarding teachers through financial means. While principals may not have the supplementary resources or authority to write teachers additional checks for their hard work, principals do have the influence to appoint specific teachers to certain paid extra-curricular responsibilities. Mr. Ford expounded, “Being trusted enough to do homework zone has a financial impact, you get paid... So I mean there are financial benefits that the principal can recognize those people who are stepping up and going above and beyond and give them opportunities.” To be sure, there is a danger in a principal demonstrating favoritism based on who is selected for additional positions; nonetheless, Mr. Ford certainly points to a strategy that a principal might employ to demonstrate his/her appreciation and support teachers.

Mr. Torrey provided an additional way that he seeks to reward teachers at Dewey Academy. However, in explaining his reward system, he was careful to add stipulations. The rewards for teachers go to “the entire faculty,” are “silly and fun,” “brand [Dewey Academy],” and he spends his own money on the gifts. In doing so, over the years, Mr. Torrey has purchased “scarfs, hats, mugs, and mittens” for teachers. Finally, he indicates that he views these gifts not as a reward; rather, “it’s a thank you” to all teachers. In crafting his support in this fashion, Mr. Torrey recognizes the complexity of using monetary and material goods as rewards for teachers. Nonetheless, in the end, his
teachers are receiving an additional reward for their contributions to the school as a way to support their on-going efforts and commitment to the school.

Finally, teachers described the reward that is inherent in their work, as they impact the lives of their students. While he also spoke to the impact of a financial reward, Mr. Miller, at Ellison, also depicted a situation when a student expressed the influence he had on him, and it “was so moving, and that was 30 seconds out of the school year. That’s all I need.” Several other teachers also described student compliments as the ultimate reward. Hamlet’s Mr. Suber explained the “maximum reward” when students greet him and compliment him in the neighborhood outside of school. At Ellison Mr. Smith and Mr. Bryant both pointed to the impact of watching students grow as more motivating than their checks. Mr. Sokhem connected the strong community feel and emphasis on students growth at Hamlet as a way to promote this motivation for teachers with a focus on relationships and students.

2C.3 – Images of Exit

In the scope of a career, the final stage is to exit the occupation. As turnover in this dissertation is defined as leaving a school, not leaving teaching altogether, the data set in this area refers to an exit as leaving a school. Given the budget crisis in the School District of Philadelphia at the time of this study, there were many layoffs and, consequently, very little job security, especially for early career teachers. This context provided a strong influence over the data in this study. Interestingly, there was little discussion of retirement as a reason for teachers leaving the classroom. Instead, as this
section will discuss, teachers and principals focused on the firing of ineffective teachers and the layoffs resulting from budget challenges.

One image of teachers leaving the classroom emerged from teachers who could not adequately fulfill their duties as teachers. While effective teaching can take various forms, ineffective teaching is also evident in a variety of ways from poor instructional delivery to an unsafe classroom environment to little professional growth. If these negative outcomes are sustained, then principals have recourse to move to disciplinary actions against teachers to attempt to support and initiate a positive change in teacher practice. Mr. Lloyd described the process as “laborious” but necessary as “if you’re not cutting the mustard, you’ve got to follow through with that process and cut people loose.” Ultimately, he believes the system is “effective if you follow through.” Mr. Sokhem described a similar process. He provided the example of a veteran teacher who was “totally burned out and to the point where she couldn't control her temper.” Through a series of conferences and many observations, he identified a pattern; he described, “I actually did not get her fired, but she was forced to retire because she didn't want to lose her pension.” Over the course of their careers as administrators, Mr. Lloyd and Mr. Sokhem both estimated that they sought to terminate an average of one teacher per year; however, their attempts were not always successful. In these scenarios, a traditional form of management is followed with principals maintaining a large degree of control in the process, as teachers receive performance reviews, an improvement plan, and, eventually, are released of their duties if they do not demonstrate improvement.

This process, however, is met with mixed responses from teachers. On one hand, Mr. Ford recognizes the importance of providing principals with the ability to assess a
range of responsibilities for the teacher and take action if a Hamlet teacher is not
effective. “Not everyone who gets to be a teacher necessarily is meant to be a teacher,”
Mr. Ford explained. “So that’s the point where I think – that’s where administrators need
to be putting people under their microscope.” On the other hand, some teachers
expressed less trust in principals to effectively handle this process. Mr. Smith described a
situation at Ellison between Mr. Lloyd’s predecessor and a new teacher, saying “The
administration pretty much attacked her, and this was last year, as they attacked every
teacher in the building, and that led her to just being like, I'm done with teaching in
general….she wanted to do something positive and she just gave it up.” Mr. Smith’s
strong language exemplifies the cynicism teachers may hold for principals. The
complexity of schools further obfuscates the relationship between principals and teachers
when moving teachers out of the profession, and the ways in which a principal addresses
the school community and teachers in these situations can make a profound difference in
how it is perceived by other teachers.

Outside of the principal’s direct influence, some teachers also decide to leave a
school for another opportunity. In these instances, principals described the movement as
positive opportunities for the teachers although the school was losing a strong
contributor. “We’re losing a great teacher,” Mr. Geraghty, principal at Adams,
explained. “because she has an opportunity to go to another school and become a math
department chair.” At hiring, Mr. Torrey asks teachers to commit to at least a four year
tenure with the school based on their intensive advisory program. Nonetheless, Mr.
Torrey believes his teachers assume an “entrepreneurial” mindset, and he recognizes the
movement that is inherent with this mindset. “You have to be okay – people give you
four years of their life and grow with you and then want to go do the next thing and want
to go be leaders,” Mr. Torrey added. While this type of movement out of a school is not
a central cause for the high rates of teacher turnover, it does have a large impact on a
school’s culture. When strong teachers leave, the school needs to find ways to replace
their contribution in the classroom and in the school community.

Principals also described the external challenge of retaining teachers due to the
budget reductions in the School District of Philadelphia which during the time of this
study led to many layoffs. Mr. Torrey described the impact in both retention – “Sadly,
we’ve lost more teachers to layoffs than we have to anything else” – and recruitment -
 “[The budget crisis has] been hard because its been this kind of halting step…does
anybody really want to work in the school district no matter how good the school is
because it’s been such a time of upheaval.” This diminished control greatly limits a
principal’s ability to influence a school community as centralized decisions remove the
ability for a principal to maintain a cohesive faculty.

Further reducing a principal’s control during a time of budget reductions is the
influence of seniority-based layoffs in a school. Given the faculty cultures and tenure at
Hamlet and Ellison, this impact of seniority was described in different ways. At Hamlet,
Mr. Ford explained that young teachers choose to leave “to avoid the threat of having
their position eliminated.” On the other hand, at Ellison, Mr. Miller issued a less
favorable interpretation of seniority. He stated, “[The teachers’ union] protects my job in
situations where I’ve been wrong and screwed up, but they’re screwing me. I mean, they
eat their young. They laid off 676 of us, and we’re all under the age of 35, guaranteed.”
Both Mr. Ford and Mr. Miller recognize seniority-based layoffs as a reality of the system;
Mr. Ford heightens the control of new teachers in a different way than Mr. Miller. Given the legacy of teacher unity at Hamlet and high turnover at Ellison, this discrepancy of perspective is not surprising.

2C.4 – Implications for Retention

As teachers exit a school and the profession, change is initiated at each school that principals must address. Whether the transition is recognized as positive or negative for a school community, principals must realign the school community to on-board new teachers and recalibrate the existing faculty to proceed with the loss of teachers. Principals must address teachers on various stages in a career ladder and create a unified school culture that meets the needs of these various and, at times, competing demands for teachers at different stages of their career. Taken together, these management challenges for a principal offers the opportunity to influence a school culture that promotes greater faculty engagement and retention.

An array of supports and rewards emerge in the data that teachers and principals identify as meaningful to promote retention. While this multitude of options does not provide a succinct solution to retain teachers, it is consistent with existing research, bolstering the challenge for a principal. These findings are also consistent with the culture of teachers as the individualistic nature of teaching bolsters an idiosyncratic profession. In response, a principal must assume a flexible stance to incentivize a teacher’s work. Beginning with the importance of connecting with students, a principal must creatively devise ways to compensate teachers through both tangible and non-tangible methods. A principal must identify various structures in a school that offer
different methods for teachers to feel appreciated and remain connected to the pulse of the school to ensure that people are accessing the appropriate supports.

This challenge is further complicated with the tension between individuals and the community that often exists in a school. On one hand, teachers have a strong sense of independence; however, on the other hand, a cohesive school community is of great importance in a school. In response, principals must carefully balance both of these needs in seeking to support teachers. Principals must recognize the contribution and value of individual teachers in their contributions to a school. This appreciation is further amplified given the pay structure and lack of supplemental resources for teachers. As Mr. Sokhem described, “I believe that if I treat them with respect, and allow them to do their job as a professional, they will continue to stay...I have no other incentive to give them monetary or anything else.” This trust and individual respect is critical for teachers.

However, there is a danger in over-emphasizing the individualistic nature of teacher motivation in a school. Mr. Sokhem and Mr. Lloyd, principals at Hamlet and Ellison, shared a perspective on teachers as either motivated or not, resulting in their need to leave a school. Specifically, Mr. Sokhem described teachers “who just [are] not motivated anymore [and] have lost their passion to do anything beyond their daily assignment.” Positioning teachers in this light as either motivated or not ignores the impact of the school environment on a teacher’s performance. Teachers do not exist in a vacuum in the school and simplifying teacher motivation in this fashion likely reduces a principal’s ability to best retain teachers. While there is an inclination from both teachers and administrators to reinforce the individualistic nature of teachers, principals must also
recognize their influence on a school community to shape a culture that promotes teacher satisfaction and retention.

Therefore, principals need to consider the impact of the school community on a teacher’s involvement in the school. This dynamic emerged most notably in the structures for new teacher induction at Ellison and Hamlet. In both schools, the principals acknowledged the need to improve their structures. At Hamlet, there was an informal support system from experienced teachers to aid new teachers; however, Ellison lacked this network, as teachers described an individualistic sink or swim culture. In addressing the conservative nature of teachers, principals can take steps to promote involvement to both support teachers and create a sense of new responsibilities in an occupation that may feel static. At Hamlet, Mr. Ford described this impact in retaining teachers as when teachers “have a deeper involvement in the school community,” they will feel “they’re a part of something.” Engaging teachers in meaningful ways in a school not only builds a stronger community, but it also invigorates teachers to minimize teacher turnover.

In framing the principal’s ability to retain teachers, given the range of challenges in the career ladder of a teacher, the ability to create a work environment that values the individual contribution for every member while also recognizing the impact of a collective vision is critical. As such, a principal must also recognize when there is value in not retaining teachers. A school must define a vision that is inclusive and responsive to the needs of the community while also cultivating a shared responsibility for educating the students. In doing so, the need for some teachers to exit the school and move to a different school or out of the profession is appropriate. A principal plays the central role
in coordinating these efforts and must find ways to support a range of needs while leading a school as a unified and dynamic learning organization.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Summary of findings

This study examined the principal’s perspective of teacher turnover and principal actions to create a positive working environment to improve teacher retention. The framework is grounded in research that explores the characteristics of the teaching occupation, the influence of a principal, and causes of teacher turnover. In designing my research and conducting the subsequent analysis, I aimed to honor the complexity of schools through offering descriptions of each school’s context, recognizing the multitude of demands that school communities must address. Emerging from my study is an affirmation of several widely accepted factors as well as fresh perspectives that can support future training, research, and policy to help schools.

As researchers and practitioners have described, leadership is critical to the effectiveness of a school organization. Growth must be embraced to allow for healthy development, as schools struggle when they become static organizations. The principals whom I studied recognize the weight of their decisions, and they sought to influence their schools with care and in the best interest of their students. Likewise, teachers consistently acknowledged the ability for principals to set the tone in a school and make decisions to either increase or reduce their power. Principal influence was illustrated in implicit and tangible ways, and there was evidence of opportunities for principals to exert their control in their school.

Moreover, teachers described the importance of autonomy. The well-documented paradox between teacher isolation and interdependence was evident in my research.
While teachers discussed the importance of collaboration and dangers of seclusion, they were protective of their classroom independence. This led teachers to create conflicting images of what a teacher’s role should look like, seeking a collaborative environment while also maintaining high degrees of autonomy.

Ultimately, the coupling of these principles leads to a critical, albeit not original, finding: schools are incredibly complex working environments. Leadership is important to create positive learning environments, but principals are removed from the direct service to students. Teachers yearn for a common set of school expectations, yet they resist an over-bearing administration. Not to mention, working with children is challenging and difficult to structure in neat and simple ways. Responsibilities are often positioned in opposition of one another and the ways in which principals seek to assume control and teachers aim to manage their classrooms become incongruent.

As a result, the causes that lead to teacher turnover are multi-faceted and solutions to address teacher turnover must come with a range of options. Principals, therefore, must remain flexible to support the variety of needs of teachers through finding opportunities to engage teachers in decision making while protecting their classroom autonomy. Principals must stay attuned to the dynamics in their school and address them as they arise in ways that meet the needs of their school community. However, this nebulous definition of leadership does not foster simplistic recommendations for supporting principals, teachers, and schools in the future.

Consequently, fresh research with novel recommendations continues to be necessary. To address this void and the research questions laid out earlier in this dissertation, I will share three recommendations that emerged from my findings and
analysis, which serve as clear and summative encapsulations of this research. These recommendations will describe (1) the influence of the principal, (2) the involvement of the principal, and (3) the position of the principal. Each will provide assertions to support principals and schools, as we train and support principals. Each section is also aimed at recognizing the principal’s role in building a positive working environment to reduce teacher turnover. The recommendations are grounded in the dynamic nature of the principal’s role, and the necessity for a principal to address and balance competing demands of a teacher’s work.

*The influence of the principal*

A key finding emerging in my study is the manner in which a principal can exercise influence over a school community through balancing the competing demands of shared teacher responsibility for school initiatives and classroom autonomy for teachers. From an organizational perspective, shared goals are critical for success. However, at the individual level, teachers seek to protect their autonomy and are often skeptical of school-wide protocols that may impede their practice. This is not to suggest that teachers are intentionally adverse to a collaborative working environment; instead, it is a recognition of the teachers’ position in a school that is set up to isolate teachers, without providing sufficient meeting time. As principals seek to influence the culture of a school, understanding the dynamics of this tension is essential. A school cannot develop without teacher input and action, and if teachers feel disconnected or overwhelmed by the initiatives, then the change is futile. For a healthy school community, a principal must orchestrate levers of change that honor these competing demands.
A skillful balancing of these demands was described by Ms. Scott at Region HS, as she explained the school’s “think tanks.” This system enabled teachers to gather about issues that were important to them, identifying solutions to propose to the administration. Groups organically emerged based on the needs of the teachers, and they offered a space for teachers to assume a shared responsibility for a problem they would face. In turn, Ms. Scott fostered a culture of distributed leadership that invited teachers to suggest new initiatives to best address challenges in the school. Because the teachers met on their accord, their autonomy was not threatened with top down mandates. And, because Ms. Scott’s administration bolstered the ideas into action, teachers assumed a shared responsibility for the ongoing development of the school.

Ironically, to increase her influence in the school, Ms. Scott described instances when she reduced her power on par with other members of her school community. For example, she responded to dissention about the school’s uniform policy by democratizing the process. While she believed in the importance of uniforms to set an appropriate tone for her students in and out of school, she allowed different sections of the school to create separate policies. Teachers met to discuss and determine the best policy for their collective practice, and, Ms. Scott honored their decisions. In the end, Ms. Scott reported that nearly all the groups adopted the policy she recommended at the outset. However, without the egalitarian process to identify the solution, teachers would not be as likely to support the outcome. In doing so, Ms. Scott created a school culture in which teachers were empowered to determine policies, and, consequently, enact the change they identified. A school cannot grow if the teachers are not comfortable with the direction of an initiative; at Region HS, Ms. Scott carries great influence through balancing the
importance of shared responsibility and teacher autonomy. This leadership practice requires principals to maintain a connection to the pulse of a school community, recognizing what issues are paramount for teachers to promote an optimal learning environment.

Therefore, school policy needs to recognize the challenges principals face and provide the necessary flexibility to build a dynamic school community that creates shared responsibility and honors teacher autonomy. Given the complexity of schools, there is no cookie-cutter approach to improve schools. Policies need to provide schools the appropriate latitude to respond to their most pressing needs. Furthermore, this approach should come with accountability, and it necessitates a more nuanced evaluation instrument. Policy makers should seek to refine school surveys to capture the quality of principal leadership. Influence is an essential quality for effective school leadership to ensure school development, yet it must occur with a collaborative culture that honors input from others. This data can be captured in a well-designed survey. As a result, a more thoughtful approach to identify key factors of positive school culture could promote a stronger working environment.

School leadership requires dynamic principals who are open to a range of solutions to best influence the school community. As such, teacher retention is best achieved when teachers work in an environment that is supportive to their needs. There is not a singular cause for teachers to leave a school, and there is not an exceptional strategy to keep teachers in a school. Principal leadership that assumes influence to build collective responsibility, while respecting each teacher, to create a school culture that is dynamic and productive.
**The involvement of the principal**

With a multitude of responsibilities and stakeholders, principals must adeptly identify areas to place their time based on the unique needs of their school. At the time of this study, resources in the School District of Philadelphia were being slashed and support staffs were reduced, yet principals were under great pressure to improve school results due to increased competition for students with the expansion of charter schools and the looming threat of school closures. Consequently, principals must become more strategic in their actions and initiatives. Through the framework for involvement presented in this dissertation, principals can identify a more intentional approach to their range of tasks. In doing so, principals determine when it is appropriate to delegate a task, target a specific initiative, or integrate themselves into an aspect of the school. All three levels of involvement are necessary at different times, depending on the nature of the work. The key is for principals to maintain a presence throughout the school’s functions and an awareness for all school operations.

To accomplish this challenge, principals must maintain the pulse of the building and stay connected to the needs of the school. This association was evident in Mr. Geraghty’s rationale for joining the Adams HS technology team, as he identified a detrimental void in the school’s use of technology for student learning. Similarly, with an expanding population of English Language Learners at Hamlet HS, Mr. Sokhem’s faculty praised his involvement in supporting teachers and students in this area of the school. On the other hand, Ellison HS’s Mr. Lloyd described two key projects – developing clear policies for a single school culture and creating an aquaponics program – that were disconnected from the faculty’s purview as they described the school’s initiatives.
Another model of involvement was evident when principals described establishing school-wide systems to promote greater clarity in the school’s practices. In this way, they were able to spread responsibility while maintaining a central role. Principals cannot oversee every single aspect of a school, so they must identify ways to remain connected to the priorities in the school to enable smooth operations that support transparent school policies and initiatives to bolster a positive working environment.

Because a principal must remain nimble to address a range of responsibilities, management strategies will shift depending on the contexts. At the preparation level, prospective principals need management training to recognize different ways to address initiatives in a school and strategies to weigh competing demands. Likewise, school districts should devote professional development to sharpen a principal’s ability to target their time and energy in areas that will best move their school forward. The demands on a principal change as a school develops, and a principal must adapt their practice to meet this progress. Individual principal support must capture the realities of a principal’s daily work as well as plans for strategic growth, and therefore, support a principal’s ability to strategize his or her time to optimize their involvement in school initiatives.

A principal’s adeptness to identify a range of levels of involvement is directly connected to the workplace environment for teachers. A principal must stay connected to the pulse of a school and respond accordingly. Through maintaining an awareness to the needs of the school community, a principal can best influence critical areas in the school. As such, teachers will receive varied supports to best meet their needs. Principals must evolve with a school environment. In doing so, they remain connected to the school community and are more likely to promote greater teacher retention.
The position of the principal

An additional implication that emerges from this dissertation is the magnitude of the role of the principal position. Consequently, how principals frame their work is critical to their success. The capacity for a principal’s responsibilities is vast, and there is great risk in placing principals’ duties in narrow silos. Recently, a push to primarily identify principals as instructional leaders has emerged. However, this emphasis reduces the true scope of the work of a principal. Developing from this research is a validation of the importance of positioning the principal in the multi-faceted role of an organizational leader. A principal must lead a school as a place of ongoing learning not only to ensure student growth but also as a dynamic work place that fosters opportunities for the adults. In doing so, principals recognize the interconnectedness of a school’s operations, while allowing individuals to lead smaller initiatives.

This feature of the principal’s work was exemplified in several ways in the data. First, principals described a central responsibility in overseeing the various aspects of the school. Mr. Torrey, at Dewey HS, described his role as ensuring “how the pieces add up to a unified whole.” Likewise, Ms. Scott discussed her primary role in creating “systems” to allow everyone’s work to connect. These leadership approaches situate the principal in the leadership role of linking various parts of the school to keep the organization moving in a consistent direction. This perspective removes the principal from aspects of the daily operations of the school, while securing a consistent vision and direction for the school.

An additional image of the principal as an organizational leader emanated from the principal’s central responsibility to include multiple stakeholders in developing a strong school culture. Mr. Sokhem sought to structure an environment where “people
take ownership of the school.” Further, at Adams HS, Mr. Geraghty aimed to nurture a school in which teachers “feel like they are part of something special.” This data indicates the importance of principals creating school communities that offer opportunities for teachers to contribute beyond their classroom responsibilities. They seek to develop the school as an organization larger than the individual, and their role is supporting this larger vision. To accomplish this greater purpose, principals must also coordinate the activities of the school in accordance with school’s vision, as Mr. Torrey and Ms. Scott indicate.

Given this perspective, principals must receive support and be held accountable to recognize the interconnected relationship of school operations. In principal preparation programs, candidates should receive exposure to the range of responsibilities of a principal. For instance, Grissom and Loeb’s (2011) article provides a comprehensive and organized framework. In addition to learning about the multitude of tasks, principal preparation programs should emphasize the interconnectedness of the range of tasks at different levels in the school. Alongside a well-rounded training experience, principal support should also recognize this dynamic. With such different roles, superintendents should support principals in prioritizing the different demands. In doing so, principals should be responsible for demonstrating growth in a range of areas. Currently, many accountability metrics closely examine academic gains without explicitly measuring the role of other tasks for a principal. Through applying a more comprehensive and detailed principal evaluation system, superintendents might receive a better picture of principal success that is more closely aligned with the realities of the job.
A principal must lead schools, as Senge (2000) proposes, as learning organizations. Schools are places of ongoing development and growth. While the classroom is an essential component in the school, principals who excessively focus on classroom instruction take a shortsighted approach to their responsibilities. Instead, principals must lead with the entire scope of a school in mind. When doing so, the work environment can be transformed with an inclusive and dynamic culture, and therefore, promote greater teacher retention.

Recommendations for future studies

While maintaining a primary focus on the relationship between a school’s working environment and teacher retention, the data in this dissertation raised new questions that provide avenues for additional research. These pathways emerge in considering how change is created in schools. My research framework centered on Lortie’s (1975) premise that schools are structured to resist change; however, for a healthy school organization, development is necessary. The arrangements that initiate and sustain change is well-researched field, yet few initiatives seem to gain long term tracking, especially those that seek change without a systematic overhaul of the school system. My intention, therefore, with these additional questions is to recommend opportunities for future research that continue to honor the complexity of schools and might create channels for meaningful school reform.

First, one aspect of school design that was touched on in the data but not developed in a systematic way was the degree to which systems are established in formal and informal fashions. Given the need for distributed leadership and shared
responsibilities, some control in a school will emerge from teachers, irrespective of a principal’s influence. This dynamic provides a principal a great opportunity to influence a school through garnering support from underlying conversations in the school; on the one hand, it also might lessen a principal’s ability to create change if the informal structures undermine the principal’s initiatives. Through understanding informal structures across schools, perhaps considered as “the unwritten rules,” researchers might better identify what issues do not receive necessary attention and provide greater insight for principals to become more responsive to their schools.

An additional question arose in the data about the ways in which teachers are motivated to change. Consistent with the narrative that veteran teachers simply burn out and resist new initiatives in schools, several principals mentioned their belief that new teachers were more “motivated” to work hard in a school and bring change. While there is some merit to this notion given the learning curve for a novice teacher, there is also a need to seek a more nuanced understanding of what it means to motivate teachers. In doing so, it is necessary to further analyze the ways in which school culture provides a motivating force for people. When teachers are intrinsically motivated, their work improves given their affiliation to the construct of their social milieu, not based on an external set of demands. In addition to examining intrinsic factors, there are material factors that teachers find meaningful. Additional research to better understand teacher preferences in considering ways to implement a range of incentives would benefit principals. Ultimately, this research question seeks to more deeply review how principals think of motivation and what recommendations could be made to more effectively
support a more sophisticated view of the idea. Without identifying practical ways to improve performance, principals will struggle to create lasting change in a school.

Change in schools is not a research topic that will go stale. Schools must constantly grow, adapt, and develop to not only meet the needs of its students, but also to remain viable workplaces for teachers and administrators. Through examining formal and informal structures in a school as well as teacher motivation, researchers and practitioners can gauge more accurate pictures to the realities in schools. As such, their ability to support school growth will improve.

Closing
Retaining teachers is a complicated task without a simple answer. Teachers are driven in and out of schools by multiple factors, some of which a school cannot control. To best support teachers in remaining at schools, principals can take a variety of steps to create a work environment that enables teachers to feel both fulfilled in their work with students and encouraged by their work with colleagues. As idiosyncratic and complex organizations, principals cannot merely implement a blueprint to improve their school; instead they must attune themselves to the pulse of their school to promote learning for everyone involved.

Recently, I had a conversation with a mentor griping about a frustrating conversation with a supervisor who I felt did not understand the realities of my work. In response, my mentor validated my resentment, reminding me: “At the end of the day, it is all about people work.” This straightforward comment reinforces the data and themes throughout this dissertation. The work of schools is optimized when communities come together to respond to each other needs and build systems that are nimble and conducive
to those needs. The success of our schools lies in recognizing their complexity and the value in fostering schools as learning organizations that continue to develop for all its stakeholders.
Appendices

Appendix 1 – Sample Interview Questions

Part 1: General Background
1. Tell me a bit about yourself as an educator.

2. How would you describe your school?
_Potential follow up questions:_
   What is your school’s mission?

Part 2: Teacher Retention – At this point, I am hoping to talk broadly about how you think about teacher retention and what actions you take to support and retain teachers.

3. Can you describe your hiring process and what you anticipate for this year?

4. When I say teacher “teacher retention” – what comes to mind?
_Potential follow up questions:_
   What are reasons teachers stay at your school?
   What do you see as the central challenges for the teachers in your school that may cause teachers to go to another school or leave teaching altogether?

   What impact do you think teacher turnover has on your school?
   Can you tell me about a time when turnover was positive?
   Can you tell me about a time when turnover was negative?
   What do you do to mitigate these challenges?

   Have there been times when you sought to remove a teacher from your school?
   What did you do about this?

Part 3: For this part of the interview, I would like to explore some specific aspects of your work. (30-40 min)

5. In what ways do you give teachers time to collaborate?

6. What are situations that you support teachers with classroom management?

7. How do you see your role as an instructional leader?

8. In what ways are you able to reward teachers?

9. In what ways do you see a career arc for teachers?
10. How do you think about sharing responsibility?

*Two Final Question...*

11. What are you most proud of in your work to retain teachers?

11. After going through this interview, if you had to identify 2-3 of the most central aspects of how you keep teachers, what would you say they are?
Appendix 2 – Sample Survey Questions

The School District of Philadelphia

Principal Autonomy Survey

Office of Research and Evaluation

This survey will assess the role of the School District of Philadelphia’s new autonomy initiative on principals’ perceptions and attitudes toward their work. In Full Autonomy schools, the survey aims to capture the ways in which principals use their new autonomy. In Support and Intervention schools, the survey aims to document how principals interact with district-level supports.

- Section One: Background Info/Demographics
- Section Two: Principal Attitudes
- Section Three: Level/Type of Principal Autonomy
- Section Four: Principal Role/Allocation of Time
- Section Five: Perceptions of Central Office Support
- Section Six: Teacher Retention

1. How much actual influence do you think you have on decisions concerning the following activities at your school this year?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>NO</th>
<th>MINOR</th>
<th>MODERATE</th>
<th>MAJOR</th>
<th>NOT APPLICABLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing curriculum and instructional programs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating discipline and safety policies</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determining the content of in-service professional development programs for teachers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deciding how your school budget will be spent.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing the school calendar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A. Allocation of Time

1. On average, how many hours do you work per week? ______________ hours

2. In the first column, please estimate how many hours you spend on average per week in the following work-related activities. In the second column, indicate whether you think you spent more, the same, or less time on each activity this year than last year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>FOR RETURNING PRINCIPALS ONLY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Approximately how many hours do you spend per week?</td>
<td>More than last year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional leadership</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student discipline/safety</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher professional development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Budget</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule/calendar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel (hiring, evaluation, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and Region/Area Offices (meetings, task forces, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working with parents and community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational tasks (e.g. student transportation, maintenance)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


1. To what extent do you feel teacher turnover and retention impact your school’s success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Teacher Turnover and Retention</th>
<th>NOT AT ALL</th>
<th>SO MEWHAT</th>
<th>HAS NO IMPACT</th>
<th>A LITTLE BIT</th>
<th>VERY MUCH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher turnover impacts my school’s success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher retention is essential to my school’s success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Appendix 3 – Interview Consent Form

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This is not a form of treatment or therapy. It is not supposed to detect a disease or find something wrong. Your participation is voluntary which means you can choose whether or not to participate. If you decide to participate or not to participate there will be no loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Before you make a decision you will need to know the purpose of the study, the possible risks and benefits of being in the study and what you will have to do if decide to participate. The research team is going to talk with you about the study and give you this consent document to read. You do not have to make a decision now; you can take the consent document home and share it with friends, family doctor and family.

If you do not understand what you are reading, do not sign it. Please ask the researcher to explain anything you do not understand, including any language contained in this form. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and a copy will be given to you. Keep this form, in it you will find contact information and answers to questions about the study. You may ask to have this form read to you.

What is the purpose of the study?
This research study aims to examine how principals understand teacher retention and how their understanding influences the actions they take to hire, support, and retain their teachers.

Why was I asked to participate in the study?
You are being asked to join this study because you have been identified as an administrator or teacher in the School District of Philadelphia.

How long will I be in the study? How many other people will be in the study?
The study will take place over a period of three months. Between 25-30 people will be interviewed and a survey was distributed to 55 people. Each interview is isolated; two principals will have two interviews. Interviews will last between 20-60 min.

Where will the study take place?
The interviews will be conducted in your office, your classroom, or a location of mutual agreement.

What will I be asked to do?
You will be asked to provide us with your perspectives on how you understand the principal’s role in teacher retention.

What are the risks?
There is minimal risk associated with this study. All schools and participants will receive pseudonyms. However, there is no way to guarantee complete anonymity. I will also keep all data on a password protected computer. Therefore, there is a limited opportunity for the ideas you share to be attributed to you.

How will I benefit from the study?
There is no direct benefit to you. However, your participation could help us understand the ways principals understand teacher retention.

**What other choices do I have?**

Your alternative to being in the study is to not be in the study.

**What happens if I do not choose to join the research study?**

You may choose to join the study or you may choose not to join the study. Your participation is voluntary. There will be no negative consequences, if you decide that you do not want to participate.

**When is the study over? Can I leave the study before it ends?**

The study is expected to end after all participants have completed interviews and all the information has been collected.

You have the right to drop out of the research study at anytime during your participation. There is no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled if you decide to do so. Withdrawal will not interfere with your future employment.

If you no longer wish to be in the research study, please contact Mr. Ted Domers and take the following steps:

Tell us your name and that you would no longer wish to participate in the study.

**How will confidentiality be maintained and my privacy be protected?**

The researchers will use pseudonyms for all schools and participants in all transcriptions and publications. All data will be stored on a password protected computer in which I am the only person with knowledge of the password. All data will be destroyed after data analysis is complete.

**Will I have to pay for anything?**

There are no costs associated with the study.

**Will I be compensated for participating in the study?**

You will not be compensated for participating in the study.

Who can I call with questions, complaints or if I’m concerned about my rights as a research subject? If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the
Principal Investigator listed on page one of this form. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

When you sign this document, you are agreeing to take part in this research study. If you have any questions or there is something you do not understand, please ask. You will receive a copy of this consent document.

Signature of Subject

Print Name of Subject

Date
Bibliography


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