BUILDING TRUST: THE KEY TO PRINCIPAL TRANSITIONS

A disquisition presented to the faculty of the Graduate School of
Western Carolina University in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

By

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I have dreamed of being finished and writing this specific page for years. I am reminded of a belief that when our Head, Heart, Hands, and Heels are in alignment we have the capacity to do great things. And on this journey, I have needed people to support these different components of my growth at different times. It is the combination of each person and each component that has made this process one of transformation.

Thank you to those who kept my HEAD focused. I have had the honor of working with a group of professor at Western Carolina University that made this process unique and life changing. Dr. Dean Spaulding and Dr. Ann Allen, early in the process, you helped me to formulate my thinking and deeply understand what I wanted to accomplish. Dr. Angela Dills, you asked questions that helped me process how to defend my thinking. Dr. Robert Crow, you have always been so easy to talk to about my own fears and constantly reminded me to trust my own thinking. And my chair, Dr. Jess Weiler, you forced me to challenge my own thinking resulting in an outcome for myself that was greater than I ever envisioned. It is the interaction from these great minds that have led to far more learning then is captured in this paper.

Thank you to those who kept my HEART focused. My wife, Tiffany, was far more than a supportive spouse on this project. We sat on the edge of our couch and designed the first draft of conceptual thinking framework based on what we personally had experienced from great leaders. You kept me focused on the impact this work could have on students if I stayed the course. You protected my heart and reminded me of the power of a trusting relationship.

DEDICATION

The idea of transitions, trust, and relationships is shaped by our own past experiences. This work is dedicated to two of the finest in the education field that modeled the components. Principal Anna Austin, you did the work of creating change, and I got to observe and learn from each moment that you were vulnerable. I hope you read the outcomes and take pride in your dedication to your school. This disquisition is now part of your story of being a first-year principal.

The idea of completing a doctorate was spoken over me at age four when Ms. Lillian Fisher, a retired teacher in my hometown, started babysitting me. For decades, her language and daily interaction led me to believe I had the power to be a first-generation college student, that I had the power to break patterns of poverty, that I had the heart to bring equity to those who were forgotten. I dedicate this entire degree to your legacy because without your influence I would never have believed this in myself.

Like all educators, I have scars from transitions. Scars from relationships that were not rooted in trust. I hope this disquisition could prevent merely one scar for a future principal, teacher or student.

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING TRUST: THE KEY TO PRINCIPAL TRANSITIONS

Michael Armstrong, M.S.A.

Western Carolina University (March 2019)

Director: Dr. Jessica Weiler

Principals transitioning to a new school often struggle to build or sustain a positive school climate in the first 100 days, which can impede school progress and achievement. (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009). School systems and principals must prioritize successful transitions if they wish to prevent negative impacts to the school community. Using the dissertation in practice model, this paper details and analyzes an improvement initiative designed to enhance the principal transition process; an initiative focused on building trust between teachers and principals who are new to their school. The process was implemented and analyzed using the 90-day Cycle improvement research strategy (Park and Takahashi, 2013). This disquisition employed a case study design examining an induction program focused on building trust through the principal's attention to, and expression of, openness, benevolence, and competency (Tschannen-Moran and Gerias, 2015). Specific activities and the implementation process for these three domains are shared. The findings suggest that the induction program may have contributed positively to the teachers' feelings of trust for the new principal, as demonstrated by the teachers' reported perception of the principal as open, benevolent, and competent.

Disquisition at Western Carolina University

In the spring of 2014, I was in my third year as principal at a school with many challenges including those associated with poverty and academic underachievement. Our school had some successes during those years, but I continuously returned to the same questions: "How can we do better?", "How can we bring about significant and sustainable change to our students and our community?", Most importantly, "what do I need to do as a leader to affect change?" While I felt prepared for the role of principal, there was more I needed to learn about how to solve complex problems that I faced as a school leader. As a result, I enrolled in a doctoral program (Western Carolina University) to learn how to address complex problems using improvement science and traditional research methodologies.

This paper follows the format of a dissertation in practice, or, as defined by WCU faculty, a *disquisition*. A disquisition is a scholarly paper that follows a set format for a practitioner to solve a problem in their own organization. The WCU program was modeled after the highly esteemed Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate (CPED). A key difference in the program shift was to remove the research paper component (dissertation) and replace it with an improvement initiative (disquisition). One of the pioneers to this shift, Dr. Archbald (2014) shared,

> …the practitioner should engage in a grounded problem solving exercise. What I mean by grounded is a real problem in their own organization. What we are trying to do is not just write about something but to take action…to do something differently. (7:07).

The Western Carolina University program was revitalized to be more meaningful to practitioners in the field. Crow, Lomotey, and Jorrisen (2017) wrote,

> ...a model that engages improvement science methods, the four dimensions characterizing a problem-based thesis, and the lens of contemporary thinking on the professional practice degree. The disquisition is an alternative capstone framework that affords doctoral candidates the opportunity to develop the qualitatively distinct 'empirically-grounded know-how' of practitioner-scholar thinking. (p. 479).

The disquisition allows the student to analyze the depth and history of a problem, then match the problem in their own organization with a conceptual framework that could be used to solve the problem. Through true collaboration with a team within their own organization, the student is able to guide change.

Introduction & Statement of the Problem of Practice

The phenomenon of principals leaving schools is a highly relevant and critical issue in education. A number of problems have been associated with leadership turnover, not the least of which is the uncertainty of transition from one leader to the next. Principals transitioning to a new school often struggle to build or sustain a positive school climate in the first 100 days which can impede school progress and achievement (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2005; Hicks, 2016; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008; MacNeil, Prater, & Busch, 2009).

For this improvement initiative, "principal transition" specifically refers to the 100 days after a new principal begins leading a school. A positive school climate is defined by the *National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments* as "…the product of a school's attention to fostering safety; promoting a supportive academic, disciplinary, and physical environment; and encouraging and maintaining respectful, trusting, and caring relationships…" (2017). Research has suggested that principal succession planning should emphasize the latter; deliberately targeting relationship building between new principals and teachers (Barth, 1990; Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Kotter, 2001). A review of the literature focuses on relationship building as it relates to principal transitions and includes an investigation into how a disregard for this succession component negatively impacts transition. In addition to reviewing those two elements, it is necessary to understand the present landscape of principal change. Examining the situation through three distinct lenses helps us understand the complexity of transition. These three lenses include: frequency of principal transition, impact of principal change and transitions, and a lack of trust during transition.

Frequency of Principal Transitions

Understanding the frequency of principal transitions is the first step to framing the problem. In 2009, the US. Department of Education Secretary started surveying principals to quantify the rate of principal attrition and mobility (Battle, 2010). The purpose was to determine how many principals worked in the same school in the same role (as the principal) one year after starting. The principals who left their building after one year were sorted to determine why principals were leaving their schools. The principal's reason for leaving was sorted into four main groups: a.) movement to a school in another district, b.) transfer to a school within the same district, c.) leaving the principal profession by choice or a superior's mandate, and d.) retirement (Goldring, Taie, & Riddles, 2014). Goldring et al (2014) noted,

> …approaching the problem of ineffective school leadership with a focus almost exclusively on principal entry into the profession ignores the problems of 'churn' – currently schools lose scores of experienced principals each year, requiring replacements with less effective, novice principals on an average of every three years (p. 2).

Principal transitions are frequent for a variety of reasons. Each transition has potential to make a positive or negative impact.

Snodgrass-Rangel (2018) completed a comprehensive literature review of 1,909 dissertations and theses. The words *principal churning*, *principal turnover*, *principal mobility*, and *principal attrition* were often used interchangeably in the literature. "The most basic definition of principal turnover is that it occurs when a principal does not return to the

same school from one year to the next" (Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018, p.96). Principal churn, movement, or turnover includes: retirements, transfers, voluntary moves, involuntary moves, promotions, or any other reason for leaving a school as the principal (Battle, 2012; School Leaders Network, 2014; Goldring et al., 2014; Snodgrass-Rangel, 2018). The principal attrition and mobility report has been completed twice by the US Department of Education, in 2010 and 2014 (Battle, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014). The 2010 final report states that document was the first effort to gather data about principal churn (Battle, 2010). In the US Department of Education principal survey, "stayers" was the term given to principals that continued to serve in their school in the same capacity from year to year (Battle, 2010). The term *stayer* is specific to the principals that did not move between schools from 2009 and 2010. For example, a first-year principal starting at a school in 2009 and continuing to serve in 2010 was classified as a "stayer." However, a principal who had served at the school for ten years and then transferred in 2010 was not classified as a "stayer." At the end of 2009, 79% of principals that responded to the survey stated they were in their same school and role (Battle, 2010). At the end of 2013, 78% of the principals responding reported they were in the same school and same capacity as in 2012 (Goldring et al., 2014).

Principals leave their schools for many reasons. Those who transferred within the district were identified as "movers" and those who transferred outside of the district were identified as "leavers" (Goldring et al., 2014). There was no explanation in the data given to determine why leavers/movers transitioned to other schools. The data from the 2014 report (Goldring et al., 2104) show a trend that matches School Leaders Network's statement that newer principals transition more frequently (2014). Table 1, below shows the number of

principals that moved from their school within the district or to another district by years of experience.

Table 1

*Principal Movement as Related to Years of Experience. (*Goldring et al., 2014)

PERCENT OF LEAVERS/MOVERS	TOTAL LEAVERS/MOVERS	PRINCIPALS' YEARS OF EXPERIENCE
41%	2,610	3 or less
32%	1,960	3 to 5
17%	1,080	6 to 9
9%	580	10 or more

Note: Number of principals totaled 6,230

The data above suggest that principals newer to the role are more likely to move/leave than those with more leadership experience (Goldring et al. , 2014). Forty-one percent of principals moving or leaving their school have less than 3 years of experience. The highest category of principals moving from school to school are the principals with the least years of experience. The longer a principal is at a school, the less likely they are to leave the school. Principals with 10 years of experience make up only nine percent of the principal movers/leavers category (Goldring et al., 2014).

Principals' reasons for leaving the role are varied including: leaving the profession of education for another, retiring, staying in a K-12 school system but not as a principal, working in an educational setting that is not a K-12 school system, or death (Battle, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014). In 2010, approximately three percent (Battle, 2010) left the profession and in 2014, that number increased to approximately five percent (Goldring et al., 2014). When examining the reasons behind the increase, it was determined that a spike in retirements led to the increase in the *leave the profession* category from 2010 to 2014 (Battle, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014). One of the greatest factors impacting principal change

and transition is predicted retirement. According to the Department of Education in 2012, 27% of principals were over the age of 55-years-old. The average national age of retirement is 63-years-old. Retirements are likely to continue, increasing in the next 5 years, as baby boomers in principal roles reach retirement age (Goldring et al., 2014; Toossi, 2005).

Between 2007 and 2014, two different studies showed similar results in the frequency of principal churn. In the graph below, the averages of the 2010 and 2014 final reports are provided. On average, 21% of schools across the country experience a principal transition each year (Battle, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014).

National Principal Churn Rate

2% 1%

11%

7%

79%

■ Continuity of Leadership   ■ Change Districts

■ Change Schools within District   ■ Retire

■ Leave Profession
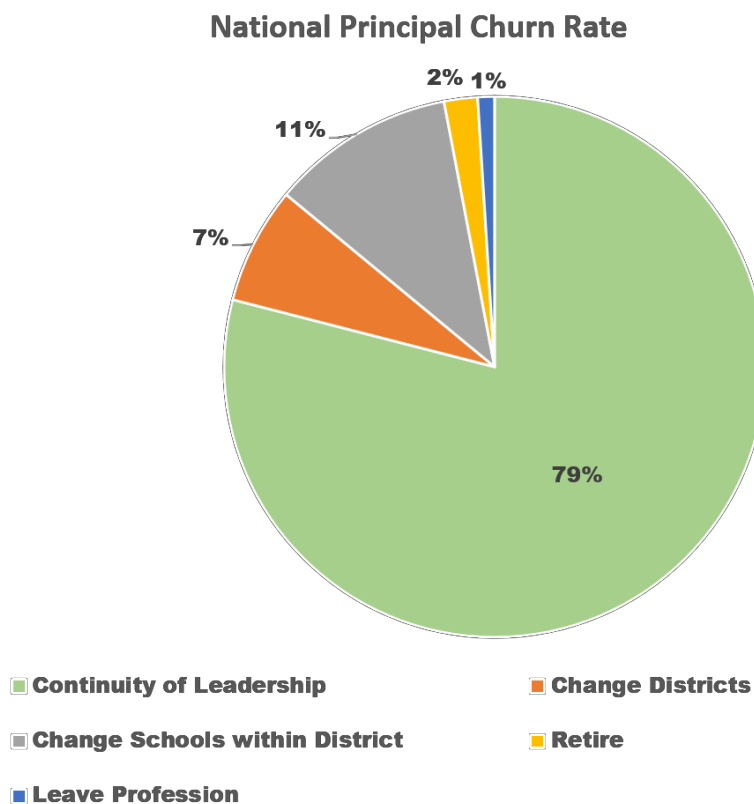
Figure 1. National principal mobility and attrition rate yearly averages between years 2007-2014.

Nationally, there has been a slight increase from 21% (2008-2009) to 23% (2012-2013) of schools facing an annual change of school principals. The slight change of two percent is equivalent to 2,230 more schools facing a principal transition in 2012 than in 2008. School Leaders Network (2014) writes,

> Twenty-five thousand (one fifth of the country's principals) leave their schools each year, leaving millions of children's lives adversely affected. Fifty percent of new principals quit during their third year in the role. Those that remain frequently do not stay at high poverty schools, trading difficult-to-lead schools for less demanding leadership roles that serve more affluent populations. (p. 3)

When the rate of retention is compared to other professions, we begin to gain perspective about how big of an issue this is for our country's schools. Reports from the Bureau of Labor state that teachers on average stay in their role 38% longer than principals (School Leaders Network, 2014). CEOs of small companies remain in their positions 11% longer and CEOs of large companies stay 44% longer than principals. The US Department of Labor states that only three professions have a rate of transition higher than principals: mining and logging, retail, and leisure and hospitality (School Leaders Network, 2014). The position of the principal has the highest revolving door of any profession that requires a college degree (School Leaders Network, 2014).

A longitudinal study from 2006 reviewed principal mobility and transition for a cohort of North Carolina principals from 1987-1993 (Gates, Ringel, Santibanez, Guarino,

Ghosh-Dastidar, & Brown, 2006). A key finding of the research was that principal churn

rates have been consistently increasing over time. During the period from 1987 to 1993, it

took six years for 20% of North Carolina schools to experience a transition (Gates et al.,

2006). In 2014, it only took one year for 20% of North Carolina schools to experience a

principal transition (Goldring et al., 2014). The study looked at schools in Illinois and North

Carolina. At that time, only half the states in our country gathered information on principal

mobility (Gates et al., 2006).

It is difficult to get accurate data about school principal churn in individual states,

and even more so for individual school districts, because of lack of standardization with

reporting of information (School Leaders Network, 2014; Spillane, Healey, & Mesler,

2009). Only about half of the states currently collect information about principal mobility,

and each state that collects data uses a different methodology and reporting system (School

Leaders Network, 2014; Spillane et al.., 2009). North Carolina was the context for this

improvement initiative; therefore, literature focused on North Carolina principals was

reviewed. I was unable to gather data from the NC Department of Public Instruction

showing principal churn by district or as disaggregated data that reveal reason for transfer.

One factor reported by the School Leaders Network, (2014) was the amount of time the

average principal remained in their position, but the report did not explain the reasons for

retention. School Leaders Network (2014) gathered the data from different state reports and

found principal tenure ranging from 2.7-3.5 years on average in the following states: North

Carolina, Rhode Island, Alaska, California, Oregon, New Mexico, Delaware, Nevada, and

Idaho. School Leaders Network (2014) claimed that North Carolina is the state with the

highest turnover.

The graphic below shows the potential principal transfers that North Carolina schools may be facing in the near future. When national transfer data and retirement data are applied to North Carolina schools, out of the total of 2,526 schools, only 1,215 will likely have the same principal five years later. A projected 48% of NC schools will be affected by principal churn between 2016 and 2021 (Battle, 2010; Goldring et al., 2014).

In 2016, 2,564 Public NC schools started the year with a principal.

It is projected that in 2021, only 1,215 of those schools will have the same principal.

Five Years Later

Transfer Within the District

Move to Another District

Leave Profession
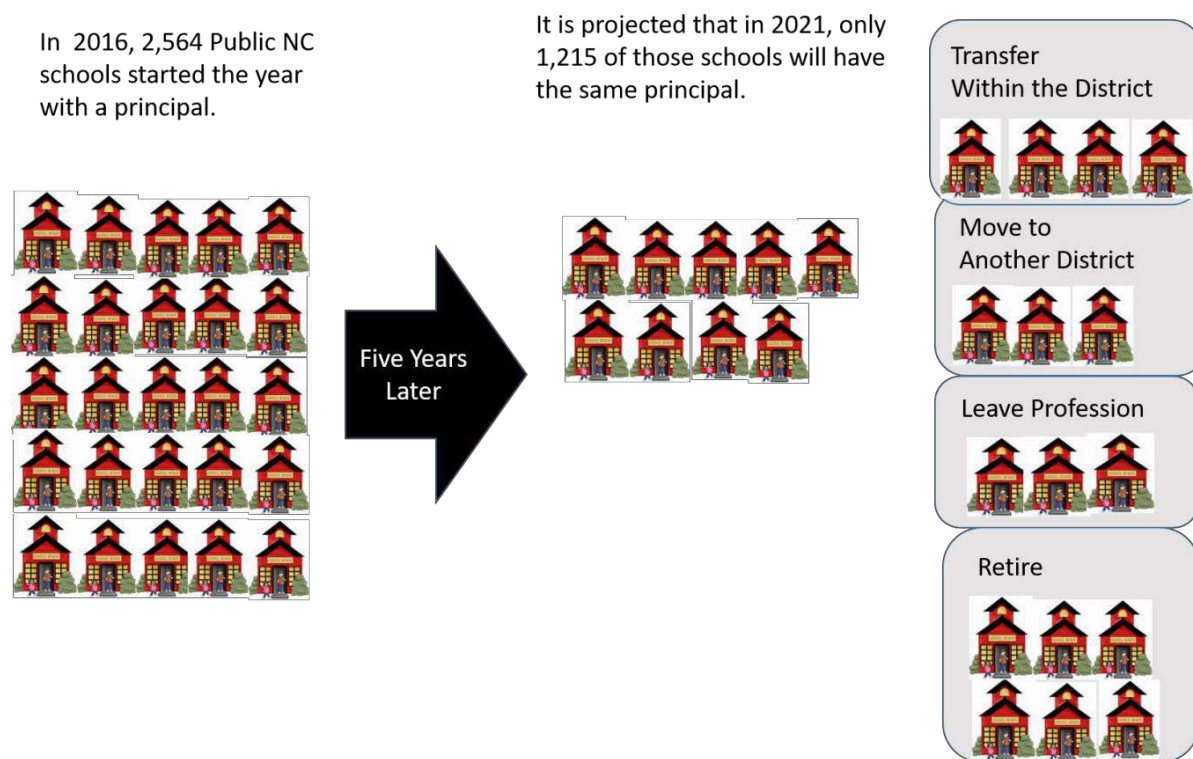
Retire

Figure 2. Projected principal mobility and attrition (Battle, 2010, School Leaders Network, 2014, Goldring et al., 2014).

If the retirement projections are accurate and if the national data stay consistent for district transfers, leaving the profession, and transferring to other districts, then the graph above will show the state of affairs for North Carolina in 2021. Between 2016 and 2021, out of approximately 2,500 school principals, 700 will retire, 300 will move to another district within the state, 400 will transfer to a new school within their district, and 300 will leave the

profession. The state may be facing transitions in half of its schools. There is a possibility that principal transitions could be one of the most significant and frequent educational concerns for the state of North Carolina in the upcoming years (Battle, 2010, School Leaders Network, 2014, Goldring et al., 2014).

Impact of Principal Change

Each educator that has experienced a principal change has an opinion about the success or lack of success of the transition. Change will be perceived as positive or negative depending on the transition process of the new leader and the focus of succession planning (Fink & Brayman, 2006). The principal directly impacts school climate including teacher morale. Teacher morale directly impacts professional satisfaction and student learning (Fink & Brayman, 2006). Inadequate transitions can have a negative impact on the principal and the school's community members.

Impact of principal change and transition on students. In Miller's key findings (2013), she states that principal turnover is more common at low performing schools. In this study, Miller analyzed 12 years of school performance and the academic performance of those schools. She focused her study on 1,779 schools in North Carolina that were in existence in 1994 and were still serving students in 2006. The academic performance of the 979 schools that experienced a transition was compared to the 800 schools that had a consistent principal for the 12 years. The researcher noted that when there was a significant gap in test scores from year to year, half of those gaps correlated with a new principal leading the building. One of the key findings of Miller's research is that, after a large decline of academic performance (partly due to an inadequate principal transition), it took an average of six years for the school to reach the level of performance previously reported.

One of the key responsibilities of a principal is to be an instructional leader and when the instructional leader transitions, the stakeholders may feel the impact (Leithwood et al., 2008), especially if that leader was successful at improving teaching and learning.

If principal transitions impact teachers and students, then ultimately transitions impact every element within the school. Research shows trends in school performance levels correlating with principal transitions. Clark, Martorell, & Rockoff (2009) gathered data to quantify the correlation between New York high school graduation rates and the number of principal changes the schools experienced. In his findings, the schools with high principal turnover were also the schools with lower graduation rates. The more frequent a school experienced a principal change, the lower the graduation rate. The research does report that poverty served as a contributing variable; however, they were also the schools that experienced the most principal change. Rowan and Denk (1984) stated in their research that students identified as experiencing poverty were often the subgroup of students most negatively impacted when experiencing a principal change. Jacobson (2008) states low performing schools repeatedly experience more principal change. School Leaders Network (2014) boldly wrote, "Common sense suggests that high rates of principal "churn" would be disruptive to a school community—especially when the principals who leave are strong instructional leaders." (p. 3).

Research shows the decline in academic performance during a transition can be quite dramatic and sudden. Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin (2009) reports that school performance dips during the first two years of a new principal compared with previous years. They theorize that it takes time for the stakeholders to accept the new leader as the instructional leader (Branch et al., 2009). At this time there appears to be a relative void in the literature

directly connecting negative school climate with an inadequate principal transition. The

literature does assert that a negative impact on academic performance occurs when there is

an inadequate principal transition (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004; Leithwood et al., 2008; Miller,

2013). What can we as school leaders do to ease the impact of principal transitions? There is

indeed literature on how to have a successful principal transition to positively impact

academic performance and school culture (Fink & Brayman, 2006).

       Impact of principal change and transition on teachers. Principal turnover is listed

as one of the top reasons that teachers leave their jobs (Ingersoll & Smith, 2004). Teachers

have the greatest impact on student learning, but principals have the greatest impact on

teachers (Leithwood et al., 2008). Principals are the educational leaders and have the power,

position, and responsibility to impact schools' academic performance, school climate, and

teaching practices (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001).

       Teachers list a change in school leadership and the lack of consistent expectations as

reasons for leaving the profession; unfortunately, higher teacher turnover rate has been

associated with lower academic performance of students (Hardy, 1999). A poor principal

transition can jeopardize the academic success of the school, performance of individual

students, and the climate that teachers work in daily (Cheema & Fuller, 2017). There is

difficulty in quantifying the impact of leadership change on an organization, but that does

not mean it cannot be done. The report proposes that preventing transitions is unrealistic and

that creating a pipeline to feed the increasing number of transitioning leaders does not

eliminate the problem (School Leaders Network, 2014). Principal preparation programs and

school districts are leading individuals to focus on improving instruction, building

momentum, and casting vision. We are not, however, focusing on the importance of the transition of school leaders as we should (School Leaders Network, 2014).

A Lack of Trust During Transition

The literature, to some extent, also tells the story of the problems associated with inadequate principal transitions. When building a new team, it takes time to build trust and while trust does not guarantee success, lack of trust guarantees failure (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Low trust of entering principals by teachers can adversely affect principal transitions. Transitions that do not attend to trust-building activities can have a negative impact in both the short and long term. Research that states the need for trust in any organization (Brewster & Railsback, 2003; Bryk & Schneider, 2003). Creating trusting relationships among principals and teachers leads to a positive and supportive school climate, which directly impacts teachers' willingness to take academic risks, and this results in a direct impact on student success (Gates, 2006; Tschannen-Moran & Gareias, 2015). Trust is not an isolated factor but rather something that connects to all other facets of school improvement. Tschannen-Moran & Gareias (2015) state,

> Intuitively and empirically, trust is a powerful construct when considering influence on and through behavior in the pursuit of educational mission of schools. Yet, trust does not operate irrespective of other important constructs (Tschannen-Moran & Gareias, 2015, p. 264).

Key findings state a trusting relationship between principal and teachers directly impacts three components: a.) academic focus through policy and norms, b.) teacher efficacy (one's efforts will have positive impact on students), and c.) teacher professionalism

(knowledge, skills, and practices needed to be effective) (Tschannen-Moran & Gareias, 2015). The trust between the principal and teachers impacts the teachers' mindsets about teaching, and the teachers' mindset impacts every component of the classroom (Leithwood et al., 2008).

Organizations lacking trust struggle to share a common vision, set goals, and work together (Byrak & Schneider, 2003; Leithwood et al., 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareias, 2015). Bryk & Schneider (2003) completed a research study with 400 Chicago elementary schools to study the impact of trust within the organization and the detriment of a lack of trusting relationships in the organization. Byrk & Schneider reported a key finding in their study, ". . . trust is the connective tissue that binds individuals together to advance the education and welfare of students." (Bryk & Schneider, 2003, p. 45). Building trust takes time and it is unlikely for someone to blindly trust until the individuals have had shared experiences that provide an opportunity to build trust (Byrk & Schneider, 2003; Hoy, Smith, & Sweetland, 2002).

Robinson (2007) confirms that when a principal is placed at a school, their beginning actions will impact the way the staff perceives the principal. Does the new principal meet with teachers to learn about the school? Does the new principal meet with individuals to learn about their concerns or their values? Or, does the new principal stay isolated, seeing no value in connecting with others? Robinson (2007, p.24) writes that during change people will question "how does this impact me" and "how long will he stay." Robinson's research reiterates that the relationship between teacher and principal impacts the teachers' beliefs and the teachers' beliefs impacts their actions (Robinson, 2007).

The increasing percentage of principal churn across the country is creating an urgency to understand the phenomena of leadership change and transition. Literature suggests schools may experience a reduction in student academic performance and/or high teacher turnover during principal transitions. Principal transitions that do not include trust-building processes between teachers and principals, may negatively impact the school climate, and potentially impede school progress and achievements. Implementing a transition process that focuses on building trust between teachers and new principals will likely contribute to a positive school climate, advancing school progress and achievement.

Problem Statement and Theory of Improvement

A lack of trust between new principals and teachers potentially weakens school climate. Since school climate is a foundation for school and student success and achievement, principal transition processes should create the conditions necessary for trust, building positive relationships that contribute to a positive climate. My theory of improvement proposes that a transition process focusing on building trust between teachers and new principals will increase the likelihood of building and/or sustaining a positive school climate which will contribute to school progress and student achievement over time.

Causal Analysis

Many variables can be identified as contributing to a lack of trust between teachers and new leaders during a transition. I crafted a casual analysis in Figure 3 using Ishikawa's fishbone diagram (1982) as a tool to help dig deeper and examine the potential causes of reduced trust. Doggett (2005) supports causal analysis saying,

> Beneath every problem is a cause for that problem. In order to solve a problem one
> must identify the cause of the problem and take steps to eliminate the cause. If the

root cause of the problem is not identified, then one is merely addressing the

symptoms and the problem will continue to exist. For this reason, identifying and

eliminating the root cause of a problem is of utmost importance. (Doggett, 2005, p

34).

As detailed below, the head of the fish contains the problem statement and the potential

causes are stated on each bone of the fish body.
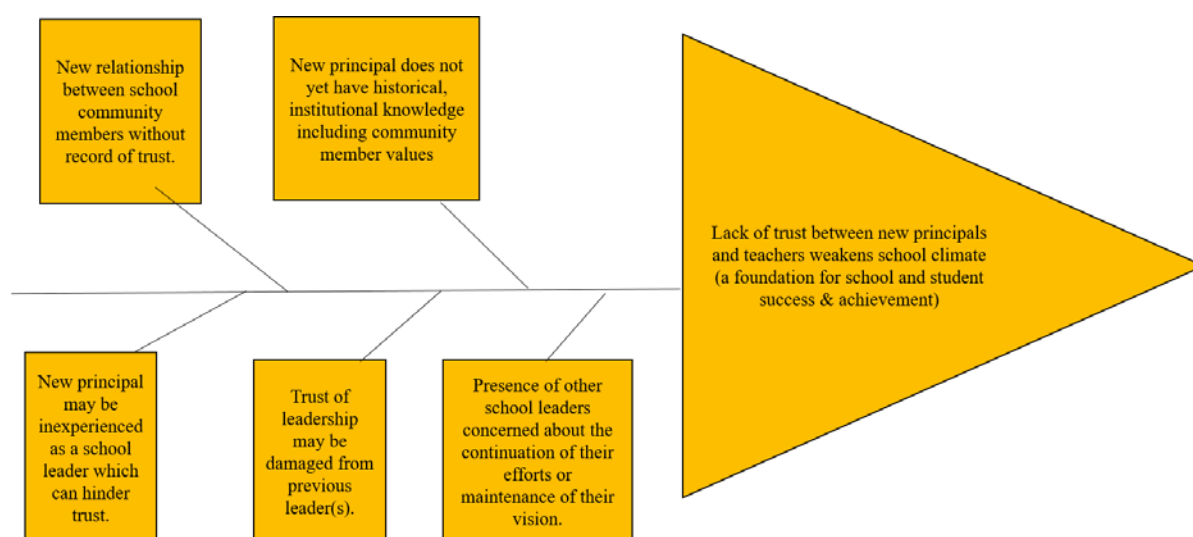
Figure 3. Fish Bone Diagram.

After reviewing the research, I identified five commonly reported, potential causes

of lack of trust between new principals and community members, specifically teachers: a.) a

new relationship assumes the absence of a record of trust between school community

members and the new principal, b.) the new principal may be inexperienced as a school

leader, which can hinder the development of trust as it connects to competence, c.) the new

principal may not be trusted because trust of leadership may be damaged from previous

leaders' behavior, and d.) the new principal does not have the necessary historical or

institutional knowledge, including community member values. The above includes a lack of

knowledge about other school leaders and the acknowledgement of their efforts or maintenance of their vision. Although I identified causes on my own, I worked with the principal and assistant principal to ascertain collective agreement on the causes, and to allow the opportunity for additional influences. This causal analysis helped the team to design a targeted improvement initiative aimed at mitigating the primary causes. In addition, we relied on the research literature to closely examine trust and how it can be cultivated between teachers and leaders.

Review of Literature for Building Trust

Relational trust is a key indicator to building strong relationships between teachers and the principal (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Cosner, 2009; 2016; Paxton, Leis, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014). Tshannen-Moran & Gareias, define relational trust as (2015, p. 6), "Relational trust refers to the interpersonal social exchanges that take place in a group setting." The role of the principal is to build a trusting relationship where the teachers believe the principal will lead the school effectively (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Cosner, 2009; Paxton, C. L., Leis, M., & Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. ., 2014). The trust and openness has to go beyond simply believing the leader is a "good person" and actually instill trust that the leader is capable and willing to lead the school in the needed direction (Gbunblee, 2016). Paxton et al., (2014) states relational trust is, "know who to trust with what" (p 87).

Paxton et al. (2014) conducted research with small teams from eight different schools. During the school year, the researchers worked with a team at each school to provide strategies that would specifically enhance the relationships within the school building. The relational trust activities appear to increase trust between principals and teachers (Paxton et al., 2014). A key component to the research method used in this study

was a Critical Friends Framework (Gold, 2014) where a non-supervisory peer was able to guide the principal in reflection after each activity about their personal learning (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Zepede, 2016). Each principal in the study modified a series of activities that included: a shared *WHY* (a story or speech that tells the reason the individual is committed to a cause)*,* listening protocols for concerns, reflective journaling about personal learning, understanding others' personal stories, and shared experiences that built trust.

Based on the research, the specific activities in which principals built trust varied greatly. Gbunblee (2016) conducted research using small teams from five different schools. The aim of the research was to identify common factors in the school that increased trust and openness between principals and teachers. A key finding of the research was the importance of each principal and leadership team implementing activities that focused on shared experiences (Gbunblee, 2016). Cosner (2009) conducted interviews with all staff members from 11 different schools. The interview data were synthesized to find trends at each of the schools with demonstrating increased trust. A common thread stated in the key findings was that each principal led the staff in activities that improved trusting and open relationships (Cosner, 2009).

As an incoming leader, interacting with key stakeholders to understand the vision, direction, and values of the school is a key activity to determine how to connect with where the previous leader left off (Hoy et al., 2002). Dialogue with stakeholders is a crucial first step to determine the need and future direction of the school. Research clearly supports the significance of discussion with stakeholders to ensure that the current principal has a clear understanding of the barriers and support, as identified by key stakeholders (Robinson,

2007; Hoy et al., 2002). During the stakeholder sessions, the purpose should not be how we solve the problem; rather, what is the problem (Hoy et al., 2002). Principals and, ultimately, organizations, will be more successful in the continuous improvement cycle if this process is repeated with each change in leadership (Hoy et al., 2002).

The literature provides many different, principal-led activities to build relationships and openness with teachers. Each researcher stated the importance of the principal in creating the activities (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Cosner, 2009; 2016; Paxton et al., 2014). Influential activities included reviewing current beliefs, interactive activities, and discussions of impact on students (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Cosner, 2009; Paxton et al., 2014). A new leader sitting down with an employee for a 1:1 conversation creates a first impression that "we are in this together" (Watkins, 2004, p 14). Principals begin to build trust with individuals by creating an open environment where thoughts can be shared freely (Tschannen-Moran & Gareias, 2015).

While the specific activities principals used to build trust varied, there were similar types of activities that reoccurred in the literature. Each principal in the case studies (Barnett & McCormick, 2004; Cosner, 2009; Paxton et al., 2014) allowed teachers to share their personal experiences. Principals sharing their personal stories is an effective method for teachers to connect with the leaders and understand the principal's intention (Versland & Erickson, 2017).

Each author varied their approach on how to build trust, but each had a commonality of focusing on individual relationships. Blasé & Blasé (2001) share the importance of building trusting relationships with all stakeholders in a school setting. Relationships are built upon trust; trust is built in part upon clear communication.

Without communication and conversation from principal to teachers, and teachers to principal, people may feel isolated and disconnected from many of the activities of the school. The principal has a responsibility to create an environment where teachers feel comfortable sharing (Blasé & Blasé, 2001).

Researchers who are experts in building trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2003; Fink & Brayman, 2016; Hargreaves et al., 2011) agree that trust is not constructed as a one-time event, but rather a repeated action over time. The case studies' key findings show that a principal cannot simply lead a few activities and expect trust to be built, but rather trust is built through a repeated commitment over time to building it (Cosner, 2009; Gbunblee, 2016; Paxton et al., 2014). Each activity and interaction is an opportunity for the leader to build or break trust (Watkins, 2004). If the teachers can see the personal and compassionate side of their principal, they are more likely to share their own personal thoughts and beliefs back with the principal (Versland & Erickson, 2017).

Two different teacher mindsets directly impact the way in which teachers measure the principal's competency of the school as found in 24 case studies (Cosner, 2009; Gbunblee, 2016; Paxton et al., 2014). Teachers believe their job is either to implement the academic programs selected by the principal, or make decisions about academics that impact our students. Teachers with the decision-making mindset would consider a principal competent and trustworthy if that principal facilitates the process for making academic decisions together, and creates systems for teachers to make instructional decisions (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). The reverse is also true; when teachers believe it is the principal's role to make academic decisions, they may perceive a principal as incompetent. Perceived principal competency appears to be a key indicator that builds strong relationships

between the principal and teachers (Brewster & Railsback, 2003). A teacher's perception of

a principal's competency is based on the principal's actions matching the teacher's

perception about the principal's role and responsibilities (Brewster & Railsback, 2003).

The literature stated there is a difference in the terms, principal preparation and

perceived competency, by the teachers. Principal preparation can have a standard, however,

perceived competency is relative to the specific context of the school. Tschannen-Moran and

Gareias (2015) write, "Competency is the ability to perform a task as expected, according to

appropriate standards." It is important for the principal to understand the standard and

expectation for solving the problem before solving the problem (Tshannen-Moran &

Gareias, 2015). New leaders often make the mistake of choosing the wrong problem to solve

first. They often set their sights on a problem that will impact the organization first, rather

than solving a problem that will win the people over first (Watkins, 2004). An "early win" is

a strategy in which the new leader understands a pressing problem that is meaningful to the

stakeholders. The leader intentionally spends time and effort on the problem to quickly

demonstrate competency and an ability to follow through (Watkins, 2004).

Over the years, the leaders I have trusted the most have allowed a safe space to

debate and disagree with the status quo. Being able to express concerns and disagreement

without fear of reprisal is essential to building trusting relationships (Lein, Johnson, &

Ragland, 1997). Blasé and Blasé (2001) advise principals to, ". . . welcome and embrace

conflict as a way to produce substantive, positive outcomes over the long run. Regarding

conflict as potentially constructive helps build supportive human relationships because it

allows us to deal with our differences in win-win ways" (p. 29). It also allows teachers to

feel more secure in providing honest input and participating meaningfully in school decision making.–

Problem of Practice within the Local Context

The improvement initiative took place in the western region of North Carolina. North Carolina's 100 counties are divided into three distinct regions: eastern region, made up of 44 counties; the central region, comprised of 29 counties; and the western region, with 27 counties (Ballotpedia, 2017). Washington County Schools (pseudonym) has 25,600 students in 45 different schools. The student population is made up of 89% Caucasian, 6.5% African American, 6.5% Hispanic, 1.5% Asian, .and .5% American Indian. (Totals equal more than 100% because respondents may report more than one race). Fifty-five percent of the student population receives free and reduced-price lunch (Ballotpedia, 2017).

After an interview with the assistant superintendent, it was determined that of the 45 Washington County schools, 19 experienced a new principal in the last three years. The yearly rate of transition (14%) is slightly lower than the national rate of 20% (Goldring et al., 2014). To learn more about the district's experiences with principal change, I interviewed Washington County leaders to gather additional baseline data to determine: a.) perceptions of principal change and transition, and b.) impacts of principal churn on succession and transition planning.

During an interview with the assistant superintendent, I learned more about the current protocols for principal transitions. The district leaders meet with school staff prior to selecting the principal to try and best match principal candidates to the school personality. The teachers have an opportunity to verbally express the qualities they expect in the next

school leader and the concerns they have for the school in the future. The assistant superintendent takes notes to capture stakeholder feedback to be used in identifying their next school principal. Once the principal has been selected by the superintendent, the assistant superintendent meets with the school staff to formally introduce their new leader. The original notes from the stakeholder meeting are given to the newly-hired principal, allowing the leader to learn more about the stakeholder expectations for the new principal.

Once selected and hired, each new administrator becomes part of a year-long cohort. The assistant superintendent provides the new administrators with a monthly meeting focused on topics intended to help the transition. The school system had not focused on trust during school transitions prior to this improvement initiative. The district's transition process focused mostly on new principal responsibilities. These are formal meetings with required attendance in year one, and optional during year two, for the new principal to the district. The assistant superintendent shared that most topics for the cohort meetings focus on evaluations, academics, systems, and protocols. Most conversations about trust-building or culture development occur one-on-one between the new principal and the district leaders.

In addition, principals new to the principal role are assigned mentors who are seasoned, building-level administrators in the district. Each mentor/mentee relationship is unique based on the new principal's/school's individual needs. Mentors are assigned by central office in July and asked to connect with their mentees once a month. The mentor/mentee may continue to meet if they decide to continue after year one. At this time, no formal accountability system accompanies the mentee/mentor program.

For the disquisition, the assistant superintendent proposed three schools that fit the criteria and I made a final selection from the three schools experiencing a transition. The

school met the key components of the criteria: highly recommended by the superintendent, no recent trauma in the school community, and an incoming principal committed to the process. I met with the principal on July 15th at the beginning of the process to outline the project and received her consent to be a part of the improvement initiative.

Principal Amy Anne (pseudonym) started her first year as a principal at Metamorphous Elementary School (pseudonym) on July 1st. With principal Anne, Metamorphous Elementary School had its third principal in three years. The school routinely performs at 45% to 50% proficiency in Reading and Math. The school is comprised of 36% White, 29% Hispanic, 18% Black, 10% other minority races, and eight percent multi-racial students. The school has 34% of students receiving English as Second Languages services. The staff is comprised of 29 teachers that serve 300 students. The principal was eager to participate in the improvement initiative.

Desired Aim/Outcome

The aim of the improvement initiative was to implement a transition process that focuses on building trust between teachers and new principals (immediate desired outcome) to increase the likelihood of building and/or sustaining a positive school climate, (short-term desired outcome) which contributes to school progress and achievement (long-term desired outcome). It was surmised that the long-term, desired outcome (the advancement of school progress and student achievement) would be impacted by the achievement of the short-term outcome (positive and supportive school climate), which would be influenced by the desired immediate outcome (trust among principals and teachers). Figure 4 represents this relationship. The improvement initiative aimed to achieve the immediate desired outcome with indications of impact on the short-term desired outcome.
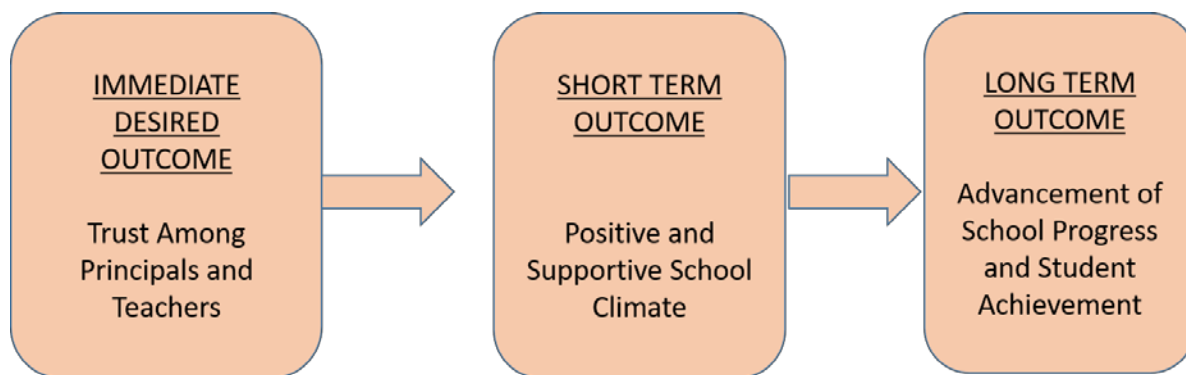
Figure 4. Desired Outcomes of the Improvement Initiative.

Improvement Methodology

Figure 5 provides a summary view of the improvement initiative including: a.) the aim of the improvement initiative; b.) the three key indicators of trust; c.) and the specific goals to measure progress towards building trust between principal and teachers.

Conceptual Framework and Improvement Initiative Goals
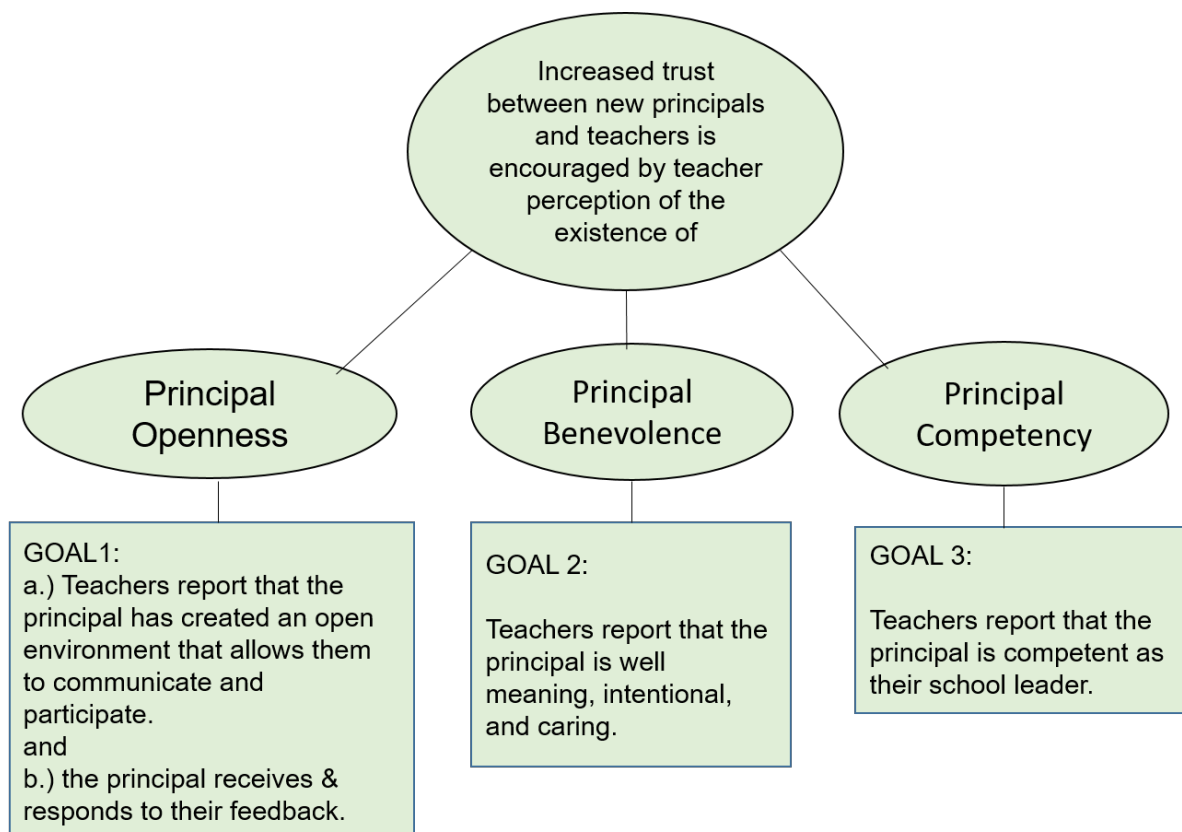
Figure 5. Conceptual Framework for the Improvement Initiative.

The conceptual framework (Figure 5) connects the desired state (trust between the principal

and teachers) with three key indicators of trust, as supported by the literature. Three specific

goals are listed to measure the trust indicators. The improvement initiative was designed to

measure specific goals of improvement for a 100-day principal transition. The specific

activities used to reach the improvement goals are detailed in the *plan-do-study-act* (PDSA)

cycles in the Implementation Plan section.

Implementation Plan

The implementation plan was a joint creation by the principal of the school and

myself with input from the assistant superintendent. The success of the improvement

initiative was directly connected to the commitment of the principal and dependent on the

strength of the activities created by the researcher, modified by the principal and advised by the assistant superintendent (Cosner, 2009; Gbunblee, 2016; Paxton et al.., 2014). To select the school, the superintendent and I reviewed the following statements to ensure the school and the new leader were a "fit" for the improvement initiative. It was crucial that the chosen context of practice met the following requirements to avoid contexts with unique and extra challenging variables.

1. For the context of practice, the outgoing principal should have left on relatively "good terms" so that the incoming principal does not have to focus on repairing general trust in leadership. In a situation where this does not exist, more than 100 days would be needed to establish even a small degree of trust.

2. For the context of practice, the new principal should be highly recommended by the district leaders (considered competent to lead). In a situation where they were not, more than 100 days would be needed to support and coach the principal to increase competency.

3. For the context of practice, the school community should not have recently experienced high emotional stress or trauma. In a situation where they have, extra activities would be needed to help the community heal before building trust with the incoming principal.

4. For the context of practice, the new (incoming) principal was willing to participate in the improvement initiative which included collaborating with a coach. In a situation where they were not, implementation would be a challenge.

5. For the context of practice, the superintendent supported the proposed interventions and frameworks. Collaborative design and modification of the improvement initiative was encouraged. The principal should feel supported by the superintendent to participate in the improvement initiative. In a situation where these systems and/or support do not exist, implementation would be a challenge.

After three schools were identified that fit the criteria, I selected the final school for the improvement initiative.

Although a wide range of stakeholders including parents, non-certified staff, and students can be helpful during the on-boarding process of a new principal, I focused solely on the principal-to-teacher relationships for the purpose of this improvement initiative. The literature and this initiative support the idea that principal transitions which focus on building trust with teachers can be expected to have positive long-term outcomes on school climate, student performance, etc. While each stakeholder group may benefit from similar activities, the scope of the literature research and the commitment from the principal was focused solely on implementation with certified teachers. Including a wider-range of stakeholders would be better-suited to a wider-reaching initiative or one focused on community relations as related to school performance.

My role during the improvement initiative was to serve as a critical leadership friend while also providing coaching that leveraged my expertise in the area of trust-building. The goal of the coach is to adapt to the needs of the principal and guide the principal in deep reflection about their own practice (Gold, 2014). The assistant superintendent also served as a member of the Critical Friends Conversation. The assistant superintendent clearly stated that she was part of the meetings to help coach the principal and not as an evaluator. The

assistant superintendent was very aware that being an evaluator could impact the dynamics

and to reinforce, continuously restated to the principal that conversations in the meetings did

not impact evaluation, The assistant superintendent allowed the researcher to lead the

meetings to create a culture where the assistant superintendent was not the primary lead of

the conversations.

Cognitive Coaching after each improvement initiative activity allowed for formative

evaluation data to be gathered. Garmston, Linder, and Whitaker (1993) define Cognitive

Coaching,

Cognitive Coaching is a process during which teacher (principal) explores thinking

behind their practices. Each person maintains a cognitive map, only partially

conscious. In Cognitive Coaching, questions asked by the coach reveal to the teacher

(principal) areas of that map that may not be complete or consciously developed. (p

8).

The benefit of Cognitive Coaching is having the opportunity to think and reflect upon one's

own thinking (James-Ward & Potter, 2011; Gold, 2014; Zepede, 2016). Having a non-

judgmental person strategically guide you toward personal reflection improves leadership

(Gold, 2014). The role of a principal can be one of isolation (Baucer, 2018), therefore, it is

important for a leader to have critical friends, colleagues, and coaches that encourage deep

reflection on their own leadership (Gold, 2014). A research study of 16 principals in Georgia

evaluated the effectiveness of principal coaching (James-Ward & Potter, 2011). Key findings

indicated that principals across contexts found value in coaching. The basic framework we

used during Critical Friends Conversation with the principal included three components:

share theory or best practice, allow modification and commitment based on principal input,

collect data and reflection to show outcomes (Gold, 2014; Garmston, et al., 1993; Zepede, 2016).

The coach and the principal collaboratively shared the theories and research around trust-building activities. By looking collectively at the research support, the principal deducted that the trust-building activities were credible and potentially effective, increasing her commitment. Collaboratively, the principal and the coach chose high-impact activities which she felt comfortable implementing. Collaboratively, the coach and principal collected evidence and data to show progress toward specific goal achievement (Gold, 2014; Garmston, et al., 1993; Zepede, 2016).

Below is the 100-day (Table 2) implementation plan. The table was modified collaboratively by the coach, the assistant superintendent, and the new principal before and during the implementation process. The actions were shared with the principal during Critical Friend Conversations. The goal was for each activity to improve based on the prior experience; therefore, this started as a skeleton of the activities which were continuously modified with principal's input. The timeline incorporated scaffolding to ensure all five components of the improvement initiative were reached during the first 100 days.

Table 2 includes three columns. The first column is the implementation component that defines a major step of the improvement initiative. The second column details specific action(s) taken by the principal and researcher. The third column identifies the time-frame for the actions. The proposed implementation plan was given to the principal and assistant superintendent at the beginning of the research process.

Table 2

Proposed Implementation Plan with Timeline and Methods

Proposed Implementation Plan		
Step	*Action*	*Timeframe*
Step 1: Collaborative Coaching	1a. Met with superintendent to determine framework for moving forward	May
	1b. Met with superintendent and new principal to discuss big ideas for three goals and level of commitment.	July 2nd
	1c. Met with new principal to collaboratively design trust-building activities and modify timeline.	July 7th
Step 2: 1:1 Meetings	2a. Created questions and protocol with principal for 1:1 interviews.	July 9th
	2b. Principal conducted 1:1 interviews.	July 10th-August 5th
	2c. I sent one email mid-way through to inquire about accuracy of agreed upon timeline.	July 24th
	2d. Principal wrote in journal as a reflection about process and new learning.	July 9th-August 5th
Step 3: Collaborative Coaching	3a. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "What were the key learnings from the activity?" Discussion followed.	August 6th
	3b. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Would you do this again if transitioning to a new school? And if so, what would you do differently?" Discussion followed.	
	3c. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the 1:1 interviews?" Discussion followed.	
	3d. The team discussed, "Should another activity be added based on our new learning? How should the next activity be modified based on this new learning?"	
Step 4: Crucial Conversation	4a. New principal and researcher created agenda and protocol for Crucial Conversations meeting.	August 7th
	4b. Principal conducted Crucial Conversation meeting.	August 8th-18th
	4c. I sent one email mid-way through to inquire about accuracy of agreed timeline.	August 12th
	4d. Principal wrote in journal as a reflection about process and new learning.	August 7th-18th
Step 5: Collaborative Coaching	5a. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "What were the key learnings from the activity?" Discussion followed.	August 19th
	5b. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Would you do this again if transitioning to a new school? And if so, what would you do differently?" Discussion followed.	

	5c. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the Crucial Conversation meetings?" Discussion followed.	
	5d. The team discussed, "Should another activity be added based on our new learning? How should the next activity be modified based on this new learning?"	
Step 6: Personal Story	6a: New principal and I discussed the components of personal story to include based on knowledge learned in previous activities.	August 20th
	6b. New principal prepared their personal story to share with staff.	August 20th-22nd
	6c. New principal shared personal story with the entire staff.	August 23rd
	6d. New principal wrote in journal to reflect about the experience and others responses.	August 24th
Step 7: Collaborative Coaching	7a. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "What were the key learnings from the activity?" Discussion followed.	August 25th
	7b. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Would you do this again if transitioning to a new school? And if so, what would you do differently?" Discussion followed.	
	7c. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the personal story?" Discussion followed.	
	7d. The team discussed, "Should another activity be added based on our new learning? How should the next activity be modified based on this new learning?".	
Step 8: Focus on Relationships	8a. New principal and I designed the PLC (Professional Learning Community) about relationships and the protocol. This was a culminating activity designed for the early release on Sept 21st.	August 26th
	8b.New principal conducted grade level PLCs being explicit about the value of relationships.	August 26th- September 20th
	8c.New principal focused on building trusting relationships.	August 26th-October 10th
	8d. New principal wrote in journal to reflect about the trusting relationships being built.	August 20th-October 10th
Step 9: Collaborative Coaching	9a. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "What were the key learnings from the activity?" Discussion followed.	September 20th
	9b. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Would you do this again if transitioning to a new school? And if so, what would you do differently?" Discussion followed.	
	9c. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the Relationship PLCS?" Discussion followed.	

	9d. The team discussed, "Should another activity be added based on our new learning? How should the next activity be modified based on this new learning?" .	
Step 10: Team Identifies Most Pressing Problems	10a. New principal and I designed the agenda and protocol for groups to prioritize pressing problems, create action plans, and identify principal's role in solving the problem.	Sept 20th
	10b. New principal led Early Release day PD focused on activity.	Sept 22nd
	10c. New principal focused time and effort on their part of action plans created.	Sept 22nd-October 9th
	10d. New principal wrote in journal to reflect about the activity.	Sept 15th- October 9th
Step 11: Collaborative Coaching	4a. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "What were the key learnings from the activity?" Discussion followed.	October 10th
	4b. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Would you do this again if transitioning to a new school? And if so, what would you do differently?" Discussion followed.	
	4c. The superintendent and I asked the new principal, "Is there anything else you would like to discuss about the most pressing problems?" Discussion followed.	
	4d. The team discussed, "Should another activity be added based on our new learning?"	
Summative Data Collection	Surveyed staff using a Likert scale on 3 goals of improvement initiative, value of each activity and perception of transition. Ten total questions.	November
	Surveyed staff using Teacher Working Conditions Survey. Eight identical teacher working condition survey that align with improvement initiative question will be asked to the staff.	November
	Teacher Working Condition Survey from past principal about openness, benevolence, competency and trust was compared to current perception of the staff on the exact same questions answered in regards to the new principal.	November
	Interviewed superintendent their about perception of the experience.	November
	Interviewed new principal about their perception of the experience	November
	Triangulated perception of new principal, superintendent, and myself by coding responses.	November

The Proposed Implementation Plan was compiled based on best practices from the

research cases studies examined earlier. The purpose of Table 2 was to create a starting point

of discussion for the principal, assistant superintendent and researcher. All three columns within the graphic were modified to adjust and accommodate new understandings based on input from the other members of the team.

Evaluation of Improvement Methodology

I conducted formative and summative assessment and analyses for the improvement initiative. The formative assessment process informed the improvement process as we moved through it. Formative data were collected seven times throughout the intervention cycle, and each time, adjustments to the intervention activities and methodology were made (as needed) to best align with the school principal's personal style, and to reach the desired aim of the improvement initiative. Summative data were collected through both quantitative and qualitative research methods at the conclusion of the improvement initiative in order to measure the impact of the improvement initiative, and to determine whether the goals were attained.

Method for Formative Evaluation

I used a PDSA cycle to collect formative data. In 1982, Edwards Deming defined a process called PDSA to ensure total quality in an organization (Deming, 1982). There have been many iterations in the last 40 years; however, the steps remain the same: *plan*, *do*, *study*, and *act*. The four cycles are recursive and allow for continuous adjustment to the improvement. Each step is influenced by the prior step, allowing the actions to bring about maximum impact of change.

In the *plan* stage, I met with the principal to share the research-based programming and protocol to be implemented. The principal offered modifications, additions, and

deletions to each activity to ensure the activity fit the context and her ideas for building

trust. In the *do* stage, the principal implemented the co-designed activity. The proposal

suggested helping a team solve a problem. The principal created her specific protocol for

meeting with teams to define problems, and her specific way of understanding the root

cause of the problem. The method in which the principal solved the problem was created by

the principal, but the expectation that each team had a specific time to voice problems was

the effort and focus of the coach. In the *study* stage, the principal, superintendent, and I met

for coaching and reflection. The principal was asked a series of questions to better

understand the method of implementation and the value of the activity. The superintendent

and I asked probing questions to encourage deep reflection from the principal. In the *act*

stage, we used the knowledge learned to adjust the next activity. For example, the coach and

assistant superintendent commented that from each Critical Friends Conversation, the

principal did not always remember all of the work she had done to solve school-wide

problems. So the team created a T-chart template where the principal would journal weekly.

She journaled her work into a T-chart, with the first column defining the problem and the

second column detailing a linear response as to how that problem was solved. The T-chart

allowed the team to reference the comprehensive list of problems solved over time.

Activities were added, deleted, or modified as we learned more about the impact of the

intervention activities. All four steps allowed users to make adjustments to the processes,

which ideally resulted in achievement of the desired aim (Deming, 1982). The PDSA cycle

was repeated five times across the implementation plan. Details about each individual PDSA

cycle will be provided in the upcoming tables. It was significant to understand that as

implementation activities were interconnected, new learning arising from the activity (an

outcome from collaborative coaching) positively impacted the next activity. For example, the principal took the initiative to write an "It Matters" speech for her staff based on the success and positive feedback she received from writing and sharing her personal *WHY* statement.

In the role of the coach, I met with the new principal and superintendent five times in collaborative coaching sessions, called Critical Friends Conversations. The principal shared her notes/experiences from the key activity with the superintendent and researcher. All three of us engaged in a dialogue aimed at informing the principal's next steps. Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: a.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and b.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences. The following question prompts were used to help elicit the essential information:

- Tell us about the activity you conducted

- What were the key learnings from the activity?

- What were the challenges, if any?

- How do you think the activity was received?

- How would you modify this activity if you did it again or if another school leader wanted to try it?

While the questions framed the coaching sessions, the assistant superintendent and I asked probing questions based on the principal's response to create conversation that ensured that

the principal was reflecting deeply about the value of the activities. I took field notes during each of the meetings. The field notes included the feedback provided by the coach, the superintendent, and the principal. These field notes were available if the coaching team needed to reference them while making decisions about how to proceed with the improvement initiative. The following tables provide the detailed suggested protocol we used for each of the activities of the improvement initiative. The framework served as a guide but was continuously modified based on formative information gathered during the Critical Friend Conversations.

The first PDSA cycle began with the principal meeting 1:1 with the teachers. It was originally suggested by the researcher in the *plan* stage these be called interviews, but the principal felt that "1:1 interview" had a negative connotation and preferred to call these "1:1 meetings." The principal, assistant superintendent, and researcher met to discuss the theory behind meeting with each teacher, a protocol that would make it manageable, and questions that would serve a purpose. The activity was the first action in the initiative designed to demonstrate principal openness to the teachers. The 1:1 meetings were the *do* in this PDSA cycle and the anchor activity in this cycle. The Critical Friends Conversation was scheduled to occur before all 1:1 meetings were completed. During the *study* section of the PDSA cycle, there was discussion about how to improve the efficiency, such as having the lead secretary set appointments. The principal recommitted to asking the specific questions outlined in prior Critical Friends Conversation, as she had observed that open-ended conversations were not yielding effective results. The *act* part of the cycle allowed the principal to have specific follow ups with teachers she had met and to adjust her meeting

strategies with those teachers that had not completed the 1:1 meetings. Table 2 outlines the detailed steps to the first PDSA cycle.

Table 3 provides a detailed framework for the first PDSA cycle. The objective of the first cycle was to impact Goal #1 of creating an open environment which was primarily accomplished by 1:1 meetings with teachers. The table has four sections, detailing each of the *plan*, *do*, *study*, *act* stages of the cycle. The suggested time frame to start and end the activity is stated. In the *plan* row of the graphic a detailed suggested protocol of how to complete the 1:1 meetings is documented. The activity allowed the principal to meet with each teacher for 20-minutes to learn what the teachers liked about the school and wanted to change at the school. In the *do* row, the activity is suggested to be completed by the principal. The *study* row, the protocol for having dialogue is defined. And finally in the *act* row, adjustments will be made to the next PDSA cycle based on information gathered.

Table 3
Proposed PDSA Cycle One as Formative Evaluation

PDSA Cycle as Formative Evaluation

1:1 Teacher Interviews

Objective of this Cycle:	Teachers report that the principal has created an open environment.
Start Date:	JULY 9th End Date: AUGUST 6th

Plan	I met with the new principal to share the section of the Proposed Implementation Plan. We discussed suggested protocol, how to modify the activities to fit the principal and adjust the timeline. The framework was offered to the principal; however, all components can be adjusted to meet the principal need. Current Protocol: 1.) Principal emailed the entire staff inviting all to sign up for an interview. 2.) Lead Secretary organized appointments. 3.) 30-minute time slots between principal and individuals. 4.) The new principal and I created a template to take notes for the agreed upon questions. Proposed Interview Questions a.)Tell me about yourself. b.)What do you love most about this school? c.) What do you want to see changed? d.) Any advice you could give me for the school year?

Do	The principal completed the 1:1 interviews using the template created in the planning meeting.	

Study	Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: 1.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and 2.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences.

Act	Respond to the data gathered in the *study* portion of this cycle determined next steps in the implementation process. Steps included re-adjustment, repetition of previous steps, abandonment of the improvement initiative, or moving on to the next step as planned.

Table 4 documents the PDSA cycle two to reach the objective of creating an open environment through Crucial Conversations. The time frame to start and end the conversation is stated. The *plan* row, shows a protocol used to set up the meetings and how to implement them. The principal met with small groups of teachers to learn about the physical environment, parent involvement, school traditions, community support, and current initiatives. The *do* row, clearly states what the principal committed to accomplish. While the principal facilitated important information about school culture was learned that could impact principal behavior during the transition. The *study* row, captures a very similar protocol from the previous PDSA cycle of how the activity with principal and assistant superintendent was discussed. The *act* row, reminded the members of the team that actions completed and the information learned in the current PDSA cycle then influenced steps taken in the next PDSA cycle. The PDSA cycle is designed to be recursive, and therefore as the timeline progressed the implementation changed from the initial version, because new information created an ongoing domino effect.

Table 4

Proposed PDSA Cycle Two as Formative Evaluation

PDSA Cycle as Formative Evaluation

	Crucial Conversation
Objective of this Cycle:	Teacher reported that the principal creates an open environment.
Start Date:	AUGUST 7th End Date: AUGUST 18th

Plan	1. Lead Secretary organized appointments. 2. 1-hour meetings facilitated by the principal with small groups of teachers. 3. The principal and I created the agenda based on topics that the principal desires to know more about. <u>Proposed Group Discussion Topics</u> a.)What physical components of the current environment have meaning and why? b.) What traditions have meaning at this school and why? c.) Who in the community, that is not an employee, has had influence of this school? d.) What parents should I meet to help me with my transition and why? e.) What are some initiatives that failed at the school in the past and why?

Do	Principal Conducted Meetings

Study	Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: 1.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and 2.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences.

Act	Respond to the data gathered in the *study* portion of this cycle to determine next steps in the implementation process. Steps included re-adjustment, repetition of previous steps, abandonment of the improvement initiative, or moving on to the next step as planned.

Table 5 illustrates a PDSA cycle that worked toward Goal #2 of benevolence: well-meaning, intentional efforts, and caring. The primary activity used to reach the objective was the principal sharing her personal *WHY*. There was a very short suggested time frame to complete this activity and it was suggested to be completed at the first whole-group staff meeting the principal held. However, this was a modification made during formative assessment, and the principal did not complete this activity until a month into school when she had more time to prepare and had stronger relationships with the staff. The timeframe

shifted from middle of August to middle of September. The *plan* row, taught the principal

the process, the impact, and a method to engage the staff. The *do* row, states what the

principal accomplished. The *WHY* is a speech or story in which the principal explained her

commitment to the organization. An impactful *WHY* allowed the teachers to see the

emotional connection the principal had to the school. Vulnerability was critical to the

success of a personal *WHY*. The *study* row, describes the process used to discuss and learn

from the improvement initiative's implementation. The *act* row, reminded the assistant

superintendent, principal, and researcher that the outcome of the PDSA should impact the

next cycle.

Table 5
Proposed PDSA Cycle Three as Formative Evaluation

PDSA Cycle as Formative Evaluation

	Principal shared their personal story of *WHY* they became an educator.
Objective of this Cycle:	The intervention provided an opportunity to demonstrate the principal's well-meaning, intentional efforts, and caring.
Start Date:	AUGUST 19th End Date: AUGUST 24th

Plan	Current Protocol: 1.) At the opening day with the entire staff, time was scheduled to focus on benevolence. 2.) I shared video examples of why personal stories are impactful. 3.) The principal determined one additional activity that would go along with sharing of personal story to make the story meaningful.

Do	Principal completed the meeting.

Study	Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: 1.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and 2.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences.

Act	Respond to the data gathered in the *study* portion of this cycle determined next steps in the implementation process. Steps included re-adjustment, repetition of previous steps, abandonment of the improvement initiative, or moving on to the next step as planned.

Table 6 outlines the PDSA cycle designed to impact Goal #2 of benevolence: well-meaning, intentional efforts, and caring. The activity was suggested to take place on October focusing on the principal explicitly sharing details of her professional relationships at school. The *plan* row, created a protocol for how this activity would be accomplished by the principal in an effort to reach the desired outcome. The principal attended each team meeting and shared her commitment to relationships with staff members. In addition, the principal journaled about the different relationships she was building with staff members. The *do* row, states the action that the principal took. While reviewing journaling, the principal was able to see who she was actively building relationships with in the school and who she needed to be more intentional on building a relationship with in the school. The *study* row, documents the method used to discuss and gather formative data through dialogue. The *act* row, restated the learning from the current cycle impacted the action in the next cycle.

Table 6
Proposed PDSA Cycle Four as Formative Evaluation

PDSA Cycle as Formative Evaluation

	The principal explicitly shared the benefit, impact and depth of relationships created in the building.
Objective of this Cycle:	The intervention provided an opportunity to demonstrate the principal's well meaning, intentional efforts, and caring.

| | Start Date: | OCTOBER 10th | End Date: OCTOBER 30th |

Plan	Current Protocol. 1.) Principal participated in each team meeting to share importance of relationships. 2.) The principal actively tried to build trusting relationships. 3.) The principal journaled about the relationships built.
Do	The principal completed the activity.
Study	Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: 1.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and 2.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences.
Act	Respond to the data gathered in the *study* portion of this cycle determined next steps in the implementation process. Steps included re-adjustment, repetition of previous steps, abandonment of the improvement initiative, or moving on to the next step as planned.

Table 7 outlines the one activity suggested to allow the principal to demonstrate her competency to the staff. The activity was suggested to span from the start of the school-year in August to the end of the improvement initiative timeline in October. The activity required input from teachers to create context for the activity. In the *plan* row, a method for the principal to illicit input from the staff was stated. This activity was more organic and embedded into meetings then the researcher had originally intended. The researcher knew that the protocol would be modified to meet the specific leadership style of the principal. The process became more of a discussion then implementation of a protocol. In the *do* row, the expectation for the principal action to complete was defined. Because the system was not as defined the implementation of this activity was not as clearly implemented. Instead of qualitative data being gathered this activity became more of a realization of the importance of defining and committing to a system. In the *study* row, the repeating protocol to discuss

the activity was restated. In the *act* row, the behavior and next steps were influenced based

on the learning from the *study* component.

Table 7
Proposed PDSA Cycle Five as Formative Evaluation

PDSA Cycle as Formative Evaluation

Principal led teachers in discussion and activity identifying and solving current problems in the building.

Objective of this Cycle: The intervention provided an opportunity to demonstrate the principal's competency as their school leader.

Start Date: AUGUST 25th   End Date: OCTOBER 10th

Plan	Current Protocol. 1.) During a staff meeting, teams of teachers worked together to identify root causes of problems in the school. 2.) The teams used a tool such as the PDSA cycle to articulate the reoccurring problem and how they will *study* the problem. 3.) The principal customized the meeting and process based on all new knowledge learned during the preceding interventions. The goal is for teachers to have a voice to identify problems that could be solved by the individuals in the building with the principal's support.

Do	The principal completed the activity.

Study	Decisions for how to proceed were made collectively, based upon the team's review of two practical measures during the collaborative sessions: 1.) the principal's experiences as supported by general recall and notes from her reflective journal, and 2.) feedback from the other two members of the team in response to the principal's experiences.

Act	Respond to the data gathered in the *study* portion of this cycle determined next steps in the implementation process. Steps included re-adjustment, repetition of previous steps, abandonment of the improvement initiative, or moving on to the next step as planned.

It is plausible for there to be more or less cycles based on the input from principal and assistant superintendent. The above PDSA cycles created a starting point for each meeting with the two educators. The researcher constantly encouraged input that led to modifications, deletions, and additions. Each PDSA cycle led to changes:

a.) The suggested required 1:1 interviews were renamed meetings and were made optional by the principal, and then during the *study* step the principal reflected on the value of the process and recommitted to require the 1:1 meetings.

b.) The suggested Crucial Conversations protocol for small groups became a protocol of teachers providing feedback after staff meetings based on learning that took place during a *study* step. The originally protocol was too time consuming.

c.) The suggested WHY was not implemented during the time-frame because of principal's personal reluctance but during a *study* step the process was revisited and the principal recommitted. The principal completed her personal WHY in September and modified the process and shared a similar process of "It Matters" in October.

d.) The suggested activity of teams identifying a problem became more authentic and organic then the suggested protocol. In lieu of a meeting to define the problem and empower the teachers to solve it, the principal journaled conversations where teachers identified problems. During a *study* step it was decided the principal would keep a record of problems brought to her attention and document how the problem was solved.

The PDSA cycles were not as linear in reality as they were presented in the originally plan. At times, cycles overlapped and an additional activity was being implemented in tandem. The PDSA cycle created a systemic way for the principal, assistant superintendent, and researcher to implement the improvement initiative activities.

Method for Summative Evaluation

While formative data allows the practitioner to make immediate adjustments to the improvement initiative; summative data allows the practitioner to measure the overall

effectiveness at the end of the research. Four different data sources were accessed following implementation of the improvement initiative. Combining data from the four groups involved (teachers, assistant superintendent, principal, and researcher) gave a holistic perspective to the summative evaluation. When all four perspectives are reviewed in unison, it is more likely to get a better evaluation of the overall effectiveness of the improvement initiative. The four sources include: a.) teacher survey results from a self-constructed, digital survey, b.) superintendent survey, c.) new principal survey, and d.) field notes. The teacher survey data allowed us to measure the effectiveness of the improvement initiative activities and to supply data points for comparison with the previous Teacher Working Conditions survey. The two surveys provided opportunity to discuss what worked well, how to modify for the future, and the in-depth discussion about the improvement initiative. The field notes supplied a record of stories of how human behavior changed throughout the process. Collectively used, all four methods provided a holistic examination of the improvement initiative.

Method for teacher survey. The teacher survey included questions taken from the Teacher Working Conditions Survey (New Teacher Center, 2018) and questions I designed to elicit data in the areas of principal openness, benevolence, and competency. Together these three areas would be used to evaluate if the principal built trust with the teachers. Several questions in the initiative's survey were identical to those from the North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) survey (New Teacher Center, 2018). The TWC survey is given every other year in April and is the tool used in NC schools to objectively measure organizational culture. My survey questions used a Likert scale that mirrors the scale of the TWC survey format. The former principal gave the TWC survey in March 2018.

Teachers received an electronic survey on November 1st, 100 days after the principal took office. Although trust is built over long periods of time, 100 days is a sufficient amount of time, whereby if trust has been built, evidence of trust should be great enough to be measurable (Watkins, 2014). November 1st was selected because it met the previously agreed upon time commitment given by principal, and the date aligned with a preset staff meeting allowing the survey to be introduced. The aggregated data were used to determine any change over time reported by the teachers. The expectation was for each teacher to individually and anonymously complete the survey as they exited the regular monthly scheduled staff meeting. Each survey item used a five-point agreement scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree.

The following questions appeared on the survey:

1. The 1:1 meeting I had with my principal before school started was valuable to me.

2. The principal has asked our feedback on our most urgent problems and this was valuable to me.

3. Our principal's personal *WHY* that she shared in a staff meeting was valuable to me.

4. During Professional Learning Community (PLC) meetings and staff meetings where my principal shared "It Matters" she demonstrated her commitment and relationships to our school and I found this time valuable for our staff.

5. My current principal has helped our team solve a problem that we identified and this was valuable to me.

6. I believe my current principal took action and followed through on the most pressing problems identified by the staff.

7. I believe my current principal has demonstrated her commitment to building relationships with the community.

8. My current principal is working to create an environment that encourages us to share with her and with each other.

9. My current principal responds to teachers' feedback.

10. My current principal appears well meaning, intentional and caring.

11. My current principal appears competent as a school leader.

12. I have begun to build a trusting relationship with my current principal.

The twelve questions directly aligned with the teachers' perceptions regarding the value of each activity, the three specific goals of the improvement initiative, and one comprehensive question regarding the personal relationship with the principal.

The North Carolina TWC survey is given every other year to all public school teachers in North Carolina, with the most recent TWC survey administered in March of 2018. Each survey item uses a five-point agreement scale to match the TWC survey scale: strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree. The results of the TWC survey administered under the leadership of the former principal in March of 2018 were compared to the responses of the staff after 100 days of the new principal leading the school in November of 2018. The following additional eight questions were identical to the questions asked of the staff five months earlier under a previous principal in the TWC survey:

13. Our school has a positive school culture.

14. Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.

15. Teachers are encouraged to participate in school leadership roles

16. The faculty has an effective process for making group decisions to solve problems.

17. The faculty and staff have a shared vision.

18. There is an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect in this school.

19. Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.

20. I enjoy my job.

By comparing the survey results from March (mean of 81% agree and strongly agree) to the survey in November (mean of 85% agree and strongly agree), I was able to identify if there was significant decrease, increase, or stable response from the staff after principal transition.

Method for superintendent interview. The superintendent was interviewed using open-ended questions at the end of the 100-day improvement initiative. The questions allowed the superintendent to give her opinion and insight about the methods and outcomes of the activities and methodology. The same questions were used for the principal interview,

1. What were potential benefits of this improvement initiative to the new principal?

2. What would you do differently if this framework was implemented in another different school?

3. How might the entire district benefit from using a similar framework during principal transitions?

4. Is there anything else that you would like add about your experience with the
   improvement initiative?

Method for new principal interview. The new principal and superintendent were
interviewed separately about the improvement initiative after full implementation. The
principal interview questions were open-ended, allowing the interviewee to share her
personal perceptions about the impact of the improvement initiative. The interview lasted
approximately 45 minutes. The interview has specific questions but turned into a back and
forth conversation with the coach asking probing questions to each answer given. The same
prompts were used in the principal interview as the superintendent interview.

Method for field notes. I took field notes during each of the five Critical Friend
Conversations. Field notes (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault 2015) are the details of the actions
taken, words spoken, and observations by the coach during the process. Qualitative data has
many limitations and the field notes allow the nuances during the process to be captured to
help fully understand the impact of the initiative. Field notes allow a holistic view of the
process. The superintendent interview responses, new principal interview responses, and
field notes were coded to find common perceptions of the two district school leaders and to
determine how perceptions of the new principal have changed over the 100-day initiative. In
the social sciences, coding is a practice of categorizing results or transcripts thereby making
it possible to transform the data to be analyzed and compared (Creswell, 2002). During final
analyses of the field notes, the researcher identified many reoccurring comments that were
shared in multiple Critical Friends Conversations. Also, through coding and analyzing the
notes, former success and past concerns were referenced and used in follow-up.

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Formative Evaluation Results

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Each Critical Friend Conversation offered formative insight that led to adjustments to the proposed plan. There were modifications to the details of each activity throughout the initiative. A key factor for a successful disquisition is to allow formative evaluations to create modifications to the plan during the process. There were five Critical Friend Conversations and the table below is a record of the specific dialogue captured during each of meetings. The researcher took notes during each session and created each section of the graphic below using the field notes. Table 8 illustrates the reoccurring themes shared by the principal in each meeting. Each bullet is a quote or a paraphrase captured in field notes. The formative data in this section falls in two different categories. The first column answers the question, "What did you learn?" and the second column the principal shared what she would do differently. The answers to these questions became the formative data points that created ongoing adjustments to the implementation plan.

Table 8.

Formative Data from the Five Critical Friends Conversations.

Formative Data from Critical Friend Conversation on 8/16	
What did you learn?	**What would you do different next time?**
- It was clear who wants to be here and who does not want to be here. - They really want to know if I (the principal) will support them. - A few teachers are negative and not happy. "I need a better game face" to not show my immediate reaction or emotion to a situation.	- I would definitely do it but I would delegate more to others to help me set it up and help me manage time. They got long. - I would open it up to groups if they wanted, not just individuals. - I would try to talk less and listen more.

Formative Data from Critical Friend Conversation on 9/4	
What did you learn?	**What would you do different next time?**
• The point of sharing a personal *WHY*. It was very eye opening of how valuable it would be. I did not want to do it. The activity was really out of my comfort zone. • I have to do lots of things outside of my personal comfort zone because is what's best for my staff. • Social media is a great way to be positive or negative about our school *WHY*.	• Yes, I would share my *WHY* again. • I'm not sure what I would do different. Maybe practice more.

Formative Data from Critical Friend Conversation on 9/26	
What did you learn?	**What would you do different next time?**
• I learned the details of how to do a safety drill. And I learned there is a difference between what we do and what is written. • I am going to figure it out but it is going to take time and have some bumps at times. • Teachers get upset and their feelings hurt so easily here. • Common sense is always a strong plan.	• "Listen and hear what that means to them." What it means and what I think it means are not always the same. • Let things play its course and have natural consequences sometimes. I don't have to predict ever problem before it happens.

Formative Data from Critical Friend Conversation on 10/01	
What did you learn?	**What would you do different next time?**
• My staff wants me to fix all the problems. I have to get them to fix their own problems.	• Maybe asking more literally what problem they want to solve instead of me trying to figure out what problems they need solved.

• Relationships are important to solving our problems • The staff is beginning to trust me more.	

Formative Data from Critical Friend Conversation on 10/25	
What did you learn?	**What would you do different next time?**
• They need to know how passionate I am about this school and my job. • They want to know and hear how I am feeling and what I am thinking. • Elementary School is very much about emotions compared to high school. • Teachers need structure, correction, advice and comfort, just like students. • I see the teachers that have problems with other staff members are the same teachers that have student behavior problems.	• One thing is always tied to another, it's like peeling the layers of an onion. I would start to connect issues to other issues quicker. • I want to say not cry. Not be emotional. But I think it was okay that I did. • I like the T-chart activity it gave me perspective and account of how much we have done. I would keep that going.

The qualitative data captured in the Critical Friend Conversations led to constant revisions to the implementation plan. For example, an original activity consisted of the principal stating her values as a leader. The principal took the concept and created the "It Matters" speech that demonstrated examples of her values. Instead of a philosophical list of values, the principal shared specific actions that demonstrated her leadership style and why "It Matters." For example, the original 1:1 meetings were optional for staff, but the principal realized the value of the meetings and made these meetings required for the four teachers who did not originally volunteer. Repeatedly during Critical Friend Conversations, the

principal noted that the four teachers who did not volunteer for 1:1 meetings were less responsive to relationship-building than the rest of the teachers. The lack of investment from the four teachers during the first activity, foreshadowed the level of difficulty in building a relationship with the specific teachers.

The next five figures capture the interconnectivity between each PDSA cycle and the Critical Friend Conversations (ongoing formative assessments) and demonstrate the impact on the implementation plan. In a narrative format, before each figure, I will restate the activity that was planned going into implementation. After each figure, I will state modifications that were made to the implementation plan by the principal, assistant superintendent, and researcher based on the formative data captured.

Figure 6 captures the first PDSA cycle of the improvement initiative. The process started with the researcher sharing with the principal the literature supporting 1:1 meetings with teachers at the beginning of a transition. The principal immediately supported the concept and had already begun having 1:1 meetings the week prior to the first Critical Friends Conversation. Without prompting, the principal had made 1:1 meetings optional for new staff members to meet her. When the group discussed what was being learned using the personal format, it was shared that most of the meetings were the principal resharing details about herself. During the *plan* component of our first Critical Friends Conversation the three members made three adjustments to the implementation plan and the principal's current protocol. First, the principal wanted to call the meetings "1:1 Meetings" instead of the proposed "1:1 Interviews." Second, instead of open-ended conversation the principal would ask every staff member the three specific questions (what do you like, what do you not like, what do you want me to know). Third, the principal wanted to continue to make all meetings

optional. Figure 6, shows the entire PDSA that started based on the first Critical Friends

Conversation on June 31st.
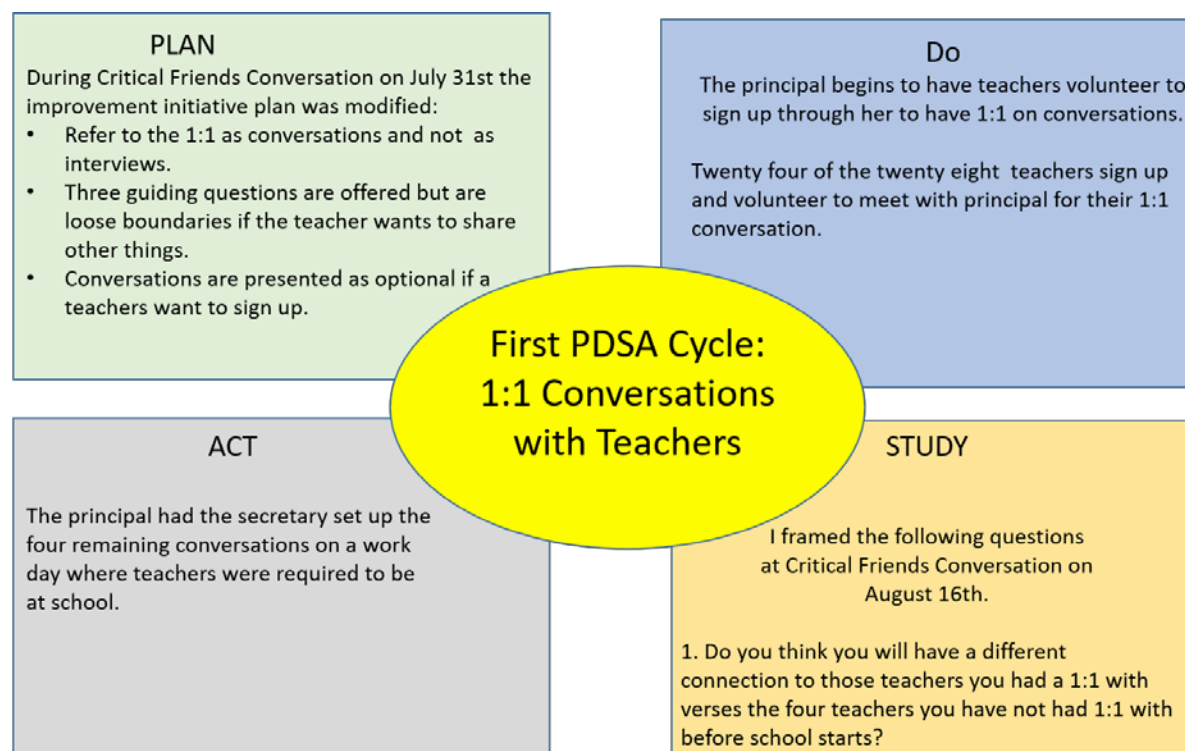
Figure 6. First PDSA cycle.

The principal continued to implement additional 1:1 meetings with the modified

parameters. A few teachers met as duos, a few teachers didn't volunteer, and a few teachers

expressed the value at the beginning of the conversation. During a Critical Friends

Conversation, the assistant superintendent and researcher posed the question, "Do you think

you will have a different connection to the teachers that you met with in a 1:1 meeting

versus the four teachers you will meet on the first day of school?" Two adaptations were

made based on the principal's response during the Critical friend conversation rooted in this

PDSA cycle. First, the researcher realized that the principal had to have freedom to adjust

the process to fit her style. The researcher had never imagined there would be a 2:1 meeting

but the researcher saw the value in allowing the principal to adjust to meet her style and

need. Second, the commitment from the principal increased the moment she saw she had

input to make the process her own. The principal began to see value in the first activity and

she immediately requested the school secretary call and set up required 1:1 meetings with

the four remaining teachers.

The next PDSA's primary focus was for the principal to share her personal *WHY*

with the staff. The original activity was designed to be a speech or monologue from the

principal to the staff. During the Critical Friend conversation (*plan*), the principal wanted to

design the activity to be interactive with the staff, and the principal wanted the assistant

principal to take the lead on the activity. The principal was very reluctant to participate in

this activity. Intellectually, she knew the value and benefit of sharing her personal *WHY,* but

she was very uncomfortable to be this personal, vulnerable, and intimate with the staff. The

PDSA cycle held the principal accountable to the desired outcome of connecting with the

staff around a personal *WHY*. The PDSA cycle organically allowed the principal to move

from her personal *WHY* to the staff sharing and visually displaying their own personal *WHY*

statements around the building. Figure 7 shows the original implementation initiative (*plan*),

the behavior that flowed out of the plan (*do),* the conversation/reflection around the action

(*study*), and the modified action that was implemented at the end of the cycle (*act*).

PLAN
During Critical Friends Conversation on August 16th the improvement initiative plan was modified:
- The principal wanted to create an activity where ever member of the staff shared their personal *WHY* on a piece of paper to make a display.
- The principal wanted her and the assistant principal to jointly share the importance of knowing their *WHY*.

Do
At the staff meeting on August 23rd the principal and assistant principal model an activity of how individuals can share their why.

The principal does NOT share her personal why due to time constraints and her personal hesitation.

Second PDSA Cycle: Principal Shared Her Personal Why

ACT

The principal wrote, practiced a very heartfelt personal WHY monologue , and shared with the staff on September 6th.

I received the following text the moment she completed her WHY with the staff.
"I did it. Read it. Round of applause."

STUDY

I framed the following question at Critical Friends Conversation on September 4th.

1. Do you think you have modeled the power of a personal *WHY* statement?

Figure 7. Second PDSA cycle.

During the third Critical Friend Conversation the principal began to mutually own the improvement initiatives with the researcher. It was during the third cycle that the principal had the idea of following up with the staff on the personal *WHY* but with her very individualized intervention of "It Matters." During the whole group staff meeting, the principal spent 30 minutes retelling her first 45 days at the school and the events that mattered most to her during her short tenure in the building. The "It Matters" was not an activity in the original implementation plan and it took time before it was implemented but the idea came from reflections during Critical Friends Conversation.

During Critical Friend Conversation on 8/16, field notes captured the principal's learning and her suggestions for the future. The repeating learning from this activity was the reflection on how important it can be to follow through and commit to actions even when

uncomfortable. At this time, the principal did not have tangible suggestions of how to improve this activity in the future.

During the third PDSA cycle (see Figure 8), the initiative transitioned from directed by researcher to led by the principal during Critical Friends Conversation. In lieu of the proposed activity of a Crucial Conversations protocol to build openness, the principal wanted to design a protocol that matched her personal style and fit into the current structures in the school that was renamed "Asking for Feedback." The process was added to the end of staff meetings during the research time period, the principal asked an open-ended question allowing teachers to directly or anonymously give feedback on what problems needed to be addressed with the staff. The principal would then follow up with individuals or the entire staff about each item. The open ended question, "Please put on a sticky note, any concerns you have that need to be addressed" was intentional by the principal, and a routine closure to each meeting. Figure 8 examines the agreed upon plan, the behavior that flowed from the plan, the conversation that studied the action, and the modified action based on the process.

PLAN
During Critical Friends Conversation on September,4th the improvement initiative plan was modified:
- Instead of referring to the activity a Crucial Conversations it will be called Asking for Feedback.
- Instead of being at small group PLCS it will be a routine question at each monthly staff meeting.
- The principal will ask the staff members to share feedback on individual posted notes.
- Feedback is allowed to be anonymous.

Do

At the staff meeting on September 25th the principal created a system for teachers to provide feedback of the first month of school.

All feedback received was positive.

Third PDSA Cycle: Asking for Feedback

ACT

The principal shared her thought that "trust is still being built."

The principal followed up in small groups of teachers asking for feedback and got more direct feedback- some positive and some concerns or misunderstandings.

STUDY

I framed the following question at Critical Friends Conversation on September 26th:

1. Do you think anyone has a concerns they are not sharing? Why?

Figure 8. Third PDSA cycle:

There was no crucial learning gathered on posted notes about the staff during this activity; however, the fact that all feedback was positive led to conversation during Critical Friends Conversations of, "Is there strong enough trust, yet?" The team agreed that asking for feedback cannot be seen as an event; feedback has to be consistently infused into the culture of the school. Therefore, the feedback activity became an ongoing component of staff meetings, not isolated to the time frame of the improvement initiative.

It should be noted, while the focus of the Critical Friends Conversation was on the improvement initiative, it allowed a safe space for the principal to ask specific clarification questions to the assistant superintendent. The isolated statements did not always correlate exactly to the activity in the proceeding PDSA cycle, yet it did connect to the overall improvement initiative. As the recorder of the conversations, I made a comment in the field

notes, "The principal is asking specific questions to the assistant superintendent that demonstrate the anomalies around a transition. I was able to observe the principal realize that written expectations and cultural norms were not always identical." It was during the Critical Friends Conversation in a PDSA cycle, that I began to question the original implementation plan involving separate activities for openness, activities for benevolence, and activities for perceived competency. Field notes illustrated how one activity could demonstrate all three at the same time. There was a deeper understanding by the researcher of how interconnected the three goals were to each other.

In Figure 9, the PDSA cycle was used to capture the methods in which the principal helped solved problems for different teams. The T-chart method of writing down the many different challenges and solutions became a critical learning point for the principal. During Critical Friends Conversation, the trio discussed how many problems a principal encounters in such a short amount of time, and how important it is to realize how the problems build to the next, and how the solutions are interconnected. An observation made by the coach during this session was that there was not a clear process to prioritize problems. All problems were seen as urgent and important to the teachers, and at times were seen as urgent and important to the principal.
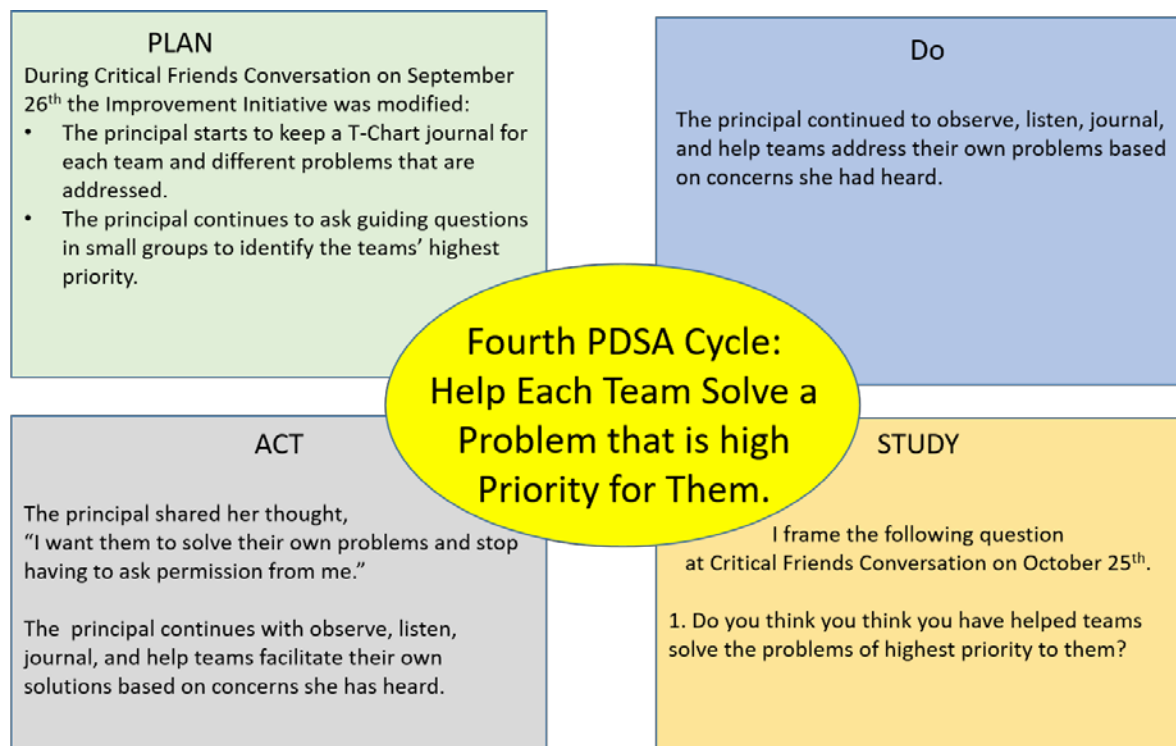
PLAN
During Critical Friends Conversation on September 26th the Improvement Initiative was modified:
- The principal starts to keep a T-Chart journal for each team and different problems that are addressed.
- The principal continues to ask guiding questions in small groups to identify the teams' highest priority.

Do
The principal continued to observe, listen, journal, and help teams address their own problems based on concerns she had heard.

Fourth PDSA Cycle: Help Each Team Solve a Problem that is high Priority for Them.

ACT
The principal shared her thought, "I want them to solve their own problems and stop having to ask permission from me."

The principal continues with observe, listen, journal, and help teams facilitate their own solutions based on concerns she has heard.

STUDY
I frame the following question at Critical Friends Conversation on October 25th.

1. Do you think you think you have helped teams solve the problems of highest priority to them?

Figure 9. Fourth PDSA cycle.

The narrative captured in the figure directly aligns to the observations from the researcher about the previous PDSA cycle. There was not a clear system to prioritize issues. The principal was aware that the teachers want her to solve their problems and that all problems were seen as urgent, but there was not a consistent method used to prioritize problems that should be addressed.

Figure 10 captures an activity that was predominately created by the principal to address a problem she saw within the staff. The process mirrored the personal *WHY* method, but it fit the style of the principal. The principal became emotionally invested in the activity and emotional when sharing her experience during Critical Friends Conversation. The "It Matters" activity was a monologue where the principal demonstrated her personal values through storytelling and recalling specific moments during the beginning of the year. The activity provided a customized method for the principal to demonstrate benevolence.
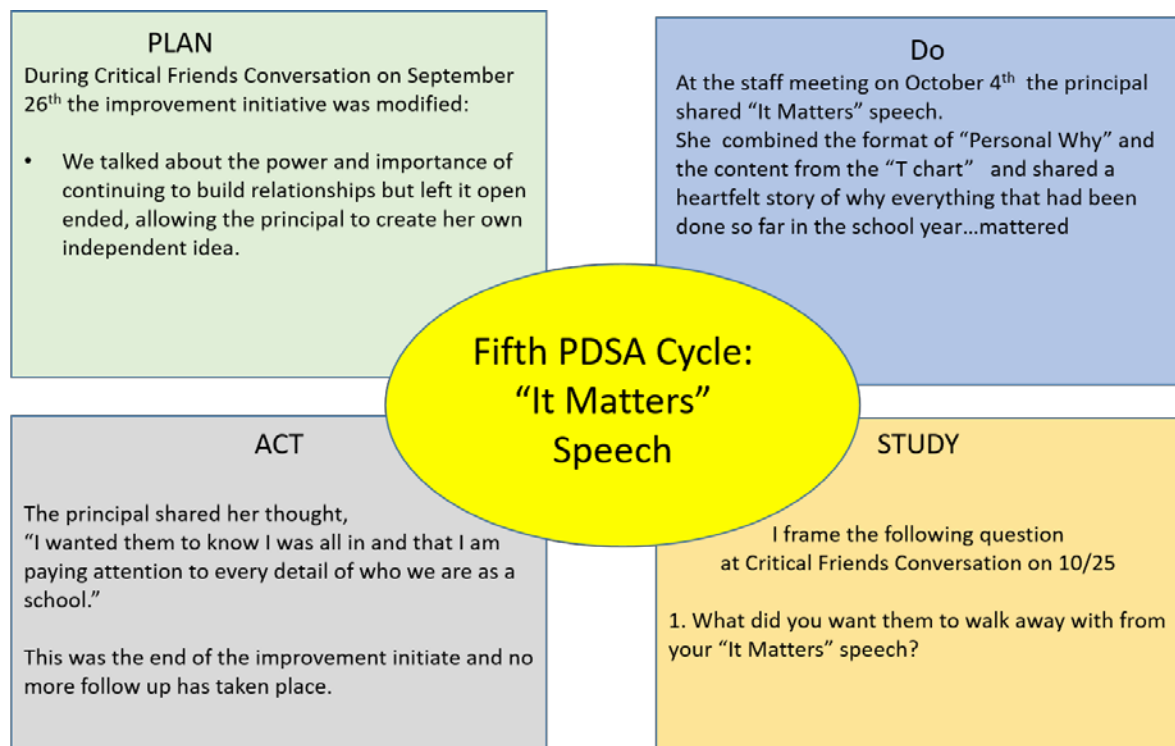
Figure 10. Fifth PDSA cycle.

The dialogue between the assistant superintendent and principal consisted of reaffirming to the principal the value of being vulnerable and showing her caring nature. While being vulnerable and emotional were very uncomfortable for the principal, she admitted that she was beginning to see the value of sharing an intimate moment with her staff.

Synopsis of Formative Evaluation Results

In the beginning, the activities (1:1 teacher meeting and personal *WHY* statement) were heavily led by the investigator, and the principal complied and followed through. There was a moment in the process where the activities became mutually owned, and the principal began to take ownership on how to individualize the interventions. As the researcher I was aware of the shift during our second Critical Friends Conversation, when the questions from

principal shifted from, "What should I do?" to "How about if I did.…" The first two cycles

of Critical Friend Conversation were about very specific activities, but by cycle three, the

conversation was less about activities and more about ongoing interaction with her staff. Out

of one Critical Friend Conversation with the principal, assistant superintendent, and

researcher, the idea emerged of creating a T-chart of problems that had been presented to her

and how they had been addressed. In later meetings, she referenced the T-chart and a

reflection of how many topics she and the staff had addressed in such a short time. The T-

chart activity form a Critical Friends Conversation made an impression on the principal.

<div align="center">

Summative Evaluation Results

</div>

Summative data were collected through teacher survey results. On November 1st, I

met with the staff during a regularly scheduled staff meeting to introduce the survey. The

date met our improvement initiative timeline and allowed me to introduce the survey to the

staff in a scheduled, full staff meeting. The survey was emailed to the principal as a

hyperlink prior to the meeting, which allowed the principal to forward the email with the

survey to the entire staff immediately after the comments below were shared with the staff. I

read the following script to the staff,

> Hello, my name is Michael Armstrong, I am a leadership coach and a
>
> student at WCU in their educational leadership doctoral program. I have
>
> been researching principal transitions; more specifically, how school
>
> communities experience a new leader.
>
> I received permission from Susanne Swanger and your principal to observe
>
> the principal transition process at your school as part of my research. I am
>
> here today to ask you to take a 15 to 20-minute survey about the transition

process at your school. Your experiences/perceptions are critical to
understanding what helps and what doesn't. In the long run, I hope to
contribute to the knowledge-base on successful transitions knowing that
smooth transitions contribute to the success of both teachers and students.

Twenty-five of twenty-nine staff members gave their consent to participate and completed the survey. The principal had scheduled time at the end of the meeting to allow most teachers to choose to complete the survey. Twenty-one surveys were completed that afternoon and an additional four surveys were submitted within the week time frame given to the teachers.

Additionally, two interviews were conducted on October 25th to provide summative data: a 45-minute interview with the assistant superintendent by the researcher and a separate 45-minute interview with the principal by the researcher. The morning of October 25th met the improvement initiative timeline and the principal and assistant superintendent were available. The interviews were a critical component of the summative results. The qualitative feedback given from the two individuals provided more context to better understand the teacher survey data. The separate interviews allowed the other critical members of the Critical Friend Conversations to share their perspective of each activity's value, the overall framework, and thoughts on how to improve the initiative.

The summative evaluation results were analyzed to determine the level of accomplishment of the three desired outcomes: openness, benevolence and perceived competency. First, teacher survey data collected at the end of the improvement initiative was interpreted. Twenty-five of twenty-nine teachers chose to take the survey. Second, the

results from the two summative interviews (principal and assistant superintendent) were analyzed. Each had separate interviews for 45 minutes with the researcher on the overall benefit of the improvement initiative. And third, a vignette from field notes that captured the human story of change was shared. The moments that made up the story were collaboratively decided on by the researcher and principal as moments that demonstrated the impact of the improvement initiative. Finally, a data set of eight questions was compared to the composite of overall change in trust between former principal and staff in March 2018, with the new principal and staff in October 2018. Teachers were given eight questions drawn from the NC Teacher Working Conditions Survey (TWC). A comparison of the results illustrates the change or continuity of school culture and trust within the first 100 days of the principal transition. While teachers were asked to respond to all questions on a 5- point Likert scale, the data are being reported in three categories. The options strongly disagree and disagree are combined on all graphs. Strongly agree and agree are combined on all graphs. And neutral remains a middle category. The primary reason for organizing data in this way is to match the method of collecting data and the method of reporting data used by the TWC. Using the same data reporting structure allows for stronger comparisons.

Desired Outcome for Goal # 1: Openness

Goal #1: Teachers will report that the principal has a) created an open environment that encourages them to communicate and participate and b) teachers will report that the principal is responsive to their feedback. The primary activity from the improvement initiative that addressed Goal #1 is the principal hosted 1:1 meetings with teachers prior to start of school and the principal created a feedback system after staff meetings for teachers to share their concerns.

Teacher survey results. All questions in Figure 11 connect to the first goal of openness. The data set is directly connected to specific actions during the improvement initiative. The teacher perception of the value of the 1:1 meetings and the system the principal created to gather feedback during staff meetings is depicted on the graph below. The fourth question measures teacher perception of a culmination of many actions that the principal worked on daily during the first 100 days that are not solely connected to the improvement initiative. Figure 11 shows the results of the survey that connect to Goal #1.

Goal 1: Openness

4. My current principal is working to create an environment that encourages us to share with her and each other. — 92% / 8%

3. The principal has asked our feedback on our most urgent problems and this was valuable to me. — 72% / 16%

our feedback. — 82% / 12%

1. The 1:1 meeting I had with my principal before school started was valuable to me. — 88% / 12%

■ Strongly Agree and Agree
■ Neutral
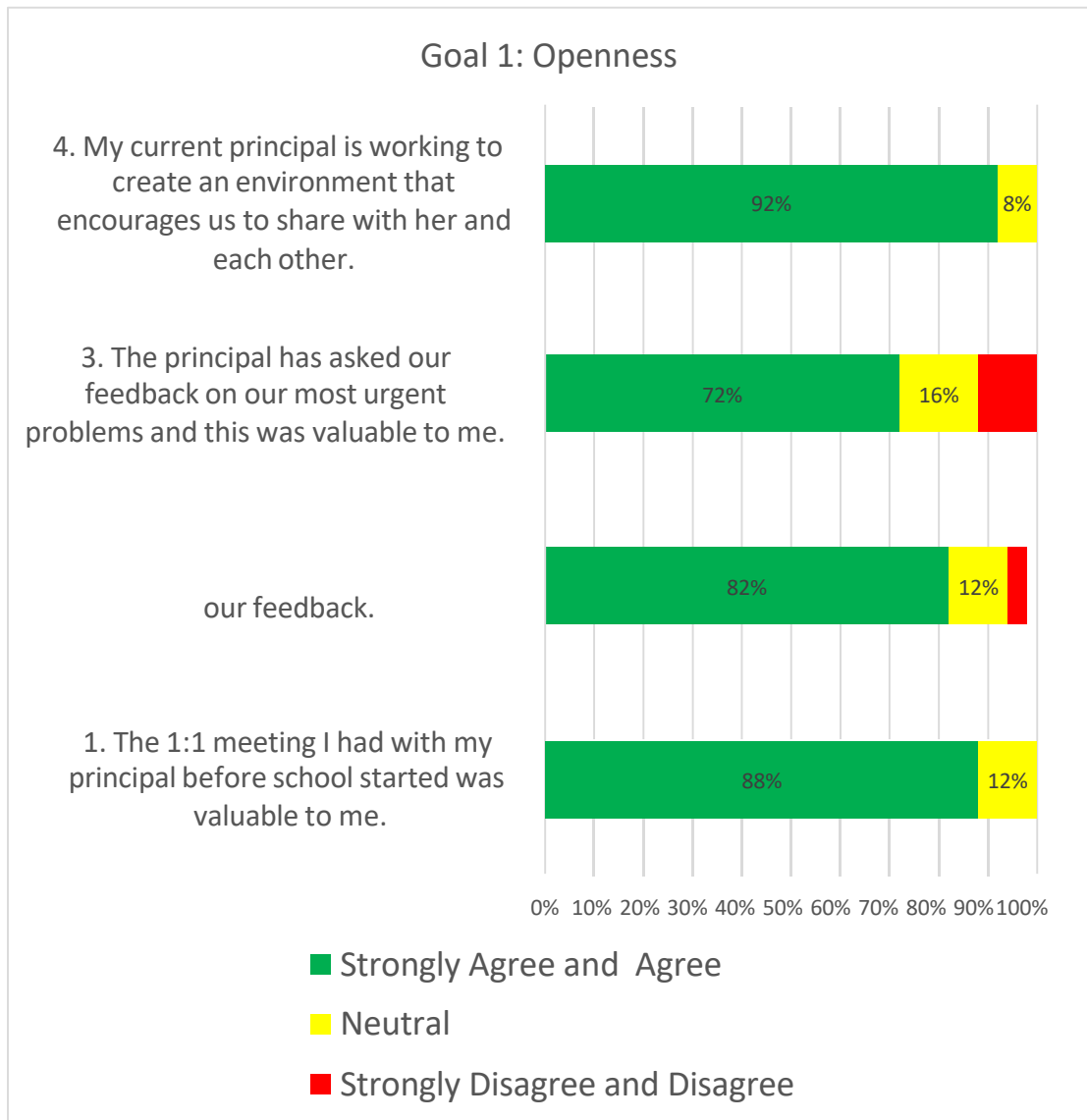■ Strongly Disagree and Disagree

Figure 11. Teacher survey results for Goal #1 of openness. n=25.

  Question about 1:1 meetings. No staff member disagreed with the value of time on the 1:1 meetings. When digging deeper in the data: 60% strongly agreed with the use of this time, 28% agreed with the use of the time, and 12% were neutral. The dialogue and specific impact of the 1:1 meetings were discussed in detail with the principal during her summative interview. The survey data suggests 1:1 meetings with staff members are of value to a school during a principal transition. The intervention is an example of an activity that was mutually owned by the principal and the researcher. The 1:1 meeting format and questions were revised during Critical Friend Conversations with continuous principal input to make the process more authentic and individual to the principal.

  Question about responding to feedback. Eighty-four percent of the teachers felt that the principal addressed their feedback. Only four percent (1 of 25) of teachers felt the principal was unresponsive to teacher feedback. The high positive rating on the second question in Figure 12 would suggest that a routine intentional way of asking for feedback from staff could have a positive impact on teachers' perceptions of principal's capability to address issues of concern.

  Question about responding to urgent problems. Staff agreement on this statement was the lowest data of any of the questions in the survey at seventy-two percentage points. The question was very similar to the previous question, "the principal responds to our feedback." The significant word in this question was "most urgent." When digging deeper into the data around the question: 12% strongly agreed with this statement and 60% agreed. The data suggest the staff believes the principal is competent and focused on their feedback.

Question about Environment that Encourages Sharing. The final question measured the overall outcome of Goal #1: Openness. The fourth question, a comprehensive question, had the highest level of affirmation from the staff. Ninety-six percent of the staff felt creating an environment where the staff shares with others is a focus of the principal. And the remaining four percent were neutral. The comprehensive question connected to three specific principal actions from the improvement initiative from above, but more importantly every small interaction the principal had with her staff on a daily basis. The data might suggest that not all strategies will apply to all staff members, but there is value in focusing on strategies that demonstrate openness to the staff.

Summative interviews results. The assistant superintendent and principal were interviewed separately in 45- minute sessions with four basic leading questions:

- What were the benefits and outcomes of this work?

- Reflect on the framework used and how it could be improved.

- Is there a need to replicate a similar process at district level?

- Any other thoughts on this process?

The principal responded, "We built our relationships (principal and researcher) over time and having that outside view helped me focus on relationships within the school." She shared how it was helpful to bounce off ideas and think through where to focus. " You have given me focused time to reflect. A nudge." The response from the principal suggests the value of the Critical Friend Conversation process. The process prompted reflection and discussion with a non-evaluator.

The assistant superintendent responded to the question in the summative interview with affirmation to the protocol. She commented on how the improvement initiative created timelines, deadlines, and defined activities that set the principal up for success. The assistant superintendent elaborated on how she talks about the importance of relationships in principal meetings and that the activities ensured relationships were a focus for the new principal.

Story of impact from field notes. The two leaders referenced anecdotal stories over the last 100 days of how a relationship became a success story through intentional focus of the principal. One of the stories is highlighted here. Early in the process, I asked the principal, "How are the 1:1 meetings going?" She replied,

> They are good. But some of them are so long. I had a teacher yesterday that just wanted to talk about so much. I had scheduled 20 minutes, but she talked for an hour. I wanted to cut her off but she had so much to say. I just listened. We didn't really even solve anything. I didn't even talk. She is a special education teacher, and she just wanted to share so much.

In the beginning, the principal found the 1:1 meetings long and very time consuming. She had not yet felt the benefit of the time investment. She was assuming the time spent was keeping her away from more pressing problems.

A month later I asked, "Which team has been the most challenging in helping to solve a problem?" She replied,

> The special education team. They all have so many questions. Well, remember that one teacher that talked to me for an hour at the beginning of the year. Well, she is

great. She just does her thing like we are on the same page. The others, they have

lots of questions.

I ask, "Why do you think the two of you are on the same page?" The principal laughed, "I

guess we have a connection because she knew I listened to her before school started." The

principal began to articulate that she could see how all the steps were interconnected and

designed to build trust.

Synopsis of Goal #1. The teacher survey data and the interviews from principal and

assistant superintendent suggest that the incoming principal has demonstrated openness to

the teachers within the first 100 days. The 1:1 meetings were very time-consuming at the

beginning of the school year, but the information gathered in the twenty-eight 1:1 meetings

have been used routinely, referenced, and built upon during the beginning months of the

principal's tenure. The 1:1 meetings appear to be an effective method to demonstrate

openness.

Desired Outcome for Goal #2: Benevolence

Goal #2 is "Teachers will report that the principal is well-meaning, intentional and

caring." To address this goal, the principal implemented her personal *WHY* and her "It

Matters" speech to establish a sense of benevolence. Benevolence is defined as caring,

intentional, and well-meaning. The activities were designed to allow the teachers to see that

the principal personally cares about them as individuals.

Teacher survey results. Five questions in the teacher survey were intended to

measure the principal's benevolence, as seen in Figure 12. The first two questions were

about specific actions the principal took as part of the improvement initiative. The first

question asked about the value of the principal sharing her personal *WHY* with the staff that

allowed the teachers to know more about her personal background. The second question

asked about the value of the principal sharing her "It Matters" speech that allowed her to

share specific examples of what she values. Questions 3 and 4 allowed the teachers to give

overall feedback on their level of trust with the principal and principal benevolence. Figure

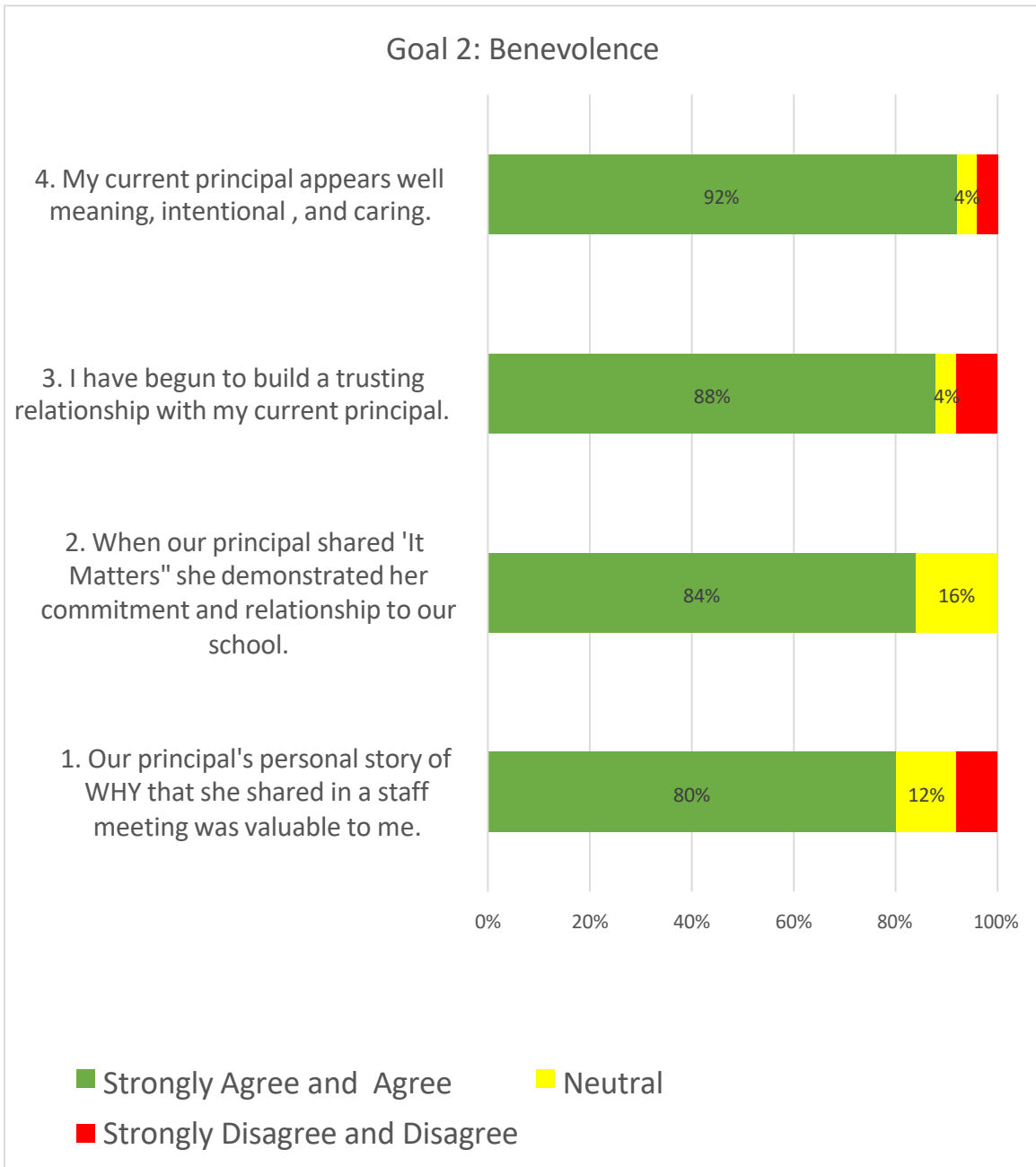12 provides data about teacher perception on Goal #2.

Goal 2: Benevolence

4. My current principal appears well meaning, intentional , and caring. — 92% — 4%

3. I have begun to build a trusting relationship with my current principal. — 88% — 4%

2. When our principal shared 'It Matters" she demonstrated her commitment and relationship to our school. — 84% — 16%

1. Our principal's personal story of WHY that she shared in a staff meeting was valuable to me. — 80% — 12%

0% 20% 40% 60% 80% 100%

■ Strongly Agree and Agree   ■ Neutral
■ Strongly Disagree and Disagree

Figure 12. Teacher survey results for Goal #2 of benevolence. n=25.

Question about principal sharing personal WHY. Eighty percent of teachers agreed or strongly agreed that hearing the personal *WHY* story from the principal was valuable. Another 12% were neutral about the experience and only four percent (1 out of 25) disagreed with how the time was spent. The data suggest that the principal sharing her

personal *WHY* was well-received by the staff and a good use of time during a staff meeting at the beginning of the principal transition.

      Question about "It Matters." Eighty-eight percent of the staff found the "It Matters" activity valuable and the remaining 12% were neutral about the experience. The data on the third question in Figure 12 question suggest the ongoing value and impact of the principal demonstrating openness to the staff. A teacher summative interview question was modified to specifically evaluate the value of the "It Matters" activity.

      Question about building trust. Twenty-two of the twenty-five teachers (88%) believed they had begun to build a trusting relationships with the principal in the first 100 days. Literature suggests if trust is built within the first 100 days, then the principal is more likely to maintain a positive school climate, which would result in stronger positive impact over time.

      Question about well meaning, intentional, and caring. One out of twenty-five (four percent) of staff members did not believe the principal was well-meaning and intentional. When disaggregating the data, one teacher survey respondent disagreed or was neutral with each of the 20 questions asked. The data suggest that there is one staff member who is having great difficulty with the new principal. The fact that 92% of the staff have a positive perspective of the principal's intentions is an indicator that the principal has managed an effective transition.

      Summative interviews results. The summative interview allowed the participants (assistant superintendent and principal) to share their reflections on the comprehensive processes and outcomes of the improvement initiative. The assistant superintendent

reaffirmed her belief in sharing a personal *WHY* and the need to better equip new principals on the importance of this type of activity. When the assistant superintendent was asked about the benefits of this process, she replied,

> She learned how to share her *WHY* with a systemic approach and a method that made an impact. I am not sure even experienced principals always remember the power of sharing a personal *WHY*. And her (the principal's) vulnerability was highlighted allowing others to see her kind, caring heart and that she is ready to serve this school with all she has. I knew this about her. Now the staff knows it.

The district leader knew the entering principal had the characteristics to be caring, intentional, and well-meaning to the staff (benevolent). It appears the improvement initiative activities allowed the staff to see the principal's benevolence as well.

In both interviews the leaders focused on how the improvement initiative reminded them of the value of structures, timelines, and specific activities that built benevolence. When reflecting in the final interview the principal added,

> I didn't want to share my *WHY*. It just didn't feel like me. But you kept nudging me and I did it. And then they applauded. And later that activity led to "It Matters" with the staff.

The story below captures the impact and excitement around the improvement initiative. The principal stated she found value in the improvement initiative which led to her modifying some of her own behaviors. The teachers responded positively to the modified behaviors while increased the level of commitment to the new behaviors.

Story of impact from field notes. During the summative interview, the researcher and principal agreed on a story that provided a tangible example of the improvement initiative leading to perception of benevolence. The following story is the retelling of a specific event as recorded in field notes during Critical Friend Conversations,

> The principal had a grin on her face as she handed me her phone. 'This is the text I got the afternoon after I shared my personal *WHY* with the staff.' On her phone was a meme of President Obama giving a thumbs up and a caption that read, *We are grateful for you.* The principal beamed as she shared the gesture from a staff member. She continued, I didn't want to share my *WHY*. This is not me. It seemed too touchy-feely. I thought, they know my *WHY*…I love children. But you forced me and I'm glad I did. They were able to see a little bit deeper about me. I shared more personal things than I ever have with a staff. And they seemed genuinely interested. We are now leading an activity where each staff member is writing and posting their personal *WHY*. And I got to model this for the teachers. I didn't want to, but I'm glad I did.

A month later, I sat in the same chair and the principal held a piece of paper in her hand.

> Something wasn't right. I felt that we had lost our *WHY* after just a few weeks. I sat down and read the journal I have been keeping about my first 45 days and I created a list of "It Matters." The specific things that we have done to help a child, to support each other, to impact our community. And I thought, I need to tell them this. I need to remind them of why "It Matters." So, I stood in front of the staff and looked them in the eye and shared this part of my story. And I cried. I am not a crier. I didn't expect to respond this way. I was just overcome with how important my *WHY* is

here at this school. I remembered you both reminding me, "It's okay to be vulnerable

and let the staff see how much you care." So I went for it. I just shared my heart.

The principal saw the benefit of sharing her personal *WHY* with her staff. After feeling a

positive effect from the activity, she built upon the idea and later created her "It Matters"

speech which was a more in-depth version of her personal *WHY* statement. The focus on

activities during the improvement initiative led to these outcomes illustrated in the story and

examples above.

Synopsis of Goal #2. The data from the teacher survey, interviews with principal

and assistant superintendent, and stories from field notes all suggest that the principal has

been effective in demonstrating benevolence with the teachers. It is imaginable that the

principal utilized many other methods to show benevolence that led to these end results.

However, it is likely that the principal sharing her personal *WHY* and her "It Matters" speech

impacted teacher's perception of their principal's benevolent nature.

Desired Outcome for Goal #3: Perceived Competency

For Goal #3, "Teachers will report the principal is a competent leader." An important

exchange of thoughts during a Critical Friend Conversation involved the difference between

competency and *perceived competency*. The assistant superintendent reminded the principal,

"It is not only doing the right thing, but doing the right thing at the right time for the right

people." The preceding conversation between the school leaders focused on how to inform

the stakeholders, how to engage the stakeholders, and how to report back to the

stakeholders. It was repeatedly stated that there is no lack of competency for the principal.

The challenge was keeping those she supervised abreast of when, how and why she made a decision.

Teacher survey results. The following questions addressed activities and items that were mutually created by the principal and researcher. These items were modified in the fourth and fifth PDSA cycle based on formative date collected. Figure 14 shows the survey results for this goal.
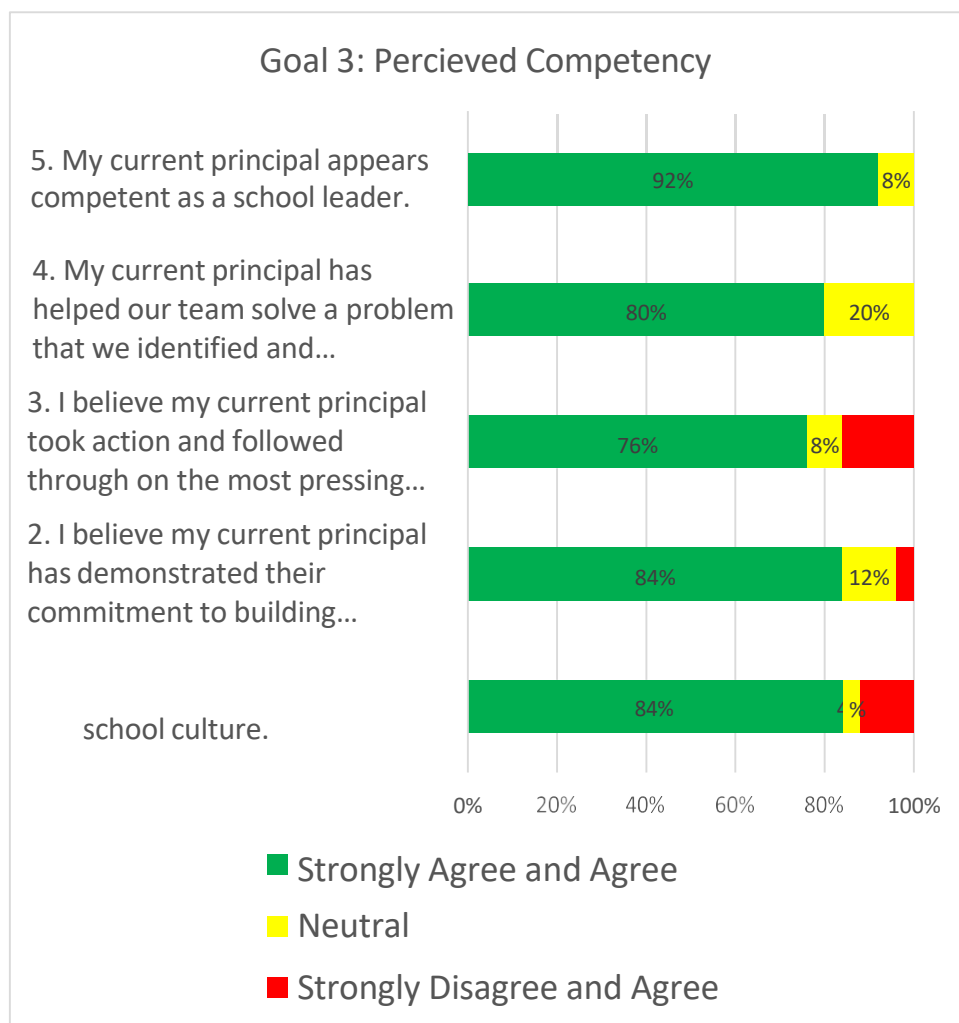

Figure 13. Teacher survey results for Goal #3 of perceived competency. n=25.

Question about solving problems. Eighty percent of teachers state the principal has assisted their team solve a problem. Additionally, 20% were neutral to the statement. The data point has potential to be interconnected with an earlier question, "My principal has addressed our most urgent problems." If the research were continuing, I would encourage the principal to find ways to determine if her priorities of problems are in the same order as members of the staff. The principal might be solving problems that the staff do not feel or are unaware are a priority. Theoretical questions to pose to the principal if the research was continuing: is it possible there is different set of priority of values between you and the teachers? Is there a lack of awareness of the problems you are helping to solve?

Question about positive school climate. Eighty-four percent of staff members felt that the school has a positive school climate. When compared to past TWC data points the current score is very positive compared to historical data.

Question about competent as a leader. One hundred percent of staff members agreed or were neutral to this statement, "My principal is competent." No staff members reported having reservation about the principal's competency.

Summative interviews results. These data suggest the assistant superintendent was very knowledgeable of the principal's capability. In addition, this data point suggests one of the assistant superintendent's specific goals were met during the research. The assistant superintendent stated,

> She brought lots of skills to the table. Her previous work added to her strength and readiness to be a principal. I think we might have to be more intentional with other principals that may not have the skill set she has for leading.

As researcher, the competency goal was the easiest of the three goals to discuss with the principal during the process. Her skill set for leading instruction and systems were very high, and she spoke with knowledge and conviction. The assistant superintendent elaborated, "I think this built her confidence for the specific work at this school." The principal had spent the majority of her career in a high school setting and often referenced the differences between emotional responses from high school and elementary teachers. The principal felt that elementary school teachers focused on emotional responses more frequently than the high school teachers from her previous experiences. The principal elaborated,

> That T-chart activity really got me thinking about the kinds of issues and things that came up with the staff and how we found a solution. I forgot how elementary is so different than the high school world. They go to their department and focus on content, first. Here we have to strive to build relationships. They are living and eating together. I found myself started to processing…there is something bigger here for me and "It Matters."

The difference between "competency" and "perceived competency" was an ongoing discussion during Critical Friend Conversation. The leader is competent by all standards, but did the staff know about her competency? Did the staff see her competence around the issues that mattered the most to them?

The principal replied, "I don't want to solve all their problems. I want them to start solving their own problems." This comment led to a specific story that captured the principal's method for demonstrating her competency to solve problems.

Story of impact from field notes. I asked the principal during the summative interview to tell me about a problem that a team faced that you helped them solve. She replied,

> Oh, I know exactly which one. Choosing an LEA for IEP meetings. Our special education teachers are not planning ahead on who will be the LEA and then turning it into an urgency for everyone around them. I saw this last week. One teacher had a scheduled IEP meeting and I knew all the people that could LEA, including myself, were in other meetings. But I just waited to see how this would be solved. And then the morning of the IEP (individualized education plan) meeting she was running around asking people to leave their other meetings to LEA (local education agency) for her. She came to me and said, "What do I do?" I asked her, "What do you think you should do?" She replied, "I have to get someone to leave their meeting so we can have the meeting because the parent is here." I responded, "Or you could tell the parent a mistake has been made and we will need to reschedule. Then bring the team together and create a calendar so that this problem never happens again." She was not happy at that moment. But when the calendar and process for reserving an LEA was complete, the team was happy. It was so simple but required a natural consequence and then time for them to solve their own problem. They acted like I had an event scheduled ahead of time. I thought this is so simple, it just take time. We have to create more systems like this to make it easier for our staff.

The story shares the principal's excitement around helping her teachers solve their own problems. She had the teachers identify the problem and then she took action proving her leadership competency to the staff.

Synopsis of Goal #3. The staff was clearly aware of the principal's competency as evidenced by the teacher survey data, interviews with principal and assistant superintendent and stories shared during Critical Friend Conversation. The idea of "perceived competency" could be an area to focus on in the future. The activities for Goal 3 could be more specific allowing the principal to lead the teachers in defining priority of issues. Less time was spent on activities for this goal than the first two goals as part of the improvement intervention.

Comparing 2018 TWC Data with Improvement Initiative Data

The North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions (TWC) survey is the tool used in NC schools to objectively measure organizational culture. The first survey was given in April of 2018 under the leadership of the former principal, with the second survey given on November 1st. The following eight questions in Figure 14 were worded exactly the way they were on the TWC survey, allowing comparison of teachers' perceptions from April of 2018 to November of 2018. The aim of the improvement initiative was to prevent a decline in teacher perception of benevolence, openness, and competency during the first 100 days. The data from Figure 16 will be reviewed in three categories: data that remained consistent, data

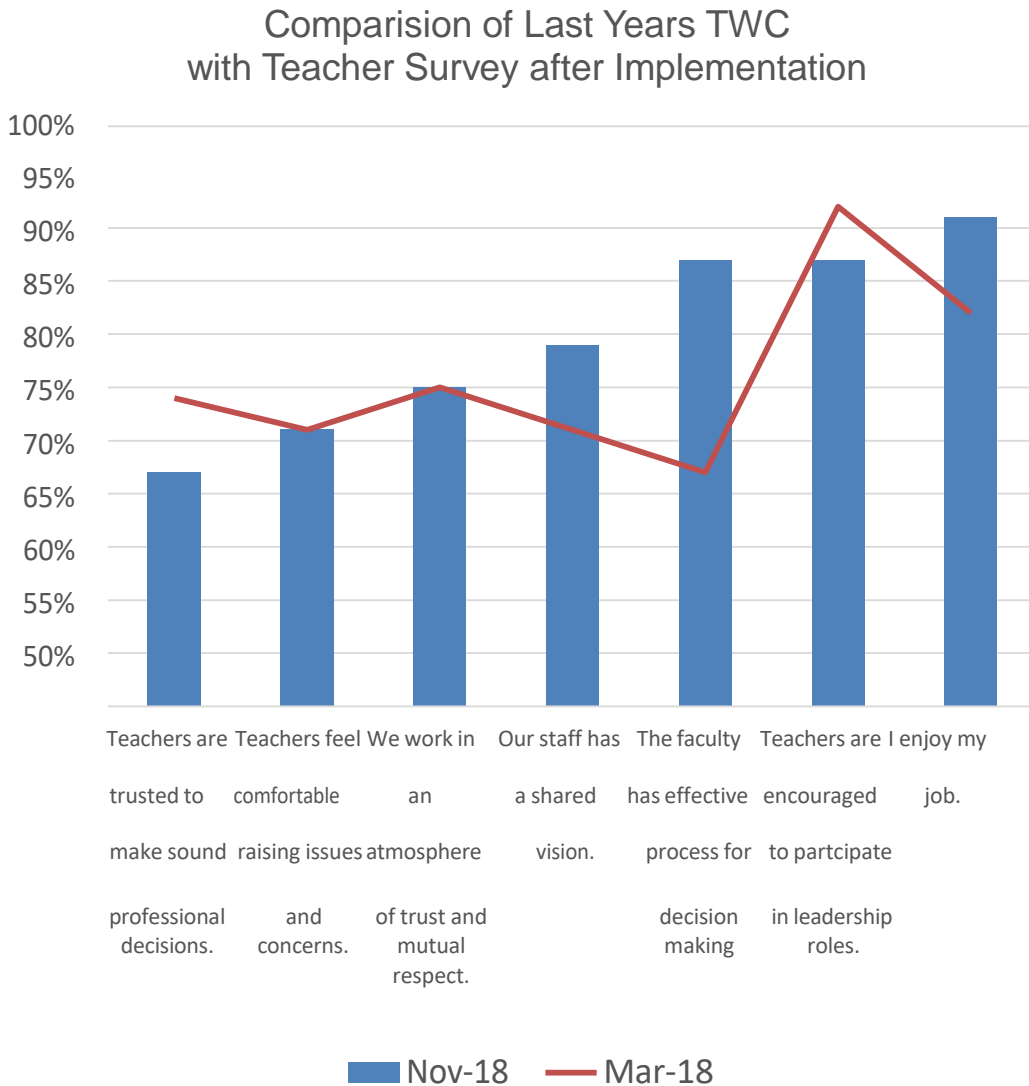that illustrated improvement, data that illustrated a decline.

Figure 14. Comparison data with Teacher Working Conditions survey results. n=25 for November data. n=28 for March data.

Data that remained consistent. Two of the seven questions had the exact same percentage of approval from the twenty-five teachers at the school from one school year to the next. "Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns," and "We work in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect" had the same rate of approval year to year. Both questions were measures of trust in the building between the staff and the principal. The consistent response suggests that in the first 100 days the incoming principal was able to

maintain similar levels of trust that the former principal had established in the school over the entire school year.

Data illustrated improvement. Three survey questions have an increased number of teachers that agreed or strongly agreed with the statement in November of 2018 versus April 2018 of the former school year. The TWC survey data was completed by teachers working at Metamorphous School in April of 2018 and the second data set was completed by teachers working at Metamorphous School in November of 2019 (there has been some teacher turn-over during the data collection). The three questions with an increased approval: "Our staff has a shared vision," "The faculty has an effective process for decision making," and "I enjoy my job." The "effective process for decision making" had the highest change in scores of any of the questions from 72% to 92% approval from the staff. These three question suggest that the principal had been very effective in maintaining and possibly improving the school culture within the first 100 days of her tenure as principal of the school.

Data illustrated a decline in trust. "Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions" dipped from 78% to 72% and "Teachers are encouraged to participate in leadership roles" decreased from 96% to 92%. There was one staff member at the school who responded with disagree or neutral to every question asked on the survey.

Comparing Summative Survey to Historical TWC Results

Table 9 captures historical data about teacher perception at Metamorphous Elementary School. Seven questions on the summative survey were identical to questions asked of the staff at the end of the 2014, 2016, and 2018 school year. The survey was not

taken by the identical staff because there has been teacher turn-over each year. However, TWC survey is used as a means by our state to recognize trends over time. Metamorphous Elementary school has had three principals since 2013 (the time frame of the comparison data in table 9) and this is the first time specific data have been captured about the principal transition during the first 100 days of the transition.

Table 9

Aggregated Historical Pre and Post Data of Teacher Perception

Teacher Survey Question		Strongly Agree AND Agree						
	N	Summative Survey	N	TWC 2018	I	TWC 2016	N	TWC 14
I enjoy my job.	25	96%	22	87%	21	89%	26	64%
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns.	25	76%	22	76%	21	39%	26	24%
We work in an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect.	25	80%	22	80%	21	42%	26	30%
Our staff has a shared vision.	25	84%	22	76%	21	n/a	26	n/a
The faculty has effective process for decision making	25	92%	22	72%	21	48%	26	57%
Teachers are encouraged to participate in leadership roles.	25	92%	22	97%	21	76%	26	82%
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions.	25	72%	22	79%	21	69%	26	50%

Mean of the selected seven questions	25	85%	22	81%	21	61%	26	51%

While there is evidence to show the TWC data have improved over time (51% approval on

2014 TWC survey to 81% approval on TWC in 2018) there is also evidence in the short

time between 2018 TWC in April and the summative survey in November 2018, that

perhaps the anticipated risk of transition was mitigated (TWC in April 81% approval and

summative survey in November 85% approval).

Synopsis of Summative Evaluation Results

The aim of the disquisition is to create trust between the new principal and teachers.

Indicators of trust included openness (goal #1), benevolence (goal #2) and principal

competency (goal #3). Questions from the TWC survey from March of 2018 were compared

to the teacher responses to the identical questions in November of 2018 (after the

improvement initiative). The two surveys offer pre and post-data to measure the impact of

the improvement initiative. The comparison data offers evidence the school did not

experience a decline in trust during the first 100 days of the new principal. Stories from field

notes and reflections from principal and assistant superintendent suggested that the

improvement initiative activities were perceived as beneficial. Assistant superintendent and

principal shared evidence in summative interviews that illustrated the principal adopted new

behaviors such as being vulnerable and sharing her personal story, creating systems for

feedback and journaling how she empowered teachers as a personal awareness. Data

suggests the experience was positive for teachers, the principal, and the assistant

superintendent. The original theory of improvement: (My theory of improvement proposes that a transition process focusing on building trust between teachers and new principals will increase the likelihood of building and/or sustaining a positive school climate which will contribute to school progress and student achievement over time.) seems to have some evidentiary support.

Recommendations for Research

The importance of trust in any organization and the indicators of trust have been well- researched. However, there appears to be a gap in the research around the topic of principal induction and transition including a.) concrete protocols and programs for a transitioning principal, b.) district-wide induction and transition models, and c.) the impact and/or outcomes related to principal induction and transition programs.

Limitations

This study can provide valuable information but caution must be used considering generalization, transferability, and/or scalability, as this was a single-case study with context-specific variability.

Recommendations for Leaders Considering Implementation

Many personal leadership lessons were learned that will impact my future roles in education. I continue to reflect upon the magnitude and complexity of the problem. My greatest take-away is that there are strategic activities that transitioning principals (in concert with district leaders) and district leaders can do to build trust and mitigate the challenges of new leadership.

Lessons Learned

Lesson 1. Leaders should consider principal transitions are frequent and impact stakeholders. There is no indicator that the likelihood of principal transitions will decrease anytime soon. There is not a frequent, universal method in which "principal churning" data is reported; therefore, it is difficult for the average educator to talk about how often transitions are occurring in schools. In collaborative dialogue with others during the disquisition process, I often heard people share that principal transitions in their specific district were extremely high, but in reality, they had no evidence to support the assumption. A recommendation for district leaders would be to collect data about the frequency of transitions in their district to create an awareness of the problem.

Lesson 2. Leaders should consider the importance of trust-building activities during a transition. Trust can be built more rapidly with an intentional plan. In the beginning of the disquisition process it was often suggested by colleagues that trust could not be measured or that trust was not linear enough for a principal to design specific activities. Also the idea that trust merely comes after time was repeated. In contrast, there is evidence in the literature, through my own experience, and through the improvement initiative that confirms trust-building is more effective when conducted intentionally. A recommendation for district leaders would be to create a system of support, protocol, and/or framework for principals to follow when transitioning to a new school.

Lesson 3. Leaders should consider the importance of teacher's perception of a new leader; specifically principal competency (ability and knowledge to complete all expectations) and teacher's perception of principal competency (teachers believing that leaders have the skill-set to solve problems that the teachers find most valuable). I am reminded of a training I received in my master's program to make me a competent leader,

but rarely did I learn about how to measure someone's perception of my competency. These differences will continually impact my current role in education. A recommendation would be for district leaders/principals to create and administer a survey after the first 100 days of a principal transition that gathers data about teachers' perceptions of the principal and transition.

Lesson 4. Leaders should consider the importance of a systemic way for transitioning principals to dialogue with another school leader about culture and trust in a non-evaluative way, creating authentic reflection. The Critical Friend Conversation became an essential component where learning took place for the principal. The researcher and assistant superintendent were able to frame reflection questions, answer specific questions and provide a sounding board for new ideas. I reflected on the many times I had officially been a mentor or mentee with no structure or designated time, and how ineffective the process was as the experience became more ambiguous and undirected over time. The greatest value to this behavior is it allows a safe, supportive, and defined time for the school leader to be reflective about their actions. Reflection for all leaders is beneficial. The Critical Friend Conversations improved my skill-set of Cognitive Coaching that I will apply in future mentor experiences. A recommendation would be for district leaders to create more structure and training of mentors in current principal mentor programs that allow for more effective Cognitive Coaching. The reflective leadership practice would be beneficial to all school leaders.

Lesson 5. Leaders should consider examining their own balance between giving direction and empowering others to leads. Some of the activities of the improvement initiative with the greatest impact came when I released control to the principal and allowed

her to make decisions without guidance. The principal demonstrated full ownership of the process, when the principal created her "It Matters" speech using the feedback from her personal *WHY* activity. The teacher's perception was the "It Matters" speech (an activity created by the principal) was the most impactful. A recommendation would be for leaders to start an initiative with clear structures and then release implementation to others allowing the process to be owned and modified.

Lesson 6. Leaders should consider collecting state-wide data of *principal churning* in North Carolina (115 school districts). There is a need for *Principal Transitions* to be addressed in North Carolina School Districts. While the focus of research was in one specific school district, throughout the process I had many additional conversations with leaders across the state about their lack of infrastructure around principal transitions. When sharing my research topic with many principals throughout the state, I often found myself in conversation with principals who were eager to learn about the outcomes because of the frequency of principal transitions. A recommendation would be for the State of North Carolina to create a system to gather comprehensive data about frequency of principal transitions.

Lesson 7. Leaders should consider solving problem using improvement science. Solving a problem based on research and a defined method is very time consuming. As a leader, I have made lots of decisions over the years based on instinct or a quick analysis of a few data points. The disquisition process has helped me understand the value of structure to test and measure future leadership hypotheses. My leadership has been improved by understanding the value on improvement science and formative assessment. A

recommendation would be for district leaders and principals to be educated on improvement science methods and formative assessment.

Lesson 8. Leaders should consider the value of *compassionate leadership* as an influential style of leading. Principals often lead from a traditional, patriarchal style that consists of an authoritative relationship between principal and teachers. There was evidence collected during field notes to support the magnitude of benevolence. When a principal is caring, intentional, and vulnerable the staff connects to the leader through emotion. A recommendation would be for school leaders to intentionally find activities and actions that allow for behaviors that focus on compassion for people.

Lesson 9. Leaders should consider how to individualize *trust work* in their school. There are elements of the disquisition that are reproducible and easily replicated in any setting. However, the impact of the work was due to an ability to make the work match the school leader, current structures and culture of the school.   A recommendation would be for school leaders to use the framework of the 100-day plan, but to dedicate time and effort to individualize a plan that meets the specific need of a school and style of the principal.

There are so many stories that I have heard from fellow educators about positive and negative impacts of transitions. In the future, I would love to be a part of a collective research project, gathering stories to help future principals learn best practices for transitions.

Reflection on Social Justice

The desire to learn ways to impact social justice has been a focus of the Western Carolina Ed.D program and a personal focus of mine as a researcher. The awareness of how

frequent "principal churning" is happening in high poverty areas has to be a beginning focus. I can envision districts analyzing a comparison of principal transitions in high-need schools versus others. I understand the demographics of the school that participated in the improvement initiative mirrors my own principal experience which originally led me to the disquisition problem of practice.

Metamorphous Elementary School was selected for the improvement initiative because of its frequency of principal change. In the last three years, the school has had three different school leaders. The school serves about 300 students each year with 25 classroom teachers. Ninety-eight percent of those students are classified as free and reduced lunch, 64% minority, and 34% receiving English as Second Languages services. The demographics of the local school provide a context for the need of social justice.

The school I transitioned from at the end of 2014 as school principal has had three school principals in the following four years since I transitioned. The school make-up is 98% minority, 80% free and reduced lunch, and 15% receiving English as a Second Language services. In the last three years, 76% of the teachers have transferred and the academic performance has decreased by 18% proficient.

Schools that serve high-poverty and high-minority areas have higher principal turnover, and principal turnover impacts teacher turnover. Teacher turnover impacts student performance. Student performance impacts the future for students from high-poverty and high-minority areas. It appears that the cycle of principal churning is a systemic problem in low-performing schools. In the future, I would like to research high-performing schools that are making an impact on social justice. Is there a correlation to churning? Are there districts

who decrease the frequency of transitions in high-poverty areas or have they found ways to prevent the negative impact of transitions in high-poverty areas.

The long-term desired outcome of the disquisition is to make a positive impact on school progress and student achievement with the end result to impact students. While the immediate measurable results of the disquisition are focused on adult behaviors, there is urgency because adult behaviors directly impact student's experience in school. Positive trust between the adults in school can directly lead to a better quality of education, more stable positive school culture, and a group of unified adults that have potential to positively impact students. All students deserve a school that consists of the best educators making unified decisions for student's best interest. If high-needs, low-performing, and high-minority schools could systemically minimize the negative impact during principal transitions there is a possibility to impact the overall equity and social justice experience for students. One in three schools in poverty are experiencing a principal transition each year. The student population within a school of poverty is often comprised of the subgroups that experience a lack of equity during their school experience. Improved transitions has the potential to be a catalyst to make a positive impact on social justice.

Conclusion

Evidence supports that principal transitions happen frequently, and unsuccessful principal transtions can result in a negative impact on trust between teachers and principal, positive school climate, and school progress and achievement. When school leaders and district leaders create systems of support for principal transitions the negative impact can be reduced. The 90-day cycle of improvement evaluated the effectiveness of specific activities that strengthen openness, benevolence, and perceived competency of a school principal

during transtions. The disquisition results suggest the activities implemented positively impacted teacher perception of their new principal which led to an overall effective transition, and ultimately, has potential to prevent a decline in school culture which is common during a school transition.

The principal's role can often be a very isolated one, yet the school principal and I bonded and began creating a sense of community. There were mutual experiences learning and growth for both the school principal and I, as evidenced during the Critical Friend Conversation. Dr. Murphy (2014), a catalyst for the disquisition process, keynoted at a conference on the importance and relevance of a disquisition for a practitioner. He explained that a sense of community is one of the greatest outcomes that flows from the Problem of Practice process. I feel that the three key leaders (myself, principal, assistant superintendent) that led the improvement initiative have a deeper sense of community bond and trust with each other that will positively impact the next challenge we collectively face.

The principal, assistant superintendent and I are making plans of how to scale the improvement to the approximately 5-8 other school leaders that will likely experience a principal transition next year. The value of conducting a disquisition is clear to me, as I have seen the positive impact that has begun in the relationships between the teachers and principal in the study. I am hopeful the process of reflection and building trust will be continued next year in Metamorphous Elementary School, and for many years in other Washington County Schools.

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