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School Leadership Review

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Call for Manuscripts

The editorial staff of *School Leadership Review* seeks high-quality, original manuscripts in consideration for the upcoming publication of the journal. The School Leadership Review is an internationally refereed journal sponsored and published by the Texas Council of Professors of Educational Administration and is designed to offer a publishing opportunity to professors of educational leadership across the country on topics related to school administration. We encourage submissions from new professors as well as those with years of valuable experience. Manuscript guidelines are as follows:

❖ Submissions should be 2,000 to 3,000 words in length (approximately 20 pages including references).
❖ Articles, including references, <u>must</u> follow the guidelines in the 6th edition of the APA Manual. Submissions in different formats will be automatically rejected.
❖ Limit the use of tables, figures, and appendices, as they are difficult to import into the journal text layout.
❖ Manuscripts must include a cover page with complete contact information (name, position, institution, mailing address, phone, email, and fax) for one or all authors.
❖ Manuscripts may be submitted at any time for consideration through the journal's blind review process.

Deadline: August 6, 2017
Submit manuscripts electronically as an attachment to
Dr. Pauline M. Sampson: sampsonp@sfasu.edu

Filling in the Blanks

What a _____ time to be teaching, learning, researching, or otherwise involved in education!

Why the blank in the sentence above? Because in the current politically-charged environment, filling that blank in meaningfully, in a mutually agreeable and action-oriented way would likely prove impossible. So, we leave it to you to fill it in for yourself, and ask that you take a moment to reflect on why you chose the word you chose.

Whether you are a practitioner involved in public education, a researcher in higher education, a policymaker, a proponent of privatization, a homeschool advocate, a concerned parent, or just an anxious taxpayer, the one adjective around which we could probably build consensus to fill the blank is "uncertain," for uncertain is most certainly an apt descriptor of these times. Issues remain unsettled; courses of action remain undetermined; fundamental beliefs remain unresolved; and, emotions remain uneased. Some see a future fraught with rancor and divisiveness, while others simultaneously swell with optimism at the possibilities that lie ahead: polar opposite views in a polarized world.

While a the few articles in this issue of the *School Leadership Review* are unlikely to deliver a détente among the disparate views of the purposes and roles of educational systems, they can attempt to fill in some of the blanks related to best practices in teaching, leading, and learning, primarily focusing on leadership in school districts. The articles range from an examination of urban school leadership with community support and involvement, a review of leadership coaching as professional development, an investigation of school administrators as instructional coaches, to an identification of patterns of failures in Texas school improvement efforts. Additionally, this edition has one article on the learners preparing to be educational leaders and their persistence as learners in an online environment.

John A. Branch and Melissa M. Leigh provide an examination of failures in their article, "Patterns of Failures in Texas Urban Improvement Required Schools: An Equity Audit Expansion." Their study looked at all 11 high schools in Texas with the designation for urban and schools identified as "improvement required." The study was a qualitative study using the Qualitative Comparative Analysis approach. Their findings question the methods used to determine "improvement required" status in Texas public schools. The problems of high mobility rates and special education enrollment rates are not under the control of the schools, yet these two factors have a causal relationship to the improvement required status.

Mary Keller Boudreaux also examined the urban school but from the focus of the leaders' role in community support and involvement with the urban school. Her article, titled "An Analysis of Urban School Leaders' Role in Community Support and Involvement" looked at the teachers' dispositions toward their school leader in this role of community involvement. They researched whether there were significant differences between the teacher's perceptions and type of school level, differences between elementary and middle school. This quantitative study was a non-experimental design with a survey, Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning Survey. There were 1, 793 respondents form 282 districts. Their findings showed a significant difference

in community support and involvement between elementary, middle, and high school. Additionally, there was a significant difference in teachers' perceptions of their leaders' role in community support and involvement between elementary and high school, as well as between middle and high school. There was not a significant difference of teacher perceptions of the leaders' roles between elementary and middle school.

Beth Ray provides an article on the professional development of educational leaders in her article, "Educational Leadership as Professional Development." Her qualitative study of 16 coaches on consultant in a small suburban school district in north Texas provides their perceptions of the impact of shared leadership. The leaders for this study were teacher leaders, administrators, and central office personnel. All coaches had been trained by the district. coaches saw the coaching as helpful in developing relationships. The important of trust building was emphasized in this study. Additionally, the coaches understood the benefits of coaching; however, coaching conversations were not viewed as authentic or inclusive from those being coached.

Yanira Oliveras-Ortiz further examines the role of school administrators as instructional coaches, in the article, School Administrators as Instructional Coaches. This quantitative study explored the degree of 198 teachers' perceptions that administrators have the skills to be instructional coaches as well as the level of trust teachers have with their administrators as evaluators and instructional coaches. The perceptions were a total of 363 participants with the school principal and assistant principals combined as leaders. Most the leaders were rated a skilled or highly skilled in leading goal setting process and leading instructional coaching, and that teachers had a lower trust level in their leaders than how they rated their leaders' skills. This difference was explained as teachers sharing that some leaders have limited experiences and are not in their classroom daily.

Casey Graham Brown shows the importance of examining online learning from the attributes of the online learner in her article titled, "The Persistence and Attrition of Online Learners." Her phenomenological study of doctoral students' reasons for desiring an online format as well as reasons for obtaining the degree. Supports for continued enrollment were explored. The participants in this study were 75 doctoral students in one online doctoral program. The choice for an online program was often determined because of schedule flexibility and travel concerns. Attributes that led to continued enrollment included faculty support and familial support. Most of the participants enrolled in the doctoral program to advance their careers. The challenges of the online program were confusing information, the desire for more face-to-face time with fellow students, and the need for more guidance from advisors. Participants workload, poor communication, and time factors were reasons that participants gave for their consideration of leaving the doctoral program before completion.

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Patterns of Failure in Texas Urban Improvement Required Schools: An Equity Audit Expansion

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This article was a paper presented at the 39th Southwest Educational Research Association Conference, February 11, 2016, New Orleans, LA.

The achievement gap is a concept that has long been explored in education; students of color, low socioeconomic status, those who speak languages other than English, and students labeled as special education perform lower on student achievement tests and often receive less in terms of funding and resources (Harris & Hopson, 2008). Brown (2010) stated, "As a result, these students, without realizing it, often fall into a predetermined mold designed for school failure and social inequity" (p. 2).

In the state of Texas, schools are graded on a system of accountability based on four performance indexes. Based on the scores for these indexes, schools are rated as Met Standard, Met Alternative Standard, Improvement Required, or Not Rated (Texas Education Agency, 2015a). There are a number of reasons why a campus may not be rated; however, the criteria for Improvement Required was the focus of the original program equity audit completed by Branch and Leigh (in press).

Through the Texas Education Code, TEC §39.023, (2011) the state of Texas has outlined five domains or indexes which are used to determine the accountability ratings of districts and campuses. Index One focuses on student achievement on the State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness or STAAR test. Index Two addresses student progress where points are awarded based on growth expectations per student. The third index is designed to address the need to close performance gaps between certain populations of students. Index four measures post-secondary readiness across student groups combined over all subject areas. Index five allows school districts to determine three local programs or categories related to community and student engagement (Texas Education Agency, 2014c).

The purpose of the original equity audit was to evaluate what common factors, if any, were present in schools classified as Improvement Required in a large urban district within the state of Texas. For the purposes of the original equity audit, data were collected on non-charter, non-alternative high school campuses, and the identity of the district was changed to Urban ISD. The results of the original study encouraged Branch and Leigh (in press) to examine other urban districts within the state to see if similar patterns emerged.

The Texas Education Agency (2015b) defines a school district as urban if:

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(a) it is located in a county with a population of at least 870,000; (b) its enrollment is the largest in the county or at least 75 percent of the largest district enrollment in the county; and (c) at least 35 percent of enrolled students are economically disadvantaged. A student is reported as economically disadvantaged if he or she is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program. (para. 1)

For the purposes of this equity audit, all 11 schools district in Texas that met the urban designation criteria were included in this analysis.

In the original equity audit that guided this study, Branch and Leigh (in press) asserted that Urban ISD high schools similar to those in that study needed to pay special attention to their percentage of high mobility students. A student is considered high mobility if they have not been in the specific school for a substantial majority of school year (Texas Education Agency, 2015b). If the percentage of students considered mobile exceeds 25% of the total student population, the school should monitor disciplinary placements and dropout rates, as these are strong predictors of IR status, or schools that are classified by the state of Texas as being classified as improvement required (IR). If either of these two exceeds the state averages, which are 1.6% and 2.2% respectively, they have met sufficient cause for IR status.

Branch and Leigh (in press) also found that the high schools in the original study that had at least 11% of the student population designated as Special Education were also likely to be in IR status, and that this formed a necessary condition for IR. The current study aims to determine whether these same patterns emerge for multiple urban school districts in the state of Texas.

Research Questions

In the initial study conducted by Branch and Leigh (in press), three major relationships were observed within the specific district studied:

(1) having a Special Education enrollment in excess of 11% of the total student population was common to all of the IR schools in the study, therefore it was a necessary condition;

(2) that the vast majority of the IR schools in the study had at least 25% of the student body identified as having mobility issues; and

(3) a combination of either disciplinary placements higher than the state average or a dropout rate higher than the state average plus the aforementioned high mobility was sufficient to indicate designation as an IR school (p. 13)

The research question for the current study asked if those same three relationships were present in statewide data from similar urban school districts. Upon data collection, it was observed that some urban school districts in Texas contained no public, non-charter, non-magnet high schools that received Improvement Required ratings; this prompted slight refinement to the wording of the research question: Do urban school districts with IR high schools follow the same patterns of relationships as the district in the original study?

Review of Literature

The state of Texas was one of the first states to adopt accountability standards in the early 1980s. As the accountability standards and versions of the state assessments have changed and evolved over the years, many critics distinguish Texas as leading the nation in the drive for high stakes accountability, testing, and by proxy, driving education policy (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Kosar (2005, as cited in Ellison, 2012) stated that the purpose of standards-based learning is the following:

> Children will not learn to high levels unless they are taught challenging curricula... To raise achievement, the level of skills and knowledge students are taught must be raised, and this can be done through establishing challenging education standards. Doing this will maximize the probability of good teaching or worthwhile content to all students. And the children will respond. (p. 22)

It is this line of thinking that has driven high-stakes accountability. Proponents of standards-based accountability systems believe that school personnel, administrators at the district and campus levels and teachers will be encouraged to enact changes in their school to meet standardized assessments based on "the explicit threat of dismissal of administration or the possibility of a complete re-structuring of schools either by quasi-privatization (e.g., charter schools) or re-constitution of school staff" (Ellison, 2012, p. 23).

Part of the current system of accountability in Texas rates schools and districts as Met Standard, Met Alternative Standard, Improvement Required, or Not Rated (Texas Education Agency, 2015a). In order for a public Texas school to receive a rating of Met Standard, the school must meet the target for all indexes for performance data in the 2014 year. Schools that do not meet one or more targets are classified as Improvement Required (Texas Education Agency, 2014a). Once a campus or district receives a rating of Improvement Required (IR), the campus and/or district is then subjected to the Texas Accountability Intervention System (TAIS) in order to target interventions to remedy the mitigating factors (Texas Education Agency, 2014b). Campuses and districts that fail to meet standards and are classified as Improvement Required (IR) for two consecutive years are subject to reconstitution according to the Texas Education Code.

Schools undergoing reconstitution are charged by the Texas Commissioner of Education of the state of Texas to create, implement, and maintain a campus intervention team dedicated to improving instructional practices. Part of this charge includes making decisions concerning the suitability of current administrative and teaching teams, and whether the personnel on those teams should retain their positions (Texas Education Agency, 2014a). If not, the campus intervention team has the authority to make personnel changes.

Tucker (2011) classified Texas schools as "data-rich," but "information-poor" (p. 86). Citing a 2008 study by TEA, Tucker illustrated that although schools receive and submit a great deal of data to and from TEA each year, the information has little to do with actual school improvements. "Much of the information the state collects... governs the flow of dollars, but it is not on its own useful for improving school operations or performance" (Tucker, 2011, p. 86).

In other words, the variables being measured have little to do with either student performance or academic improvement. Brown (2010) similarly posed the question, "What variables actually influence student achievement, and how can schools capitalize on these to narrow the gaps?" (p. 3). As certain populations within public schools, such as minorities and students in special education programs, continue to experience inequality, school leaders must seek additional sources of information and data in order to better serve these marginalized students (Harris & Hopson, 2008).

Discussion of the Audit

This study used a qualitative design methodology, even though it may appear to have been quantitative. The Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) approach described by Ragin (2008) was used to convert ordinal data to binary data, representing crisp group membership. Crisp group membership requires that each subject be classified as either in the group or out of the group; there can be no partial membership, which would qualify as fuzzy group membership (Ragin, 2008). This procedure is explained more fully in the following sections.

Methodology. As indicated previously, this study relied upon the original equity audit performed by Branch and Leigh (in press). That study examined one large urban school district with which the researchers were familiar, and sought commonalities among the public, non-charter, non-magnet high schools which received Improvement Required ratings within that district. School status as a public, non-charter, non-magnet high school was based on researcher knowledge and both district and school websites.

Participants. For this study, all 11 school districts deemed urban by the Texas Education Agency were included. This brought the total number of high schools analyzed to 108. Of these schools, 25 received a status of IR (23%). The original study only included 21 schools, all in one district, of which 11 received a status of IR (52%). Status as a public, non-charter, non-magnet high school was determined using examination of school name and school websites. Likewise, district alternative education programs were excluded from this study.

Procedures. Since this study was searching for the presence of previously identified trends, there was no need to undergo the entire analysis of the original study. Pertinent data from the same categories as were deemed important in the first study were collected from the Texas Education Agency's publicly available on-line database and tabulated. These included the special education enrollment as a percentage of the student population, the mobility rate, dropout rate, and the percentage of disciplinary actions that resulted in alternative placements.

These data were then coded for crisp set membership (Ragin, 2008) using the same criteria as in the original study, as shown in Table 1. In keeping with Ragin's (2008) definition of crisp data sets, only binary status could be obtained. If the data indicated that the school met the criteria for group membership, as shown in Table 1, the data were recoded as ones; if the criteria were not met, and the school therefore did not meet the criteria for crisp group membership, the data were recoded as zeros.

Table 1
Criteria for Crisp Set Membership

Condition	Membership Criteria
STATUS	Improvement Required = 1, Met Standard = 0
SPED	Special Education Enrollment greater than or equal to 11% of student population
HM	Mobility greater than 25
HD	Disciplinary Placements greater than State average of 1.8
DO	Dropout Rate greater than state average of 1.2%

Following conversion of the data into crisp sets, analysis was performed using fuzzy-set/Qualitative Comparative Analysis (fs/QCA) version 2.5 (Ragin & Davey, 2014). A crisp set truth table analysis was performed first.

A necessary cause analysis was then performed on the data once again using fs/QCA 2.5, specifically testing the same data categories as found in the original study. The results of this analysis were then compared with the results of the original study.

Data Analysis

The crisp set truth table analysis showed two combinations of causal components that met Ragin's (2008) criteria of at least 0.75 consistency and 0.5 coverage as shown in Table 2. These results indicate a causal relationship between the combinations of conditions and IR status.

Table 2
Crisp Set Truth Table Analysis

Combination	Consistency	Coverage
HD*DO*HM	0.89	0.64
SPED*HM	0.86	0.72

If a school had high disciplinary incidents resulting in alternative placements, a high dropout rate, and a high mobility, all in comparison to state averages, the results reflected in Table 2 indicate that 89% of the time the school would be IR status. Similarly, if a school had high special education enrollment and high mobility, 86% of the time the school would be classified as IR. By Ragin's (2008) standards, both of these combinations of conditions would have a strong causal relationship to IR status.

The Necessary Conditions analysis results that met Ragin's (2008) minimum requirements are shown in Table 3. Row one of this table, for example, shows that in order for an urban public, non-charter, non-magnet high school in Texas to receive a status of Improvement Required, having more than 11% of the total student population enrolled in special education is a necessary factor 92% of the time. When the special education and high mobility crisp groups are examined

together, it was found that 96% of IR schools in this study were members of at least one of the two crisp groups.

Table 3
Necessary Conditions Analysis

Condition/Combination	Consistency	Coverage
SPED	0.92	0.58
HM	0.76	0.83
HM + SPED	0.96	0.57

As these results were compared to the findings in the original study, a truth table was created to determine if the same factors were present, as shown in Table 4.

Table 4
Comparison of Findings

Condition	Original Study	Expanded Study
SPED was a necessary condition for IR status	True (0.92)	True (0.92)
Majority of IR schools had HM	True (0.91)	True (0.86)
DO or HD, plus HM, was sufficient for IR status	True (1.00)	True (0.96)

The evidence presented in Table 4 establishes that the patterns found in the original study do indeed apply to urban districts statewide, although it is should be noted that the set theoretic consistency is slightly less when applied statewide than in the original study. In particular, the third criterion, in which a combination of either dropout rate or high disciplinary placements and high mobility was sufficient to cause Improvement Required status, had four counterfactual cases in the statewide study. This dropped the set theoretic consistency for that criterion to 86%, still above Ragin's (2008) threshold.

Discussion of the Findings

The findings of this study call into question the methods, either direct or indirect, used to determine Improvement Required status for public urban non-charter non-magnet high schools in Texas. The educational impact of IR status upon special education and high mobility students within these districts is of particular concern; are the educational needs of these students being met?

Pinar (2011) defined curriculum as heavily influenced by the past and by one's view of the future. Both concepts work together in the present moment to create the conditions under which curriculum is practiced through analysis and synthesis (Pinar, 2011). For students in high mobility and/or high special education urban districts, a primary question arises as to student

interpretation of the school's curriculum and its efficacy. In the case of high mobility students, they would not have sense of the past associated with the particular school; their life experiences would, by definition, have occurred elsewhere. Their current school would have limited input into their historical context, their pasts; and with a status of IR, one could argue their schools could not offer much hope for the future either.

Giroux (2011) decried the disposability of students in today's educational systems. Some of the districts and campuses in this study had disciplinary placement rates of over 10%. In such environments, how could students be expected to make adequate yearly progress? Instead of investing in the social needs of students who, as described above, have negative educational historical contexts and limited hope for the future, schools have rendered students who do not meet standards as invisible and disposable (Giroux, 2011).

Jenlink (2006) described school leaders as *bricoleurs* who utilize all of the tools at their disposal to address issues. With concerns such as those introduced within this paper, school leaders seem to be in need of new tools. The tools provided by the State of Texas, such as reconstitution (Texas Education Agency, 2014a), do little to help with the underlying problems of high mobility and special education enrollment rates, and give little hope for any authentic improvement. This study clearly shows that at least two of the causal factors tied to IR status are not under the control of the schools or the students. As Booher-Jennings noted,

> While our knowledge of the impact of high-stakes testing and accountability systems has burgeoned in the past decade, researchers have focused their attention on the effects of these systems rather than the mechanisms that account for districts' and teachers' willingness to change (2005, p.232).

When compared with national assessments, the data showed conflicting arguments as to whether or not the Texas Accountability system provided any significant results in terms of student achievement and reducing the achievement gap between populations of students (Heilig & Darling-Hammond, 2008). While some point to the motivational aspects of high stakes testing and accountability systems, both in terms of internal and external motivation, others direct their attention to more negative aspects, such as administrative pressure and "teaching to the test." As stated in the original equity audit by Branch and Leigh (in press), it is important to note that the presences of external factors that contribute to IR status cannot be perceived as reasons or excuses for accepting the status quo. It is the responsibility of school personnel to evolve and adapt instructional strategies in order to meet the needs of all students.

Through the research findings, this study aimed to assist schools and school personnel in identifying common factors of campuses that are classified as IR in order to serve as a source of possible prediction so that campuses and districts can take preventative measures before meeting the state's requirements for IR status. Most importantly, this study raises additional questions of meeting the needs of special education and high mobility students enrolled in IR schools. The fact that membership in these crisp groups could be linked directly to IR status calls into question the validity of the entire IR process in Texas. It is hoped that this study will assist in the critical evaluation of the Texas school accountability system in order to provide a more equitable system for all students within the State.

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An Analysis of Urban School Leaders' Role in Community Support and Involvement

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Introduction

While school systems have the arduous task of educating a plethora of diverse students from different backgrounds and social economic status, the task is multifaceted. Epstein (1995) argued that to successfully meet the goal of improving education for all children, there must be considerably more involvement from parents, the community, and other stakeholders working together to promote the success of all students. That is, "students learn more and succeed at higher levels when home, school, and community work together to support students' learning and development" (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 87). To meet the needs of such diverse students, their families, other administrators, and faculty (i.e., school community), school leaders, according to Green (2013, p. 14), must engage in several processes: (1) have knowledge of the emerging issues and trends that can potentially impact the school community; (2) be able to recognize the need to involve stakeholders in school decision-making; (3) assess whether they are highly visible; (4) assess whether they are actively involved; (5) assess their effectiveness in communicating with the larger community; (6) assess whether they give credence to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict with theirs; and (7) assess whether they are recognizing and valuing diversity. In essence, these factors have an impact on the organizational structure of the school, influencing a collaborative culture of student, faculty, parental, and stakeholder decision-making processes (Wagner, 2007).

School leaders are hired to manage and supervise schools (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). In such, a number of characteristics are pertinent towards becoming a successful and effective school leader. One particular tenant is forming a collaborative relationship with stakeholders in the community (Compassion Capital Fund Resource Center, 2010). Although the school leader functions as the instructional leader within the school, *setting up and maintaining parental and community relationships* are equally important (Compassion Capital Fund Resource Center, 2010, p. 16). This includes, sharing the vision, clearly articulating the goals, an agreement of roles and responsibilities of members to reach the target (Compassion Capital Fund Resource Center, pp. 16-18). Fiore (2016) adds that even more important to the role of the school leader or principal as school-community leader is the "values and beliefs that guide the principal's behavior" (p. 40). That is, the principal's beliefs guide his or her actions with community stakeholders. These actions are deliberate and intentional leading towards a "two-way communication with internal and external groups" Fiore (2016, p. 40).

While much is known about the necessity for parental and community involvement in schools, very little research explores teachers' views of their school leader's role in developing and

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maintaining school and community relations. Since it is well documented that collaborative and participatory leadership is critical in the success of an organization and the culture of such organization (see Green, 2013), it is presumably just as critical to explore such dispositions of those individuals directly involved in the day to day structure of the school and the teaching and learning processes of students and faculty. In short, there are few research studies directed towards teachers' perceptions of their urban school leaders' roles in creating and sustaining partnerships with community, stakeholders and families. Considering the importance of community involvement and support in the success of student achievement, it is critical that other denominating factors are explored and not delineated from the overall establishment of the professional learning community. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to understand teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' role in community involvement and support within their urban schools. That is, skills that contribute to the organization's "success in building positive relationships, developing a supportive culture, and effectively communicating with all stakeholders" (Green, 2013, p. 232).

Literature Review

Improving Community Relationships. Epstein, Galindo and Sheldon (2011) state that there lies a dichotomous view of school leaders as "irrelevant, peripheral, or inadequate managers" to "essential for improving schools" (p. 463). However, as noted by Sergiovanni and Green (2015), "there are various types of relationships within a school community" (p. 142) to improve and lead a 21ˢᵗ century school. In an effort to utilize a school's human resources, Sergiovanni and Green (2015) indicate that "regardless of the type of relationships or where they exist, the school leader has to build bridges to goal attainment through them" (p. 142). To meet this challenge, Hirsch (2013) provides several factors in effectively utilizing essential data for improving schools. Hirsch (2013) states that teaching and learning conditions are "systems relationships, resources, environments and people… that affect teaching (sic) and learning (sic) at a high level" (p. 8). Hirsch (2013) concludes that when assessing teaching and learning conditions, a more critical, but positive view towards school improvement is pertinent to results, that is: (1) teaching and learning conditions are an area for school improvement, not accountability; (2) teaching and learning conditions are not about one individual and it will take a community effort to improve; (3) perceptual data are real data; (4) conversations need to be structured and safe; (5) identify and celebrate positives as well as considering areas for improvement; (6) create a common understanding of what defines and shapes teaching and learning conditions; (7) focus on what you can solve; and (8) solutions can be complex and long term.

Preparing School Leaders. 21st century school leaders are providing leadership in "an era of standards, competencies, and accountability measures" (Sergiovanni & Green, 2015, p. 40). As such, ten standards were developed by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) focused on "promoting the learning, achievement, development, and well-being of students" (2015, p. 3). These revised standards called the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) guide school leaders in creating effective schools. One specific revised PSEL standard to effectively lead the second half of 21ˢᵗ century schools includes Standard 8. PSEL Standard 8 indicates that: "effective education leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being (NPBEA, 2015).

PSEL Standard 8 requires the school leader to effectively collaborate with faculty, staff, the community, and stakeholders. Knowledge of the community in which the school leader serves is advantageous when building relationships and collaborating with parents, community members, and stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success and academic achievement of students within the community. Green (2013, p. 14) notes seven tenants that are essential for school leaders in building a collaborative school culture: (1) have knowledge of the emerging issues and trends that can potentially impact the school community; (2) be able to recognize the need to involve stakeholders in school decision-making processes; (3) assess whether they are highly visible; (4) assess whether they are actively involved; (5) assess their effectiveness in communicating with the larger community; (6) assess whether they give credence to individuals and groups whose values and opinions may conflict with theirs; and (7) assess whether they are recognizing and valuing diversity. Green (2013) adds that when school leaders are not open to the idea of collaboration, the result is "a lose-lose situation with the school standing to lose the most" (p. 94).

Community Support and Involvement. Research has demonstrated that parental support and involvement is one of the key components tied to academic achievement (Darling, Kleiman & Larocque, 2011). In such, parental involvement has several benefits for students: student behavior improves, student motivation increases, attendance becomes more regular, student dropout rates are lower, students have a more positive attitude toward homework, parent and community support for schools increases and academic achievement rises (see Coleman, Campbell, Hobson, McPartland, Mood, Weinfeld, & York, 1966; Epstein, 1984, 1995, 1997, 2001; Griffith, 1998; Schneider & Coleman, 1993). Research denotes that in many cases, poverty and parental support has been a contributing factor in student attrition (see Deslandes, Royer, Turcotte, & Betrand, 1997; Dornbusch, Ritter, Liederman, Mont-Reynaud, & Chen, 1987; Rumberger, 2006; Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch, & Darling, 1992; and Wiggan, 2007. When parents are involved in their children's education, there is a higher academic performance in course content. Other findings include fewer disciplinary problems (see Deslandes, Royer, Royer, Turcotte, & Betrand, 1997; Eccles, Early, Frasier, Belansky, & McCarthy, 1997).

Haines, Gross, Blue-Banning, Francis, and Turnball (2015) present significant findings on family-school partnerships in knowledge development sites (KDS) conducted by the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) Center. The findings of a focus group research approach resulted in five themes: (1) school culture of inclusion; (2) administrative leadership; (3) attributes of partnerships; (4) opportunities for family involvement; and (5) positive outcomes for all students (p. 229). Haines, et.al (2015) found that positive and inclusive schools lead to trusting partnerships and involvement with the family, community and stakeholders.

While most research focuses on specifically classroom practice and parental and community involvement as major factors in influencing student learning and achievement, only recently have research focused on deep discussions and reflections amongst school leaders at and across building levels positioning teaching conditions and data use in the forefront of school improvement. More research is needed to establish a framework to guide school leaders and school district personnel in developing effective processes towards the involvement of a new

wave of 21st century parent/guardian and community stakeholders. The focus of this study is not to examine the value of particular activities associated with the current orientation of community support and involvement, neither is it intended to highlight issues that specifically influence such involvement. Rather, the focus of this study is to gain insight into the dispositions of teachers regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement and to provide a platform for establishing communication amongst school officials regarding how to engage and involve parents/guardians and other stakeholders who represent a new cultural wave of opinions and thoughts that differ from the former and present academic institutional landscape.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement by type of school level?
2. Is there a significant difference in elementary and middle school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement?
3. Is there a significant difference in middle and high school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement?
4. Is there a significant difference in elementary and high school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement?

Methodology

The researcher submitted four questions to be answered by this study. In order to answer the research questions, this study used a quantitative methodology that facilitates an analysis of the variables in the study. The researcher determined that a non-experimental approach utilizing descriptive and non-parametric statistics would be the most appropriate for a secondary data analysis study. To compare between group data, the researcher performed the Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVA of ranks test. There were three independent sample populations included in this study, which were non-normally distributed data. Using SPSS 23 Tests for Several Independent Samples, the three factors extracted through factor analysis were tested against the grouping variable, type of school level. A descriptive analysis was performed on the sample group to obtain a clear understanding of the group. Standard deviations were determined during data analysis and reported as well. A Mann-Whitney U Test was utilized to determine which groups were statistically significant from one another. In the parametric analysis, the researcher was able to determine significant differences between pairs of school levels by Bonferroni adjustment. An effect size was calculated. The results of the analysis procedures were interpreted and evaluated for implications.

Instrumentation

The survey for this study is the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning (TELL) Survey (New Teacher Center, 2012). The TELL survey is based upon the MET Working Conditions Survey of the New Teacher Center. The TELL analyses presented are based on the responses to a survey instrument that was based on the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey (Hirsch & Church, 2009), but customized to Texas.

Different in some particulars from versions of the TELL administered at other times in other places, the TELL Texas 2014 nevertheless partakes of an accumulating body of evidence that testifies to the instrument's psychometric quality. To be sure, some degree of informal or *prima facie* evidence of the validity of the TELL derives from its longevity and wide-spread usage. To the same point, however, more formal evidence derives from initial efforts to ensure the instrument's "content validity" "and later efforts to establish its "construct validity." With respect to its content validity, the TELL capitalizes on two sources: 1) a wide-ranging literature review of the role of working conditions on teacher dissatisfaction and mobility and 2) an analysis of School and Staffing Survey data focused on areas identified as driving teachers' satisfaction and employment decisions. In terms of its construct validity, a 2014 Research Brief published on the TELL Texas website alludes to the work of Swanlund (2011) in confirming the factor structure of the instrument and in using "Rasch model person separation reliability and Cronbach's alpha" to verify that the TELL is capable of producing consistent results across participant groups" (NTC Validity and Reliability Report, 2014, p. 3). In sum, for purposes of measuring teacher dispositions towards the working conditions directly or indirectly fostered by the leadership of their schools, the TELL Texas 2014 would appear to be a generally accurate tool that produces consistent results.

The TELL Survey provides analyses of "teaching conditions… associated with improved student achievement" and "provides direct support to facilitate school improvement" (TELL Texas, 2014, para. 2). The TELL Texas 2014 Survey examines eight different constructs from teacher leadership to new teacher support. However, this research study will only examine the TELL Texas 2014 construct of community engagement and support.

Sample Population

Schools in this study were selective elementary, middle and high, all located in a large urban district in the southwestern United States that were selected based on convenience. That is, "only campuses with 50% of educators responding to the survey have we reports" (TELL Texas, 2014). The TELL Texas was administered to educators at 282 district sites in the large urban school district. 1793 respondents provided data from these 282 district sites. The total teachers employed are 11, 452, and total principals employed are 258. The total enrollment for the large urban district are 211, 552 students in the 2013 - 2014 school year. With over 100 languages spoken, educators serve a population of 61.9 % Hispanic and 25.2% African American students in the large urban school district. By program, 93.3% of students are Title 1, 68.7% are "At Risk," and 80.4% are economically disadvantaged.

Data Analysis and Findings

Urban teachers' responses by school level are pertinent to some aspect of community support and involvement invested in improving a climate of academic achievement in schools. The eight "community support and involvement" items read as follows:

1. Parents/guardians are influential decision makers in this school.
2. This school maintains clear, two-way communication with parents/guardians and the community.
3. The school does a good job of encouraging parent/guardian involvement.
4. Teachers provide parents/guardians with useful information about student learning.
5. Parents/guardians know what is going on in this school.
6. Parents/guardians support teachers, contributing to their success with students.
7. Community members support teachers, contributing to their success with students.
8. The community we serve is supportive of this school.

Research Question 1: *Is there a significant difference in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement by type of school level?*

Table 1
Results and Descriptive Statistics for Community Support and Involvement by Type of School Level.

School Level	N	Median	SD	$\chi2$	Sig.
Elementary	30	31.00	5.22	19.42**	79.62
Middle	46	31.00	4.31		68.34
High School	107	32.00	6.83		105.64

* Indicates p < .0125; ** Indicates p < .001.

A Kruskal-Wallis Test revealed a significant difference in community support and involvement across three different school levels (Gp1, n = 30: Elementary Level; Gp2, n = 46: Middle Level; Gp3, n = 107: High School), X^2 (2, n = 183) = 19.42, p = .000. The high school group recorded a higher median mean score (Md = 32) than the other two school levels which both recorded median values of 31. Results indicating that high school teachers have higher dispositions towards their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement compared to both elementary and middle teachers. Table 1 also relates the school level median mean values, the standard deviation, the calculated *P* value report as Chi-square, and the mean rank for the school levels.

Research Question 2: *Is there a significant difference in elementary and middle school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement? (Elementary and High School)*

Table 2
ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Elementary and High School Leaders' Role in Community Support and Involvement

School Levels	N	Median	SD	X2	Sig.
Elementary	30	31.00	5.22	.02*	54.95
High School	107	32.00	6.83		72.94

* Indicates p < .0125; ** Indicates p < .001.

Table 2 indicates the school level median mean values, the standard deviation, the calculated P value report as Chi-square, and the mean rank for the school levels. A Mann-Whitney U Test revealed a significant difference in teacher dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement for Elementary ($Md = 29$) and High School ($Md = 27$), $U = 1184$, $z = -2.34$, $p=.02$, $r = -0.2$. Results indicate high school teachers having a higher disposition regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement compared to elementary school teachers.

Research Question 3: *Is there a significant difference in middle and high school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement? (Elementary and Middle)*

Table 3
ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Elementary and Middle School Leaders' Role in Community Support and Involvement

School Levels	N	Median	SD	X2	Sig.
Elementary	30	31.00	5.22	.56	40.17
Middle	107	31.00	4.31		37.41

* Indicates p < .0125; ** Indicates p < .001.

Table 3 indicates the school level median mean values, the standard deviation, the calculated P value report as Chi-square, and the mean rank for the school levels. A Mann-Whitney U Test revealed no significant difference in teacher dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement for Elementary ($Md = 31$) and Middle ($Md = 31$), $U = 640$, $z = -.587$, $p=.56$, $r = -0.7$. Results indicating no difference in dispositions of elementary and middle school teachers' regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement.

Research Question 4: *Is there a significant difference in elementary and high school levels in terms of teachers' dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement? (Middle and High School)*

Table 4
ANOVA Results and Descriptive Statistics for Middle and High School Leaders' Role in Community Support and Involvement

School Levels	N	Median	SD	X2	Sig.
Middle	46	31.00	4.31	.000**	54.42
High School	107	32.00	6.83		86.71

* Indicates p < .0125; ** Indicates p < .001.

Table 4 indicates the school level median mean values, the standard deviation, the calculated P value report as Chi-square, and the mean rank for the school levels. A Mann-Whitney U Test revealed a significant difference in teacher dispositions towards their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement for Middle (Md = 31) and High School (Md = 32), U = 1423, z = -4.38, p=.000, r = -0.4. Results indicating high school teachers having higher dispositions towards their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement than middle school teachers.

Discussion

The researcher sought to identify urban school level dispositions regarding leadership roles that could attribute to positive school climate and community support and involvement. For this study the researcher analyzed the responses from teachers within three different school levels: elementary, middle and high school in the fourth largest city in the nation, specifically, by the use of a secondary data set related to school leaders' roles in community support and involvement that could highly improve school climate and conditions.

At the elementary level, a major perception is that parents/guardians and the community are not supportive of their teachers; yet, the school provides useful information to parents about student learning and respondents believe that parents know what is going on in the school. Grunig and Hunt (as cited in Moore, Bagin, and Gallagher, 2016) state that as much as 50 percent of schools follow a public information model when communicating with the community. This model involves the dissemination of information in a one-way format, directly to the parent. Perhaps, this sentiment supports Bagin's (as cited in Moore, et.al, 2016) assumptions surrounding the failure of school and community relations. In addition, solely disseminating information to parents/guardians is not a two-way communication (Bagin, as cited in Moore, et.al, 2016).

Although results from high school teachers indicate that their school leaders encourage teachers to provide useful information about student learning to parents/guardians, maintains a clear two-way communication with parents/guardians and the community is supportive of the school, one area of concern is encouraging parent/guardian involvement. Simon (2001) reveals that the role of parental involvement drops when students enter high school. However, Simon (2001) points out several findings from high school parents and school leaders regarding parental and community involvement. Simon's (2001) research explores various activities that create a symbiotic relationship (two-way communication) between the school, parents/guardians and community such as creating parenting workshops, (re)introducing parent-teacher conferences, parents/guardians attending school activities with their teens, communicating through direct contact about student's homework, establishing a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) or Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) as a forum for parents, and creating community-service programs. According to data results, teachers at all levels believe that the majority of efforts to provide useful information about student learning to parents/guardians is sustainable.
However, Simon's (2001) research findings contradicts participant responses from groups in the present study that a clear two-way communication between parent/guardians and schools is optimal, particularly within the high school. Perhaps, it is unclear to the extent in which the

schools choose to communicate with the diverse parents served. That is, e.g., communication through letters in the first language of the parents, accessibility to a computer or Internet access.

Although, the literature indicated that school leaders' roles in community support and involvement does impact student achievement, it also identified that learning environments must have certain attributes in order to facilitate effective communication between the school, community, and stakeholders. An ideal form of communication style is the two-way symmetric model that emphasizes an ebb and flow open communication between the school and community (Grunig & Hunt, as cited in Moore, et.al, 2016). This particular model emphasizes an understanding of the needs of the community and the needs of the school that greatly impacts school climate.

Based on related surveyed items on dispositions of school leaders' roles in community support and involvement, the responding participants indicated a significant difference between elementary and high school teachers' responses and middle and high school teachers' responses regarding dispositions regarding their school leaders' roles in community support and involvement. In fact, of the sample population surveyed, high school teachers stochastically dominate elementary and middle school teachers' overall responses.

Implications

Two implications for school leaders emerge from this study. The first entails creating a plan of action. According to Holliday (as cited in Moore, et.al, 2016, p. 13), the purpose of school-community support and involvement is to "foster student achievement...establishment of positive school climate and parental and citizen involvement". Unsuccessful urban school leaders continue to forge relationships with the community without a plan of action. According to Moore, et.al (2016), the most current schools have a community relations' plan or public relations' plan. This plan involves specific elements supported by The National School Public Relations Association. Based on the results found in this study, elementary, middle, and high school leaders in the Southwestern region of the United States should consider the following recommendations from The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) concerning the elements of the school climate as it relates community involvement and support (building trust and relationships).

First, school leaders should do an effective job by letting parents/guardians and the community know about the successes and challenges of the school. Secondly, parental and community concerns regarding discipline issues should be taken seriously. A third recommendation to consider is enhancing the comfort of the parent/guardians and community being served. Personal experiences have an impact on decision making factors, even within the school environment. Fourth, inclusive decision making is an important factor in staff morale. Fifth, communication to parents/guardians and the community should be in words that are understandable. That is, less multisyllabic words and jargon. Sixth, to gain trust and support, a strong collaboration is key amongst teachers, administrators, parental groups and the business community. Seventh, attracting the support of the business community is essential when building public confidence in schools. Eighth, effort must be made to involve nonparents through community education and volunteer programs. Finally, a two-way communication process

involving feedback from parents/guardians and the community to school officials is a major part of the decision-making process (Fiore, 2016, pp. 4-6).

The second implication for school leaders involves removing barriers of communication to all stakeholders. Fiore (2011, p. 84) provides several communication barriers that school leaders should consider when building relationships and trust with the parents/guardians and the community. First, an influx of non-English proficient families is moving into large cities. Therefore, school leaders should consider ways to position personnel to facilitate communication with parents/guardians and community members who are less skilled with speaking English as a first language. Cultural differences have an impact upon communication style (i.e., direct eye contact). Also, school leaders should consider effectively communicating with underrepresented groups with a physical disability such as blindness. Adjusting the communication style by verbally articulating points within the message is important to this population. Finally, while school leaders are rushed to make quick time-related decisions; rather, consider purposeful communication to parents/guardians and the community through face-to-face meetings, e.g. town hall meetings.

Conclusion

Topor, Keane, Shelton, and Calkins (2010) postulate that there is a direct link or relationship between students' education, the school, and teachers. These three elements according to Topor, et.al (2010) strongly impact student achievement "by being engaged with the child to increase ... cognitive competence and ...the teacher and school to promote a stronger...positive student-teacher relationship" (p. 3). The findings in this research supports Henderson and Mapp's (2002) research that "when families of all backgrounds are engaged in their children's learning, their children tend to do better in school and stay in school longer" (p. 73) and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 (latest authorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] of 1965 which was last reauthorized in 2002 as the No Child Left Behind [NCLB]) depiction of parent involvement as a consistent, two-way, communication regarding academic achievement and other school activities which supports student success. The ESSA 2015 Act ensures that schools are:
- training staff in regards to engagement strategies;
- supporting programs that reach families at home, in the community and at school;
- disseminating information on best practices focused on engagement, especially for economically disadvantaged students;
- collaborating with community-based organizations or businesses that have a track record of improving family engagement; and,
- engaging in any other activities that the district believes are appropriate in increasing engagement (The Leadership Conference Education Fund, 2016).

The findings in this research also support Fiore's (2016) seven tasks or responsibilities that school leaders must assume that are relative to positive school-community relations. Fiore (2016) states school leaders should: (1) be a good listener; (2) be tactful and diplomatic in all relationships; (3) create meaningful professional development activities; (4) promote an open-door policy; (5) keep the superintendent informed of successes and failures; (6) recognize and

celebrate accomplishments of the school family; and, (7) maintain school publications and a school media plan that keep stakeholders informed (p. 41).

The common strands validated in the aforementioned research pertaining to parental and community involvement is based upon three specifics: (1) maintaining good internal communications which involves enlisting external support from parents/guardians and the community; (2) engaging in constructive conversations with internal (teachers) and external (parents and community) stakeholders; and (3) recognizing human needs that lead to a sense of belonging from internal and external stakeholders (Moore, et.al, 2016, p. 86).

Huang and Mason (2008) affirm that "empirical evidence supports the concept that student achievement is influenced by what parents believe, how they behave and the type of activities that they engage in association with their children's education" (p. 20). More importantly, parents' attitudes about the relationship with the school, that is with teachers and administrative staff, and parent's participatory role in their child's overall academic and social development, increases school involvement (Smrekar & Cohen-Vogel, 2001). While there is much progress in the area of community and school involvement, to meet the academic and social needs of a new generation of students, a paradigm shift must take place in the communication style of school leaders regarding the involvement and support of parents/guardians and community members in the second half of the 21st century.

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Educational Leadership Coaching as Professional Development

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Introduction

As the burden of school leadership continues to increase in complexity, the need for reflective, collaborative leadership surges in tandem. The collaborative approach of educational leadership coaching develops school leaders and teacher leaders into meta-cognitive, reflective practitioners. Shoho, Barnett, and Martinez (2012) posited, "Many school systems are embracing coaching as a way to influence and enhance leaders' skill development, cognitive abilities, and emotional intelligence" (p. 165). These skilled educational leaders can then seek solutions that allow for the complexity of the school systems while generating positive student outcomes, relational trust, and increased teacher efficacy.

Franklin and Franklin (2012) and Wise and Hammack (2011) framed coaching as a new approach to thinking, leading, and learning, that may help to transform education. School leaders face a daunting challenge as they lead groups of individuals toward the common goals of increased student achievement, increased skill, and knowledge development while balancing political pressure and providing differentiated professional development to the adult learners under their leadership.

When coaching is applied in the educational context, teachers, teacher leaders, and principals can begin to navigate the system with a new attitude and awareness of human potential. Franklin and Franklin (2012) explained, "In the space of little more than a decade coaching has gained a significant foothold in many areas of change management" (p. 33). According to Van Nieuwerburgh (2012), there is a "natural synergy between educational leadership and effective coaching" (p. 27).

Educational leadership coaching is a job-embedded, school-based form of professional development and an approach to transformational conversations that has the potential to change school cultures and improve student achievement (Stevenson, 2009). In this type of professional development, conversations and reflective questions guide educational leaders into metacognitive practices that transform schools. Within a coaching framework exists the potential to transform schools and create student success (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010).

Educational leadership coaching differs from instructional coaching in the sense that a sage is not leading a novice into an area of content expertise. Rather, an educational leadership coach can be a great coach without subject specific knowledge (Reiss, 2007). This is a distinction from

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mentoring where subject-specific knowledge is prized. Whitmore (2014) explained, "The effect of coaching is not dependent on an older, more experienced individual passing down his knowledge. Coaching requires expertise in coaching but not in the subject at hand. That is one of its great strengths" (p. 14).

Theoretical Framework

Shostack (2002) articulated the dual nature of theory in qualitative educational research as both a liberator and an inhibitor of thought. Fullan's (2012) change theory often was a liberating force while also providing structure and a lens through which to view the studied transformational conversations. Fullan (2012) argued for change that encompasses moral purpose and the expectation that employees can sense the underlying trust and love of their leader. Change was resisted when leaders in the studied district approached teachers in conversation with the intent of creating change in classroom practice; the teacher felt manipulated and that the conversation lacked authenticity. Fullan's (2012) change theory also encompasses teachers, principals, and central office personal learning from each other called *lateral capacity building*; this philosophy encompasses coaching beliefs and practices.

Literature Review

Coaching is a type of professional development that focuses on clarity of communication and personal empowerment (Reiss, 2009). Educational leadership coaches engage school leaders in purposeful growth conversations that will positively impact collaborative decision making, teacher leadership behaviors and classroom practice. Coaching as leadership development has the ability to transform teachers and principals into effective leaders and systems thinkers who believe in human potential, envision positive outcomes, and understand the importance of student success.

Although school leaders typically have a couple of days at the beginning of the year to devote to professional development, that time alone is insufficient to train and grow teachers. Further, staff meetings can be an excellent time to devote to introducing a new idea, but lack the time and support systems to create real change from a once-a-week check in. Educational leadership coaching offers a solution to this problem. School leaders can begin to coach their teachers, team leaders, and campus improvement teams, creating ongoing professional development through continual, purposeful conversations. Rather than a single event, the professional development becomes an incremental, daily practice. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) explained, "During the course of a single day, school leaders have dozens of opportunities to effect change through short conversations with staff, students, parents, colleagues, supervisors, and community members" (p. 2).

These conversations, often generated by teachers themselves, allow school leaders to grow their teachers into metacognitive problem solvers. Since the coachee is leading the conversation about an area of concern, the conversation itself is differentiated by interest, expertise, and self-awareness. The ability of coaching to be differentiated and to allow each teacher to learn to solve his or her own problems makes it unique (Knight, 2009). Knight (2009) explained "Coaching is not a quick fix; it is an approach that offers time and support for teachers to reflect, converse

about, explore, and practice new ways of thinking about and doing the remarkably important and complex act, called teaching" (p. 2).

This dual approach, the tailored nature of coaching and the optimism of the process, position coaching as an excellent form professional development. Professional development suffers the same inequities as other school resources, but the importance of coaching is clear. Beneficial professional development "provides continued follow-up, support, and pressure that can only be delivered by a school-based coach" (Sweeney, 2011, p. 31). Aguilar (2013) stressed, "Coaching is a form of professional development that brings out the best in people, uncovers strengths and skills, builds effective teams, cultivates compassion, and builds emotionally resilient educators." (p. 6)

However, schools that are looking to implement coaching as professional development lack models to guide the process (Wise & Hammack, 2011). In 2011, two studies delved into the role of the principal as coach (Loving, 2011; Stevenson, 2011). However, there is a lack of district-wide coaching in a professional development model.

In this coaching leadership style, the leader still holds the school's goals, including student achievement, with primacy, however, the school leader encourages the development of creative choices and individual reflection as the process by which school goals are met. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) explained new leadership practices: "In the new leadership model, the leader does not know all the answers" (p. 11). This creates a shift from the leader telling people what to do to a leader who asks questions, listens, and then responds (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010). Instead of a professional development workshop that occurs once and is an individual process, coaching is an ongoing, shared leadership exercise.

Coaching Develops Relational Trust

The metacognition and self-reflection that is required in coaching conversations aids in the development of relational trust and self-awareness. Aghili (2001) studied coaching in a business environment and found that, "without a strong sense of self-awareness and clear vision, leaders are likely to lack the commitment and the integrity associated with outstanding leadership" (p. 37). Coaching also develops alignment between organizational values and personal ones, thereby developing trust in each coaching relationship. This alignment is necessary for schools to be successful as is evident in the statement by Cheliotes and Reilly (2010): "Through ongoing, respectful coaching conversations, space is provided for personal and professional growth and change within a framework of relational trust" (p. xii).

Additionally, relational trust is key to school improvement. Payne (2008) wrote about persistent failure in urban schools and discovered through research of over 200 Chicago schools that relational trust was key to student success. This relational trust is an irreplaceable resource when aiming from school and student success. Once relational trust has developed, it is more likely that change will occur. Cheliotes and Reilly (2010) underscored this point by stating, "In other words, when coaching conversations are sincere, there is a high probability that trust will grow between the participants and that pathways for growth and change will develop" (p. xiii).

Coaching allows school leaders to build capacity by giving teachers the chance to think deeply to solve problems. Once trust is established, "coaching is a way of listening and speaking to colleagues that assumes a belief that others are whole and capable" (Cheliotes & Reilly, 2010, p. 9). By utilizing coaching as way of approaching conversations, the paradigm changes from telling and dictating to reflecting and owning. Leaders often encounter resistance in their efforts to turn around areas of low performance. Coaching can be a way for leaders to positively deal with resistance from teachers. Instead of fighting resistance with resistance, a coach-leader builds on positives to create growth. Coaching offers another avenue for dealing with resistant teachers. Transition into quote "Coaching provides a methodology and skills for confronting resistance, a thorn in the side of leaders everywhere. The coaching process, done well, reveals what lies beneath resistance" (Reiss, 2009, p. 178).

Data and Methods

The setting of the study was a small suburban district in north Texas containing one elementary school, one intermediate school comprised of 4th and 5th grades, one 6th-8th middle school, and one 9-12th high school campus. The district rating was *met standard*, according to the state of Texas accountability system.

This setting has particular relevance toward coaching research focused on educational leadership. The unique coaching hybrid used by the district is comprised of professional development in the art of coaching by an outside coaching consultant, followed by an expectation to train their team in the coaching behaviors in order to create a coaching culture in the organization.

For this study, coaches who underwent formal coach training from the external coach were invited to participate. This included 20 invitees, four of whom were current administrators. All invitees who accepted the invitation to participate in the study were interviewed. The target population for the current study included teacher leaders, campus administrators, and central office personnel. All participants were current employees of the district and had participated in formal coach training with the external coach, coaching conversations with their teams, and coaching staff development.

Data collection was facilitated through the use of open-ended interview questions to answer the following research questions:
1. How do coaches perceive that coaching impacts shared leadership?
2. How do coaches perceive that coaching impacts instructional decisions?
3. What are coaches' perceptions of coaching on team member relationships?

District and campus leaders with coach training were the participants in the study. The district offered coach training to administrators, office personnel, curriculum coordinators, and team leaders. Coach training occurred in the district for six years, led by an outside coaching consultant licensed by the International Coaching Federation.

Once district coaches were trained by the outside consultant, they were expected to train their teams on the coaching behaviors they had learned. The district called this the *trainer of trainers* model. These district coaches were called on to provide coach training and modeling during professional development in addition to facilitating coaching conversations with their staffs and

teams. It is important to note that these trained coaches participated as both coaches and coachees in coaching conversations. In the current study, coaches were assigned numbers as pseudonyms in order to protect their identity.

The current study addressed the research questions with a broad understanding of the complexities of the coaching implementation. The interview protocol contained 13 questions designed to understand the coaches' perceptions of the implementation, including their perceptions of the original purpose of the staff development, the training component, and their perceptions of its effects on coaches and coachees.

The participants had between two and 20 years of teaching experience. Both genders were represented in the study. Approximately one-third of the participants had earned advanced degrees and all participants had received state certification and had participated in district-initiated coach training consisting of staff development sessions, coaching conversations with the consultant, and leading coaching conversations with others.

Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed and all interview data were entered into NVivo 10, a computer program for qualitative data analysis. Interviews were transcribed. Following data transcriptions, the coaches participated in member checks. Member checks consisted of each participant reading the transcript of the interview and clarifying their responses. With member checks, the researcher was assuring trustworthiness of the participants' responses. Word counts and other representations of these were analyzed including word and phrase frequency and co-occurring word diagrams. Each interview was read several times, and the answers were coded into nodes (themes) and connections between data were discovered.

Data were triangulated by individual interviews with the coaching consultant. The coaching consultant also shared several PowerPoint presentations she used for training. The researcher explored the original goals for the coaching implementation and compared them to coaches' perceptions of the goals for the implementation. Data were collected on the coaching consultant's views, beliefs, and experiences with the coaching implementation. Data were then analyzed for themes; and once the themes emerged, the researcher conferred with a panel of experts to review the themes discovered (Creswell, 2012).
Of the themes that emerged from the data, this article will address trust and coaching led to an increase of organizational trust and difficult conversations: the implementation of coaching allowed coaches to replace personal biases with objectivity during difficult conversation.

Findings

Data revealed that coaches perceived the critical role that trust played in their relationships. One participant related trust to the ability to find one's own way stating, "coaching makes your relationship stronger because it builds that trust with each other…because whenever you come to me or you allow me to coach, I found that answer within myself. We are stronger when we are working together." Another coach commented that shared trust builds individual strength: "as a result of coaching, the relationship between both people becomes stronger because there is a trust

that's built there…that person is there for you. They want what is best for you." Aligning with the literature, coaching's desire for mutual success was effective in developing trust and allowing deeper, more meaningful conversations (Kouzes & Posner, 2007). Mrs. Smith, a veteran team leader, reiterated the concept of personal growth being empowered by a belief that the coach is acting in benevolence and stated, "Having colleagues who I trust and who I know have my best interests or I have those relationships with…probably has made the most growth for me as a teacher." This also illustrates the connections participants noted between trust and transformation. Mr. Jones, a dean at the high school, noted that, due to coaching, relationships are strengthened, "because there's a trust that's built there. I think it's going to have a ripple effect when everyone is really honest and open and willing to make changes."

Coaches saw the potential of coaching if, according to a veteran elementary princial, it is "done correctly and done without threat, it is amazing for team relationships and building rapport." Another participant emphasized the importance of relationships that "build trust…and a bond." She stressed the need for a "deeper level of trust" that had developed and shared, "I feel like we can be honest with each other because we know we are free from judgment when we are in a coaching situation. For some reason, that builds trust within."

The consultant described evidence of trust and relationships prospering, but not to their full capacity. She shared that there were key people who "became masterful at coaching and I saw their relationships improve dramatically. I saw their ability to lead improve. But…overall I'm not sure that I ever saw the communication from teacher to teacher reach the level I hoped it would." This reflection echoed the researcher's concern – the promise of coaching eluded leadership. Perhaps, the leadership failed to develop trust prior to coaching, or perhaps in their coaching behaviors, exhibited manipulative tendencies that broke trust during conversations that should have been transformative.

This was exemplified most clearly when coaches used qualifiers when expressing their support of coaching. Instead of predicted words of full support of the coaching paradigm, coaches used qualifying and conditional words during their interviews such as, "when coaching is done correctly" and "when coaching is authentic". Mrs. Jones used the phrase, "If a coach is sincere…" to convey her mistrust of some of the conversations in which she participated. These qualifiers imply that coaching conversations had undercurrents that teacher leaders sensed and responded to. It is in that nebulous space of trust and fear that coaching conversations should build strong bridges.

These instances display concerns about the sincerity and authenticity of the conversations. Participants seemed to fear the purpose of conversations and attempted to address their concerns with stipulations about how the coaching process is used. When relational threat replaced trust and conversations didn't feel authentic, these dysfunctional conversations undermined the ultimate goals of the coaching implementation. After some of the coaching conversations, the participants walked away feeling manipulated and led. They felt as if the decisions to be discussed had already been made and their opinions should not have been asked. Mrs. Gentry, teacher leader, discussed this phenomena stating, "There have been times where we have felt as though we were being led. Like the line of questioning was more like the skill a police detective might use when they're trying to get you maybe to admit to something."

Coaches had used coaching language, and told the participants it was a coaching conversation. However, the participants revealed their impression that the coaches leading the conversation already had an idea in place. This was clear when a coach that led a failed meeting was a participant in the study said, "I would have an idea for something…guiding them, asking right questions, and then we came up with the solution together." This coach believed they were both coaching well and guiding people to an answer. This is an inherent contradiction. Although this participant was ignorant to it, a tension developed when participants felt led to preordained outcomes. When school leaders used the conversation to apply subtle pressure toward compliance, participants felt forced and manipulated. Based on participant responses, these misuses of conversation hurt relational trust.

When coaching rules were broken, conversations felt forced to the participants and created a breakdown in both trust and coaching buy in. Mrs. Gentry summarized her thoughts, stating, "The end that's presented isn't necessarily what your conclusion might have been, or the groups' consensus. You feel like you're being…moved along a predetermined path as opposed to being able to explore all of the options." Some coaches lost trust in the coaching process when conversations had pre-ordained outcomes. This raises the concern that coaching carries potential for developing great trust, but false or manipulative or leading behaviors in conversations can abruptly end some coaches' willingness to participate in the coaching process or their desire to create relational trust.

Relationships

The importance of relationships in coaching was accentuated by all participants. Mrs. Smith said, "When you have to have a conversation with someone about…a conflict, a change…if you do it in a coaching way versus a demanding, telling that you're wrong way, it builds that relationship. It makes you start working stronger together." Mrs. Central, who works at the district level agreed, "There's a lot less drama…following the coach-leader mindset…when there's a true issue you go to one another….If I was having an issue with you and…didn't feel confident at that moment to go directly to you it keeps everything professional." Strong relationships between individuals have been proven to be important to school success. Reiss (2009) found that when school and district leaders acquire and utilize coaching skills, "students, teachers, and other staff will feel acknowledged, hopeful, and positive. They will be heard and respected as they observe their own performance and results on the job and explore ways to improve them" (p. 177). When asked about team member relationships, a teacher leader commented, "The way we interact and talk to each other has definitely changed in a positive way." An assistant principal mentioned, "it is now a safe and comfortable environment." These improved relationships were perceived by all coaches in the study.

A department chair reflected, "When you have a team that is rich in good listeners—those who have the ability to reflect on the situation—that impacts the team in an amazing way." Mrs. Jones articulated how her thinking changed and how she began to examine how words would impact the person: "Instead of asking, 'Did you do that?' I might think about it and say, 'When you did that, did you?' I don't just try to be fast. Now, I'm intentional about relationships."

Difficult Conversations

The implementation of coaching allowed the administrators and coaches to replace personal biases with objectivity during difficult conversations. Coaches perceived that, as a result of coaching, their conversations were elevated. They were able to debate while deemphasizing their personal emotions. In some cases, this allowed for the creation of a work environment that was warm and valued everyone's opinion.

Team Leaders were often asked to have difficult conversations in the teams they led. Mr. Bowman was often in the position of leading difficult meetings. Leading does not need to be, in the words of Mr. Bowman, "my way or the highway." Rather, the coach or coachee can "see the other person's side...don't just say, 'this is what it's going to be.'" Further, when coaches were willing to take on difficult conversations and invest time in addressing issues, coaches felt empowered.

Successful difficult conversations can also occur between larger groups. disclosed, "I have seen it improve relationships where maybe it's not one-on-one coaching, but maybe two people and you help them both see and understand what each other is thinking and feeling." Removing personal bias and deemphasizing oneself were important elements of the successful navigation of difficult conversations. Mr. Bowman reflected that before coaching was implemented, "I honestly thought the conversations were about *me*. What am *I* going to say next? What's *my* next thought...I was always trying to stay one step ahead of you...as to my response or my reply." Mrs. Matthew leads a team of elementary teachers and also shared the impact of coaching: "but coaching has given me tools to hear what you say and listen to what you say and not think about what *I* have to say, but think about the situation that *you're* sharing."

By removing personal bias and focusing on what the other person thinks, coaching conversations can help develop a deep relationship out of conflict or tension. Mrs. Wessex shared, "When you put that mirror in front of you sometimes you kind of want to push it away… but it feels so good that...somebody that really understands the depth of what you went through." Other coaches felt coaching through difficult conversations developed respect. An assistant principal, Mr. Ryan, posited about the importance of respect: "sometimes you're having to talk to other people about something that may be difficult for them...and you don't want to hurt anyone's feelings. Coaching really takes that emotion to the side and it really helps you talk about it." Mr. Jones shared, "at times you have to make yourself vulnerable because that's when we grow the most— from those awkward and uncomfortable situations. If team members can do that, it can make a huge difference for the kids."

Discussion and Implications

Coaching as professional development is a powerful vehicle for transformation of conversations, teachers, and leaders (Showers & Joyce, 1996). When the school district chosen for the study planned their coaching initiative, they envisioned a self-perpetuating change process as Joyce and Showers (1996) purported. The coaches who participated in the study did feel that the training and coaching they used created change and improved practices. When relational trust

was in place, the process became self-perpetuating because coaches had transformational conversations.

Several implications for practice can be addressed. The first implication should be a change in the amount of time devoted to coaching. Coaching is not a quick fix (Knight, 2009). Several coaches in the study mentioned the amount of time that it takes to have one on one conversations with teachers. When coaching in teams or to improve instruction, planning meetings and team conversations take time. Often, coaches are faced with the option to give a quick piece of advice rather than spend time in metacognition.

As management changes from a dictatorial to a collegial model, leaders must understand the difference in the amount of time decisions take. Administrators should provide time for additional conversations, including budget funds to cover team planning when needed.

A second implication to improve practice includes providing opportunities for teachers to interact with paid professional coaches. When coach training is only done by new coaches or by peers learning the process, the training can become somewhat filtered. By allowing teacher leaders to interact with professional coaches, coaching improvement can be made quickly. Further, using an outside coaching consultant as the main source of coach training protects the line between evaluating and coaching. When the district attempted to save money by having coaches train their peers, some of the coaching expertise and language was lost. Therefore, resources should be provided to allow a coaching consultant to directly train teachers.

The implementation of coaching allowed administrators and teachers to replace personal biases with objectivity during difficult conversations. This elevated the conversations and positively affected school climate and collegiality. Further, trust was developed between coaches and coachees during the coaching implementation.

Instructional decisions saw only a rudimentary impact. This could be improved by ensuring a stated focus for coaching of student success and instructional impact. Teacher leaders did not perceive a link between coaching as professional development and student achievement. Clarifying the link between the two would have enhanced instructional practice. Further, coaching conversations would be professionally based and focus on professional content.

Lastly, if the district requires adherence to a curriculum initiative, leaders should not pretend to *coach* through teachers' concerns. Pretending that teachers have a choice, when in fact they do not, does not create buy-in to district initiatives or encourage teachers to trust the leadership.

Conclusion

Coaching is meant to improve practice through reflective metacognition, increased organizational trust, and shared decision making. Coaching as professional development has the potential to positively affect student outcomes. In the current study, teacher leaders revealed that coach training improved trust and collegiality, but instructional improvement only occurred on a rudimentary level. Coaching professional development allowed coaches to navigate difficult conversations in a positive manner by removing emotions and personal bias. Conversations

became somewhat elevated with more positive outcomes, however, leadership practices and teaching outcomes did not obtain the standards aimed for by the coaching consultant. Although some teacher leaders perceived a shift toward greater shared leadership, most did not feel more empowered following the coaching professional development implementation.

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School Administrators as Instructional Coaches: Teachers' Trust and Perceptions of Administrators' Capacity

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As the Texas Education Agency (TEA) rolls out the state-wide implementation of the new teacher evaluation system, thousands of Texas school administrators have completed the required training and have become certified appraisers under the new Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS). During the state training, participants are challenged to serve as change agents in leading the shift in thinking about teacher evaluations to embrace a teacher growth model with an instructional supervision platform. Studies have indeed found that school principals who are involved in instructional supervision have a positive impact on test scores, including a constant improvement in scores at schools with an increasingly high percentage of economically disadvantaged students (Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007). T-TESS provides educators a tool that has the potential to significantly impact the quality of instruction in Texas classrooms, and ultimately student achievement.

Statement of the Problem

While the Agency's message is clear and the intent of T-TESS aligns with research that has shown instructional supervision can positively impact teaching and student achievement, the level of trust of teachers in a process that is new to Texas educators, ought to be explored and considered by school leaders. It would naïve to believe that the two decades under the Professional Developmental and Appraisal System (PDAS), a compliance evaluation system that was widely used as a way to document and removed ineffective teachers, has not influenced teachers' perspective and their trust in their administrators to serve as instructional supervisors. Hence, the current study aims to create an awareness among practitioners, scholars, and aspiring school leaders about the reality faced by educators as they implement a system that requires school administrators to serve as both evaluator and instructional supervisor. The data and findings shared in this manuscript are part of a larger study. The study aims to answer two research questions: (1) To what degree do teachers believe their administrators have the skills to serve as instructional coaches? (2) What is the level of trust teachers have in their campus administrators as evaluators and instructional coaches?

Theoretical Framework

The Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) requires that school administrators use observation data to engage teachers in conversations about the observed lessons and their instructional practices. The observation cycle embedded in T-TESS mirrors what scholars have defined as instructional supervision - a process through which educators engage in discourse about instruction for the purpose of enhancing teaching and learning (Glanz & Neville, 1997;

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Glickman, Gordon & Ross-Gordon,2014; Goldhammer,1969; Nolan & Hoover, 2011; Sullivan & Glanz, 2009). However, T-TESS also requires that the administrator rate the lessons they observe using the T-TESS rubric. Supervision and evaluation are fundamentally different; notwithstanding, T-TESS requires that administrators lead both processes simultaneously. Evaluation is the process through which the appraiser, generally a school administrator trained and certified to conduct evaluations, rates or grades the effectiveness of the observed lesson (Nolan & Hoover, 2011). While the findings of study reported in this article do not address the conflict between these two processes, it is important to differentiate between the two to begin to understand issues of trust and teachers' perceptions regarding their administrators' capacity to serve as instructional supervisors when they have generally served as evaluators.

Instructional Leadership

Educators across the United States are witnessing a continuous shift in expectations; instructional leadership is increasingly considered the primary role of school principals (Fullan, 2014; Stronge, Richard & Catano, 2008). With the simultaneous implementation of T-TESS and the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System (T-PESS), TEA has sent a clear message that instructional leadership is valued and the responsibility of Texas school leaders. The Agency's expectations as outlined in the teacher and principal evaluation systems are aligned to the current literature. Research has shown that "the principal is second only to the teacher in terms of impact on student" (Leithwood, SeashoreLouis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004, p. 5) and those that engage in instructional supervision have a positive impact on student achievement (Glanz, Shulman & Sullivan, 2007). However, some school administrators lack the knowledge and confidence in their skills to serve as instructional leaders (Wright, 2015). Campus principals' abilities to serve as instructional leaders is key to the success of teachers and ultimately students. For principals to effectively serve as the campus instructional supervisors, not only do they have to possess the curricular and instructional knowledge and skills, they must possess the skills to communicate effectively, build relationships, and earn their faculty's trust and respect (Knight, 2007).

Instructional Coaching

Jim Knight (2007) defines an instructional coach as a person whose responsibility is to develop teachers professionally by helping them implement instructional best practices while focusing on the individual's professional goals (p. 12-13). Knight's theoretical foundation for instructional coaching include seven principles: "equality, choice, voice, dialogue, reflection, praxis and reciprocity" (Knight, 2007, p. 53). He identified skills key to the success of an instructional coach including communication skills, relationship building, and the ability to facilitate teachers' reflection about their instruction (Knight, 2007). Instructional coaches must build relationships with teachers to ensure the instructional discourse is based on high expectations and honest feedback (Knight, 2007). Furthermore, it is important to define the scope of the knowledge and background of the instructional coaches. Instructional coaches are not curriculum experts but rather have a strong understanding of instructional best practices that transcend content areas. Based on Knight's work, his definition of instructional coaching, and the expectations set forth in T-TESS and T-PESS, Texas school administrators are expected to serve as instructional coaches or supervisors.

Trust

In addition to the principles identified by Knight (2007), relationships and trust are key to the success of instructional coaching. "Relational trust refers to the interpersonal social exchanges that take place in a group setting" (EL Education, n.d.) and "is grounded in the social respect that comes from the kind of social discourse that takes place across the school community" (Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Schools with strong sense of relational trust foster collaboration and promote the faculty's willingness to grow professionally (Cranston, 2011). Without relational trust between teachers and administrators, it will be difficult to establish instructional supervision that is effective and impacts the teachers' practices. Trust is considered a precondition for those looking to improve their schools (Cranston, 2011).

Methods

A quantitative study was conducted in order to answer the research questions: (1) To what degree do teachers believe their administrators have the skills to serve as instructional coaches? (2) What is the level of trust teachers have in their campus administrators as evaluators and instructional coaches? An anonymous survey was distributed to teachers at randomly chosen Texas school districts. A survey was chosen as the method to gather data for this study given what are considered strengths of surveys, such as the convenience, ease to access data about sensitive issues, generalizability and accuracy of the data (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). By deciding to survey teachers, this researcher has made the assumption that teachers' perceptions and level of trust "can be described or measured accurately through self-report" (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 129).

In order to ascertain the validity of the survey, a pilot study was conducted. The pilot survey was completed and submitted by 27 Texas teachers. To ensure construct validity, the pilot participants answered open-ended questions and provided feedback to ensure the items were measuring what they intended to measure – teachers' perceptions about administrators' capacity and the teachers' level of trust in their school leaders. Additionally, in an effort to increase the reliability of the data, different items related to the same construct were included in the survey.

The survey, distributed and analyzed using Qualtrics, consists of 14 items focused on the teachers' perceptions of capacity and their level of trust in campus principals and assistant principals separately. Each participant was asked to complete the 14 items for up to three school administrators. Teachers rated, on 4-point scale, their administrators' skills to lead the instructional coaching process including: teacher goal setting, instructional coaching, observation data collection, and professional development planning. Teachers also rated, on a 4-point scale, their level of trust in their administrators to lead each of the processes embedded in the instructional supervision process. When teachers rated their level of trust at a one, two or three, they were to asked explain the reservations that keep them from trusting their principals as instructional coaches.

Additionally, the survey included eight items aimed at gathering the participants' and their administrators' demographic data. The data collected includes the participants' gender, level of school (elementary, middle or high), years of teaching experience, the gender of the participants'

principals, years of teaching and administrative experience of the campus principals. Participants were also asked to indicated which teacher appraisal systems their school districts used in 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 (PDAS, T-TESS or a district developed system). Only the survey items focused on goal setting and instructional coaching, and the differences in the responses of teachers with and without prior experiences with T-TESS are explored in this manuscript.

Data Analysis

To determine the differences between the measures of trust and perceptions of administrators' capacity, Qualtrics was used to run the descriptive statistics. The mean scores and percentages of the different measures were compared. The initial data analysis focused on the ratings for administrators as a whole, combining the principals' and assistant principals' data. Data was also disaggregated to compare the mean scores and percentages of teachers with prior experience with T-TESS and those with no prior experience with the instrument. While the descriptive statistics provide a glimpse into teachers' perceptions, the data does not allow the researcher to determine the reasons for the differences between the teachers' ratings of the administrators' capacity and their levels of trust in the administrators.

Results

During the first two distributions of the teacher survey, 198 teachers completed and submitted the survey. Each participant had the opportunity to answer the questions multiple times, focused on their principals and assistant principals separately. When analyzing the data, the principal and assistant principals' data was combined; 198 participants rated their perception of the administrators' skills and their level of trust in 363 school principals and assistant principals. The descriptive statistics data for the teachers' surveys are presented in Tables 1 and 3.

Teachers' Perceptions of Administrators' Capacity

Table 1. **Descriptive Statistics – Teachers' Rating of Principals' Skills**

On a scale of 1 to 4, teachers' ratings of their administrator's skills to lead each of the steps in the instructional coaching process.

School Administrators	n	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Teacher Goal Setting	363	3.0	0.97	0.95
Instructional Coaching	363	2.78	1.09	1.18

4 representing "highly skilled" and 1 being "not skilled" to lead the process

Teachers rated their administrators' capacity to lead each of the instructional supervision processes using a 4-point scale where one (1) represents that they believe their administrators were not skilled to led the process and four (4) represents that the administrators were highly skilled. Teachers reported having the most confidence in the administrators' capacity to lead the goal setting process (M=3.0, s.d.=0.97). For the purpose of the study, goal setting was defined as the process through which a campus administrator guides teachers to set professional growth goals that improve their instruction and have a positive impact on student learning. Teachers

reported the least confidence in the administrators' capacity to lead instructional coaching (M=2.78, s.d.=1.09). On the survey, instructional coaching was defined as individual meetings in which the administrator meets with a teacher to discuss an observed lesson. The administrator guides the discussion by posing reflective questions, based on the observation, and provide instructional suggestions to help the teacher refine his or her craft.

Given the variance reported in Table 1 data (0.95 and 1.18) in a 4-point scale, the raw data was analyzed in an effort to further understand the teachers' ratings of their administrators' skills to lead the instructional supervision processes. Upon looking at the data raw, 38% of the administrators were rated as "highly skilled" to lead instructional coaching, with a mean score of 2.78, while 37% rated their administrators as "highly skilled" to lead the teacher goal setting process, with a mean score of 3.0. The data was then grouped into two subsets: the lower ratings of the administrators' skills (ratings of 1 and 2) compared to the higher ratings (ratings of 3 and 4). The majority of the school administrators were rated as "skilled" or "highly skilled"; 72% of administrators were rated as "skilled" or "highly skilled" to lead the teacher goal setting process and 69% were rated as "skilled" or "highly skilled" to lead instructional coaching.

Further data analysis was conducted based on various demographic data points. When the data was disaggregated by teachers who participated in T-TESS pilot and those that had no prior experience with T-TESS, the analysis reveals a significant difference in the teachers' perceptions. The teachers who participated in the T-TESS pilot rated their administrators' skills to lead the different processes at a higher rate than those who had no prior experience with T-TESS. Table 2 presents the data.

Table 2. **Teachers' Rating of Principals' Skills – Prior vs. No Experience with T-TESS**

	T-TESS experience		No T-TESS experience	
Ratings	**1 & 2**	**3 & 4**	**1 & 2**	**3 & 4**
Teacher Goal Setting	17%	83%	34%	66%
Instructional Coaching	19%	81%	45%	55%

4 representing "highly skilled" and 1 being "not skilled" to lead the process

Teachers' Trust

Table 3. **Descriptive Statistics - Teachers' Trust Measure**

On a scale of 1 to 4, teachers' ratings of their trust in their administrators to lead the instructional coaching process.

School Administrators	*n*	Mean	Standard Deviation	Variance
Teacher Goal Setting	363	2.90	1.16	1.34
Instructional Coaching	363	2.73	1.18	1.40

4 representing "completely trust" and 1 being "do not trust"

Teachers rated their trust in their administrators to lead each of the processes embedded in T-TESS. The teachers' level of trust was consistent across the targeted processes. The analysis of the raw data provides additional information regarding teachers' level of trust in their administrators as instructional supervisors. Forty-five percent (45%) of teachers indicated that

they "completely trust" their administrators to lead the teacher goal setting process while 39% "completely trust" their administrators to lead instructional coaching. When the highest level of trust (4) data is combined with those who rated their trust at a level 3, there is a significant increase in the percentage of teachers who trust their administrators. The trust levels are lower than the teachers' perceptions of their administrators' skills to lead the instructional coaching processes. When the two highest level of trust are combined the trust percentages are: 62% trust in the administrators to lead goal setting and 56% trust administrators to lead instructional coaching. Similar to the teachers' rating of their administrators' skills, trust levels among teachers who had experience with T-TESS prior to the study are higher than trust levels among those who had no prior experience with T-TESS. Table 4 compares trust levels among teachers with and without prior exposure to the T-TESS supervision cycle.

Table 4. **Teachers' Trust – Prior vs. No Experience with T-TESS**

| | T-TESS experience | | No T-TESS experience | |
Ratings	1 & 2	3 & 4	1 & 2	3 & 4
Teacher Goal Setting	22%	78%	41%	59%
Instructional Coaching	24%	76%	50%	50%

4 representing "completely trust" and 1 being "do not trust"

When teachers were asked to explain why they do not trust or trust but have reservations about their administrators leading the instructional coaching processes, teachers reported that "a principal's abilities to lead in the instructional process is limited based on their experiences" while others indicated that their administrators are seldom in their classrooms and unaware of what is going on in the classrooms on a daily basis. Others reported that their principals do not have enough experience in the content areas to accurately provide feedback, which leads to very generic suggestions. Another participant shared, "I trust my current administrator but I still have PDAS PTSD from bad administrators. I feel the system is very flawed and designed to punish not really improve anything." The lack of time, consistency and a sense of favoritism were also repeatedly cited as reasons for reservations or the lack of trust.

Discussion

The data analyzed for this manuscript provides scholars, practitioners and aspiring principals with a small window into the reality faced by school administrators as they implement T-TESS. The differences in the ratings among teachers who have experienced instructional coaching and those who have not is not surprising; research has shown that effective instructional coaching can positively impact teachers' practices. However, regardless of the positive outlook given by the previously mentioned differences, one cannot dismiss the number of teachers who expressed a lack of trust in their administrators' skills to lead the instructional supervision process. While teachers were asked to explain their trust ratings, they were not asked to explain the difference between their rating of the administrators' skills and their trust in their administrators to lead instructional supervision. It will be important to explore the issues that can potentially explain the discrepancy between the skills ratings and the trust level, 69% of teachers perceived their administrators as "skilled" or "highly skilled" to lead instructional coaching but only 56% expressed that they "trust" or "completely trust" the administrators to lead the same process. Similarly, 72% rated their administrators as "skilled" or "highly skilled" in leading the goal

setting process but only 62% rated their trust level at 3 or 4. The difference between teachers' trust and their perceptions of the administrators' skills must also be explored. Administrators and aspiring principals must be conscious of the impact these issues might have on their efforts to serve as instructional supervisors.

Based on the teachers' comments, it appears that teachers recognize what many consider the biggest challenge in implementation of T-TESS, the administrators' apparent lack of commitment to consistently visit classrooms with the goal of providing teachers with meaningful feedback. Research has shown that principals who are highly effective in promoting teacher growth conduct brief unannounced classroom observations on a weekly basis followed by specific feedback (The Wallace Foundation, 2013). The teachers in this study reported experiencing the opposite; no constructive feedback and a lack of administrators' presence in the classrooms. Campus leaders have many responsibilities to juggle. The implementation of an instructional coaching model as the state teacher appraisal system requires administrators to make the commitment to find the time to be in the classrooms and most importantly take the time to provide meaningful, timely feedback to their teachers.

Moreover, as principal preparation programs engage in continuous improvement efforts, it is imperative that they scrutinize their current practices to develop aspiring principals' instructional supervision skills to improve teachers' trust in their administrators and the instructional supervision process. TEA has provided Texas educators with a system that has the potential to positively impact student achievement; however, the system will become a compliance piece, as PDAS did, if school leaders lack the instructional skills and the commitment to maximize the impact of T-TESS. Ultimately, it will take the administrators' commitment to building their capacity and establishing trusting relationship for the process to have the impact on teaching and learning that research has shown instructional coaching can have.

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The Persistence and Attrition of Online Learners

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Student retention is a growing concern as more university programs move toward online learning. With a continual increase in online program choices, it is important to recognize course elements that affect the success of online learners (Kane, Shaw, Pang, Salley, & Snider, 2015). University professors need strategies to provide assistance for students and to decrease the number of students who fail to progress in online programs. It is important that faculty support students, but just as important that universities provide time, opportunities, and resources for such support to occur.

Classes taught using online delivery methods can lead to challenges for both teachers and learners (Howell, Williams, & Lindsay, 2003). As many colleges have described high attrition rates for students in distance education programs (Nash, 2005), universities are seeking ways to reduce attrition. According to Angelino, Williams, and Natvig (2007), it is paramount to engage students early and to sustain their engagement.

Study participants were students enrolled in a university's newly developed online doctoral program in Educational Leadership. The study was developed in response to approximately a dozen students who exited the program during their first year of coursework and who alluded to time and family situations as reasons for their departure. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to explore doctoral students' perceptions of work, university, and patterns of familial support that contributed to students' choice to remain continuously enrolled in the online degree program. Also examined were other supports not received that the students believed would have helped them achieve additional success. The research questions included: a) Why did the students seek to pursue an online doctoral degree program? b) What university and personal (non-university) supports did the students experience during the pursuit of their doctoral degree? c) What was the students' perceived impact of the supports? d) What challenges did the students experience during the pursuit of their degree?

Literature Review

Students often balance demanding jobs, family commitments, and financial obligations. A search for convenience and flexibility can lead students to online learning. Radda (2012) posited, "Demands of the modern workforce, coupled with rapid advances in educational technology, have created a new paradigm of doctoral learning" (p. 50). Personal and university-based supports can contribute to student success. Angelino et al. (2007) described the need for educators to create a "framework for engaging the distance learner with the goal

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of increasing persistence" (p. 8) by encouraging collaboration and the development of relationships and working together to increase the knowledge base.

Effective instruction must be at the crux of instructional endeavors (Crews, Wilkinson, & Neill, 2015). It is important that faculty of online programs exhibit effective teaching and organizational skills and be willing to cooperate with and receive support from other university units that assist online learners (Kumar, Dawson, Black, Cavanaugh, & Sessums, 2011). Communication is critical in online learning. Knowledge is acquired through a "synthesis of social experiences that occur in the learning environment" (Rausch & Crawford, 2012, p. 176).

Another issue exists in terms of faculty load. According to Singleton and Session (2011), "a common barrier to delivering instruction for nontraditional courses is that there seems to be a blurred line in regard to what is actually considered a reasonable teaching load, especially as it pertains to nontraditional doctoral instruction delivered online" (p. 37). Online doctoral programs are often larger in size; programs of such size frequently depend on part-time faculty members who also are employed at other universities. An overreliance on part-time faculty can lead to challenges with timeliness of responses to students and issues with directing student research (Jones, Kupczynski, & Marshall, 2011).

Technology is a prevalent part of course delivery (Crews et al., 2015), but students must be aware that technology is only a tool. Parkes, Stein, and Reading (2014) found that many students are prepared for the technology of online environments, but are not as prepared to read and write critically.

Accessibility to doctoral programs has increased. Archbald (2011) stated, "Students can enter doctoral study without residency requirements, without facing hundreds of hours of annual commuting, and without quitting their jobs or relocating. The barriers, costs, and risks associated with the decision to pursue doctoral study have substantially diminished" (p. 13). Although many students stay enrolled in online courses, others experience attrition (Bowden, 2008). Gomez (2013) wrote that many administrators worry about being able to predict early students' risk of dropping out.

Many researchers have examined the impact of online instruction. Few researchers, however, have explored how online education has affected doctoral programs (Jones et al., 2011) and specifically the direct impact on students.

Theoretical Framework

Andragogy provides a theoretical framework for adult learning. Students are offered choice and flexibility (Knowles, 1984); experiences of the learner are a fundamental element of andragogy as "students learn what is worthwhile in their own, real-life application" (Baird & Fisher, 2005/2006, p. 7). The students in this study were expected to take active roles in their learning. The program faculty offered students forums to express their needs as well as flexibility in scheduling.

Andragogy can help to "recognize and articulate the needs of adult learners in an online learning environment" (Boyette, 2008, p. 5). The program allowed for some student choice in the pace of the course sequence. Students were allowed choices in scheduling, could take fewer courses at a time than were recommended, were allowed to change between dissertation advisors, and were able to take certification courses as electives.

Methods

The qualitative tradition of non-transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) was utilized to examine participants' perceptions of their experiences of online learning. The purpose of this study was to examine online doctoral students' perceptions of support that contributed to their choice to remain continuously enrolled in the degree program. I worked to recall my experiences with online learning during the epoche process in order to set aside judgments and perceptions before interacting with the participants.

Responses to open-ended questions were collected in an effort to help account for the reasons for student persistence and attrition in an attempt to find ways to help decrease the number of students who fail to progress in the program and to determine what interventions might assist other learners in their pursuit of program success. Research questions centered on students' reasons to purse an online doctoral degree program, the supports they experienced during the pursuit of their degree, their perceived impact of the supports, and the challenges they experienced during the pursuit of their degree.

An interview protocol was created; three individuals who each had at least five years of online learning experience assisted in ensuring that the questions were appropriate. The individuals examined the questions for clarity and verified that the questions did not appear to lead the participants to respond in certain ways. Ten open-ended interview questions and a short demographic questionnaire were used to collect data from 75 doctoral students enrolled in an online doctoral program at one university. The students represented two cohorts of doctoral students. All students in the two cohorts were invited to respond.

The open-ended questions included prompts pertaining to whether the participants had considered leaving the program (and, if so, why), university-based supports, reasons for pursuing a doctoral degree, and why the participants pursued an online degree specifically. The participants were asked to share about assistance they had received from others in their personal lives and about areas in which additional help was needed. Demographic data collected pertained to participants' educational background and past and current employment.

Value was assigned to participants' statements and significant statements were identified. The statements were clustered into units and themes. A description of the individuals' experiences was built; the textual-structural description that emerged exemplified the essence of the experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Results

Participants contemplate multiple issues as they make decisions regarding their options for doctoral programs and universities, but officials may not know what led the participants to choose their universities over another (Jorissen, Keen, & Riedel, 2015). Three-fourths of participants in this study shared that they chose to apply for the online program because they believed the program would fit into their work and family schedules and require less travel than traditional programs. Themes that emerged from the data included: a) professor support was vital to student success, but students perceived a lack of professor empathy; b) support of family and co-workers was helpful, but students exhibited guilt when they could not fulfill the responsibilities with which their supporters assisted; and c) students sought an online, concentrated program, but missed the traditional elements of face-to-face programs.

Of the 75 participants, 37 were current or retired school administrators. More respondents had experience in the campus principalship than in any other profession represented. Almost half of the participants had earned an education-related bachelor's degree; just over half had earned a master's degree in Educational Leadership. The majority of participants sought the doctoral degree for school administration promotion opportunities or to support their goal of entering the professoriate.

When asked to select as many reasons as applied to why they sought admission to an online program specifically, 63 participants responded that flexibility was a factor in selecting an online program; 56 cited work schedule as a factor. Additionally, 43 participants responded that they favored an online program because it required less travel compared to a traditional program. Alignment with family schedules was also a factor in selecting an online program for 43 of the participants.

Faculty Members: The Best University-Based Support

Participants were asked about the best university-based supports they were provided. The support most often mentioned by students who held a master's degree in Educational Leadership was help from instructors and advisors. Two-thirds of the participants who did not hold the leadership degree shared that instructors and advisors were their biggest university-based support.

A specialist with a non-Educational Leadership degree shared that he considered dropping out during his first term, but his professors convinced him to stay. A principal participant with a master's degree in a non-education field discussed her professors' effective organization skills: "each has a way of doing things, but everyone is easy to follow regarding organizational skills." A participant who was a teacher with a degree in a non-Educational Leadership field shared that the best supports of the doctoral program were the positive encouragement of professors and professors' prompt responses.

Five of the 75 participants who had Educational Leadership degrees stated that they were assisted by no university-based supports, compared with one non-Educational Leadership master's degree participant who felt similarly. Even though these numbers are low, they are disconcerting. Three participants who had earned an Educational Leadership degree shared that course colleagues were supportive; three non-Educational Leadership degree recipients felt likewise. "My cohort has created a Facebook group and we communicate through that," shared a teacher participant with a degree in Educational Leadership.

Five participants who had earned an Educational Leadership degree shared that communication from university office personnel was helpful. A principal participant with a degree in Educational Leadership stated, "The university support for the program has been wonderful. I have only needed assistance once, and the time spent resolving the issue was standard. The issue was resolved and the outcome positive."

Although almost all of the participants were complimentary of their professors overall, several shared areas in need of improvement. A school district director participant with a degree in Educational Leadership noted that the program helped him grow, but said that he experienced frustration with inconsistencies in information. A teacher participant with a non-Educational Leadership master's degree shared that many professors acted like that their class was the only one that participants were taking, "thereby making the workload cumbersome."

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Personal Supports

Participants shared that they were grateful to have family members and co-workers who provided supports that resulted in time for them to pursue doctoral studies, however many shared that they were conflicted by guilt for not fulfilling their perceived responsibilities. Participants shared that they were supported most by spouses or significant others, followed by children, parents, co-workers, and friends. They cited home responsibilities as the area in which they received the most assistance, followed by childcare, errands, and financial obligations.

Challenges shared by a specialist with a degree in Educational Leadership included finding time to complete assignments and struggles with family illness. An administrator participant with a non-Educational Leadership degree said that she felt overwhelmed by the combination of work, two small children, a husband who worked out of town, and the doctoral program requirements.

Challenges

Participants shared that they sought an online, concentrated program but that when their program began they missed the face-to-face interactions of a traditional program. A school district director participant with a non-Educational Leadership degree expressed frustration over the inability to speak with instructors. He stated that emails were not as helpful as face-to-face communication. A principal participant with a master's degree in Educational Leadership reported that he had contemplated changing to a traditional program and taking one class at a time because he did not feel like he was learning the material at the mastery level that his grades reflected. A principal participant with a degree in Educational Leadership said that she considered leaving the program weekly, due to course workload.

Struggles shared by a school district director participant with a degree in a non-Educational Leadership field centered on availability. The participant stated that it was difficult to get questions answered at a time when he was working on classes because it was after business hours and the university was closed. A principal participant with a degree in Educational Leadership said she struggled with not having enough time to read assignments as thoroughly as she would like. Another principal participant with the same degree expressed difficulty with working full-time and pursing the doctoral program.

Five participants with degrees in Educational Leadership said that they wanted more face-to-face time with instructors. Several participants with master's degrees in other fields discussed a need for additional information about professor expectations and requested face-to-face time with instructors. An assistant principal participant who had earned a master's degree in Educational Leadership shared,

> A few professors have been extremely supportive and helpful. Others have been nit-picky, demanding, and unforgiving of the working professionals they are teaching. I wonder if they forget some of their students run entire districts and may not be able to post a discussion board response to a hypothetical situation they have already actually dealt with during a hectic week.

A principal participant with a degree in Educational Leadership requested more guidance from her advisor. She stated, "He is always available when I ask questions, but I don't feel like the staff knows me individually, as I did during my undergraduate and master's work."

Attrition Contemplations

Participants were asked about their thoughts on staying in or exiting their doctoral program. Twenty of the participants with a degree in Educational Leadership shared that they never had contemplated exiting the program. Of those 25 participants who had considered exiting, 14 cited lack of time and workload as issues. Four shared problems with professor communication and assistance.

Similarly, half of the participants with degrees in non-Educational Leadership fields shared that they had never considered exiting the program. Six participants who considered leaving the program cited issues with time and workload; another 5 shared issues with professor communication and assistance. A teacher participant with a master's degree in education stated,

> I have not considered leaving the doctoral program; however, it has been extremely challenging journey (sic). The amount of reading, researching, and time committed to completing my assignments always seem to overwhelm me on a weekly basis. This stress added to my home responsibilities of raising [children], cooking, cleaning, sports/cub scouts, and work. . .all add to the stress I battle everyday.

Family and work obligations were cited as factors that led to participants' consideration of dropping out of the program. A specialist with a non-Educational Leadership degree shared that dropping out was contemplated, "Only during the first 7 weeks. The pace and workload was intense and I was not sure I could do it. Thank goodness I had professors that said, 'Hang in there!'"

Those who stated that they had not considered dropping out were adamant in their declarations. "I am doing this for me and I am worth it," stated a teacher participant with a non-Educational Leadership degree. "I've not considered leaving because I can't stand the thought of quitting. I have wondered if the stress is worth it," shared a principal participant with a degree in Educational Leadership.

Eighteen of the 37 administrator participants shared that they had never considering leaving the doctoral program prior to graduation. Of the 19 who had contemplated quitting, 14 shared that time and workload issues came into play. Four shared issues with professor communication and assistance and one noted general stress issues. Of the 25 participants who did not serve in school administration positions, 17 had never considered quitting. Just like the group of administrators, the group of individuals not serving in administrative roles who considered quitting cited problems with time and workload (6) and professor communication and assistance (4). Two members of the group shared challenges they had faced with registration.

Discussion

The participants shared that they chose to pursue an online program due to the program's flexibility. The students were expected to take actives roles in their learning such as communicating needs to professors, planning their time appropriately, choosing a dissertation advisor, and deciding on the pace at which to take courses; such active roles are characteristic of the theory of andragogy (Baird & Fisher, 2005/2006).

Participants in the study were expected to enter their doctoral program with background knowledge from their previous employment and education experiences. During recruitment, the experience and degree in the field requirements were lifted for some student cohort groups, therefore several individuals did not have such past experiences. Therefore, due to a possible lack of prior content knowledge and in order to fill the gaps in the experience that they lacked, students with fewer life and educational experiences may have had to take a more active role in their learning than other students who had life and educational experiences that related to the learning.

The essence of the participants' experiences centered on support from others. While most of the participants indicated that they were pleased with the support that they received, others craved additional support. Participants' most prevalent perceived university support centered on assistance from instructors and advisors. They requested additional communication with faculty and increased familial and work support; ironically, multiple students mentioned the lack of face-to-face instruction in the online program.

Most of the students pursuing online doctoral degrees in the Educational Leadership Program sought the degree in order to move up in school administration or to pursue higher education teaching. Participants shared that the program's online format fit their work and family schedules and required less travel than traditional programs. Singleton and Session (2011) posited that students "pursuing nontraditional doctoral degrees are older working professionals looking for flexible education options. These students are actively engaged in their family and work life, so they seek nontraditional doctoral programs that are tailored to meet their individual education needs" (p. 37). Jones et al. (2011) wrote, "The asynchronous nature of many online courses enables students to attend and participate in their courses at their convenience subject to the needs of their individual schedule" (p. 14).

The needs of working learners impact the workload of the faculty. Singleton and Session (2011) posited, "Unlike traditional doctoral students, nontraditional students are balancing several responsibilities besides education that challenge faculty to adapt to the changing demands of this emerging student body and require authentic interaction" (p. 37).

The most prevalent theme of university support discussed by all of the participants was support from instructors and advisors. The participants perceived that spouses and significant others provided the most personal support, followed by children, parents, and friends. According to Hart (2012), the presence of family support can increase persistence while lack of it can decrease student persistence.

Five of the participants who held an Educational Leadership degree were assisted by no university-based supports; one student without the leadership degree felt like none of the supports offered to them were helpful. Cohort colleagues also were cited as helpful. Five

participants who had earned Educational Leadership degrees shared that they received assistance from communications with university office personnel.

A lack of time was the greatest challenge for the participants, followed by face-to-face time with instructors. Participants who had not earned an Educational Leadership degree needed additional information pertaining to professor expectations. Faculty members need to share expectations pertaining to the extent that the learning will require self-regulation (Gomez, 2013).

Approximately half of the participants in each degree group never considered leaving the doctoral program. Of those who did, time, workload, and professor communication and assistance were driving forces. Almost half of the school administrator participants had not considered quitting; those who did cited issues with time and workload, professor communication and assistance, and general stress.

Just over two-thirds of the participants not working in school leadership positions had never considered quitting the program; those who had contemplated exiting cited time and workload, professor communication and assistance, general stress issues, and registration struggles as factors. According to Jones et al. (2011),

> doctoral programs are designed to produce competent future members of the academic community. Students are viewed as both future colleagues and as skilled professionals. Therefore, there is a need to develop a strong sense of community that facilitates communications, higher order thinking and strong levels of interaction between faculty and students. (p. 15)

It was surprising that, proportionally, more participants serving in school administration roles considered leaving the program than did participants not serving as school leaders, but the difference was only slightly more. The work time required of the individuals in school administration positions may have affected this number.

Lack of empathy in relation to professors not taking participants' work and family schedules into account also emerged as a theme. In traditional courses, professors regularly see students in-person and can check the climate of the class and make adjustments, something that may have to be done in a non-traditional manner when courses are online. In doing so, professors may check the climate of the class and make adjustments, something that may be more difficult to do in online courses. The concerns about work and personal life were described by a central office administration with an Educational Leadership background who shared challenges with professors: "Teaching to the multiple learning styles and understanding that we have jobs while we are taking these courses."

A teacher participant with a non-Educational Leadership background shared concern about whether instructors would show empathy:

> I would love to finish the program in a reasonable amount of time, but I must confess that I've considered leaving the doctoral program when my books did not arrive in time for my first few assignments, when my internet is not working properly or not working at all, which hinders me from meeting my responsibilities in a timely manner and uncertainties flare as to whether the professor will understand or not.

Another teacher participant with a non-Educational Leadership master's degree shared, "professors may believe their class is the only one, thereby making the workload cumbersome."

An administrator participant with a non-Educational Leadership degree stated that the combination of "Working 40-50 hours a week, two small children. . .a husband who works out of town 40% of the week, and a doctoral program is overwhelming at times."

Implications for Practice

University professors need strategies to provide assistance to students in order to help to decrease the number of students who fail to progress in online programs. Faculty members need to be encouraged to communicate often with online students and to be provided with the technological tools necessary to facilitate the communication (Vai & Sosulski, 2015). It is important that faculty support students, but just as important that universities provide time, opportunities, and resources for such support to occur (Radda, 2012).

Communication should be encouraged among students and between students and faculty to develop relationships and increase students' sense of belonging. In their study of an online program, Aversa and MacCall (2013) found that cohorts of students were "encouraged to develop identities through activities such as developing their group's preferred method of networking and engaging in activities that set them apart from other cohorts" (p. 151).

A face-to-face orientation held before students begin a program can provide a forum in which faculty can advise new students to prepare their families, places of work, and finances for the time commitment of doctoral studies. Regardless of presentation format, students need information about program expectations and timelines. Students should be encouraged to follow benchmarks toward program completion and consider issues that may occur if they change employment positions during their program.

Writing requirements and assignment expectations should be discussed and writing style expectations should be shared. Students who are identified as lacking writing skills need intense intervention (if allowed to proceed). Follow-up discussion sessions need to be scheduled in advance, with additional optional sessions scheduled for students who need more assistance.

Special communication may be necessary for students such as the two participants who indicated that no individuals in their personal lives had provided support and no university-based supports had been assistive. Perhaps the two students were not in need of supports, but opportunities for communication should be offered in case the students have needs they wish to share with which the university may be able to assist.

University administrators should recognize the time required for instruction of doctoral students in online programs. Faculty should not be overloaded with service, courses, and advisees, thus freeing up time for more frequent interactions with online students. A staff member should be assigned to respond to student questions regarding registration and other non-advisement inquiries.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional reasons for student persistence and attrition need to be examined. Students need to be asked about the demands of their jobs, whether they changed jobs during their degree programs, and whether family commitments or financial obligations were altered during the pursuit of their degree. Several participants mentioned professors not believing that they were ill or hospitalized. It is recommended that an exploration of the responses for late and missing

assignments of online students be explored to determine if the validity of students' excuses changes when students in online courses are unable to look professors in the eyes and their explain reasons for absence or tardiness.

Another question that needs exploration is whether professors of online students feel free to share with students their opinions about the students' abilities. A specialist with a degree in Educational Leadership shared,

> This semester. . . .The professor was very harsh in her response and she actually suggested that I quit the class. This email response took a toll on me for some time but now I am not considering this as a solution.

Shared a teacher participant with an Educational Leadership background,

> I work full time and sometimes my school duties such as grades being due, night programs, and meetings all seem to happen when there is too much work due for the courses. . . .I am tired of all of the reflection papers that I have to write. I write so much that I don't have time to keep working on my literature review.

This begs the question of whether or not professors feel comfortable sharing with a student that perhaps it is not a good time for the student to be enrolled in a doctoral program.

Conclusion

Although many participants cited time and workload challenges, the program in which the participants were enrolled initially was marketed as a 2.5-year doctoral program during which time students would take up to four courses per semester. The workload requirements should not have been surprising to students; however, some students reported that they feel overwhelmed. As many participants expressed concern about assignments required for courses, an area of discussion among professors of online programs might be techniques for assisting prospective students determine whether their current career stage is conducive to the addition of doctoral study.

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