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Teacher Retention: Behaviors of Principals Influencing Teachers in Schools as part of Georgia's Vision for Public Education

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TEACHER RETENTION: BEHAVIORS OF PRINCIPALS INFLUENCING TEACHERS IN
SCHOOLS AS PART OF GEORGIA'S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

by

SHARISSA Y. SEYMOUR

Under the Direction of Jami Royal Berry

ABSTRACT

Once considered managers of school buildings, principals have moved into the role of instructional leaders, charged with putting student learning first in their realm of daily responsibilities. The concept of transformational leadership helps foster the development of a school culture that includes student-centered interactions, an underlying sense of social stability, and student learning at its core. Principals lead their staffs in a multitude of ways. The extent of principal effectiveness as it relates to retaining teachers in school buildings is in need of exploration. Four issues related to principal effectiveness are addressed as supported by the literature: (a) educational leadership theory, (b) organizational culture in schools, (c) teacher mobility, and (d) effects of teacher mobility on school culture. Teacher retention at the local school builds stronger communities simply by fostering relationships that enable problem solving among colleagues, students, and parents. This dissertation looks at the role of the principal in developing a healthy

school culture in order to provide descriptions of leadership practices, so their value can be assessed and debated. Data collection consisted of sixteen semi-structured interviews that constitute the source of this instrumental case study. By interviewing system leaders in two distinctly different districts and examining the perceptions of teachers in those districts, the researcher was able to understand the effects of the Georgia Vision Project and teacher retention at the local school level. Data analysis resulted in the central categories: respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door policy, and encouragement as ways in which principals can influence retention.

INDEX WORDS: Georgia vision project, Teacher retention, Principal, Education policy

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by

Sharissa Y. Seymour

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my sweet girls, Jordan and Taylor. The time it took to read, research, and write took my time away from both of you and I know there were many times you wished I was devoting those moments to you. It is my hope that continuing my education demonstrated that no one or nothing should stand in your way of accomplishing your personal desires. Love you forever. Love you for a lifetime. Love you always!

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1 THE PRINCIPAL AND TEACHER RETENTION

This dissertation reviews the research around the idea of principal influence on teacher retention. Schools need leadership, and teachers need administrators who support their professional growth (Balyer, 2012; Duke, 2010; Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012). There are many similarities in how effective leadership is viewed between researchers within the academic community and other industries (Silva, 2014). In essence, leadership is increasingly difficult regardless of who is being led (Latham, 2014). Thus, the position of principal is powerful, and research on the practices of this position is critical to the future of the profession. Qualities defining behaviors of effective principals have been studied by researchers (Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2012; “The Wallace Foundation”, 2013). This literature review refers to the principal as the leader of the school building and examines the impact teacher retention has on school culture. The literature reviewed informed the researcher’s understanding and interpretation of leadership, school culture, and teacher mobility.

Principals lead their staffs in a multitude of ways. The extent of principal effectiveness as it relates to retaining teachers in school buildings is in need of exploration. Price (2012) stated, “Principals are central figures in schools whose actions directly shape their school’s climate” (p.40). Four concepts are explored in this review: (a) educational leadership theory, (b) organizational culture in schools, (c) teacher mobility, and (d) effects of teacher mobility on school culture. Each area contributes to bodies of literature while ultimately exploring the impact of the principal on school culture and its influence on teacher retention.

Guiding Questions

Empirical research is limited on the influence of the principal when referring to teacher perception, attitudes, and behavior that affect retention (Adams & Woods, 2015). By examining certified staff perceptions, using a qualitative approach, this dissertation will assess complex questions as it relates to the strategic efforts of the Georgia Vision Project.

Four questions guide the overall work of the evaluation:

1. How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in schools?
2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in schools?
3. How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of self and others in schools?

In addition to the Vision Project, this study will also explore the practices of elementary school principals and their influence on teacher retention from the perspective of certified employees: What are the behaviors of principals influencing teacher retention in schools?

Review

Teacher retention at the local school builds stronger communities, allowing a long standing staff to develop a culture bonding its citizens (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2011; Buchanan, 2012; Ingersoll, 2003; Ladd, 2011; Torres, 2012). This literature review is written to explore and understand the number of years teachers spend at a particular school and the correlation to the leadership practices of their principal. This research is important because it contributes to educational knowledge and provides school leaders tools with which to

become effective leaders. To begin, district leadership is reviewed and the assessment continues across the levels of school structure.

Superintendents are known to be at the top of the educational pyramid (Simpson, 2013). They are responsible for maintaining the integrity of the system (Tarter & Hoy, 1988). School processes start and end with them. They make decisions expected to be carried out throughout their organization with principals as middle managers and teachers as implementers (Fredericks & Brown, 1993; Price, 2012). Principals are the “central source of leadership influence” (“The Wallace Foundation”, 2013, p.6). Principals who can articulate a sound vision for their schools with a focus on teaching and learning are known to elicit successful school climates coupled with high levels of student achievement (Stronge, Richard & Catano, 2008; Sun & Leithwood, 2012). In the past, this understanding has not always been common knowledge.

Over the years, the job description and expectations of the school principal have changed dramatically (Lattuca, 2012; Odhiambo & Hii, 2012). Once considered managers of school buildings, principals have moved into the role of instructional leader, charged with putting student learning first in their realm of daily responsibilities (Fredericks & Brown, 1993; Leithwood & Seashore-Louis, 2011). In addition to facilitating managerial functions of their buildings, principals are now spending more time in classrooms, but it has not always been that way (Cascaden, 1998; Catano & Stronge, 2006; DuFour & Eaker, 1987). In the last decade, educational leaders have made note of leaders in non-academic based settings.

Those in academia, practitioners and consultants have all contributed to the leadership body of knowledge (Hess, 2013; Latham, 2014). Research focused on educational leadership mirrors leadership in other non-educational entities. Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) stated, “The traditions and beliefs about leadership in schools are no different from those regarding

leadership in other institutions” (p. 5). Covey (1989) presented seven principles not specifically designed for educators in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, although they have been a primary tool guiding many educational leaders’ practices. Covey (1989) helps readers understand different approaches exist for effective leadership. These universal, timeless, self-evident principles are needed now more than ever as challenges become greater in an attempt to find effective change solutions, especially for principals as they lead schools (Covey, 1989). For example, one of the principles, synergize combines the strengths of people through positive teamwork producing great results.

Michael Fullan’s (2011) study of leadership contended the use of reflective practice to become more effective. Fullan went on to say, “leaders never go from theory to practice or research evidence to application. They do it the other way around: they try to figure out what’s working, what could be working better, and then look into how research and theory might help” (2011, p. xii). Many educational leaders find great comfort in the art of reflection, especially when the trial produces great results with which to grow upon, and the error has minimal effects (McCotter, 2009).

Becoming a principal often means increased responsibilities that result in increased accountability. “Given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school” (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005, p. 5). Schools with ineffective leadership struggle with low student achievement, poor community support, and low teacher morale (Louis, Dretzke, & Wahlstrom, 2010). Higher teacher mobility rates can be a result of low teacher morale (Sedivy-Benton & Boden-McGill, 2012). This review explores research on educational leadership theory to explain the evolution of the role of principal.

Educational leadership.

Prior to the 1970's, principals spent most of their time dealing with necessary day-to-day administrative items, moving from crisis to crisis (Parsons and Beauchamp, 2012; Spiro, 2015). Parsons and Beauchamp (2012) report this type of work most often deals with people and happens quickly, therefore allowing principals to become experts in managing school operations. Over the years, the job description and expectations of principals have changed significantly. Odhiambo and Hii (2012) discussed the changes in expectations of school leaders. They contended that with an increase in autonomy and accountability, the roles and responsibilities of school leaders have expanded and intensified.

The role of the school leader from the past is no longer appropriate (Odhiambo & Hi, 2012; Shoho & Barnett, 2010; Lattuca, 2012; Lynch, 2012). As educational leadership evolved, society had to adjust to lessen the impact of leadership transition. Parents, teachers, and community members have had to understand the new role of school principal (Blasé & Blasé, 1998; Catano & Stronge, 2006). At one point, parents thought of the school principal as disciplinarian. Teachers thought of the school principal as managers of budgets and public liaison. Community members thought of principals as the gatekeeper between the school and the outside world. In order for the role of principal to begin to change, these groups had to understand the leader of the past needed renovation.

As the job description evolved, characteristics of principals who are effective leaders were examined. Parsons and Beauchamp (2012) posited ten effective leadership themes making schools successful. The ten themes described the importance of leading with influence. Successful principals understand their most powerful work occurs by developing teachers as individuals. Through setting direction and developing teachers, student achievement can be positively im-

pacted. The research of Crum, Sherman, and Myran (2009) identified five common themes of practice: leadership with data; honesty and relationships; fostering ownership and collaboration; recognizing and developing leadership; and instructional awareness and involvement. These themes are critical as they form the framework for how principals can use their leadership practices for positive influence. Lastly, Spiro (2015) reported on five key practices of effective principals as published by the Wallace Foundation. Examples of effective principals were shared using the practices: shaping a vision of success for all students, creating a climate hospitable to education, cultivating leadership in others, improving instruction, and managing people, data, and processes to foster school improvement. The commonalities between these lists are core sets of practices identified to form the basics of effective leadership. These practices help facilitate high levels of student achievement. All of the sets state the importance of leading by building relationships and having instructional awareness. Findings from the researchers emphasized common threads allowing principals to thrive as facilitators, despite rigorous accountability demands.

Educational reform.

The history of educational reform in public schools dates back over the past two centuries. When children were first given the opportunity to receive a free public education in the early 1800s, the need for better organization and structure in school settings was created (Lattuca, 2012). The distinction between the role of teacher and principal began to emerge. The role of school leader was that of principal teacher. As time has progressed, the concept of education reform has continued to remain constant and the role of the principal has developed.

National educational reforms such as No Child Left Behind (Hess & Petrilli, 2004; Rudalevige, 2003) and Race to the Top (2009) have illustrated the importance of the right person sitting behind the principal's desk (Crum, Sherman, & Myran, 2009; Lynch, 2012). In these re-

forms, student achievement growth is calculated across various subgroups to determine school effectiveness (Dumay, 2009; ten Bruggencate, Luyten, Scheerens & Slegers, 2012; Leithwood, & Mascall, 2008). An increase in student achievement performance across all subgroups is the ultimate goal. Effective school leadership is a contributing factor to high levels of student achievement. With these reforms, many principals had to reevaluate the way in which they led schools.

When considering changes in education today, particularly leadership, one must consider its evolution into present time. Instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership are three examples of current researched based educational leadership theories (Balyer, 2012; Heidmets & Liik, 2014; Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, & Slavit, 2011; Latham, 2014; Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990; McCleskey, 2014; Onorato, 2013; Stewart, 2006). A review of these approaches is needed to identify characteristics of particular styles that can reduce challenges to school culture. Reflective practice can be used by practitioners to identify personal areas of strength and need (Blase & Blase, 1999; Drago-Severson, 2012; Latham, 2014).

In the 1980's, the concept of instructional leadership began to emerge due to the 1983 Nation at Risk report ("National Commission on Excellence in Education", 1983). "Leadership studies have been redirected from administrative management towards instructional leadership, and from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning" (Parsons & Beauchamp, 2012, p. 700). Instructional leadership has been defined as the practice of school leaders who promote student learning and believe schools are places where a focus should be on academics (Stronge, Richard, & Catano, 2008). Conclusions have been made that principals can make a difference and play a central role in student achievement, school effectiveness, and school improvement when an instructional focus is at the core (Hitt & Tucker, 2015; McCleskey, 2014). In our current era of

accountability, one in which an increased level of student achievement can be measured by the results of high stakes, normative tests, the principal who sends the message that student learning comes before all else has the potential to outshine in effectiveness. “Leadership at the school level is more important than ever” (Odhiambo & Hii, 2012, p.233). Today’s principal must focus on student achievement of all students by being both instructional leader and operations manager, with greater emphasis on the first.

Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) defined the term transformational leadership as “the enhancement of individual and collective problem-solving capacities of organizational members” (p.252) in their search to find leadership strategies which help foster the development of a school culture that included student-centered positive interactions, maintained discipline, and held student learning at its core. The researchers looked for processes engaged in by typical and effective principals while solving problems with groups of teachers. Leithwood (1994) summarized three of his studies by saying that transformational forms of leadership are sensitive to “organization building: developing shared vision, creating productive work cultures, and distributing leadership to others” (p.501). To begin, principals lay the foundation by involving teachers in all aspects of instructional decision making and school operations (Sun & Leithwood, 2012). Teacher buy-in can create environments rich in collegiality. The emphasis of a transformational leader is one who empowers his or her colleagues.

According to Marzano, Waters, & McNulty (2005), transformational leadership can be defined as “focused on change” (p.14). With additional responsibilities of administrators, “many school leaders are seeking more effective organizational behavior by drawing on the leadership potential of all stakeholders, especially teachers” (Gabriel, 2005, p.1). Gabriel (2005) posited by strengthening and developing strong teachers, the payoff is great as teacher leaders are created.

Teacher leaders can provide a voice in shaping programs, supporting the mission, and guiding the team toward its goal. Principals are then able to deepen their role as facilitator.

Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, and Berebitsky (2010) conceptualized instructional and transformational leadership as two of the most dominant theories of educational leadership. They contended that emerging research is linking the constructs of instructional leadership and transformational leadership tightly; therefore encouraging people to begin a combined discussion. When considered simultaneously, the researchers provide a strong foundation to measure principal effectiveness.

Instructional leadership generally refers to the management and improvement of teaching and learning, including the nature of the work principals engage in to support such improvements. In contrast, transformational leadership describes the work of leaders to deepen the motivation, commitment, and dedication of group members to organizational goals (Goddard, Neumerski, Goddard, Salloum, & Berebitsky, 2010, p. 338).

In companion with one another, effective schools can be created.

Leading quality improvement and pedagogical leadership were emphasized as responsibilities asked of those under distributed leadership (Heikka & Hujala, 2013). A shared commitment among stakeholders for the effectiveness of the organization rests within the distributed leadership context. Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, and Slavit (2011) believed when teachers and principals share leadership in a school, both the adults and students win. They posited important features of distributed leadership. Creating an environment characterized by ongoing professional learning that support the development of strong school communities focused on improving student learning through teacher collaboration defines their research. Formal leaders acting alone cannot accomplish the tough task needed to meet the educational needs of students; however, distributed leadership is not about creating numerous leaders (Harris, 2013). Distributed leadership is firmly based on increasing leadership quality and capability by recognizing the work of

those who can support the development of the school, bringing about productive change and improved instruction. This model provides a mean to assist learning in a wide variety of educational settings.

Distributed leadership can pose challenges and lack optimism. It is believed that “distributed leadership must be considered within the context of previous leadership models” (Corrigan, 2013, p. 70). If relational trust is not built with individuals, this theory of leadership can be simply seen as delegation by another name.

Leaders are constantly learning and then using and sharing what they have learned to support students. Researchers contradicted a long-held concept of leadership in which singular figures with charismatic and heroic qualities control a school (Kennedy, et al, 2011). By differentiating schools that have top-down and lateral decision making practices, researchers separate schools based on how stakeholders are involved in processes (Davison, Brown, Pharo, Warr, McGregor, Terkes, Boyd, & Abuodha, 2013). Research suggests that when adults in a school engage in deep conversation that supports student learning, teams exhibit a spirit of inquiry by continually asking questions of data and each other. “Schools work better when leadership is shared” (Parsons and Beauchamp, 2012, p.699). This conversation is made powerful by individuals working together to deepen their understanding of core instructional practices that ultimately increases each teacher’s capacity.

Leadership has proven vital, if not the most important aspect of the effective functioning in a school (Leithwood, 1994). Instructional leadership, transformational leadership, and distributed leadership research have illustrated characteristics evidenced by effective school leaders. A challenge to the educational field is further development of leaders and leadership. Principals

must be reflective about their practice and engage in connections between development and efficacy to become effective practitioners, creating positive school cultures.

Teacher empowerment.

The teaching profession is one of the largest occupations and continues to grow (Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010). Principals are second in line to teachers in their impact on student development within the school setting (Johnson, 2012; Stronge, Richard & Catano, 2008). Teachers play an important role in how schools function because they are the core of schools. Hipp (1996) believes the most important resources in our schools are the teacher and warns of the impact of ignoring the social, psychological, and physical aspects of their work. A crucial component of any successful drive to improve the quality of education is providing students with access to effective teachers and keeping teachers in schools where they are needed most.

Mutually reinforcing school factors influencing the relationship between schools and school leaders were identified (Chambers and Huggins, 2014; Price, 2012). In particular, Chamber & Huggins (2014) considered “the influences of teachers and school personnel” (p. 211) as the most important factor for school improvement. Positive adult interactions between students and teachers, administrators, and other school personnel were positive contributors of high academic success (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). It was found that negative comments and low expectations seemed to play just as important a part of student’s lack of success, highlighting the importance of employing and keeping effective teachers in schools, particularly teachers who are positive (Kraft, Papay, Johnson, Charner-Laird, Ng, & Reinhorn, S, 2015).

Explorations of hiring and retention practices have been researched. Ingersoll & Merrill (2010) found trends in data explaining how the teaching force is changing. Ballooning refers to the increase in the number of teachers employed since the mid-1980s. Reduced class size and an

increase in growth of special education as a result of the changes in the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) have contributed to this progress. As educators grow older and begin to approach retirement age, the number of newcomers has steadily increased. The researchers found large proportions of teachers at both ends of the age spectrum, creating twin peaks in data. Importantly, they found the teaching force is becoming less stable as an increase in teacher turnover has been noted since the early 1990s. As more teachers are joining the profession, research on teacher mobility is in need of review. Egalite, Jensen, Stewart & Wolf (2014) identified characteristics of teachers who enter and remain in schools. Teachers highly value the positive influence they can have on a student's life. They found schools with a strong sense of community and high academic standard as an indicator of teacher commitment.

Based on the work of James Burns, often considered the founder of modern leadership theory, Leithwood and Jantzi (1990) addressed the call for the restructuring of school initiatives that aimed to empower teachers. Historically, they found that schools where teachers were autonomous and isolated prevented staff members as a whole from working toward a unified school vision. Practices of schools with autonomous teachers did not include professional conversations with one another of a collaborative nature focused on student learning. Teachers felt hindered and ineffective (McLean, Dixon, & Verenikina, 2014). Adams and Woods (2015) discussed teacher efficacy as the quality of feeling successful. Feelings of isolation can be a stress factor, therefore transferring over to educators' negative performance in the classroom. Teachers then become overwhelmed and discouraged.

Successful principals develop teachers by encouraging them to take on more direct leadership roles in the school (Blase & Blase, 1999; Wells & Klocko, 2015). Collaborating with teachers by involving them in the important work of the content and organization of the school

gives them purpose (Dauksas & White, 2010; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; MetLife, 2012). Educating staff members of accountability structures enable administrators to delegate tasks to teachers showing an interest in improving school culture thus empowering school teams.

In today's intense school reform climate, principals who can build trust with their teachers may be especially important for improving schools (Price, 2012). Additionally, studies have found a positive link between administrative support and teacher outcomes (Hipp, 1996; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). In schools where teachers describe the work as rigorous, the lack of clarity regarding the instructional and organizational culture, including undefined norms and shared expectations, can be frustrating (Cucchiara, Rooney, & Robertson-Kraft, 2015). Principals who lead schools by communicating expectations, maintaining order, and establishing norms for culture have teachers with improved job satisfaction. Keeping effective teachers in the schools that need them most is an exceedingly difficult challenge for districts and in need of continued study.

Teacher mobility.

Educators may enter the profession to make a difference in a young person's life because they had wonderful teachers in school, because they always liked learning, or because of the interest in the content (Buchanan, 2012). Considerations to salary, benefits, time commitment, and workload are also made (Johnson, 2012). Once employed, ongoing assessments of the school culture and individual performance are measured.

The percentage of teachers who either leave the profession or transfer to another school has steadily increased in the United States through the last decades, leading to unstable inconsistent school staffs (Ingersoll, 2003; Ingersoll, 2010). Kukla-Acevedo (2009) separated the two types of teachers in transition. The researcher defined those who leave the profession as leavers and those who transfer to other schools as movers. Characteristics of the school, teacher, and

students are all potential determinants of teacher turnover (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Stability at local schools, where educators are establishing strong roots in the community are imperative to the success of effective schools.

In reviewing research conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), specifically data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and its supplement, the Teacher Follow-Up Survey (TFS), it was found that of the 3,377,900 public school teachers in 2014 who were teaching during the 2011–12 school year, 84 percent remained at the same school, eight percent moved to a different school, and eight percent left the profession during the following year. Among public school teacher movers, 59 percent moved from one public school to another public school in the same district, 38 percent moved from one public school district to another public school district, and three percent moved from a public school to a private school between 2011–12 and 2012–13. These data were obtained from a questionnaire given to a random sample of about 50,000 educators representing all types of teachers, schools, and districts in all 50 states. Developing an understanding of the reasons driving higher turnover rates is needed to provide insight into how teachers can be supported in the future (Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2011).

Employee turnover in any occupation, including teaching, has benefits and challenges (Hanushek and Rivkin, 2010). In a study by Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski, & Karelitz (2012) it was suggested that teachers who stay, outperform those who leave, implying that turnover includes the weeding out of less effective teachers. In contrast, research has found that teacher turnover plays a large role in school staffing problems, creating teacher shortages (Ingersoll and Merrill, 2010).

A potential source of valuable input on teacher retention is from the perspective of current and former teachers (Buchanan, 2012; Odhiambo & Hi, 2012). By examining the characteristics and gaining a better understanding of the reasons teachers leave, practitioners are able to reflect and revise practices (Boyd, et al, 2011). Ladd (2011) used quantitative research data to show a strong correlation to working conditions as a contributing factor in a teacher's decision to leave a school and found "teachers' perceptions of working conditions at the school level are highly predictive of an individual teacher's intentions to leave a school, with the perceived quality of school leadership the most salient factor" (p.251). This teacher perception data provides insight into the relationship between leadership and teacher retention. Perception data from former teachers allows researchers to discuss factors contributing to mobility and implications for its impact.

Attention has been paid in recent years to the issue of teacher attrition and to the factors that influence teachers' decisions to move from one school to another or to leave the profession altogether (Dagli, 2012; Kukla-Scevedo, 2009; Ladd, 2011). Relationships between teacher attrition and working conditions have been studied to have a strong connection (Boyd, et al, 2011; Buchanan, 2012; Cucchiara, et al, 2015; Dauksas & White, 2010; Ingersoll, 2001). Working conditions are defined based on the review of the literature and can be separated into the following school contextual factors: teacher influence, professional learning, administration, staff relations, student behavior, and demographics.

Teachers feel professional satisfaction when they perceive they have more influence on school policy and practices thereby contributing to school-wide decisions (Boyd et al, 2011; Dagli, 2012). Positive correlations are drawn between teacher influence on school policy and autonomy over their individual classroom (Dauksas & White, 2010; Ladd, 2011). The lack of

school wide professional learning plans and non-existent or limited mentoring programs negatively impact teacher attrition (Buchanan, 2012; Dauksas & White, 2010). Teachers should continually be provided opportunities to develop and update their skills so they are better able to reach all learners, therefore contributing to becoming highly effective.

The way in which school principals are willing to help teachers improve professionally refers to administrative support (Boyd et al, 2011; Dagli, 2012; Heidmets & Liik, 2014). Those with administrative support are more likely to remain in teaching because the leader has the potential to influence many other working conditions in a positive manner. Recognizing teachers and showing appreciation are other ways in which administrators can be supportive. Leaders who provide teachers with an opportunity to establish reciprocal relationships support retention in schools (Dauksas & White, 2010).

Staff relations refer to teachers' collegial and social relationships with others in the building (Boyd et al, 2011). Dagli (2012) described school culture lacking in collegiality by recounting findings of teachers who went out of their way to see other teachers fail as an indicator for wanting a changed profession. Additionally, teachers emphatically outlined the need for experienced teachers to share their knowledge in formal and informal structures with one another (Blase & Blase, 1999; Kraft, Papay, Johnson, Charner-Laird, Ng, & Reinhorn, 2015). Providing opportunities for teachers to collaborate with colleagues to plan and participate in professional activities is considered a need for teacher retention (Dauksas & White, 2010). Research from teachers' perspective describes principals who model a philosophy of teamwork by providing regular time for collaboration and teacher sharing as essential for teaching and learning (Blase & Blase, 1999).

Student behavior is considered a working condition influencing teacher mobility. Students' lack of motivation in some environments eventually creates student misbehavior and classroom discipline problems (Buchanan, 2012). Feeling safe is a central theme behind teachers' reasons for resignation, and students who behaved inappropriately limited teachers' levels of comfort (Boyd et al, 2011; Dagli, 2012).

When looking at the percentage of teachers who transfer to other buildings, teachers often shuffled more from poor schools than wealthier schools (Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010). The MetLife Survey of the American teacher (MetLife, 2012) reported the challenge to maintain an adequate supply of effective teachers in urban schools and in schools with two-thirds or more low-income students. Teachers often move to teach students in schools with less poverty to avoid these pitfalls.

Personal characteristics as well as characteristics associated with the schools and districts in which teachers teach, significantly impact decisions of retention (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2011; Ingersoll, 2001; Ladd, 2011; Torres, 2012). Teacher characteristics such as gender, race, age, certification, educational level, and years of teaching experience have been found to be indicators of retention decisions (Dagli, 2012). Demographic characteristics of the school's students can also be used as a second tier predictor of mobility, especially when race or social backgrounds are unequal (Clotfelter, Ladd & Vigdor, 2011; Goldhaber, Lavery & Theobald, 2015). A teacher's willingness to stay in a school can ultimately result from unequal demographic percentages.

Teacher turnover is higher when teachers have adverse working conditions (Ladd, 2011). Conversely, working conditions are positively impacted when teachers feel committed to their school (Boyd et al, 2011; Dumay & Galand, 2012; Johnson, 2012). When teachers perceive they

have opportunities for professional growth and are successful in the implementation of practice, they feel as if they are making a difference and that their work is appreciated. Researchers found a positive psychological meaningfulness between work-role fit and job enrichment (Astakhova, 2015; Janik & Rothmann, 2015). This appreciation has been found to be predictive of sustainability in the profession.

Working conditions have been described based on a number of school contextual factors. For the sake of the researcher's work in this project, the contextual factor of working conditions refers to the quality of school leadership. School administrators play a particularly important role in teacher career decisions (Boyd, et al, 2011; Heidmets & Liik, 2014; Ladd, 2011). Buchanan (2012) stated school leaders who lacked positivity and did not instill a culture of community were indicators of negative influence for teachers. Boyd et al (2011) found "the administration factor is the only one that significantly predicts teacher retention decisions after controlling for other school and teacher characteristics" (p.323). Understanding the role of workplace conditions on teacher turnover can potentially assist school officials in creating a school work environment that encourages teachers to remain in their current positions (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Seemingly, if teachers feel supported by their administrators, their working conditions can be positively affected.

Effects of teacher mobility on school culture.

Chambers and Huggins (2014) defined the impact of organizational culture as "The essence of an organization's culture exists not only on a macrocosmic level through organizational structures but also microcosmically in the way that those organizational structures are manifested in individual exchanges and the interpretations of those individual exchanges" (p.192). Leaders of an organization play a significant role in establishing the culture of schools (Cherkowski,

Walker & Kutsyuruba, 2015; Pater, 2105). Teachers are also impactful contributors. The effect of teacher retention on school culture is an area of needed research (Boyd et al, 2011; Dagli, 2012; Shaw & Newton, 2014). Resolving high teacher mobility is a needed discussion for schools and districts. Its impact has direct implications on school culture and the students who are served in the schools (Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski & Karelitz, 2012; Ronfeldt, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2013).

With staff turnover, organizations are always burdened with interviewing potential employees, onboarding new hires, and high productivity costs (Kukla-Acevedo, 2009). Levy, Joy, Ellis, Jablonski & Karelitz (2012) researched a model to determine explicit and hidden costs of teacher turnover. Calculations of data broken down by separation, hiring, and training contribute to costs of mobility. Non-monetary productivity losses when new teachers replace veteran teachers were also recognized. The expense of explicit and hidden costs of teacher turnover can be significant, draining school budgets and impacting the instructional programs.

In addition to elevated budget costs, a lack of teacher stability at the local school results compromise student learning (Ronfeldt, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2013). The authors found when teachers leave, they are often replaced with those having less experience and limited training (Helfeldt, Capraro, Caparo, Scott, 2015). Problems are then created as schools are continuously starting over to put school plans for improvement in place and train staff on local initiatives. Increases in turnover may further exacerbate these problems (Ingersoll, 2010). This dilemma puts pressure on school leaders to determine ways to lessen the impact caused by teacher mobility. Seemingly, it is important to determine characteristics of principals that retain teachers to ultimately reduce gaps in student achievement.

Literature on effective schools addresses the importance of leadership and the ability of the principal to create an environment with a clear vision (Ladd, 2011; Stronge, et al, 2008). Schools focused on transformational leadership trust teacher's professional judgment in making classroom decisions and empower teachers to participate in the decision making arena for their school, resulting in a feeling of ownership and pride for their work environment (Cucchiara, et al, 2015; Leithwood, 1994).

Past research has focused largely on the challenges of teaching in high-poverty, high-need schools (Guarino, Brown, & Wyse, 2011; Ingersoll & Merrill, 2010; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Ladd, 2011). A challenge to staffing schools is an ideal that when faced with choices of employment, candidates select optimal positions with supportive administrators and with students who are considered easier or more rewarding to teach. The percentage of teacher mobility was higher in schools where 75 percent or more students were minority or 75 percent or more participated in the free or reduced lunch program (Dagli, 2012). School demographics play little role in the decision to leave teaching but greatly influence decisions to transfer within and between districts (Adams & Woods, 2105). Poor, minority schools are much more likely to lose teachers of all types, particularly teachers from highly competitive universities with high scores on teacher certification exams (Guarino, Brown, Wyse, 2011). Wealthy schools with low minority populations have an advantage for teacher candidates.

Certain school demographics and student characteristics have been linked to schools with higher attrition rates (Cucchiara, et al, 2015). It is fair to say those contextual factors listed as reasons teachers leave are not within policy makers control to change. After teacher, student, and school characteristics were removed, administrative support was the only workplace condition that exhibited a statistically significant relation with teacher turnover (Dagli, 2012; Sedivy-

Benton & Boden-McGill, 2012). The factor of administrator support as a working condition identified by the literature in teacher perception surveys is within control at the school level and can be addressed.

Dagli's (2012) research concluded that greater autonomy in teacher classrooms and greater administrative support was associated with a decrease in the probability of moving to another school. Teachers who perceive that they have legitimate administrative support have a higher probability of staying in the same school (Egalite et al, 2014; Hughes, Matt & O'Reilly, 2015). Due to the fact that teachers seek transfers to other appealing schools, an exceedingly difficult challenge for districts is to consider options to retain highly qualified teachers (Kraft, Papay, Johnson, Charner-Laird, Ng, & Reinhorn, S, 2015). Researching behaviors of principals in local schools will provide an insider perspective in which to facilitate change. Replication of these behaviors in high mobility schools should then be a priority.

Conclusion.

The support of administrators has emerged as a significant factor in teacher retention decisions (Aslanargun, 2015; Blase & Blase, 1999; Hughes, Matt, O'Reilly, 2015). This review of the literature provides the framework that illuminates the need for a clear understanding of principal behaviors influencing teacher retention as employees in their current buildings. Clarifying those characteristics, with additional research on certified staff members' perceptions of principals is needed. Once an understanding is obtained, approaches by principals should be strongly sought out by practicing school leaders and explicitly featured in principal preparation programs (Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Leithwood, 1994). The impact of school culture can be reinforced by the relationship between students, the staff, and the administrators (Egalite et al, 2014). Ideally, a positive relationship can be forged.

The research in this review contributes to the knowledge base on the influence principal behaviors have on teacher retention. Leadership has proven vital, if not the most important aspect of the effective functioning in a school. As leadership best practice evolves by becoming more horizontal and shared by administrators and teachers, teachers grow as professionals contributing to a positive school culture (Hitt & Tucker, 2015; Spiro, 2015). As administrators get a firm grasp of leadership practices positively impacting teachers with a deep understanding that student learning comes first, remarkable outcomes can result. Once direction has been set and adequate professional development provided, teachers become motivated by their working environment which is integral to retention.

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2 TEACHER RETENTION: BEHAVIORS OF PRINCIPALS INFLUENCING TEACHERS IN SCHOOLS AS PART OF GEORGIA’S VISION FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION

The purpose of the Georgia Vision Project Research Study was to determine to what degree the project’s implementation has impacted school culture and student achievement in high implementation districts. The Georgia Vision Project hopes that “public education in Georgia will provide all children an equitable and excellent education that prepares them for college, career and life” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The work of the Georgia Vision Project is organized into seven recommendations. This project is based upon four (numbers 2, 3, 4, & 5) of the seven education system components. All of the components are:

1. Early Learning and Student Success
2. Teaching and Learning
3. Human and Organizational Capital
4. Governance, Leadership and Accountability
5. Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy
6. Teaching and Learning Resources
7. Financial Resources

In addition to the Georgia Vision Project Research Study, an individual focus of this dissertation was to explore the influence of principals on teacher retention. The fifth component of the Georgia Vision Project, Culture, Climate and Organizational Efficacy, specifically aligned with the purpose of this study to garner new information on teacher retention. Under the guiding principle of that component, which states, “effective leadership is crucial to creating organizational climates that are conducive to learning” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Ex-

cellence”, 2009); behaviors of principals influencing teacher retention in schools were researched.

Theoretical framework.

A cohort of Georgia State University’s doctoral students in the Educational Policy Studies program conducted individual qualitative studies to analyze the impact of the Georgia Vision Project by summarizing the work of two different systems using an instrumental multiple case study approach (Boozer, 2015; Creswell, 2012; Yin, 2014). Eleven public school systems in Georgia that have implemented the Vision recommendations over the last five years were studied, and this chapter focuses on two of those systems. Additionally, the researcher adds to the literature by exploring behaviors of principals to better understand how those practices influence teacher retention. The researcher obtained stakeholder data about schools and school districts by investigating employee perceptions.

Thematic analysis is considered a foundational method for qualitative analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Flexibility is a benefit of thematic analysis. It is independent of theory and can be applied across a range of approaches. Specifically, this project was based upon the design of the general inductive approach (Snell, Briscoe, & Dixon, 2011; Thomas, 2006; Tse, Laverack, Nayar, & Foroughian, 2011). This approach provided the means for assessment of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education, a phenomenon that has only recently been implemented. Thomas (2006) described the general inductive approach as a “systematic procedure for analyzing qualitative data in which analysis is likely guided by specific evaluation objectives” (p.238). In this dissertation, the vision for equity and excellence in public education, as laid out by the Georgia Vision Project, guided the work.

Bruner (1973) originated the idea of learning as an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current or past knowledge. A constructionist paradigm allows the knowledge of the researcher and the participants to work hand in hand, developing information together (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Through this method, knowledge is constructed rather than discovered (Stake, 1995). This theory was chosen because the researcher's profession allowed construction of knowledge to merge with new experiences. The researcher's professional knowledge and data collected from the participants worked together to develop new information.

Considering that both the researcher and the participants were certified educators at the time of the study, individual ethical truths based on their individual thoughts and experiences were shared. Those experiences helped make meaning of the relationship between teachers and principals. This mutual relationship allowed data to be reflective between the two groups, allowing an answer to research questions to be obtained. This concept related to teachers in this study as well, enabling them to make meaning of interactions with their principal and interpret those understandings through conversations with the researcher who shares common perspectives while participating in interviews.

Methodology

Quantitative research on the influence of principal leadership on teacher retention can be found (Astakhova, 2015; Boyd, Grossman, Ing, Lankford, Loeb, Wyckoff, 2011; Dagli, 2012; Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Heidmets & Liik, 2014). However, qualitative research is limited on the specific influence of the teacher perceptions of the principal, which may affect retention. By examining employee perceptions, using a qualitative approach, this study will fill a void in the literature.

In addition to the Vision Project, this study also explored the practices of school principals and their influence on teacher retention from the perspective of certified teachers.

Four questions guide the overall work of the study:

1. How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in your school?
2. What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in your school?
3. How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of self and others in your school?
4. What are the behaviors of principals influencing teacher retention in schools?

This research is designed as a qualitative multiple instrumental case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Creswell, 2012; deMarris, 2004; Yin, 2014). This multiple instrumental case study is an in-depth exploration of two school systems, both implementing recommendations from the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education. Creswell (2012) defined a case as several individuals involved in the implementation of a program. Generalized results of this multiple instrumental case study cannot be made within other contexts (Boozer, 2015) but they can contribute to knowledge and “retain a holistic and real-world perspective” (Yin, 2012, p. 4).

The researcher did not independently select the two systems highlighted in this work (Boozer, 2015). Rather, the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education Executive Director acted as an informant to select eleven Tier 1 Georgia school systems to participate in the overall project as assigned two to the researcher conducting this study. This multiple instrumental case study summarized the work of two systems implementing the project with fidelity. System A and

System B were selected because one or more of the project's recommendations were aligned with each district's strategic plan for direction. Additionally, the two districts were deemed by project leaders to be successful in gleaning information specific to the secondary individual focus. Through individual research, information was selected and synthesized. Analysis of data allowed the researcher to go beyond the information given to provide meaning and the recognition of new experiences.

Interviews with system leaders provided research data for the Georgia Vision Project study. An individual aspect of this study explored the relationship between teachers and principals in schools. Teachers, as the key stakeholder in the secondary study, were the voice exploring the behaviors of school principals to better understand how they influence teacher retention. Individual interviews were conducted with system leaders and teachers. In the search to discover practices of principals, the researcher was able to provide descriptions of specific behaviors. This research study ultimately describes the degree to which the Georgia Vision Project has impacted school culture.

By interviewing system leaders in two distinctly different districts and examining the perceptions of teachers, the researcher better understood the project. This research can provide insight for school district officials, local school boards, and school administrators, enabling them to put interventions in place supporting school leaders, resulting in greater sustainability.

The cases are bound by two districts implementing the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education guidelines. One system is a large suburban district and the other a small rural district. Over the context of five months, from July 2015 to November 2015, data were collected from the systems. This period provides was a clear beginning and ending time frame.

Data collection.

Data collection began early in the academic school year, summer of 2015. A one hour interview with an individual in a leadership position familiar with the Georgia Vision Project's implementation within System A and one hour interview with an individual in System B was conducted. Individual system leader interviewees were selected by the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education Executive Director and assigned to the researcher. These interviews provided demographics about the interviewees and information on the implementation of the project in each respective district. In addition, another one hour interview with someone in the human resources department was conducted in each district to continue the conversation about the Georgia Vision Project and discuss knowledge of principal influence on teacher retention. These interviews determined the researcher's local school interview data collection sites to obtain teacher perception data of principal behaviors influencing teacher retention. One school in System A and one in System B was selected by a system leader. A decision was made to study middle school personnel in both systems for consistency across the two districts.

Six teachers serving on each school's leadership team were asked to participate by their local school principals. Purposive sampling was used to select the six participants from each school. Such purposeful sample allowed the researcher to interview participants who would provide the specific information needed to describe and understand the perceptions to be studied (Creswell 2012; Merriam, 2009). All aspects related to this study were explained to the participants, including the purpose of the study, the minimal risk of participation, the nature of participation as well as the participant's right to withdraw at any time during the study. When participants agreed to be interviewed for the study, they signed an informed consent form before beginning. Interviews were recorded on a digital voice recorder and data was transferred to a password

protected laptop. The original recording was erased from the digital voice recorder after each file was transferred to the computer.

In total, data collection consisted of sixteen semi-structured interviews, one of the most common sources of data for case studies (Yin, 2013). In this study, an informant, a representative in human resources, and six teachers were individually interviewed in each system. Interviewees were asked open-ended questions based upon a loosely structured interview guide related to them and the relationship they have with their principal for steering conversations around the purpose of the study (see Appendices A, B, & C for interview questions). The interview guide was created during a brainstorming session with other researchers also participating in the Georgia Vision Project study. These interviews used open-ended questions to allow participants to voice their experiences accurately without being influenced by recent research or the perspective of the researcher (Creswell, 2012). General questions beginning with what, how, tell me, and describe were utilized, “formulated to investigate topics in all their complexity, in context” (deMaris, 2004, p.2). Questions framed this way allowed for thorough responses of participants, ensuring external validity (Yin, 2014). Finally, the participants were asked to describe leadership behaviors in their school influencing retention. The participants were advised to share responses based on actual initiatives facilitated or developed by their principal as it related to retention in an attempt to stay focused on actual practices rather than theory or hopeful action.

Analyzing interview data between an informant, a human resource representative, and teachers within each system allowed the researcher to get a complete view, using the theory of triangulation to add credibility to the data. Obtaining different perspectives on the same issue increased the researcher’s confidence in the findings to allow a fuller understanding of the richness and depth of each case (Walsh, 2013; Yin, 2014). Studying both leaders and teachers in

each district allowed the researcher to gain a complete view adding trustworthiness to the data (Thomas, 2006). The perceptions from leaders who work in the selected districts in addition to the knowledge shared by the teacher participants added to the understanding of the project.

System A.

System A is a small district located in a rural section in the northern part of the state. The system consists of six schools: one primary school, one intermediate school, two elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. The system serves roughly 4,000 students. Data were collected at the local middle school. The current leader has been an employee there for the last thirty years, first as a teacher before becoming the principal in 2000. Once considered a needs improvement school during her tenure she has been able to implement professional learning and use of distributed leadership. Under the direction of the district superintendent, the middle school began the work of Professional Learning Communities and Positive Behavioral Intervention and Supports, which has impacted teaching and learning in a positive way.

According to the principal of the middle school, she has been fortunate to have worked with proficient assistant principals with strengths in areas different from her own. Her administrative teams, past and present, find strength in supporting teachers and students. In her opinion, working on student and adult culture in an intentional way has contributed to their success. The team is constantly learning and reviewing information to make the best decisions. The principal describes her staff as a family and staff members work to help each other. Similar to nuclear families, they have outliers and difficult members, but they still find the means to support one another. Her philosophy is to take care of teachers so they are able to take care of the students. Despite being located in a rural area, the principal's mission is to hire an eclectic staff, ensuring every child can find an adult with whom to connect. Most recently, the teachers and students be-

gan the work of mindsets, an initiative to train people to begin to think differently in how they think about themselves, their surroundings, and their future (Dweck, 2006). The school has about 100 total employees; five certified staff members are new for the 2015-2016 school years. Two of those are brand new; two others came with several years' experience and one a transfer from an elementary school.

System B.

In comparison, System B is a larger suburban system in the northern part of the state. System B serves more than 40,000 students in over 50 schools. System B has a long standing superintendent who supports teaching and learning. Data were collected at one of the local middle schools. The current leader has been principal there for the last few years, after transferring from a local school in a neighboring district. She leads with more than twenty years of experience. Her expertise is in training and mentoring new teachers. The principal has many local and national accolades. Her leadership is built on developing collaborative efforts among all of the school stakeholders; parents, teachers, administrators, community leaders and students. The school provides an active learning environment that engages students, going beyond academics to include life skills, and thus promoting a world-class educational experience that meets the needs of diverse learners. The school also has about 100 employees; eight certified staff members are new for the 2015-2016 school year. Six of them transferred from other districts and 2 transferred from a neighboring district experiencing accreditation issues.

Data analysis.

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to identify, analyze, and share data. Clarity on processes and practice are provided in this section. Each interview was transcribed by an electronic transcription service before analysis of the interview data began. Each interview

transcription was reviewed by the researcher by reading the transcribed data and listening to the recordings at the same time. This procedure assisted in correcting transcription errors. A tracking sheet in Microsoft Excel was used to organize and gather all data once transcribed. This spreadsheet was used as a reference sheet to document occurrences of times mentioned, indicating the need to identify them in data analysis.

The researcher actively identified themes by selecting and reporting those of interest (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To begin, a search for common themes was obtained across all interview data within each system. Because thematic analysis is not attached to a pre-existing theoretical framework, it can be tied to a variety of others (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A contextualist method, a merge between realist and constructionist theoretical methods, “reports experiences, meanings and the reality of participants” (p. 81) with “examining the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences...are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” was used in this research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 81). In this study, the researcher reports the perceptions of the interviewees emerging from actual professional experiences.

The primary objective of the instrumental multiple case study was to determine to what degree the Vision Project’s implementation has impacted school culture in the two high fidelity districts described above. The general inductive approach was used to analyze the qualitative data to identify themes in the data that were related to the instrumental multiple case study objectives (Thomas, 2006). The general inductive approach allowed findings to emerge from the data of what was considered frequent and significant (Thomas, 2006). Once the data files were cleaned and put into a common format, the analysis commenced with a thorough reading of the text.

Clear links were found between the Vision Project education components, the correlated guiding principles and the data (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). This method allowed a structure to emerge in order to determine to what degree the project’s implementation has impacted school culture. Taking an inner look at statements that emerged during research allowed the researcher to “filter, skew, shape, block, transform, construe, and misconstrue what transpires from the onset of a research project to its culmination in a written statement” (Peshkin, 1988, p.17).

In this research, data analysis was guided by the education system components and the corresponding guiding principles of the Georgia Vision Project (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Researcher judgment was necessary to reduce data (Thomas, 2006). This study captured themes in relation to the Georgia Vision Project guiding principles (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Claims were made, allowing detailed descriptions derived from the Vision Project guiding principles found prevalent in each system were presented. The research questions provided focus but the findings arose directly from raw data (Thomas, 2006). Themes were identified in an inductive way with similarities to grounded theory (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data were collected specifically to answer the research questions; therefore coding was purposeful.

Thomas (2006) described the features of categories developed from coding. The work of the Georgia Vision Project is organized into seven recommendations. Through multiple readings of the transcriptions, four of the seven education system components emerged through analysis of data illuminating through stakeholder perceptions in this study. The components that emerged were: Teaching and Learning; Human and Organizational Capital; Governance, Leadership and Accountability; and Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy. Limited data emerged in the

components of Early Learning and Student Success, Teaching and Learning Resources, and Financial Resources (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The findings were organized to summarize the connections and interpret their significance among the entire data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The themes and their meanings were based on the dialogue captured during the interviews.

In this study, four of the seven recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project labeled each category: Teaching and Learning; Human and Organizational Capital; Governance, Leadership and Accountability; and Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy. Through data analysis, the guiding principles of each recommendation informed the descriptions of each category. Wertz (2011) described coding as applying a short hand label to a larger piece of data, defining it to later develop codes that arise from the researcher's interaction. These codes were not preconceived and were established to summarize, synthesize, and sort data. Breckenridge and Jones (2009) explained the theoretical sampling process as open coding of raw data that generates initial codes which in turn stimulate further data collection. Open coding at the beginning of the data analysis phase consisted of tagging any unit of data that might be relevant to the study. For this study, the Vision Project recommendations were the source for the open codes. The researcher used data from interviews to accompany each category. In the final phase of data analysis, data were then reduced. Themes that captured recurring patterns that cut across the data were identified. In this instrumental multiple case study, data in both systems was analyzed and similarities and differences across the two cases were identified (Boozar, 2105). A benefit of the general inductive approach allowed findings to emerge from the researcher's judgment of what was considered recurrent and worthy to be noted (Thomas, 2006).

The repetitive process of reading and rereading allowed the researcher to move back and forth between gathering data and analysis. The researcher “strived for the highest ethical standards” while conducting this study (Yin, 2014, p.76). Possible sources of bias or error were eliminated in that the researcher was only seeking to use this case study to substantiate preconceived questions. The researcher has noted her subjectivity and reported all findings, including those contrary to personal belief.

Results

The work of the Georgia Vision Project is organized into seven recommendations. Four of the seven education system components emerged through data analysis of interview transcriptions. The components reviewed were: Teaching and Learning; Human and Organizational Capital; Governance, Leadership and Accountability; and Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy. This section includes the results of the data collected in this qualitative study. Using the education system components as a guide, the researcher identified sources of evidence to support its inclusion of being considered a finding. As shown in Table 1, a snapshot of sources of evidence is displayed.

Table 1

Sources of Evidence

Themes	System A	System B
Teaching and Learning	Informant	Informant
Human and Organizational Capital	Informant Human Resources Teachers	Informant Human Resources
Governance, Leadership and Accountability	Informant Human Resources	Informant Human Resources
Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy	Informant Human Resources Teachers	Informant Human Resources Teachers

System A

Eight people from System A agreed to participate in this study. A brief introduction of each interviewee is provided.

Table 2

System A Interviewees

	Position	Total years of experience	Years at current system/school
Informant	Superintendent	34	8
Human Resources	Director	20	20
Interviewee 1	8 th grade math	14	14
Interviewee 2	6 th grade English	9	9
Interviewee 3	6 th grade English	10	7
Interviewee 4	8 th grade social studies	5	5
Interviewee 5	8 th grade English	1	1
Interviewee 6	7 th grade special education	20	9

The informant is the system's superintendent. She has been in education for 34 years, eight of which in her current position. The majority of her career spanned as a school psycholo-

gist before later becoming a director of Special Education. From there, she first moved into leadership as a school assistant principal then principal, and she quickly moved to the board office as an assistant superintendent of student services, leading special education counselors and social workers. As a graduate of the superintendent's professional development program, Georgia School Superintendent Association (GSSA), she has served System A with a lot of experience in a lot of different areas.

The human resources representative has worked in the system for twenty years. She started in the special education and curriculum office prior to the human resources department. Her main responsibility is keeping track of all employees-certified and classified, by taking them through the hiring process and then keeping them on board.

Teacher 1 is an 8th grade math teacher. She has taught for 14 years, all in System A at the same school. She went to a small private college for two years before transferring and graduating from a large, major university in the state with a degree in math and science. She has a Master's degree in middle school math and a six-year degree in curriculum.

Teacher 2 is a 6th grade English teacher. She has been in education for nine years. She graduated from a local college with a degree in middle grades math and English. She holds a Master's degree in middle grades math and received a Specialist in curriculum and instruction. Her entire career has spanned at the same school.

Teacher 3 is also a 6th grade English teacher and she has been teaching for 10 years. After beginning her teaching career in a neighboring system for three years, she transferred to System A and has remained there ever since. She is a graduate of a local private college and received a graduate degree from a for-profit higher learning institution that delivers most of its education online. After completing a long term substitute position, she was hired on to the staff.

Teacher 4, the only male interviewed, is currently an 8th grade social studies teacher and has been in education for five years. He has had multiple teaching experiences at the middle school over his short career span. He taught seventh grade for the first two years, eighth grade for one year, back to seventh grade last year, and is now back in eighth grade, always teaching social studies. He serves as the school's football and tennis coach. He graduated from a large public university in the state and began his career as a youth pastor at a local church in System A. As a former student of the school, he began tutoring some of the students he mentored at the church before ultimately getting hired.

As a former student of the middle school, Teacher 5 is beginning her first year as an 8th grade English teacher. She received a Bachelor's degree in English from a small private college and later enrolled in an alternative teaching certification program. She is beginning her career without any prior experience. She is working on her Master's degree from a different small private college. She will obtain her teaching certificate through the graduate program while working.

Teacher 6 is a 7th grade special education teacher. After working for 20 years in a different field of experience, she went to school at night to obtain a teaching degree. She was hired in another system nine years ago. She went on to obtain her Specialist degree and is currently in her fourth year in System A.

Teaching and learning.

According to the informant in System A, professional learning communities were created to improve communication and bridge the gap to improve instruction across the system. Leaders in all System A schools participate in system-wide book studies. As stated by the Vision Project and confirmed by the informant, the quality of teaching and leadership makes a significant im-

pact on student learning. A guiding principle of The Georgia Vision Project for Public Education is that “high quality, job embedded professional development for teachers and leaders support the teaching-learning process” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009).

The informant discussed her belief in professional learning communities:

You can do all these instructional improvements and we certainly have put a lot of eggs in that basket but still in all, there's got to be that piece of the adult culture and the student culture. We almost had to work on the adults first and I think it's taken it this long really to get our adults to collaborate, to look at their data, to have a sense of accountability. We all are in teams. We collaborate regularly. That's kind of a non-negotiable. Our learning community as far as our district leadership team is very learning oriented for our adults.

The superintendent also believes that in comparison to other rural districts in the area, System A is ahead of the curve in terms of technology initiatives for teachers and students. Under the education system component of Teaching and Learning, the project sets the imperative to understand “the integration of technology into educational practices is essential for student engagement” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009):

We have chrome books in every school now. All of our kids have significant access to technology now. We got bring your own technology programs for the students at all of our schools so that technology is being used quite a bit. We put a laptop in every teacher's hands. The teachers in this district, if they've been here for the last 10 years I'd say, they've had a progression of their own laptops, provided by the system. We have a lot of tech savvy teachers and one of the reasons is early on in this district we became a Mac place and I really think that is key. I have to say that because that software and that hardware are all much more engaging and intuitive than PCs.

Human and organizational capital.

The role of the human resources department in System A is an example of how organizational structures are in place. Although a small department, the human resources director’s main duty is keeping track of all employees. She is the keeper of personnel files and tracks retention data. The human resources department ensures the selection and preparation of teacher candidates and pro-

vides ongoing support of teachers, which affects the quality of teaching (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The human resources representative stated:

We try to hire the right teachers to get in the right seat, you know, get the right person on the bus, get them going, you know, and then as far as support the mentoring piece is a big critical thing to us. We try to pair them up with a mentor in their building. The principal usually selects their go-to person that they can reach out to in their school. At the district level we also try to meet with them at the very end of the year to give us feedback by asking ‘What are some things we need to do better?’ We got some really good ideas from that and we are working on new mentoring guidelines.

A small community has great benefits. According to the human resources representative, “With a good portion of the faculty and staff being born and raised here, the critical mass of people have the most commitment because they’re raising or have raised their kids here.” Because a lot of the teachers graduated from the system, great pride comes with working where you went to school and where you choose to live and raise your kids. “Motivation is a major determinant of performance” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). There is a vested interest in the community; however, when looking at compensation, needs are apparent. The informant believes compensation is an essential element in recruiting high-quality teachers. She identified low supplements as a reason limiting the attraction to the system, “Often we seem to lose teachers because our supplements are not the greatest. When you compare us to the state scale we’re not the greatest.”

The Georgia Vision Project suggested some immediate steps in regards to execution of the Human and Organizational Capital component when created in 2009. One of those immediate steps was to “develop a comprehensive performance evaluation system for teachers and leaders” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). In 2013, the Teacher Keys Evaluation System (TKES) began state-wide. A guiding principle of this component calls for “effective feedback and supports through ongoing performance evaluation” (“A Vision for Pub-

lic Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). When describing a recent evaluation experience, Teacher 5 clearly explained the feeling of support:

[The principal] recently came in and did my very first TKES walk through at the beginning of this week. She was careful to tell me what was going to happen before the fact and it wasn't a surprise. I did not know she was coming on the day of but in weeks prior she had said 'this is the way it is going to look. I know you have never done this before. You just keep teaching like I am not there', that sort of thing, and so when she walked in the door, I was prepared. She did not just give me just positive feedback. She gave me back some constructive criticisms as well – 'hey, this could probably use a little work'.

Governance, leadership and accountability.

The informant of System A describes why she feels they have an effective educational governance system. The informant stated that, “the mission of the school system is to ensure that our kids meet the highest state and national standards and to live well and function well in an ever changing society.” The superintendent graduated from the Georgia School Superintendent’s Association, GSSA, a superintendent’s professional development program. She came in to the job of superintendent with a lot of experience in a lot of different areas before being hired.

“Good governance requires effective leaders operating with integrity, ethical behavior, and good intent” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). She describes her theoretical beliefs:

If there's one unique thing about this district that I could tell you and I know because I've been in a lot of places and I'm old now is that distributed leadership is just the essence of the culture here. There are two things on our model of professional learning communities that I've used since I got here-one is relational trust and the other that I emphasize is the leadership of all because if we don't have that, there's going to be no sustainability to anything we do.

Five years ago, the system had community conversations. This happened at a time when educational budgets were slim and districts had to make tough decisions. Stakeholders were brought in for four different sessions across the district to participate in honest discussions about change. “Relevant and accurate information is essential for good decisions” (“A Vision for Pub-

lic Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). As a result of the conversations, the superintendent explained, “We had great input about what this community wants and that really got us a lot of good information and gave us an opportunity to listen.”

Because the system is rural and high poverty, many interviewees provided examples explaining why there is not as much buy in to school and education is not as important as it should. The Georgia Vision Project determined “public education is an essential factor in a democratic society, in quality of life, and in economic development.” To fill the void and establish a connection between school and community, System A works alongside community partners:

We partner with our chamber of commerce by getting our students prepared for what jobs are available in our area. Community partners tell us what they want to see out of our graduates as a way of keeping people here that go through our high school.

As a former school psychologist, the superintendent governs by encouraging leaders to think about their inner barriers keeping them from wanting to change. She said, “There are things leaders do with data and learning communities and all that but a leader has to look within on what are the things they're reluctant to do.”

Culture, climate, and organizational efficacy.

In System A, “trust, collegiality, and teamwork strengthen collective efforts” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). In this small town, teachers are considered the intelligent ones. Parents think what they think about a school because of the teachers their children have. The informant posited the feeling of an “undeniable chain of trust in the relationship.” Teachers are the ones parents listen to, especially in the churches:

The churches are huge. The teachers get the buy-in from the community. I believe you have to convince them because they're your big culture climate people. I'm a big proponent of the teachers being the ones that I've got to convince about culture and climate and principals too now because principals have the biggest impact on teachers. Their own feeling about where they are and their ability to take risks and feel like they can try these things has to do with who they work for directly.

There are positives of being in a small town. The system is home. The school is considered second family. The human resources representative and several teachers explained the benefits. Teacher 4 talked about the experience:

You see people in a grocery store, you see them at the ball field, or you see them at work because you might work with them or you know their children. I mean when you work with people, you're with them a lot. I mean they're your family; this is a closed knit community. Everybody knows everybody.

“Effective leadership is crucial to creating organizational climates that are conducive to learning” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The secondary focus of this study looked specifically at the influence of the principal on teacher retention. The following categories represent the central themes found: respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door, and encourager.

When asked to define teacher retention, varying responses were presented across all stakeholders in System A. In summary, teacher retention was defined as the ability of a school to motivate teachers to want to stay on staff. Teacher 1 defined it as, “A teacher loving her job enough to stay in a particular community and stay with the school for long term.” Teacher 3 contends it means, “Keeping teachers and not having them quit teaching after a few years, which is what they're prone to do sometimes.”

Respect for individuals and their efforts is foundational for teacher, employee, and student retention. Principals play a big role in building culture. Teachers vehemently expressed the desire for their principal to be respectful of them and their work because they want to work for someone they feel cares about them. This respect is then manifested into the staff as a whole, the students, and the community.

An indicator of respect is being approachable. Being approachable shows care beyond the job but on a human, person to person level. Teachers feel they can come to their principal with any type of issues and feel like they are on their side:

You're never going to work for someone that you do not agree with or that you do not respect or doesn't respect you. I think once a principal gets to a position where they seem like they don't care about you and what you do, I think that's when you begin to search for something else.

Teachers also expressed appreciation of teaching respect from the top down, starting with their principal, requiring respect school-wide, especially between students:

We're doing things constantly to have our children look at positive situations. I think we were getting to a point where disrespect was kind of filtering out unnecessarily. The culture in our school has to be something that we're proud of. We are implementing steps in order to get our children to realize how important it is to be nice to each other and even though you may not agree, you can disagree in a way that's not going to cause any kind of trouble. We're making our way towards that.

Support both financial and emotional is important for individual and group motivation.

References to the need for support permeated the conversations. One type of support was defined by Teacher 1 as the “principal being in classrooms all the time and making teachers feel like what they do is important.” When principals listen, teachers feel supported. An example of being supportive was how a principal went out of her way to help a teacher meet a professional goal she set for herself and was not being successful. Teacher 2 described how the principal interceded, “I said, ‘Okay, I’m having trouble with this.’ She found someone to directly help me the next day.”

Support is especially appreciated when it happens in arenas outside of the building.

Teacher 3 discussed the impact of principal support, “Administration has helped me personally and professionally in so many ways.” Teacher 5 went on to say, “I think she’s there for support and to help however she can as far as . . . wherever that could be school-wise or really, home

life-wise.” Principal support then becomes whole staff support when the entire school works together, as explained by Teacher 4, “We support each other. We care about each other. The administration is the same way. They jump right in.”

Relationships build culture through social interaction. Throughout the interviews, references were made highlighting the impact of individual personal and professional relationships. Thriving relationships influence teachers to want to come and stay, especially when the principal knows all about staff members and their families. Teacher 5 reminisced about her time as a student at the middle school before being hired:

I think one thing that made me want to apply here is because I went to school here and the current principal was my principal then. She has been principal for a while and I can remember stories of when my grandmother was a teacher here and worked under her. I heard great things about their relationship and then when I went to school here I was a personal witness.

Teacher 6 chose teaching as a second career and exclaimed how she made twice as much money before becoming a teacher but the relationship between her and the principal keeps her doing what she loves. Recognition is paramount to healthy self-development and motivation. Educators have griped about the evolution of accountability and standards challenges over the years. Principals who can minimize the feelings of being overwhelmed by recognizing when things are tough and lessen the burdens for teachers are noted as stand outs. The human resources representative expressed that as much as a principal can take off of teachers with the little things can make their life easier. Teacher 2 extends the thought by providing an example. “For example, we got to wear jeans today. We were not supposed to wear jeans. It’s these little pick me ups along the way that really help the school culture, making teachers want to do better.” Another teacher said, “They try to mention positive kudos that they see. Those help.”

Accessibility or the “Open Door” policy is a powerful builder of institutional trust. Teachers are comforted in knowing that the principal’s door is always open, any time. Conversa-

tions of a positive or negative nature are addressed professionally in the principal's office. Teacher 5 provided an example of how teachers feel that being able to go in and talk about anything is appreciated:

Her door is open unless there is something that is going on and it needs to be closed but it is always open, and if I am in the office during planning and she is working on something, I will say 'are you busy?', and she will say, 'I will put it aside'. So, it is not that she is not busy; it is that she is willing to put it aside for us to come and talk to her about whatever, and as a first year teacher, that is really a great thing.

Encouragement is an essential strategy for sustaining a vibrant school culture. Teachers are encouraged when a principal's positive personality shows in their leadership. A smile, a friendly attitude, an encouraging email or face-to-face conversation every now and then really go a long way. Encouraging principals are not finger pointers, they grow alongside their teachers, cheering them on to do their best. Teacher 2 describes how encouragement is felt:

She's willing for you to make mistakes and grow from those mistakes at the same time. She holds you to a high standard, but she doesn't expect you to be perfect. When I close my door and I'm in my classroom with my students, I'm still motivated to push them to their fullest potential, no matter if I'm being observed or not. I don't feel like I have to put on a show when I'm observed because it's just the way she allows us to teach – our style and as long as we're covering the standards, then – promoting success within students, then that's the goal.

Encouragement on a personal level is also important, as explained by Teacher 3:

I went through a bad divorce and she was right there with me. From the get go I knew that she was a woman who I wanted to emulate. She deals with people where they are. There are some people that can handle straightforward, this is how it is. There are other people who need a gentler approach. She tailors her conversation to you, no matter the topic.

System A has come a long way through the years. A wonderful team of people committed to the same things are prevalent now. "A healthy culture is devoid of blame and fosters engagement of all stakeholders in finding solutions to challenges" ("A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence", 2009). The informant postulates how the system has evolved through the years:

I'd say when I arrived on the scene I was the superintendent after two other superintendents that did not stay very long. There was not a lot of continuity. The two people that came before me didn't stay long enough to have really made a lot of impact. When I got here, I would say that we were very much separate little fortresses of schools; that each had their own history, had their own smaller community. That's what I was faced with when I came in and most principals were used to doing their own thing and kind of fighting for their share of the pie.

Because of the past system leaders, stakeholders wanted to feel like they had direct influence on the superintendent. A parent advisory council, a student advisory council, and a teacher advisory council were created. “Organizational change and improvement occur only when individuals within organizations make needed changes” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). A solid adult culture with a critical mass of people who were committed to doing what it takes for kids to improve was evolving nicely in System A, but the work with students is where the system began to focus. At this point, the informant spoke of moving the district work more on student culture. Specifically, their mindset, their attitudes about themselves, how adults talk with them, interact with them, and work with them, is the next real frontier. “Innovation and purposeful change in organizations are necessary to achieve sustainable competitiveness” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The superintendent explained her next steps:

What I feel like is something that we need to spend a little more time on is the culture for the students. Our middle school has kind of led the way. They're doing positive behavior intervention, PBIS. This is going to be their third year. Now our elementary schools will be implementing it next. Our high school has really gotten excited; the leadership team has implemented the Seven Mindset program. They're going to be using it at their level to promote more positive student interactions. We're creating a positive culture of achievement in every school. We've identified that as sort of our next issue. I feel like what we've done with adult culture has gone down into the kids.

“Highly reliable organizations are consistent in holding high expectations for all members” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). When the adults feel better about a school system and what’s happening in their jobs it is going to permeate on to the

kids. Because the adults have needed a lot of work, System A has made the progression to work on the adults first and then move to the challenge of improving the mindset of the students:

The mindset of our students really reflects the mindset of our community. Mindset is the sense of the collection of things that I feel about my place in the world and my ability to manage this world to my favor.

Under the tenets of Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy, high-performing organizations recognize, appreciate, and address cultural differences. Strength can be derived from the rich diversity of our public schools. The informant expressed her feelings on the lack of diversity in the system:

Internally we don't have that much diversity on the school board, the central office, the school, or the students. We don't have the diversity that we need to reflect the real world. Therefore, to come here and teach, people are not as likely to want to do that or to raise their family; to be committed to this community. People love it here but leave because the community is not going to be blatantly unaccepting but because nobody looks like them.

Efforts have been made to get more people in from the outside. A need was recognized, but it has been very difficult to recruit people to come to this rural area. The superintendent went on to say:

Sometimes we'll get these very dynamic young teachers like an art teacher we had at the middle school. She was fabulous. She loved it here but she was single. Who was she going to meet here that she would really want? You know those things factor into adult's decisions about where they want to be. We had one gentleman that we had hired at the high school about six years ago, African-American. Everybody was really excited about him, he was very good. His wife came up here to look for housing and he resigned the first day of preplanning.

In the end, the superintendent made the decision to work with the people the system had and work on improving their culture. As a better local reputation has been built, an attraction to the area is being forthcoming.

Improved adult culture and student culture throughout the schools has improved the community as well. Lastly, a guiding principle in the Culture, Climate, and Organizational Effi-

cacy component states, “safety, order, and respect are necessary conditions for teaching and learning to occur” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The informant described in great detail how the implementation of Positive Behavior Interventions & Supports (PBIS) has positively affected the system:

We would begin to be more positive in the way that we deal with kids and that we have a systematic way of doing that. We saw immediately with the commitment that the middle school made a difference in climate and culture immediately because a good portion of what you do in middle school is regulate discipline and manage kids. We saw by the teachers training themselves to approach kids in a positive supportive manner was making them feel better about their own role in the school.

Initial work at the middle school has spread throughout the district with the three elementary schools recently beginning their work with the state. The informant believes they have a group of teachers who are ready. She went on to say that the teachers had to spearhead the initiative because it had to be something they really think is important or it wouldn't transfer in their classrooms. Through their preliminary work, they are seeing that this has possibilities and power to really help with their student achievement.

System B

Eight people were interviewed from System B. A brief introduction of each interviewee is provided.

Table 3

System B Interviewees

	Position	Total years of experience	Years at current system/school
Informant	Elementary school coordinator	26	1
Human Resources	Director	20	13
Interviewee 1	8 th grade math	11	11
Interviewee 2	6 th grade English	8	2
Interviewee 3	6 th grade English	14	3
Interviewee 4	8 th grade social studies	11	11
Interviewee 5	8 th grade English	30	19
Interviewee 6	7 th grade special education	17	15

The informant is an elementary school coordinator. She is in her 26th year in education. She has worked in five districts through the years in various positions, including teacher, instructional lead teacher, assistant principal, and coordinator of several departments. She was recently hired as a leader in System B and has expertise in teacher induction, principal induction, onboarding, school improvement, and human resources.

The human resources representative has spent 20 years in education. As an employee of System B for 13 years, he is in his second year as human resources director. He graduated from a large out of state university with a Bachelor's, Master's, and Specialist degree. His main responsibility is providing employee support for building level administrators and superintendents.

Teacher 1 has spent eleven years in education, all in System B and at the same school. She is a 7th grade Language Arts teacher and serves as department chair.

Teacher 2, the only male interviewed, has been in education for eight years. He has spent five years teaching students with special needs, two of them at his current school. He began his career in the corporate world, with a Bachelor's degree in psychology. He then obtained his spe-

cial education certification through a local large university in the state. His original degree tied closely with addressing the needs of students needing special education support.

Teacher 3 teaches 8th grade science. She has been in education for 14 years. Eight of those years have been in System B and three have been in the current school. She went to college in another state and majored in elementary education. She has certification to teach students whose first language is not English and special education.

Teacher 4 has spent eleven years in education, all in System B and at the same school as a 6th grade math teacher.

Teacher 5 is the most seasoned of all of the teachers interviewed, with 30 years in education. She teaches 6th grade social studies. She has worked in System B for 19 years; eleven of those have been at this school. She also serves as the social studies department chair.

Teacher 6 has been teaching for 17 years. Of those 17 years, 15 have been in middle school and the other two were at the high school level. She went to a private, liberal arts college for her undergraduate degree and received her Master's degree from a different private college in the northern part of the country. She is certified in English language arts and gifted education. She has only worked at this middle school for two years. She teaches 6th grade language arts and serves as the coordinator of gifted education.

Teaching and learning.

A guiding principle of the education system component Teaching and Learning identified high levels of learning being attainable for all students. A personalized learning initiative in which the district has a strong commitment to creating personalized learning opportunities for students framed by five personalized learning tenets is the way in which System B provides a strong curriculum. The informant identified the initiative as broad, balanced, continually im-

proved, rooted in the real world, and based on a common set of learning expectations. Through the initiative, learner profiles are co-created by students and teachers and provide a deep understanding of each student's individual strengths, needs, motivations, progress, and goals to help inform his or her learning. Learning targets are clearly identified and students are able to move through coursework as they demonstrate mastery. Project based learning allow for real world experiences, inside and outside the classroom. College and career readiness is obtained through communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking learning experiences. According to the informant:

Schools had to let go of the traditional way you do school with teachers having the comfort to act as facilitator and activator and not the keeper of all the knowledge. So that's been a mind shift change for students to take ownership of some of their own learning and that has been perhaps a challenge for, you know, some teachers to make that shift and we're doing it in little steps, you know. So the teachers are facilitating that learning and are guiding them down the right path but then students have ownership or choice of what it is they want to work on.

Secondly, a Teaching and Learning guiding principle states that people learn differently and at different rates. This was acknowledged by the informant in System B:

Year one was a planning year and we've had different groups of principals come on at different times. So right now, we've got a group of schools in their first year of implementation and then the cohort that was brought on this past year. A lot of the planning and preparing for next year is in effect so by 2020 all schools will be on this learning path.

The schools found through the personalized learning initiative students were more successful when they had a measure of ownership in their learning. "Motivated and engaged learners derive more from their learning than do passive learners" ("A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence", 2009). By looking at the individual needs of each child and thinking outside the box, teachers and students work together to determine how a child learns best. Not being limited to thinking about a typical school day or the traditional part of school but really making it as engaging as possible and relevant to what they're learning.

“High quality, job embedded professional development for teachers and leaders support the teaching-learning process” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). System B is in its third year of the district goal of having all schools using personalized learning by 2020. Because the district has really embraced the personalized learning initiative it has been a huge focus and a lot of professional learning has been tailored in that area. The informant explained how professional development on the initiative is the priority of the district, “So a lot of professional development has had to happen to get us to this point and there’s going to be a lot more. Principals have made it a priority and a goal, and they are doing lots of things to support teachers and leaders in their building.”

Technology integration is a key issue students need to experience as a part of their education (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The integration is essential for student engagement, but technology also brings challenges, particularly for parents, as noted by the informant. “Technology is embedded in everything we do and there are some parents who are very traditional in their thinking of school and think it should be the way they were taught and it is not that way anymore.” Combining traditional aspects with advances in technology have created a learning curve for the parents. System B is communicating their expectations and have facilitated different parent forums to talk about the vision of the district to better the implementation.

Human and organizational capital.

“The expertise of the teachers and leaders has the greatest impact on the quality and extent of student learning” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The informant posited that effective teaching enhances student learning and schools that have gone through the personalized learning training and are implementing it are very excited about what is

going on and what they are seeing in their schools. Job-embedded professional learning has been used to manage the process in a very collaborative environment. The support of the program is hinged on the human aspect of implementation; how schools are sharing and interacting with one another. Principals in System B who are in the implementation phase of personalized learning invite colleagues from other schools to observe. The informant described how leaders engage, “Leadership teams will say to each other ‘I was really thinking about trying this. You tried it. How did it work?’ So we have a real collaborative and supportive atmosphere.”

The human resource director provides a lot of support for building administrators and superintendents, but the team spends time selecting and supporting teachers. A guiding principle of The Georgia Vision Project determined that the selection and preparation of teacher candidates and ongoing support of teachers affects the quality of teaching. The human resources representative provided an example of her work:

Our plan is to give teachers as much support as they need. A lot of people think give them support that first year but what we’re trying to do is support them throughout. It’s good to have the support the first year but also those first three to five years because research shows that a lot of beginning teachers are leaving at that first and second year so what we’re trying to do is pad that area for them by providing a teacher on assignment, a veteran teacher that would support them in the areas they need the most, say it be classroom management or lesson plan or it may be effective communication with parents and with their colleagues and with their administrators.

He goes on to say that hiring is a thoughtful process. Questions such as, ‘Am I hiring the right people who can help carry out our vision’ is asked of the human resources team. They have begun to change their hiring practices by taking an in-depth look at the way teachers are screened and thus hired.

“Compensation is an essential element in recruiting high-quality teachers” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009); although System B acknowledges they are not one of the top paying districts in the state. Nevertheless, according to the human resources repre-

sentative, they have a high teacher retention rate. He continued on by saying, in some cases, teachers will transfer to a neighboring county but will eventually return. “Our data shows that a lot of our people who leave to go the larger counties where they’re making up to \$10,000 more typically return back to us.” The human resource representative believes their positive culture makes up for the lack of monetary success.

Governance, leadership and accountability.

The mission of System B is pretty simple, ‘ensuring success’. “Effective educational governance requires a strategic vision” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). According to the human resources official, everything the district does is about ensuring success of teachers, students and those in the school. They want all of their students to be college and career ready. The personalized learning initiative is the other strategic priority. The informant and human resource representative were clear to say that this initiative would not have happened without the tremendous support of the board of education. This support is in line with the guiding principle of the Governance, Leadership and Accountability education system component that states children and society benefit from effective educational governance. In System B there’s not any one person that is the keeper of all the knowledge and responsibility. The informant described how leadership works in the system.

Leadership looks like having a wagon wheel and all the spokes are going out. Everyone has a piece of it and perhaps different responsibilities but it is all there to support the whole. It’s not a my way or the highway kind of attitude. That doesn’t exist here. We work together to do what’s best for children. Different people have different levels of support and responsibility but it’s never end all, be all.

“Public education is an essential factor in a democratic society, in quality of life, and in economic development” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The informant described an example of how local businesses support public education and quality of

life in the system. “The Chamber of Commerce sponsored a lunch for the new teachers and members were there supporting the teachers, wishing them well and getting to know them.” It was her belief that this event was an instance in which the community was able to bridge with the educational system. This connection is made possible by leadership in System B.

To build effective leaders, processes must be in place to ensure the right people are being hired. According to the human resources director, a goal of System B is to have a strong network of principals who can help lead to the next level of where the system is going by hiring the right people. The human resources representative described how leaders are selected to lead local schools:

In a principal interview, we ask specific questions about community, how to build a culture, how to communicate with parents and bring up student achievement. After that, we have the school councils come in for what we call a screening process. After that process is done, future principals meet with senior staff members at this level and then the final two or three meet with the superintendent. The superintendent makes the final selection.

In conclusion, the last finding in the Governance, Leadership, and Accountability education system component, good governance requires effective leaders operating with integrity, ethical behavior, and good intent is evidenced with the way in which the system is constantly looking at and making sure their policies match what they are doing and revising when needed. The informant shared an encouraging example stated by one of the executive officers in their most recent staff meeting. “His goal for his group of principals was that they would have a third of their staff set learning targets and student-created learning goals to start getting the students ownership in their learning.” This intent sends the message that it is their hope is to do what is best for children, teachers, communities and families.

Culture, climate, and organizational efficacy.

Leaders of System B provide a lot of autonomy to local schools, giving principals authority to design what works best for their school. “Organizational culture is an important determinant of climate and is a distinguishing factor between effective and ineffective schools and districts” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The informant described how autonomy is provided to local schools:

Some schools were just not quite ready yet to do full blown implementation of personalized learning. They're still learning and wanted to see how it's implemented in their neighboring schools. We're in no way like a cookie cutter type district. Principals have ownership of making it work for their school in doing what they need to do so that they can be successful. So the district provides great flexibility.

Providing autonomy builds elements of trust and collegiality between different stakeholders. This teamwork strengthens collective efforts, therefore building the effectiveness of the system and its leaders. “Effective leadership is crucial to creating organizational climates that are conducive to learning” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). System B has its own model for leadership development to prepare current and future leaders. The informant described theory, practice, pedagogy, and curriculum as the foundation of the program taught by their in-district leaders:

We have what we call The Five Star GOLD Academy. There is A.S.P.I.R.E. which are our teacher leaders. We have L.E.A.D. which is for assistant principals or district administrators. M.O.D.E.L. is induction level leaders. D.R.I.V.E. is just principals and then we have V.A.L.U.E. which is using our current principals as coaches to coach others.

The Five Star Gold Academy strengthens culture and climate within the district, fostering innovation, allowing the next generation of leaders to sustain the success of the system. Success can be sustained one person at a time, through their involvement in the leadership academy. An indicator of success can be evidenced through culture, climate, and organizational efficacy of local schools. An immediate step of this education system component is to make each school an inviting place for staff. The secondary focus of this study looked specifically at the influence of

the principal on teacher retention. The following categories represent the central themes: respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door policy, and encourager.

When asked to define teacher retention, varying responses were presented across all stakeholders in System B. In summary, teacher retention was defined as working in an environment in which the culture is conducive to wanting to continue in the profession either at the school or with the school system. Teacher 1 defined teacher retention as, "It's more than just teachers staying put, but teacher retention has to do with what a school or system does to keep those teachers, to make them want to stay." Teacher 5 answered with, "It means keeping teachers satisfied so that they not only want to come to work but do a good job when they come to work."

Respect for individuals and their efforts is foundational for teacher, employee, and student retention. It was evident from the conversations with the teachers that respect was vital to retention. Teachers felt that by showing respect principals trust and care for them. One teacher said, "She gets the job done but she cares about us and she shows that to us. She shows us that our work is important and for me, that has helped me. I feel like my work matters and that my work is appreciated." Another said, "Sometimes, it takes your principal to have trust in you and to go along with you and think outside of the box so that you can meet or relate to your students effectively."

Support both financial and emotional is important for individual and group motivation. Principals must support teachers academically and emotionally. Also, as explained by Teacher 6, a sign of support is when teachers feel as if the principal listens to them even if they are wrong. A listening ear provides a feeling of admiration even when it is followed up with information the teacher does not want to hear. Teacher 3 described how supportive principals remember what it was like when they were teachers, "I think that when people get outside of the classroom, they

don't always remember what it was like to be in a classroom and their expectations of teachers go beyond what they could do when they were in a classroom.”

Relationships build culture through social interaction. Ultimately, principals have a huge role in relationship building-personally and professionally. Teachers are looking for someone that is approachable. They're looking for someone who can relate to the students. The human resources representative asserted teachers want someone in the building who they know cares about the children. They want someone they can trust. Trust increases teacher retention in the way relationships are built. He went on to say, “Teachers want principals who lead schools with a family feel by going out and being visible.” He goes on to say, “Principals who have personal and professional rapport with teachers, knowing about their children and asking about people in their lives when it is known there may be an issue or concern.” Teachers 3 and 5 both agreed that being that leader who goes out of the way to know about them and make them feel appreciated is an indicator if wanting to stay. Teacher five said, “She does her best to have a one-on-one relationship with everybody in the building and tries to keep us happy by accommodating us as best as she can.”

Recognition is paramount to healthy self-development and motivation. Principals are responsible for the culture of their building. Teachers want to be where they are appreciated. They want to feel that they are making a difference and that they are doing a good job. Principals who minimize the feelings of being overwhelmed by recognizing when things are tough are positive influencers of retention. Often principals who are open to an understanding of teacher's dilemmas recognize the extra burdens put on by the state and try to limit them in many ways. Small tokens of appreciation are indicators of recognition, as Teacher 5 enthusiastically described,

“Even something that’s small like ‘hey, you guys did a great job last night. Here’s a jeans day’. Little things like that help to motivate us.”

Accessibility or the “Open Door” policy is a powerful builder of institutional trust. The school principal can impact culture by having an open door policy and by being positive. Teacher 4 expressed the gratitude felt by being able to walk into the principal’s office at any time, knowing she would be heard.

Encouragement is an essential strategy for sustaining a vibrant school culture. The teachers described, often in depth, how a principal who encourages teachers influences retention. A principal’s personality has a lot to do with it. Those who are upbeat, happy, and interesting expressed value for what teachers brought to the school. Teachers find encouragement from feedback on the teacher evaluation system. “Even the tweaks that I am given, I don’t feel like it’s an ‘aha! I got you’. It’s ‘I want you to do better and I want to help you grow’.” Teacher 5 articulated how she felt encouraged when she discussed her evaluation with her principal:

She knew so much about me for my observations. When I went in for my mid-year conference, instead of the typical, ‘Hey, you’re doing a great job,’ she also was so aware of areas that needed improvement and then she said in such a way that it wasn’t like, ‘Oh you’re doing a crabby job in this area’. She said it in a way that made me want to do better and she also came with solutions or suggestions. I’ve always gotten really good evaluations but they’ve been more on the generic side. I’m working too hard for a generic response.

Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy also indicates a healthy culture being devoid of blame and fosters engagement of all stakeholders in finding solutions to challenges. Teachers are appreciative of schools building a culture where it is okay to make mistakes. Teachers interviewed were not fearful of failure. They were confident in trying new things and knew if it was what was best for children they were going to be supported. The informant described how engagement is built in System B:

It's all part of building morale within the school so that everyone feels like they belong there by providing that sense of belonging and respecting what everyone brings to the table. It's we're all in this together and we've built the foundation to be a loving and caring group that will support each other in good times and bad.

“Organizational change and improvement occur only when individuals within organizations make needed changes” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009).

System B believes in trial and error. The human resources representative stated that with empowerment comes flexibility. He went on to say that morale is high in the district because teachers and leaders feel empowered

The informant postulated the system is in a good place because everyone realizes the bar is set high and they are doing things differently than other districts in the state. They are anxious to be successful and anxious for their efforts to work.

You know I think we're in that stage where you'd like to go and implement it all and implement it right now but we just can't do that. You know taking things slowly and having the time to thoroughly do what we need to do.

It is the belief of the informant that innovation and purposeful change in organizations are necessary to achieve sustainable competitiveness. The personalized learning initiative in System B is innovative and is bringing out change in the way students learn.

Summary.

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of sound organizational structures to be in place promoting school team's effectiveness, thereby contributing to the literature. Leaders and teachers in both districts were instrumental in the work and allowed their knowledge to merge with the knowledge of the researcher to review the work of the Georgia Vision Project.

In this study, perception data from both systems was laid out side by side in order to determine similarities and differences. It was through this comparison that central themes evolved. Four recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project labeled each category in this study. The

guiding principles of those recommendations informed the descriptions of each category. While reviewing the data side by side, the researcher found clear links between the Vision Project guiding principles and the data in four of the seven education system components (see Table 4).

Table 4

Study Highlights

Themes	System A	System B
Teaching and Learning	Professional learning communities for adults System wide book studies Collaboration among adults Technology integration with Chrome books in all schools	Personalized learning initiative Project based learning Technology integration with traditional teaching Schools at various spots of implementation Professional development of system initiative
Human and Organizational Capital	Thoughtful hiring Mentoring program People born and raised here have pride for area Vested interest in the community Low compensation but high pride Effective support through TKES	Job-embedded professional learning Schools sharing info and progress with one another Continuous support of teachers Thoughtful hiring Low compensation but high morale
Governance, Leadership and Accountability	Superintendent has lots of experience Belief in distributed leadership, relational trust, and choice and power of teachers Community conversations with input on how to improve the system Community businesses to partner with local schools	System wide mission 'ensuring success' Support of the board Thorough selection process for hiring principals
Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy	Small town Churches are huge High levels of trust Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports Lack of diversity Personal and professional rapport	Autonomy to schools and leaders Aspiring leader programs Personal and professional rapport Empowerment and flexibility

The components that emerged were: Teaching and Learning; Human and Organizational Capital; Governance, Leadership and Accountability; and Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy. Three strands were not identified in data analysis: Early Learning and Student Success, Teaching and Learning Resources, and Financial Resources (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The researcher used the structure of education system component Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy to describe the secondary study. The central categories: respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door policy, and encourager were found.

Similarities were found in both systems. Stronger sources of evidence were prevalent in some themes than in others. For example, in System A, evidence of support was identified in the Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy component. It was described as principals being visible in the classrooms and providing a feeling of teachers doing important work. Support was also considered in System B, but an indicator of influence simply referred to a principal who listens and leads by remembering the demands of the job as examples of evidence.

Differences between System A and System B exist. Although both middle schools have fairly consistent numbers of staff members, System A has a more stable staff of teachers, according to the sample of teachers interviewed. Four of the six teachers in System A have spent their entire educational career at the school, compared with only two in System B. The longevity could be attributed to each sitting principal’s years of service. The principal of the middle school in System A has been the leader for the last 15 years. The principal of the middle school in System B has only led for two years.

Discussion.

The purpose of the study was to determine to what degree the Georgia Vision Project’s implementation had influenced school culture and student achievement in high implementation

districts. Additionally, an in depth analysis of principal behaviors influencing teacher retention were also obtained. Stakeholder data about schools and school districts were found by investigating employee perceptions. The results section described the perceptions as interpreted by the researcher.

Four recommendations of the Georgia Vision Project labeled each category. The guiding principles of each recommendation informed the descriptions of each category. The components that emerged were: Teaching and Learning; Human and Organizational Capital; Governance, Leadership and Accountability; and Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009).

An in depth analysis allowed a structure to exhibit itself in order to determine to what degree the project’s implementation has impacted school culture. The general inductive approach was appropriate as it provided an explanation of analysis on the implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education. The flexibility of thematic analysis allowed the researcher to construct new knowledge and make meaning of the relationship between teachers and principals. As a practicing educator, the general inductive approach allowed findings to emerge from the researcher’s judgment of frequent and significant items (Thomas, 2006).

In this instrumental multiple case study, data in both systems were analyzed and similarities and differences across the two cases were identified (Boozar, 2105). The informant of system A was on the governing board of the Georgia Vision Project and was willing to talk at great length. She was proud of her district and their work toward effective change implementation. She was cordial and made the researcher feel at ease. The informant of System A had a vested interest in the Georgia Vision Project and the researcher was made to feel like an extension of the work. Feelings of admiration were also present when speaking with human resources and teach-

ers in the local middle school. Despite the fact that the county office stated that the work of the Georgia Vision Project was a guiding practice, none of the teachers had heard of the project. However, the work was fundamentally guided by the tenants of the project's principles.

In contrast, when speaking with the informant and human resource official of System B, the researcher felt rushed and this interfered with the flow of conversation. Interviews at the local middle school were extremely pleasant, however. Although the district was identified as high fidelity in terms of implementation by the Vision Project Executive Director, the interviews of the informant and the human resources official in System B were limited in their knowledge of the project. No one in the district office nor the school in System B were able to explicitly articulate their work related to the project. Teachers however engaged in very productive conversation guided by the Vision Project recommendations. After analyzing the responses to the interview questions from both systems, the researcher was able to develop descriptions of stakeholder perceptions.

Theoretical implications.

In this section, the researcher will include a discussion of the findings. Current literature connected to each research question will be provided. Table 5 provides an example of how the work in each system is specifically tied to the work of the Vision Project. Four questions guide the overall work of this study. It was found that the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in System A as evidenced by the sense of community felt by interviewees living and educating the future citizens in this small, rural town. All of the interviewees spoke of their pride living in the town. Many of them grew up, graduated from the local high school, went off to college, and came back to work and raise their own children in the community.

Table 5

Example of Findings with Research Questions

Research Questions	System A	System B
How have the internal contexts coupled with the implementation of the Vision Project impacted learning and leadership in your school?	Human and Organizational Capital strength of the community	Human and Organizational Capital personalized learning
What are the features of the Vision Project that have specifically impacted learning in your school?	Teaching and Learning professional learning communities	Teaching and Learning technology integration
How has the implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of self and others in your school?	Governance, Leadership and Accountability distributed leadership	Governance, Leadership and Accountability Five Star Gold Academy
What are the behaviors of principals influencing teacher retention in schools?	Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy practices of school principals	Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy practices of school principals

The strength of this community resides in the Vision Project education system component, Human and Organizational Capital. A vested interest of living and working in an area where most of your life evolves is a “motivator for performance” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Grover, Limber, & Boberiene (2015) posited school-wide and classroom practices should be enriched to help children experience their community, therefore enhancing their academic, behavioral, social, and emotional well-being. Because many of the teachers in System A attended schools in the district, there is a level of trust evident in the relationships. Lam, Chen, Zhang, & Liang (2015) proved students able to relate to those in their school are satisfied psychologically, developing a connection with their peers and school mem-

bers. The adults who work in System A are able to develop relationships with the students providing an element of motivation for academic success.

The internal context of System B is the work of the personalized learning initiative. The system is proud of the autonomy they are providing each school to accomplish the goal of individualized instruction by 2020. The personalized learning initiative is framed under five personal learning tenets: learner profiles, competency-based learning, project –based learning, 21st century skills, and technology enabled learning. This flexible teaching and learning pedagogy is an innovative format placing students at the core of learning. As System B progresses toward a more student-centered learning style, they are incorporating a hybrid of face-to-face and online instruction. Wanner & Palmer (2015) found students today enjoy face to face personalized learning activities that are interactive, collaborative, and well-structured. Personalized learning engages the active development of knowledge juxtaposed with deep reflection on the process (Kong & Song, 2015). In System B, learner profiles are co-created by teachers and students. This record provides documentation of each student’s individual strengths, needs, motivations, progress, and goals to help inform future learning. Under the guiding principle of the Human and Organizational Capital education system component, “effective teaching enhances student learning,” System B is ensuring student’s academic needs are met. The people of the organization head this effort.

The feature of the Vision Project that specifically impacted learning in System A was the work the superintendent did while on the team creating the project. She was a part of the Teaching and Learning component team and focused on the idea of professional learning communities. Professional learning communities have proven to be effective in teacher and student learning (Christiansen & Robey, 2015; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Owen, 2014). The strategic plan of

the system is aligned with components of the Vision Project and although the superintendent clearly identifies a lack of specific knowledge on the project by the teachers, she is confident in the implementation of its guiding principles. The adults in system A engage in conversations with others through adult book studies, impacting the learning of adults and students. The teachers inquire together on how their practice can be improved and then implement what they learn to make it happen. “High quality, job embedded professional development for teachers and leaders supports the teaching and learning process” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The work of System A is characteristic of research proving its effectiveness.

The technology integration of the personalized learning initiative is a distinctive attribute of System B. Learning has been impacted in System B as supported by moving away from the traditional way in which students are taught. A guiding principle of the Teaching and Learning component challenge all students through the use of differentiated strategies. “The integration of technology into educational practices is essential for student engagement” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Through blended learning, students in System B are provided opportunities to use technology to access and learn content. Students receive face-to-face and online instruction pervasively. Students are encouraged to bring their own electronic device. Positive results indicate a ‘bring your own device’ initiative facilitates learners to become more engaged in flipped classrooms (Kong & Song, 2015). Learners are engaged in reflective inquiry in this paradigm shift of learning.

The implementation of the Vision Project helped build the capacity of self and others in System A by their assurance in distributed leadership (Harris, 2013; Heikka & Hujala, 2013; & Kennedy, Deuel, Nelson, & Slavitt, 2011). From the informant to the teachers, there is a belief in leadership of all. The superintendent and the principal of the middle school allow teachers to

have a say about what happens to them. They are given choice and power because, as the informant said, “in the end if teachers don’t like what is going to be done to them and were not given an opportunity to provide input, trust will be lost.” Sustainability is built through relational trust. It is through Governance, Leadership and Accountability that state “good governance requires effective leaders operating with integrity, ethical behavior, and good intent” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Distributed leadership is rooted in practice and not based on roles and structures (Spillane, 2005). Leaders of this perspective believe their interactions among stakeholders are most critical as multiple people are often responsible for actions in a school.

System B recently implemented the Five Star Gold Academy. Governance, Leadership and Accountability suggested, “Good governance requires effective leaders operating with integrity, ethical behavior, and good intent” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). The implementation of the Five Star Gold Academy is instrumental in building the capacity of self and others. District led programs are competing against colleges by tailoring programs specific to their needs. Orr (2012) reported that exemplary leadership preparation programs are those in which districts use their own employees to strategically influence the content and design of their practice. Programs are more effective when they are based on implementation strategies specific to the district’s individual challenges. System B is doing important work building the leadership capacity for their future leaders.

In addition to the Vision Project, this study also explored the practices of school principals and their influence on teacher retention from the perspective of certified teachers. Behaviors of principals influencing teacher retention found in both System A and System B are respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door policy, and encourager. Data analysis supported

the education system component Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy, “Effective leadership is crucial to creating organizational climates that are conducive to learning” (“A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence”, 2009). Detailed examples from the perspective of certified educators provided descriptions of principal behaviors influencing teacher retention.

Data collected from three different perspectives, an informant, a human resources representative, and certified teachers in each system allowed for triangulation. Through these varied data sources it is hoped that the findings are trustworthy and fill a void in the literature.

Assumptions.

Peshkin (1988) argued that researchers “should systematically identify their subjectivity throughout the course of their research” (p.17). Self-identifying the researcher of their class, status, and values they hold up front allows them to clarify their personal stakes during investigation knowingly. The principal who hired the researcher her first year of teaching was a phenomenal woman. The principal had so much faith in the researcher as a beginning teacher and gave her remarkable encouragement to continue on with her education, obtaining advanced degrees. When the researcher decided to transition into administration, although the leader was no longer her principal, she provided her unwavering support. She developed the researcher’s confidence as an educator. The leader and the researcher had honest conversations about the world of academia. She was truly an instructional leader and her leadership created a climate conducive of influence. She loved kids, she loved her employees, she knew curriculum, and she fostered teacher leaders. Throughout the researcher’s career, she worked with other principals who were good; not as good, but she enjoyed going to work every day and working for them. Working with a variety of principals fostered sentiments that caused the researcher to pause and reflect.

Details of the researcher's past cannot be removed during the work. It is continually present in both research and non-research aspects of her life. By stating the researcher's subjectivity, it is hoped that the researcher has avoided biases of data sources.

In the researcher's professional practice, it is assumed that principals are the main contributors of positive organizational culture. It is also assumed that principals can create and maintain positive organizational culture. As an immediate step, The Georgia Vision Project determined each school and district should be an inviting place for students, parents, and community. It is the researcher's assumption that a principal's influence can support this initiative.

Limitations.

This instrumental multiple case study included only two school systems, described as System A and System B. As an instrumental multiple case study, no generalizations can be made in future cases (Boozar, 2015). Findings will not be transferable to all schools or systems implementing the Georgia Vision Project as various districts have laid out different strategic plans. Although this study focused primarily on the overarching implementation of the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education, a great deal of attention was made in the specific area of culture, climate and organizational efficacy. Therefore, the findings are not a clear representation of a comprehensive investigation of every Vision Project recommendation. This study is limited in that more attention could have been made to the other recommendations or an equal amount of concern could have been placed on the other recommendations.

Another limitation is the use of a qualitative research approach. Quantitative data, such as surveys, Department of Education data, or national education statistics data could have elicited different perspectives. Lastly, participants were selected for the researcher by others in the implementation systems, using purposeful sampling. If the researcher was able to choose locations

and participants on her own, consideration would have been to academic performance or teacher evaluation results, as indicated by the Georgia Teacher Keys Evaluation System.

Implications for further research.

Through the Georgia Vision Project for Public Education, this study provided descriptive information on the effectiveness of the project's recommendations. Suggestions for further researchers can include investigating the implementation of the project in only one system in order to comprehensively drill down across a specific project recommendation. An investigation of the project's implementation across three school systems as opposed to only two could also allow for triangulation across school systems as well as across data types collected.

Additional research on the individual study could come from the voice of the principal, allowing transferability. Instead of talking strictly with teachers, the researcher's conversations could be directed to school leaders or to both teachers and leaders. Structuring the study in this manner would enable the researcher to answer the following questions: Do principals see the extent of their effectiveness? Are there outlying factors that determine a principal's effectiveness, such as years of experience, location of degree acquired, leadership preparation program, or barriers to the job? Finally, future researchers could compare the findings of this study, based on conversations with teachers, to other work solely and directly with principals.

Conclusion

The purpose of this qualitative study was to determine to what degree the Georgia Vision Project's implementation has impacted school culture and student achievement in high implementation districts. In 2009, a team was formed to create a comprehensive and coherent vision for public education in the state of Georgia ("A Vision for Public Education Equity and Excellence", 2009). There was an urgent need to examine the educational programs across the state to

establish one to transform the current system. Stakeholder data about schools and school districts were found by investigating employee perceptions.

Through this research, examples of current practice were reported from System A and B that are indicative of the work specified as best practice. Additionally, this study conducted an in depth analysis of principal behaviors influencing teacher retention. Data analysis resulted in the central categories: respect, support, relationships, recognition, open door policy, and encourager to be identified as indicators of ways in which principals can influence retention. The literature stated that principals directly influence a teacher's career choice (Boyd et al, 2011; Buchanan, 2012; Dagli, 2012; Heidmets & Liik, 2014). Principals who lead with positive influence have the potential to create an environment inviting for student, parents, and particularly teachers. It is the researcher's belief that the implementation of work on the Vision project in System A and System B are worthy of accolade and will begin to transform the educational system to one more relevant for students in our states' public schools.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A – Interview Protocol

Interview #1 Protocol Questions for System–Level Interviewee – Primary Research Focus

1. Descriptor of interviewee.

Gender, age, education background, education background in leadership and management training, total years as a system level administrator, number of years in current district, number of years as in current position, leadership positions before current role, experience outside of education.

2. What is the background of this district?
 - variations: What is the story of this district? What is the district’s history?
 - clarification: What is history? How far back?
 - probe for a rich and detailed discussion; emphasis on school improvement, principal longevity, community involvement
3. Describe the current mission and vision of the district and how this connects to the Vision Project.
4. Describe the culture of the district as it pertains to learning.
5. How has the Vision Project influenced the learning environment in your district?
 - a. probe for specific examples of the contribution related to Vision Project strands
 - i. Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy
6. What long-term learning goals (or strategic plan) has been set for your district, and how are these tied to the Vision Project?
 - a. probe for academic
 - b. probe other (social-emotional/culture and climate)

7. What challenges does the district face in strengthening a culture of learning?
 - a. probe for sustainability or creating a culture for schools that may be at different levels of implementation
 - b. probe for ways implementing the Vision Project recommendations has impacted the culture of learning
8. How does the internal environment of your district impact learning?
 - a. probe what works/ what's missing
9. How does the external environment of your district (parent, community, policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) impact learning?
 - a. probe what works/ what's missing
 - b. probe for specific examples of how the Vision Project has impacted learning
10. How have you developed and distributed leadership in your district?
 - a. probe for principal development as well as all stakeholders
 - b. probe for ways the Vision Project has impacted this development
11. What short-term/long-term goals have you set to build capacity in your district?
 - a. probe for ways the Vision Project recommendations have been integrated into these goals
12. How does the external environment of your district (parent, community, policy (state/federal), political and system/central office stakeholders) influence leadership practices and processes?
 - a. probe what works/ what's missing
13. Some culminating questions:
 - a. Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?

Appendix B – Questions for Human Resources Personnel

Interview #2 Protocol Questions for Human Resources Personnel – Primary/Secondary Research Focus

Facts about the principal (demographics):

1. Descriptor of interviewee.

Gender, age, education background, education background in leadership and management training, total years as system level administrator, number of years in current district, number of years as in current position, leadership positions before current role, experience outside of education

2. Describe how principals are selected to lead local schools.
 - a. probe for a rich and detailed discussion; emphasis on school improvement, principal longevity
 - b. probe for specific examples related to the Vision Project strand
 - i. Culture, Climate, and Organizational Efficacy
3. What goals (or strategic plan) have been set for your local schools as it relates to teacher retention?
 - a. probe for ways the Vision Project recommendations have been integrated into these goals
 - b. probe for long term goals and short term goals
 - c. probe for strategies to increase/decrease
4. What challenges do the schools face in strengthening local school teacher retention?
 - a. probe for sustainability or creating a culture for schools that may be at different levels of implementation

5. How does the internal environment of local schools impact teacher retention?
 - a. probe for what works/ what's missing
6. How does the external environment of your schools (parent, community, policy, political and system/central office stakeholders) impact teacher retention?
 - a. probe for what works/ what's missing
7. Describe behaviors of principals you believe influence teacher retention in schools.
 - a. Probe for a rich and detailed discussion
 - b. Probe to clarify, as needed
8. Describe the way teacher mobility data is tracked?
 - a. Probe for differences at the district and local school level.
9. Describe the way teacher mobility data influences staffing decisions at local schools.
10. Describe how teacher perceptions are solicited at the district and local school level?
 - a. Probe for what information is gleaned? How is the data analyzed? Who is involved? What is done with the information?
11. Will you recommend a school in your system in which I can conduct further research?
 - a. Probe for information about the school.
12. Some culminating questions:
 - a. Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?

Appendix C – Questions for Teachers

Interview #3 Protocol Questions for Teachers - Secondary Research Focus

1. Descriptor of interviewee.

Gender, age, education background, current role, number of years in current position, previous positions, employment outside of education

2. What does teacher retention mean to you?

- a. Probe for a rich and detailed discussion
- b. Probe to clarify, as needed

3. What is the role of the school's principal as it relates to teacher retention?

- a. Probe for how the school principal influences teacher retention?

4. Describe behaviors of principals you believe influence teacher retention in schools.

- a. Probe for a rich and detailed discussion
- b. Probe to clarify, as needed
- c. What, how, tell me, and explain
- d. Probe for ways which school culture has impacted teacher retention

5. Describe how teacher perceptions are solicited at your school.

- a. Probe for what information is gleaned?
- b. Probe for how results are shared with stakeholders.

6. What are the greatest challenges affecting schools with a lack of sustainability in local schools?

- a. Probe for a rich and detailed discussion
- b. Probe to clarify, as needed
- c. Some culminating questions: Are there any other ideas that you would like to share that have not been covered?