

The Impact of Central Office Administrators on Teacher Retention

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Abstract

The principle focus of this mixed methods explanatory study was to understand the perceptions of building administrators as to how central office administrators' leadership impacts teacher retention through the lens of transformative leadership theory. Several factors can impact a teacher's decision to remain in one district or leave for another. Some of those factors may be personal, some may be related to the school, but it is also prudent to examine the impact central office administrators have on teacher retention. In researching the topic, the review of literature found a lack of research on this specific topic. Most of the literature regarding teacher retention was based on the principal's leadership style and compensation. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire designed to garner input on both the attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office administrators as well as the district-wide programs and initiatives they implement or support. Participation in the study was strong with 28 out of 39 building administrators completing the questionnaire. The results supported the tenets of transformational leadership theory in that there is a perception that teachers appreciate leaders who are collaborative in nature and empower them to do their jobs. Teachers desire leadership who know them as people, understand them as teachers, and ask for and value teacher input. The results also supported the existing research with an emphasis on compensation. It is necessary for a district to offer a competitive salary and benefits package as doing so will give a district an inherent advantage in retaining teachers. The most important implication of this study points to hiring leaders across all levels who

display transformative leadership characteristics rather than transactional leadership traits.

Keywords: Transformative leadership theory, transactional leadership theory, teacher retention, attrition, compensation, teacher shortage

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my coworkers, family, and friends. Thank you for believing in me, encouraging me, and motivating me throughout my time working toward this goal and helping to turn what was once a distant and seemingly unattainable dream into an accomplishment.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction to the Problem

In today's world of K-12 education, there is a well-documented teacher shortage. There is a projected increase of nearly 3,000,000 students in schools over the next 10 years and teacher education programs have realized a 35% drop in enrollment from 2009-2014, leaving schools across the nation struggling to put licensed teachers in their classrooms (Abitabile, 2020). This problem has only gotten worse according to the National Council on Teacher Quality as in 2020-21, there was another 30% drop in students enrolled in teacher preparation programs when compared to 2010-11 (Saenz-Armstrong, 2023). Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019) found that teacher attrition rates increased more than three percent from 1992 to 2008, to roughly 8.4%, which is approximately what it is today in the Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC). Based on a workforce numbering near 3.8 million people, an increase as seemingly subtle as 3.3% equates to 125,000 teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). This is a problem that has been a reality in small and rural corporations across Indiana for the last decade, if not longer. 92% of school districts in Indiana have difficulty finding qualified teachers to fill their teaching vacancies (Public Impact, 2019). Indiana ranks near the bottom in teacher retention, losing about 18% of teachers each year (Indiana Commission for Higher Education [ICHE], 2016). The great state of Indiana is not alone in this struggle, as the issue plagues all of the United States and perpetuates itself. Because there is a shortage, it gets more difficult for teachers to build a strong

professional image of the craft, thus detracting from the profession and adding to the image problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). The U.S. Department of Education estimated an additional 1.6 million teachers would be needed to fill the void of teachers across the country from 2012-2022 (Abitabile, 2020). Based on the teacher shortage of today, it is safe to say the country fell short of the goal of producing an additional 1.6 million teachers in the last 10 years. As of January of 2023, there were 36,000 teaching vacancies unfilled in the United States, with more than 1,500 of those vacancies in Indiana (Shelton, 2023). In present times, it would not be much of a stretch to surmise the shortage is impacting almost every single school district in the state of Indiana. Because the struggle to find educators is so intense, so too is the need to retain the educators who already work in the school district. To add to the problem of finding teachers, educators are leaving the profession at an alarming rate. Goldhaber and Theobald (2023) found that by the end of the 2020-21 school-year teacher turnover had grown to 17.8%, with nearly half (7.3%) of the movement comprised of teachers leaving the profession altogether. Additionally, teachers seem to have less loyalty to a school and district in current times and jump from school to school and district to district more frequently than throughout history. The problem of loyalty is not restricted to education as the average American worker's job tenure has dropped by 11% to 4.1 years (Fiddian-Green, 2023). While the teacher shortage may play a pivotal role in teachers changing jobs or leaving the profession, figuring out effective methods to retain teachers is paramount to the success of a school district.

Background, Context, and Theoretical Framework

While finding and hiring teachers to fill vacancies is more difficult than ever, some teachers do prefer to stay in one school or district for several years. Many factors could be attributed to this phenomenon, such as salary, benefits, proximity to home, leadership, and job satisfaction to name just a few. It is somewhat predictable that the building administrators (principal, assistant principal, and dean of students) will have a significant impact on the culture and climate of the building which will undoubtedly impact school culture and school climate. The relationships that shape the climate and culture of a school are strongly influenced by the school administrators (MacNeil et al., 2009). These two areas will have a major impact on job satisfaction for teachers.

What is less predictable and harder to measure is the impact of central office administrators (superintendent, assistant superintendent, and directors) on teacher retention. It is recognized that today's central office administrators are expected to provide resources to ensure the social, emotional, physical health, and overall well-being of students and staff (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). What correlations exist between the central office's ability to meet these needs and teacher retention and attrition? These are generally the individuals who negotiate a collective bargaining agreement, dictating salary, wages, and benefits as well. Furthermore, in conjunction with the school board, these people construct board policy and administrative guidelines and procedures that staff are required to follow. The highest level of decision-making also lives in the central office. Decisions to add staff, hire and fire current staff, and handle staff misconduct all

take place in the central office. It could be surmised that all these actions can affect the rate at which teachers leave a district. Regardless of why teachers are leaving, The National Center for Education Statistics reported that in school-year 2022-23, nearly half of all U.S. schools were experiencing shortages (Darling-Hammond et al., 2023).

This study focused on the issue of teacher retention and the impact of the central office administration on teacher retention. The study utilized exit interview data and a questionnaire to gain a better understanding of teacher retention and the role of the central office administrator. The quantitative questions used in phase one of the questionnaire were built by using exit survey data from the TSC Personnel Office. The concept of the central office administration impacting teacher retention was applied against a backdrop of the Theory of Transformational Leadership. This theory suggests that the relationships and interactions the superintendent and central office administrators have with the staff can motivate and empower them to take ownership in the building which impacts the school culture and climate in a positive manner. Additionally, this theory insinuates that leaders who are more transactional in their leadership style cause more isolation and lead through power and fear, and as a result they have a more detrimental impact on school culture and climate. Based on the principles of the Theory of Transformational Leadership, it can be surmised that impacting the culture and climate in a positive or negative manner has a direct result on the rate in which teachers stay or leave a building.

While there has been much research about leadership and even school culture and climate, there has not been an abundance of research on the impact of the central office administration on teacher retention. This is likely due to the fact that the teacher shortage has grown exponentially over recent years and the work has become increasingly more relevant as district-level administrators try to find reasons for teacher turnover and exodus from the profession, increasing the difficulty in finding teachers.

When studying leadership, it is pertinent to understand the theory behind how leaders promote change and get their followers engaged by understanding their emotions, motivations, and identities (Berkovich, 2020). The guiding theory to inform the research in this study is the Theory of Transformational Leadership. This theory was chosen as the focus of the study is examining how central office administrators' leadership actions and practices are perceived. Should transformative leadership characteristics be found to be more desired than transactional characteristics, it could inform best practices of future leaders. Pennell (2023) describes transformational leadership theory as the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate others to reach levels of personal and institutional achievement they may have never thought possible through promoting positive individual and group change within schools by focusing on growth, vision, innovation, empowerment, and collaboration. Transformational leaders provide inspiration and motivation to those in their charge by recognizing individual value while also challenging staff members to accomplish more (Bass & Riggio, 2006). In recent years, school administrators have realized the practicality of the theory as it relates to the challenges

they face (Berkovich, 2020). While the concept of transformational leadership is a relatively new concept, leaders have demonstrated these characteristics for many years and today transformational leadership theory is a crucial component of what administration scholars consider ideal educational leadership (Berkovich, 2020; Hay, 2006). As compared to other leadership theories, transformational leadership offers the best option for fostering growth, development, and success in the ever-changing landscape of education (Pennell, 2023). Pennell (2023) also found a transformative approach provides a more encompassing and practical framework for educational leaders who seek to make positive, long-lasting change in their school districts and to influence the thinking within the broader educational landscape.

Purpose of the Study

There is a need to determine how much the central office influences the decision making a teacher goes through when deciding to leave a school or district. If central office administrators play a significant role in teachers leaving a school or district, it is worth looking into the data to gain an understanding of why. What actions are the administrators taking to cause teachers to leave? Conversely, what are the actions the best administrators are taking to get teachers to stay? What strategies can be implemented to assist with teacher retention? By answering these questions, central office administrators will have a better idea as to which district practices are embraced by teachers and which are not favorable. In learning the preferences of teachers, central office administrators can more appropriately shape behaviors and implement processes that are more appealing to

teachers. These changes could potentially help the district increase job satisfaction and retain teachers.

It could be reasonably ascertained that most teachers do not truly know what central office administrators do all day or what the job entails. In a larger district it is hard to maintain a personal feel and connection between administrators and staff due to the sheer size of the district. How can large districts make a more personal connection to their staff? In the Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC), administrators have implemented a few practices to help address this issue; however, these changes are all relatively new and there is no data to determine the effectiveness of the practices. This study could help the district better understand the value of each.

First, the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel meets with every teacher recommended for hire for a 30-minute “interview”. In a typical summer, that can be anywhere from 85 to 110 teachers. During this meeting, there are interview questions and there is a discussion regarding salary and benefits with each teacher. However, the best meetings are those in which authentic conversation organically flows. This allows the teacher to get to know at least one person in the central office and put a face to a name so when they see a policy or a guideline shared from the central office, they know someone they can ask questions of, and the past interaction may help them better understand the good intentions that lie behind the cold language of an administrative memo.

Second, the TSC has implemented a program for all first- and second-year teachers called SEEDS, Supporting Educators Entering District Service. TSC employs an

instructional coach dedicated to new(er) teachers to help them acclimate with a move into the TSC or as they enter the teaching profession. All teachers new to TSC are required to participate in year one with the district. Brand new teachers must complete a second year in the program, whereas teachers with more than five years of experience in a previous district may opt out of year two. In this program, the instructional coach observes these teachers and sends affirmative emails. She checks in on and gets to know each teacher on a personal level. When she knows of a particular struggle, she will let the central office know to see what help is available. The instructional coach helps these teachers through the evaluation process, brings in guest speakers such as past teacher of the year recipients from other states, and provides professional development opportunities for teachers through book studies as well as helping with license renewal. This is an expense to the district that is viewed as an investment into supporting and retaining teachers by reducing burnout and providing an extra layer of support in the most vulnerable time in a teacher's career.

The third way the TSC tries to work with teachers and retain them is by treating them as individuals in a time of need and not just deferring to a contract or handbook rule. Essentially, the district attempts to implement processes that can make a large district feel small and personable. As an example, it would be easy to stick with a rule such as "teachers get five days of bereavement leave to be used within 10 days of the passing of an immediate family member". Denying bereavement requests outside of the 10 days would be the easy way to do business, but not the personal way to do it. In

today's world, especially during and post-COVID, families are more spread out and when there is a death, people may have to make travel arrangements, book flights and hotels, etc. As central office administrators felt a need for change, a process was bargained into the master teaching contract to allow for an "exception" to the rule. This created more work for the central office because instead of blindly denying a request outside of the 10-day window, the personnel department now has to engage with the employee and understand why they need time a month after the passing of a relative. While not every request can be approved, the process and the act alone have hopefully demonstrated an attempt to treat people on a personal level.

While it is assumed these three examples are positively perceived and appreciated by teachers, there is no hard data to support that teachers find them valuable or that they positively impact teacher retention. Teacher retention is such a timely and important issue because so many students are being cheated out of being taught by a highly qualified teacher. Barring any drastic changes, the teacher shortage in this country was set to hit 110,000 teachers by 2017-18 (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Currently, there is an extremely high number of unfilled teaching positions, meaning those positions are either getting filled by substitute teachers or teachers with an emergency permit. Data shows teachers who enter the profession through non-traditional programs leave the school and the profession at a higher rate than traditional teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). As professionals who pride themselves on being flexible and adjusting to solve problems, central office administrators need to understand what changes can be

made to keep teachers in their district. The aforementioned examples are some ways the TSC has adapted to the perceived needs of the teachers; however, without data it is impossible to know if the efforts are working.

Research Questions

1. What current actions and practices of Tippecanoe School Corporation central office administrators are deemed most effective by building administrators to positively impact teacher retention?
2. What actions and practices do building administrators indicate central office administrators should implement to positively impact teacher retention?
3. What are the perceptions and experiences of building administrators regarding central office administrators' influence on teachers' overall job satisfaction?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance

The aim of this study was to get a better, more in-depth understanding of how the leadership practices of central office administrators impact teacher retention. Are the current efforts and practices effective? What practices can be implemented to positively impact teacher retention? How do the actions of the central office administrators impact teacher job satisfaction? Central office administrators depend on principals and teachers to carry out the vision and mission of the corporation and have been most successful when they can provide resources, collaborate, and converse with teachers about effective instruction, encourage risk-taking, and block outside distractions and criticisms (Lashway, 2002). Because of the layers of people that work in between the central office

administrators and the teachers, there is not always a lot of direct communication between these two groups of people. The principals are the ones who likely hear from their teachers what they like and do not enjoy about the school district and how their experience compares to past districts in which they have worked. Furthermore, the principals are the ones who help to explain the logic and reason behind each policy and guidelines that come down from the central office; therefore, they also hear from teachers when they are not supportive of the new policy or procedure they are being asked to follow in their classrooms. Through a questionnaire with the building administrators, it has become more clear what practices, actions, and communications from the central office are off-putting to teachers and may incline them to explore working in other districts. Additionally, it has come into focus what is being done well and promotes the TSC as the district of choice in the area.

Definition of Terms

Attrition

Refers to leaving teaching altogether, either to take another job outside of teaching, for personal reasons, health problems, family moves, and retirement (Cooper & Alvarado, 2006).

Central Office Administrator

For the purposes of this study, the term central office administrator refers specifically to those in a leadership position in which teachers and school administrators report to as their direct/indirect supervisors. By title, the study is considering the superintendent, assistant superintendents, and directors as central office administrators.

School Climate

School climate is best defined as the quality and character of the school; a reflection of the goals, norms, values, and embedded practices that have become part of the school identity (Perkins, 2020).

School Culture

School culture is defined as the unwritten rules of the school, made up from the values, beliefs, and customs of the school community (Perkins, 2020).

Teacher Job Satisfaction

Refers to the overall attitude and outlook teachers have on their profession and working conditions (Hongying, 2008).

Teacher Retention

Refers to teachers who remain in the same school in a teaching capacity from one year to the next, also referred to as “stayers” (Lochmiller et al., 2016).

Transactional Leadership

A leadership style based on interactions between leaders and followers, relying on a system of rewards for those who fall in-line with the leader and punishments for those who do not carry out the demands of the leader (Cherry, 2023).

Transformational Leadership

A leadership style based on positively influencing the followers of a leader through motivation, engagement, collaboration, and empowerment (Cherry, 2023).

Summary

The on-going teacher shortage is plaguing school districts across America. Regardless of whether teachers are leaving a district or the profession altogether, their exodus is leaving a void to be filled. It is clear that many factors can go into a teacher's decision to stay or leave a district. One of those factors is leadership. Without a doubt, the building administrators work more closely with the teachers and have more opportunity to greatly impact the job satisfaction of the teachers in the building. What is harder to measure is the impact administrators in the central office have on teacher retention. It is harder to measure because typically the impact is secondary, but in today's job market, it is imperative to look at all factors that drive teachers away from a district or the profession.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

In this review of the literature, a summary of current literature has been presented in a manner that demonstrates the relevance of learning how central office administrators are perceived to influence teacher retention by the building administrators. Ample study has been done on the subject of teacher retention as well as the influence of building administrators on school culture and climate as it relates to teacher job satisfaction and attrition. However, there exists very little research indicating the impact of central office administrators on teacher retention. It can be surmised that central office administrators can have a tremendous impact on teacher retention through the policies and procedures put in place by the central office as well as how those policies are implemented and communicated. Furthermore, the carrying out of said policies and procedures and the enforcement of rules can certainly impact a teacher's decision to remain with a district or search for another place of employment. In this time of a teacher shortage, every action from every person who potentially impacts a teacher staying or leaving must be examined carefully.

Theoretical Framework

Transformational Leadership Theory

Transformational Leadership Theory is a dynamic and visionary leadership style with a purpose of motivating and inspiring employees to maximize their potential.

Transformational leaders are not managers, as they do not lead with a focus on position

and power, rather they keep the focus on the best interest of the people in the school (Perkins, 2020). This style of leadership has an impact on teachers' perceptions of school culture and climate, how they embrace change, and student and learning outcomes across the organization (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). By impacting so many important elements of school function, it is easy to surmise that transformational leadership positively impacts teacher retention as well. Additionally, transformational leadership style has been strongly associated with job satisfaction and sentiment towards the leader (Koh et al., 1995; Lowe & Kroeck, 1996). Teachers who are happy with their job and feel positively about their leader are more likely to stay in their position than a teacher who is unhappy in their job or does not particularly like the principal. It is believed this style of leadership leads to employees who are selfless, dedicated, and feel a sense of belonging to the organization. This is because transformational leaders emphasize new possibilities and share an exciting vision of the future (Bass, 1990; Givens, 2008). Poutiatine (2009) developed nine foundational principles of transformational leadership that must be understood by leaders:

- Transformation is not synonymous with change.
- Transformation requires assent to change.
- Transformation always requires second-order change.
- Transformation involves all aspects of an individual's or organization's life.
- Transformational change is irreversible.
- Transformational change involves a letting go of the myth of control.

- Transformational change involves some aspect of risk, fear, and loss.
- Transformational change always involves a broadening scope of worldview.
- Transformation is always a movement toward a greater integrity of identity—a movement toward wholeness (p. 190).

These nine principles are all important elements of the most successful schools and highly effective principals realize the significance of these tenants. Principals who can let go of control and empower their staff to be leaders and problem solvers are able to create sustainable change. When people change due to a mandate, when the mandate goes away or the administrator who issued the mandate moves out of the district, teachers commonly transition back to the way they did things prior to the mandate.

Leithwood (1992) identified the four main goals of transformational leaders in a school as developing a collaborative culture, valuing teacher growth and development, using group-think for problem-solving approaches, and garnering commitment from all to the mission, goals, and strategic plan of the corporation. The principle idea behind transformational leadership is the ability of leaders to inspire and motivate others to be better than they ever thought possible. Burns (1978) explained that transformational leadership is a process and is much more than the straight-forward exchange of information between leaders and followers that exists in transactional leadership. Transactional leadership does not promote a long-term bond between leaders and followers; therefore, it creates a stable environment that does not foster creativity as compared to the receptive and inventive environment that stems from transformational

leadership (Silins, 1994). In an effort to better understand the characteristics of transformational leaders, Bass (1985) developed the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ). Through analysis of the questionnaire, Bass was able to identify three important factors of transformational leadership that he referred to as charisma, personal consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Bogler, 2001). According to Bass, charisma is the ability of individuals to stimulate people and entice them to follow the leader's missions and vision, personal consideration is the leader's ability to notice and appreciate the followers as individuals, and intellectual stimulation refers to the leader motivating followers to consider creative and exceptional solutions to problems (Bogler, 2001). Bass and Avolio (1990) added inspiration to their list of factors; however it is closely related to charisma and is sometimes used interchangeably (Bogler, 2001). Leaders do this by creating individual and organizational growth and promoting innovation and collaboration to create positive change within an organization (Hay, 2006; Pennell, 2023). As opposed to other leadership theories, transformational leadership has proven to be strong in promoting the growth and development of educators in a constantly revolving field of work. With a focus on vision, leaders are able to demonstrate a clear path forward for their district and the commitment to collaboration ensures a variety of perspectives are heard and considered in the decision-making process (Pennell, 2023). Not only will better principal leadership positively impact teacher work motivation, but it will also directly improve teacher performance (Ardliana et al., 2021) which is an ideal scenario for the school.

Review of the Research Literature

Principal Impact on School Climate and School Culture

Principals have a myriad of responsibilities in leading schools. Every action a principal takes can influence the climate and culture of the school. The principal must effectively communicate the vision and mission of the school. How the principal communicates and enacts the vision and mission through his leadership style will impact the school climate and culture. Whether the principal is collaborative, dictatorial, or transformational in leadership style, the staff will have an impression of their leader. Teachers desire democratic, servant, and transformational leaders because they tend to promote and encourage positive, collaborative relationships among faculty and staff (Perkins, 2020). Principals are also judged on their decision-making as it relates to matters of curriculum, discipline, staffing, funding, and policies. The decisions the principals make better align with the vision and mission that has been shared or the climate and culture may be negatively impacted. It has been very well documented over the last few decades that school principals impact both school culture and school climate. Capable and consistent leadership that promotes a positive school culture not only helps teachers succeed but also leads to teacher retention (Grissom, 2012; Johnson et al., 2012; Johnson & Birkeland, 2003). While that statement is easy to speak and is somewhat cliché, it is not easy to define exactly what school culture and school climate actually are. School climate is best defined as the quality and character of the school; a reflection of the goals, norms, values, and embedded practices that have become part of the school

identity, whereas school culture is defined as the unwritten rules of the school, made up from the values, beliefs, and customs of the school community (Perkins, 2020). By the very nature of the definition of the word climate, it is easier for a principal to make an immediate impact and influence change due to it being established in the day-to-day operations of the school. Culture, on the other hand, is deeply embedded into the fabric of not only the school, but also the community. Stolp (1994) suggested that principals who desire to change the culture of their building must first study the culture of the building and understand why it is as it exists. Effective change can only occur after the principal understands why the culture is what it has become. Before understanding how the principal can impact culture, we must first see how principals affect climate.

Possibly the largest impact principals have on school culture and climate is through relationship-building. Newer teachers have a desire to interact with their principals much more than veteran teachers, and through increased visibility principals are more likely to witness the great feats of teachers inside and outside of the classroom (Atabile, 2020). It is important for teachers to interact with and establish rapport with all stakeholder groups as principals are pillars of the community and build relationships with students, teachers, parents, and community members. Exhibiting a commitment to being a good listener is key to building relationships. Perkins (2020) found that listening to one's followers and authentically valuing their opinions was very indicative of transformational leaders as well as democratic and servant leaders. The value of these relationships is that trust can be established between these stakeholder groups and the

principal. MacNeil (2009) suggested the relationships that shape the culture and climate of the school are strongly influenced by the school principal, and Abitabile (2020) found that newer teachers desire to develop relationships with their principals and they want to know the values and beliefs their leader has as it helps to share the same values to define the climate and culture of the building. Allen et al. (2015) believed when principals model the behaviors and expectations they set forth for their staff, it will build commitment to the school and the pursuit of goals while positively impacting school climate, which leads to retention of teachers. It is important for principals to share their beliefs and expectations as the perceptions of a principal's idealized attributes influence the overall perception of school climate (Allen et al., 2015). By forming relationships, the principal can use that trust to influence change in the school. The principal commonly and strategically uses their capacity to influence school stakeholders to move the school forward; however, the principal must realize the power of persuasion does affect the overall climate of the building (Smith et al., 2020). A key component of relationship building for principals is their leadership style and that style can greatly impact climate and culture.

Leadership can be defined as the ability to influence and motivate a group of followers to work toward school goals with strong commitment by using minimal force (Bass, 1985; Bass, 1999). Atasoy (2020) surmised that school culture and leadership style can directly and indirectly influence each other because the culture can dictate leadership style and the leadership style of the principal will contribute to the culture of the school.

While being able to influence others and garner support for initiative is important, leadership is much more than the ability to persuade others to do something (Borg, 2013). Teachers want leaders who will promote and encourage positive, collaborative relationships with and amongst staff members and to listen to them and value their input. The manner in which the principal exhibits care and concern for others will likely develop a school culture with similar values, whereas a principal who is selfish and does not value others will also develop a culture representing those values (Perkins, 2020; Stolp, 1994). Effective leaders can improve the way teachers view the climate of their building by being collaborative in the decision-making process and supporting teachers by minimizing the minutia that takes their concentration away from teaching. Doing so will improve the teacher's perception of leadership and will result in a more positive climate (Rhodes et al., 2009). Being collaborative and creating a positive climate and culture requires intentional action. Leaders must work on creating an inviting and collaborative culture daily to form a set of positive, underlying norms, values, and beliefs that will influence the climate and culture of the building. By sharing responsibilities and empowering teachers and school community members, a culture of trust, enthusiasm, and encouragement will emerge which will assist in carrying out the mission, vision, and goals of the school and positive feeling and thoughts toward the school will surface (Brion, 2021; Limon et al., 2021; Simbre et al., 2023; Sumiran et al., 2022). Successful leaders and successful schools are built on these ideals of collaboration and consensus building. These traits are absent in less successful schools. When the school principal has

a charismatic personality, is a good manager of people, and has good social skills, teacher performance will improve if the leader is able to build capacity in others by allowing them the responsibility of carrying out important tasks, allowing teachers to enjoy their work by emphasizing collaboration and valuing independence, while allowing for the pursuit of excellence and recognizing the performance of those who are successful (Ardliana et al., 2021).

MacNeil et al. (2009) found that successful school principals focus on developing the school's culture as the learning environment is paramount to improved teacher morale, which will improve school culture. When leaders are not collaborative and lead through a more authoritarian style, teachers may become disenchanting and negatively impact the climate of the building. Principals who are authoritarian in nature must communicate accurately and adequately with the faculty to avoid significantly damaging the relationship with the climate of the building (Velasco & Edmonson, 2012).

Ultimately, the role of the principal is the basis of the foundation for the success and/or failure of school culture. In schools with unhealthy school cultures, the teachers are generally unhappy and the leader is deemed to be ineffective (MacNeil et al., 2009; Sumiran et al., 2022). One area in which principals can make a foundational impact on the culture and climate of the building is through pre-service teachers. Cherubini (2008) found that pre-service teachers' expectations about school culture are significantly higher prior to their field placements, observations, and student teaching experiences. This information would be great for colleges and universities to know as DeStercke et al.

(2015) realized that more effective advising of students upon entering teacher education courses is essential in reducing the rate at which new teachers leave the profession.

According to Fitchett et al. (2018), around 25% of new teachers experience burnout in their first year in the classroom.

Teacher Attrition and Retention

Nearly every community across the country has a school within a few miles from its center. Every school is staffed with several teachers. Because of this, there is a high demand for teachers in every community. Teaching is one of the largest professions in the United States, with 4% of the national workforce being teachers. It is interesting to consider that there are more than twice as many teachers as registered nurses and five times as many teachers as lawyers or professors (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2008). With such a need for teachers, it is hard to comprehend that the Indiana Commission for Higher Education (ICHE) noted in a 2016 study that nationally, 61% of all teachers teach within 15 miles of where they grew up. There is clearly a demand for teachers, but as noted previously, there is a shortage of teachers available. One way to judge interest in the teaching profession is to examine how the number of students in teacher education programs has changed over time. This number has dropped drastically across the nation and Indiana has seen one of the largest changes: a 60% decline in enrollment from 2008-2009 to 2013-2014 (Public Impact, 2019). To further emphasize the significance of the problem, only 5% of students who took the ACT in 2014 expressed an interest in becoming a teacher, down from 7% just four years prior (ICHE, 2016). To make matters

worse with the issue of students not desiring to become teachers at the same rate as in years past, teachers are leaving the profession and changing jobs more frequently than ever.

In the last decade, teachers across the United States have been changing jobs at a higher rate than any time before in recent history. According to Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond (2019), schools across the nation seek to hire tens of thousands of teachers due to beginning-mid career teachers exiting the field for various reasons. In fact, around 25% of teachers burn out during their first year in the profession (Fitchett et al., 2018). Guarino et al. (2006) commonly found across the research that teacher attrition is very high amongst young teachers. Teacher attrition in the U.S. is at 8% annually and another 8% of teachers change jobs each year which is noticeably higher than many high-achieving countries where attrition is half the rate it is in the United States (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). An exception to the trend is in China where 170,000 teachers left the profession from 1984-1987, then since 1992 another wave of teacher exodus has threatened the profession (Changying, 2008). While teacher transfers do not seem to be as impactful as attrition, there is still a vacancy that must be filled. When teachers transfer schools, rather than leaving the district or teaching altogether, the burden on the administrator to fill the void left behind is the same as a teacher leaving the profession (Thornton et al., 2008). Teachers transferring positions or changing schools, while still detrimental, is preferred to teachers leaving the profession altogether because when teachers leave the profession, there is one less teacher to fill vacancies. To make

matters worse, two-thirds of the attrition is for reasons other than retirement (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019). More alarming, however, is the fact that teachers are leaving the profession altogether. While many reasons and/or factors exist as potential reasons, Mullen et al. (2021) found that poor working conditions, lack of support from administrators, low salaries, and a lack of adequate orientation programs all contribute to teachers leaving the profession. Becker and Grob (2021) found an increasing number of teachers are leaving their schools and the profession due to student behaviors and perceptions of safety while being overloaded with paperwork and bureaucratic mandates lead them to lose interest in the profession. It is easy to point out that teacher salaries, while better than they were years ago, are still lagging well behind industry standards. To that end, marginal increases will not suffice in remedying the problem. Brill and McCartney (2008) found consistencies across several studies that marginal increases to salary only address the problem marginally. Teacher benefits, such as health insurance, used to exceed the private market making teaching at least comparatively attractive to a standard nine-to-five job. That is no longer the case.

A Public Impact study found that in 1995 there was not a pay penalty for becoming a teacher in Indiana as salaries were lower than other professions but the benefits closed the gap. By 2016, choosing to teach came with an 11% pay penalty versus comparable professions, including some districts in Indiana with starting salaries near the poverty line. (2019)

While the naysayers may argue teachers should not be compensated equally to their peers in the private world due to working only seven and half to eight hours a day and 180-185 days per year, this argument does not consider the pressures of education, the time outside of work dedicated to planning, grading, and parent communication, or the time commitments required of professional development. Additionally, with the school year being more spread out now, often starting in early August and ending in late May, teachers do not have as much time to work a summer job to supplement income over the lengthy break as they used to when schools followed a more traditional calendar. It also seems we are in a world of instant gratification in which parents expect a teacher to reply immediately to an email and treat every child like they are the exception to the rule. Coupled with salary and benefits issues and more demanding parents, a political firestorm in which teachers are a pawn in politicians' power plays, and what you get is teachers who are overworked, underpaid, stressed out, and burnt out. Chang (2009) found that the emotional needs, labor, and work expected of a teacher in comparison to other professions is quite significant. By changing buildings every few years, teachers can potentially get a pay increase, but more importantly, they can get a fresh start. More appropriately, they get a chance to start over and refresh their mindset.

Salary is the number one headline grabber for teachers leaving the profession. While teachers are not primarily motivated by pay, low salaries are commonly cited as reasons for leaving the profession (Public Impact, 2019). Even though most teachers entered the field due to a love of children, their subject area, or a belief in the value of

education, the reality is the remuneration must be sufficient to support at least a modest lifestyle. Sadly, it is more than just a headline as salary is the only statistically significant factor related to increased odds of teachers leaving the profession (Changying, 2008; Hahs-Vaughn & Scherff, 2008). Teachers have been underpaid when compared to peers with similar educations in other professions and the pay gap has grown significantly over the last 20 years (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Salaries are such an issue today because in the United States, where higher salary was found to be associated with higher retention rates, salaries when accounting for history, were 1.7% lower in 2016-17 than in 1989-90, with some states (Indiana included) declining by more than 10% during that time period (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Guarino et al., 2006). Public Impact (2019) cited a national survey which found that 68% of teachers who have left the profession have indicated they would return to the field if salaries were higher. It would be interesting to see how much salaries would have to increase to get those teachers included in the 68% to return to teaching and make a significant difference in the shortage. Schools have fixed revenue streams and cannot simply pay teachers as much as they deserve, or at least enough to keep them in the classroom. Kelly et al. (2008) suggested that districts' hands are tied as it relates to mandated programs, but they do have the ability to prioritize salaries within available funds and control the climate of the building. Climate is very important when considering retainment, job satisfaction, and longevity, but unfortunately, it is only one factor.

The climate of the building is an all-encompassing term to include factors such as workload on teachers, professional development, support, and administrative bureaucracy. Professional development is an opportunity for a principal to lead and demonstrate their abilities as a leader. According to previous research, principals in successful schools who have provided high-level professional development for staff with a focus on high academic achievement have also realized increased teacher retention (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2001). When working conditions, which include administrative support, paperwork, and stress, are perceived to be poor, teachers will leave the profession (Changying, 2008; DeMatthews et al., 2022; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009; Thornton et al., 2008). Dahlkamp et al. (2017) noted that school climate and the principal's impact on the building climate are significant factors in teacher retention. Garcia & Weiss (2019) and Kelly et al. (2008) found that in addition to salary, training, support, and professional development were especially lacking in high poverty schools and driving teachers out of the profession. The less effective the principal is in creating a positive school climate, the more likely a teacher is to leave that school; however, there is evidence of teachers staying in buildings with supportive administrators even when culture is not great (Dahlkamp et al., 2017). Previous research has shown principals of highly effective schools have impacted retention by supporting staff with high caliber professional development (Deal & Peterson, 1990; Sergiovanni, 2001). This is significant because the principal leading professional development can motivate and inspire teachers when it is done well. At a minimum, the principal is showing support for teachers and

helping them improve and grow, which should be a positive in building climate and for teacher retention. Becker & Grob (2021) found that teachers are so exhausted from fighting bureaucratic measures and doing paperwork, they can lose interest in teaching if their administrators do not serve as a shield to protect them from some of the outside detractors. One of the most important jobs of the principal is to filter out mandates from the state-level, or even within the corporation, and figure out a way to follow the mandate and implement the demands in a way that does not overwhelm teachers. Additionally, principals have an obligation to help teachers deal with the stress of the profession and in maintaining a safe school environment. Of the 8% of teachers that leave the profession annually, approximately 55% cite symptoms of a bad climate, such as lack of support, poor leadership, lack of autonomy in the classroom, or testing pressure as reasons for leaving the profession, and list these reasons ahead of salary (Ingersoll, 2001; Sutchter et al., 2016). While other factors were cited ahead of salary, salary is still a factor, and it has to be speculated that higher salaries may make it easier to cope with the other factors when a teacher decides to leave the profession. A Public Impact (2019) report of a national study found that teachers who feel great stress rose from 36% in 1985 to 51% of teachers in 2012. Because of these potential stressors, administrative support is paramount in teacher retention. Becker and Grob (2021) found that administrative support is strongly correlated to leaders retaining teachers in their building. An anonymous school board member once stated, “Teachers do not quit students or schools, they quit poor leaders.” Principals who recruit and hire teachers that fit the school and

community dynamic in their building are more likely to be retained (DeMatthews et al., 2022). Principals must be diligent in the screening process to hire teachers who want to be in their building and are the best fit for the community and clientele of the building.

One element in the research of teacher retention that is consistent is the idea that attrition is highest in younger teachers and that each year schools across the nation seek to hire tens of thousands of teachers to fill the void left by these beginning and mid-career teachers leaving the profession (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2019; Guarino et al., 2006). Because of the negative publicity around the teacher shortage, it has become more difficult to find good people to build a solid reputation around teaching and professionalize the craft which only adds to the problem (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). Schools have to be proactive and reach out to people in their communities and help them figure out how to obtain a teaching license. Administrators are tasked with taking good people and turning them into effective teachers out of necessity. To solve the problem, we cannot simply focus on seeing the problem as one only about retaining teachers, rather we have to focus on job quality and a sense of fulfillment for those teachers so they believe they are making a strong contribution to the profession (Schaefer et al., 2012). Principals must create work environments that empower their best teachers to be teacher leaders to create a sense of sweat equity and commitment, so teachers feel a level of investment and dedication to their schools.

Teacher Job Satisfaction

The phenomena of teacher job satisfaction is derived in administrative psychology and commonly refers to the way teachers feel about their profession and the working conditions they are under (Hongying, 2008). The smaller the school district, the more direct interaction and contact central office administrators have with teachers and the more each decision potentially impacts job satisfaction. Public Impact (2019) found teachers with lower job satisfaction ratings were more than twice as likely to feel under high stress when compared to teachers feeling great job satisfaction (65% to 28%).

Serving as a small school superintendent with only two or three schools, possibly a couple elementary buildings as well as a middle school or 7-12 Jr/Sr High, it would not be uncommon for the superintendent to know all 80-100 teachers in the district and interact with many on a weekly basis. Because of the diminutive size of a small district and a structure in which multiple schools and the central office are commonly on one campus, the superintendent would be able to visit each building on a near daily basis to foster relationships. Oftentimes, in smaller districts, the central office will know most of the staff, and teachers will have more access to direct lines of communication with the superintendent, assistant superintendents, etc. In some instances, that access extends to the school board members as well. In these scenarios, it is easy to see how the central office administration can have a strong influence over teacher job satisfaction and retention. In larger school districts, there is understandably less personal connection between the central office and the teachers. This is due to the layers of people that lie

between the two groups. It is not uncommon for a teacher to report to an assistant principal who reports to a principal. That principal may report to a director who, in turn, reports to an assistant superintendent who then reports to the superintendent. Because of these layers of administration, it can feel like there is less personal touch. Does it make sense then that central office leadership can influence teacher retention?

As stated, in smaller districts it is very important for the central office administrator to be a leader who is a role model for staff and exhibits the values he promotes to others in order to build a commitment to the district and its goals (Allen et al., 2015). This attribute is important in large districts as well. However, the central office is further removed from the teachers; therefore, it is critical that central office administrators be intentional in hiring principals. Wiener (2018) believed principal candidates need to be selected and developed based on how effectively they can manage school climate. Simultaneously, principals must realize they impact retention by recruiting teachers that fit into the culture and climate of the school community they represent (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

Regardless of district size, teachers want leaders who will lead them and that starts with the superintendent. Peel and McCary (1999) suggested superintendents have the challenging task of providing the vision, collaboration, shared decision-making, and positive cultures schools need to retain the best teachers. McFarlane (2010) found a strong correlation between school climate scores and the perception of the leadership attributes of superintendents. This is because leadership affects outcomes through the

ability of leaders to influence perceptions, behaviors, attitudes, values, and our desire to be dedicated and diligent in our roles as educators (McFarlane, 2010). A challenge in larger and more urban districts, is that policies and contract protection may make mobility from building to building easier while the perception persists that the power in these districts remains centralized and is protected by many layers of authority which neglects the community needs and prohibits change (Kowalski, 1995; Thornton et al., 2008).

To overcome the leadership challenges, superintendents need to be effective communicators and put systems in place to share the vision, mission, and goals of the district. Kowalski (2005) recognized more research needs to be done in the area of superintendent communication and school culture, while also proposing effective communication by superintendents influences both positive school culture and enhanced teacher productivity. District leaders must develop strategies to build relationships, promote accomplishments, and encourage a system of support within the corporation (Frahm & Cianca, 2021). Eilers and Camacho (2007) found collaborative leadership between the central office and the schools is beneficial to the success of the school. The teacher shortage is a crisis facing the field of education, and leadership during crisis is about handling events and emotions in a manner that minimizes the impact on the employees and the corporation (Brion, 2021).

It is commonplace in current educational settings to hire good people and try to shape them into at least formidable teachers. Too often, the educators gracing classrooms

of today are not the passionate educators who spent their whole lives preparing for a career with passion; rather, a fair share of teachers today are people who are trying teaching as a new career, or their next career. Without that passion, these teachers burn out and leave the profession much quicker than traditional teachers. Goodland (1984) found that teachers who chose the profession because of their passion for and value of education conveyed greater job satisfaction than their peers who chose the job as an afterthought and a way to make money. Teaching is hard work and can be very mentally taxing. Because of the stress and mental toll teaching can take, those who do not have the inherent passion for the job are more likely to be dissatisfied and leave the profession. Hall et al. (1992) conducted a study and found that teachers who were considering leaving the profession had both less job satisfaction and more negative feelings about teaching and toward school administration. These findings suggest traditional teachers are more likely to be resilient and remain in the profession long-term. Mullen et al. (2021) found a strong correlation between resilience and job satisfaction as well as teacher retention for teachers and schools. Furthermore, Martin (2016) realized a connection between passion and perseverance with special education teacher retention, which is relevant to this study because special education teacher retention is generally lower than their general education counterparts. A key finding of Martin (2016) was that special education teachers who display passion and perseverance and are dedicated to the craft of teaching have higher job satisfaction, positive relationships with peers, and tend to persevere past obstacles throughout their career.

Summary

Due to the lack of research on how central office administrators impact teacher retention, it is important to figure out what does impact teacher retention and craft that into a model for central office administrators to follow. It is very evident from all the research that school principals have a major influence on school climate and school culture. Climate and culture, in turn, have a significant impact on teacher job satisfaction and retention. When teachers are unhappy with their leadership, they are more likely than ever to change schools or districts, or leave the profession altogether. While the principal influence on climate and culture greatly impact teacher retention, other factors do as well. Salary plays a large role in the teacher shortage as teaching salaries have not kept up with the private sector. Salary is important, but it is not the only factor. Safe working conditions are important for teachers as they need to feel protected from physically aggressive students and parents. They also need to feel a sense of autonomy to feel safe to take risks in the classroom. Top retaining districts generate a culture of trust by supporting teacher autonomy and allow teachers to excel in the classroom rather than being authoritative in the administration (Shuls & Flores, 2020). Teachers also need leaders to protect them from and filter out the bureaucratic mandates that continue to get heaped on teachers. Ultimately, teachers seek leaders who invest in them, listen to them, value their opinion, give them autonomy, motivate and inspire them, and empower them to lead collaboratively. Teachers want leaders who subscribe to transformational leadership theory. To prevent teachers from leaving, we need to show them respect as

professionals, increase compensation, and improve working conditions to maintain their enthusiasm for the profession (Changying, 2008). The best advice comes from DeStercke et al. (2015), that happiness is the key to keeping teachers in the workplace because if happiness is being pursued, everyone is universally happy. Teachers who are satisfied and happy do not leave.

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Introduction to Chapter 3

This study was of a mixed methods design, specifically an explanatory sequential structure reliant upon convenience sampling. Participants consisted of 39 building-level administrators who work in the Tippecanoe School Corporation of which 20 are principals and 19 are assistant principals. A questionnaire was distributed to all administrators. The questionnaire was comprised of both quantitative questions that use a Likert scale to determine specific background and demographic information as well as qualitative questions which will be open-ended response questions to allow for elaboration on the question topic. The questionnaire was open to administrators of all experience levels, with ideal participation being near the 50% mark, as that target provides more than an adequate sample size. The questionnaire information was collected and coded to find specific themes throughout the respondents that may lead to significant findings.

Purpose of the Proposed Study

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of which actions and practices of central office administrators are perceived by building administrators to positively affect teacher job satisfaction and lead to teacher retention. Likewise, the study identified actions and practices building administrators feel central office leaders should implement to positively impact teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention. Specifically, the study focused on the impact the central office administrators

have on teacher retention, whether it is through influencing the culture and climate of the school or by passing on policies and procedures that negatively affect teacher job satisfaction. This study was of a mixed methods explanatory sequential study design, which is a “design of inquiry in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a case, often a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 14). In this study, survey data was collected from building administrators in the Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC) to test the Theory of Transformative Leadership to assess whether central office leaders’ leadership traits relate favorably to school culture and climate, and ultimately impact teacher retention. This mixed methods explanatory sequential study utilized questionnaire data consisting of Likert scale questions to answer demographic questions regarding the administrative career of the building administrators participating in the study. These questions were based on years of experience and number of districts as an administrator. Likert scale questions were used to understand the impact building administrators feel tangible measures such as salary and benefits impact teacher retention. These questions were evaluated for common themes as were the open-ended response questions in which thematic coding was used to determine common themes. The explanatory follow-up was to further explore how the identified leadership traits which impact school culture and climate, ultimately affect teacher retention.

Research Questions

1. What current actions and practices of Tippecanoe School Corporation central office administrators are deemed most effective by building administrators to positively impact teacher retention?
2. What actions and practices do building administrators indicate central office administrators should implement to positively impact teacher retention?
3. What are the perceptions and experiences of building administrators regarding central office administrators' influence on teachers' overall job satisfaction?

Research Design

This is a mixed methods study that followed an explanatory sequential study research design. An explanatory sequential study provided an inside look into the district and the data from the survey provided valuable insight into the perception of central office administrators in the school district. For this study, the more quantifiable Likert scale questions produced raw data; however, those questions were followed up with qualitatively-based open-ended questions that allow administrators to elaborate on the themes that emerged from the Likert scale questions. In an effort to garner more in-depth information from the principals, open-ended questions allowed insight about how building administrators feel central office administrators are impacting the job satisfaction of teachers and how that affects teacher retention. Phase one of the study involved collecting both quantitative and qualitative data via a Qualtrics questionnaire consisting of both quantitative and qualitative (open-ended) questions. This questionnaire

tool was created, in part, by pulling exit interview data from teachers who left the TSC from March 2021 to the present. This exit interview data is kept by the personnel office of the TSC. The voluntary and anonymous questionnaire will be emailed out to all building administrators in the district asking for them to complete the questionnaire. In total, the questionnaire was sent to 20 principals (11 male and 9 female) and 19 assistant principals (14 males and 5 females). The questionnaire data asked administrators to disclose the number of years they have worked in an administrative capacity as well as how many administrative years they have worked in another district to determine the experiences that have shaped their mindsets as administrators. That data was then analyzed to find common themes in the data with the intention of using the outcomes to influence the leadership styles of central office administrators. All participants in the questionnaire were given anonymity to protect their identity and provide peace of mind to answer openly and honestly.

Data from the questionnaire was analyzed using thematic analysis. In coding the responses from the questionnaire, common themes emerged such as the impact of salary on teacher retention or the manner in which central office administrators communicate with staff members. This study reviewed the data and the themes through the lens of transformative leadership theory. Transformative leadership theory is when “one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978, p. 20). This study focused on the

working relationship between the central office administrators and teachers and how the climate and culture in the building affects retention of teachers.

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures

Target Population

The questionnaire targeted all building-level administrators in the school district as all administrators can share how central office administrators impact teacher retention. No building-level administrators were excluded. In total, 39 administrators were targeted as participants, with an anticipated 50% participation rate. The researcher emailed the group the week prior to the Qualtrics questionnaire being sent and informed them Qualtrics is being used to add another layer of anonymity to the study. Of the 39 administrators, 20 are principals (11 male, nine female) and 19 are assistant principals (14 male, five female). By age, the youngest administrators are in their early 30's and the oldest is in her 60's, with the bulk of the group ranging from upper 30's to early 50's. Building administrators were targeted as participants because they often hear from teachers about the actions of the central office that are frustrating to teachers, and teachers do not typically feel they can openly share their opinions with the central office. Additionally, some administrators have worked in other districts where they may have gleaned effective strategies and tendencies of central office administrators which can be implemented in other districts.

Sampling Method

This study used convenience sampling. Participants included all 39 building-level administrators in the TSC. Of the 39 administrators, approximately half have at least four years of administration experience and have worked in other school districts. The sample was comprised of 25 males and 14 females. Considering a sufficient number of administrators have four or more years of experience and have worked in other districts, the analysis lent itself to comparing perspectives of those administrators with little experience compared to those with several years. The information from veteran administrators felt more credible due to having comparison to and experiences within other districts. The administrator group was selected as part of the study focused on teacher retention and the selected group encompasses the perceptions of multiple school administrators across twenty school buildings. The participants were emailed the Qualtrics questionnaire with a summary describing the purpose and intent of the study while asking for anonymous and voluntary participation.

Sample Size

The questionnaire was sent via Qualtrics email to 39 building-level administrators within the TSC. Inside of two weeks, 28 administrators had completed the questionnaire; therefore, reminder emails were not needed as the number of participants was more than enough to provide validity to the study. The breakdown of the 28 participants included five administrators with less than five years of experience, the “Newer Administrators”,

and 23 administrators with five or more years of experience, comprising the group of “Veteran Administrators”.

Setting

This study took place in the Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC) in Lafayette, Indiana. By Indiana standards, the TSC is a large district comprised of 20 buildings, 835 teachers, and 13,500 students. The district is considered suburban as it encompasses all the area that surrounds the cities of Lafayette and West Lafayette, with some schools being more urban in nature while others are rural. The population is predominantly white, with approximately 25% being students of color. Nearly 35% of TSC students are considered low income based on qualifying for free and reduced lunch.

Recruitment

In the days prior to Qualtrics deploying the questionnaire, the researcher emailed all targeted participants and explained to them the research taking place and implored them to participate as their participation may prove to be beneficial to both them and the school corporation. Participants were notified in the email from Qualtrics about informed consent. This explained that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw at any time prior to submitting their questionnaire.

One consideration was the possibility of having a low response rate as administrators are busy people and open-ended questions take time to complete. In this event, the survey would have been emailed out on a weekly basis, up to three times to allow time for completion. Should participation rates have remained low after multiple

email attempts to garner participation, phone calls would have been made to ask for participation. Fortunately, this was not necessary as participation was strong.

Data Collection

Data was collected via the Qualtrics questionnaire that was sent out to 39 building-level administrators in the Tippecanoe School Corporation. The data that was collected will remain anonymous with no identifying information being collected. These questions were formed using anonymous exit interviews from teachers who have left the Tippecanoe School Corporation from March 2021 to the present. The demographic data that was collected from this questionnaire is that the administrators were all from the Tippecanoe School Corporation, the number of years of administration experience, and how many years they worked as administrators in another district.

In using exit interview data to form questionnaire questions, it provides rich questionnaire questions that can be utilized to sample a much larger population. The Likert scale questions asked administrators to both answer basic demographic questions and to indicate how strongly they feel about a subject. Then, the open-ended questions allowed the administrators an opportunity to explain their answers in more detail. The exit interview information, along with the questionnaire responses provided the researcher with multiple views of data as it was possible to collect data in multiple ways, all while studying the phenomenon of the impact of the central office administration on teacher retention.

Data Analysis Procedures

After questioning the administrators in the TSC, the Likert scale questions data was gathered and summarized in a spreadsheet. This data pointed to more tangible measurable themes such as gauging how much salary and benefits are communicated to administrators as the reason for a teacher leaving the district. Additionally, these questions revealed the reasons our building administrators feel teachers are leaving the district. The open-ended questions revealed common themes throughout the district which were extracted by coding the individual responses and grouping the similar answers.

The common themes attained from coding and analyzing the qualitative data from the questionnaire allowed for a connection between not only the Likert scale and open-ended questions, but also between the leadership characteristics of central office administrators and teacher retention. As a result, both research questions were answered, and the information served as a catalyst of connection between the leadership qualities of central office administrators and the way in which their leadership styles negatively or positively impact school culture and climate and ultimately affect teacher retention.

Analysis and Procedures

Independent Samples *t*-Tests were conducted to test statistical significance in analyzing the difference between how the group of Newer Administrators rated the five factors in comparison to Veteran Administrators. The results are described for each factor individually in chapter four. The factor of school culture and climate caused concern for

the researcher as eight Veteran Administrators scored it as not significant, while zero Newer Administrators scored it the same way. Because there were fewer Newer Administrators and three of the five rated this factor as slightly significant, an assumption was made that the scores balanced each other out. To test this assumption, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was conducted, and the result showed the difference to not be significant. This is also described in chapter four.

Ethical Issues

Exit interview data was used to form questions for the anonymous questionnaire. The exit interview data is anonymous with no identifying information given. The questionnaire was emailed out to all building-level administrators in the TSC. This survey was anonymous with no identifying information collected.

The questionnaire was delivered to all building-level administrators in the TSC via email from Qualtrics. Prior to the Qualtrics email, the researcher emailed the participants to provide notice of the email and ask for participation in the study. Before emailing the participants, permission was granted from the Tippecanoe School Corporation superintendent and the board of school trustees for the district. The researcher already had the email addresses for all of the building-level administrators as they work in the same district.

Informed consent was obtained by providing directions which state accessing the survey is providing consent. Participants were notified before the questionnaire was administered that they are able to withdraw from the questionnaire at any time before

submitting a completed questionnaire. Participants were advised that there is no foreseeable risk or harm from participating in the study, especially as it relates to job security. This is a necessary notice due to the participants being in a lower position than the researcher in the hierarchical scheme of the corporation.

At the conclusion of the study, the researcher was able to identify the leadership characteristics that building administrators indicated are both most desired by teachers and have the most positive impact on their decision to continue working in a building. This information will allow superintendents to build leadership capacity in central office administrators and provide targeted professional development to help them hone their leadership skills. By providing this growth opportunity for central office administrators, teachers throughout the corporation will benefit by being the beneficiaries of more positive school cultures and climates and will find enhanced job satisfaction. When teachers are happier in their workplace, they can provide a better educational experience for students and their families.

Researcher's Position Statement

Conflict of Interest Assessment

The researcher had no conflict of interest in this study. Precautionary steps were taken to assure participants would not feel pressure to participate due to the researcher holding a supervisory role over the sample. Anonymous participation was assured and all communication regarding participation emphasized the questionnaire was open for all but was strictly voluntary.

Position Statement

The researcher is employed by the TSC as the Assistant Superintendent for Personnel, overseeing all hiring and firing as well as employee benefits and having oversight over two other departments. The setting of the research was conducted within the Tippecanoe School Corporation and included building-level administrators currently employed in the district. Because the researcher serves in an administrative role, it could be possible that data could be affected as the participants that will be included are employees in the same district. The researcher has served as a school administrator in multiple districts, serving as a principal in two districts as well as in a central office capacity in one additional district. These experiences have led to some preconceived opinions on factors that affect teacher retention. These preconceived ideas could lend a degree of bias to the study. The researcher has seen an increase in unfilled positions within the corporation and within the state. The end game of this study is to find ways to increase retention within the district and entice new teachers to come to the TSC.

Both before and during the research, it was important to make sure that questionnaire results remained anonymous so the administrators felt they could openly share their feelings. While the researcher is passionate about teacher retention and the impact of the central office administrator, every effort was made to remain objective. Having the building administrators complete an anonymous and voluntary questionnaire allowed the administrators to be both anonymous and forthcoming in their responses. Data was collected and analyzed in the pursuit to find a way to increase

retention throughout the district and provide professional development to the central office administrators on ways to transform leadership practices to have a positive climate and culture in our schools.

In order to minimize objectivity in examining the research data, one strategy was to ask only Likert rating scale questions in the quantitative phase of the questionnaire as short answer questions would have a degree of subjectivity in the interpretation of the responses. Another strategy that was applied to alleviate bias was to review and analyze the open-ended responses individually and then share the findings back with the participants to check for accuracy and to make sure what was written was a true and accurate representation of what was shared.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Two issues arose during the study that do not arise to the level of ethical concerns; however, they are worth noting. The first was during the distribution of the questionnaire, Qualtrics was getting an error message from the email addresses of two participants. After multiple attempts to remedy this, support had the researcher directly email the participants the link to complete the survey. While there was nothing unethical about this action, it was not how the others were asked to participate, so there could have been some inherent self-imposed pressure to participate from those two individuals.

The second area was regarding the questionnaire. The first question asked the participants how many total years they had worked as a school administrator. The last two choices were somehow omitted when the survey was distributed. The choices were

0-4 years or 5-9 years. Every participant answered the question and seemed to understand if they did not fit into the 0-4 years category, they belong to the other choice. This is not believed to have impacted the data in any manner and the researcher did not receive any questions about this during the completion of the questionnaire.

Summary

This study was conducted following a mixed methods format, specifically an explanatory sequential study design was followed. Building administrators, including principals and assistant principals were the intended target sample. The researcher was aiming for approximately fifty percent of the 39 administrators to participate. After only two weeks, 28 of the 39 had completed the questionnaire and the researcher closed access to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was comprised of three sets of questions. The first set were used to determine demographic information about the administrators, such as how many years they had worked as a school administrator. The second set of questions sought for the participants to rank how strongly they felt targeted indicators impacted teacher retention. The third set of questions were open-ended and gave the participants an opportunity to elaborate on the leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office administrators that currently exist, the characteristics they would like to see, and the traits they have seen in other districts that positively impact teacher retention. Additionally, the third set of questions allowed for feedback on the district programs in the TSC that positively impact teacher retention and gave a forum to express programs

they would like to see implemented and share about initiatives from other districts they felt positively impacted teacher retention.

CHAPTER 4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of which actions and practices of central office administrators are perceived by building administrators to positively affect teacher job satisfaction and lead to teacher retention. While some of these ideals are easily measured, such as salary and benefits, others are not as easily measurable and may be occurring without the realization of the administrators. Likewise, the study identified actions and practices building administrators feel central office leaders should implement to positively impact teacher job satisfaction and teacher retention. To evaluate these actions and practices, building administrators were asked via a questionnaire to list the actions and practices they find are currently used successfully by central office administrators in the TSC to positively influence teacher satisfaction and retention. The results of the questionnaire will help guide the central office administrators in where to focus resources and how to prioritize district initiatives in building the budget as well as point to any new programs to assist with teacher retention. Using thematic analysis, the researcher identified reoccurring themes that presented throughout the analysis of the participant data.

Detailed Analysis (organized by theme or research question)

Themes, Statistics, Results of the Research Study

Exit Interview Data

Exit interview data from March of 2021 to February of 2024 was reviewed to help formulate the questions in the questionnaire. Respondents completing the exit interview were asked to rate on a scale of 1-5 how they felt their salary at the TSC compared to that of neighboring school districts, with a score of one being less favorable and a score of five being more favorable. Upon reviewing the data, it seemed teachers felt favorably about how their salary compared to other districts in the area. For the sake of analyzing the data, the scores were grouped into three categories. Scores of one or two were considered Less Favorable, scores of three were considered Neutral, and scores of four or five were considered More Favorable. A total of 83 teachers completed the voluntary exit interview in the most recent three years, which is the entirety of the data. Of the 83 respondents, 68 teachers, or 82%, found their salary to be More Favorable than surrounding districts. 10 teachers, or 12%, were Neutral on their salary, and five teachers, or 6%, found their salary to be Less Favorable than other local districts.

Departing teachers were asked to repeat the exercise of rating their satisfaction on a scale of one to five, only this time as it related to the benefits package offered by the TSC. Of the 83 respondents, 72 teachers, or 87% reported their benefits were More Favorable than those offered by other local districts. Nine teachers, or 11% of respondents, considered their benefits to be Neutral. Only 2 respondents, or two percent

of teachers, reported their benefits package to be inferior, or Less Favorable than that offered in neighboring districts.

While salary and benefits for TSC teachers seemed to be considered More Favorable than in other local districts, there is a lot of dialogue and press in the world citing teacher salaries and benefits as the driving force behind the teacher shortage; therefore, it felt appropriate to include questions around these two areas in the questionnaire to measure how strongly building administrators feel these factors impact teacher retention. The other two areas from the exit interview that helped shape the questionnaire were school culture and climate and support. While these two factors are less tangible and harder to measure, negative responses surfaced enough to integrate them into the questionnaire.

Table 1

Exit Interview Ratings of Significance of Salary and Benefits by Teachers

Rating Category	Less Favorable		Neutral		More Favorable	
Group	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Salary	5	6.02	10	12.05	68	81.92
Benefits Package	2	2.41	9	10.84	72	86.75

Questionnaire

The design of the questionnaire was five quantitative questions in which building administrators rated how significantly a variety of factors impacted a teacher's decision to leave the district. The rating categories were Not Significant, Slightly Significant, Moderately Significant, Very Significant, and Extremely Significant (in Table 2, these ratings were coded as 1 for Not Significant to 5 for Extremely Significant). The factors the administrators were asked to rate were Salary, Benefits, School Culture/School Climate, Communication from the Central Office, and Corporation Policies and Procedures. The second set of questions were qualitative in nature and open-ended with a focus much more on the leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of TSC central office administrators, as well as the district-level programs and initiatives that were implemented with the purpose of enhancing teacher job satisfaction. Questions sought feedback on how the attributes, actions, and behaviors of TSC central office administrators positively impact teacher retention and asked for suggestions for additional attributes, actions, and behaviors that could potentially positively impact teacher retention. These suggestions included asking for examples from other districts in which current TSC administrators had worked and found to be effective elsewhere. In addition to the leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office leadership, the questionnaire sought to learn more about the programs and initiatives offered by the TSC that have a positive impact on teacher retention and asked for recommended

programs and initiatives to implement in the TSC to positively impact teacher satisfaction and retention.

All of the data was reviewed holistically as well as disaggregated to compare the perspective of “Newer Administrators” (denoted by N, 1 in Table 2), with less than five years of administrative experience and the beliefs of “Veteran Administrators” (denoted by V, 2 in Table 2) with five or more years of experience. For the sake of analyzing the data, the ratings were grouped into three categories: Minimally Significant, Significant, and Very Significant. Ratings of Not Significant or Slightly Significant were combined and were considered “Minimally Significant”, a rating of Moderately Significant was labeled “Significant”, and ratings of Very Significant and Extremely Significant were combined and considered “Very Significant”.

Table 2*Participant Ranking of Quantifiable Factors Impact on Teacher Retention*

Partici- pant Number	Group	Code	Salary	Benefits	Culture Climate	Central Office Comm.	Policies/ Proce- dures
1	N	1	3	2	3	1	2
2	N	1	4	1	2	2	2
3	N	1	2	1	2	1	2
4	N	1	1	1	2	2	1
5	N	1	1	2	3	1	1
6	V	2	2	2	3	1	2
7	V	2	1	2	3	2	2
8	V	2	2	1	4	1	1

9	V	2	1	1	2	2	1
10	V	2	3	2	2	1	1
11	V	2	3	1	3	2	2
12	V	2	1	1	1	1	1
13	V	2	1	1	1	2	2
14	V	2	5	3	5	1	1
15	V	2	1	1	1	1	5
16	V	2	2	2	1	1	1
17	V	2	3	2	4	2	2
18	V	2	3	2	1	1	3
19	V	2	1	1	4	3	2

20	V	2	1	1	2	1	1
21	V	2	2	1	2	3	2
22	V	2	3	1	4	2	2
23	V	2	2	1	3	1	3
24	V	2	5	1	1	2	4
25	V	2	3	2	2	2	2
26	V	2	4	3	1	1	1
27	V	2	2	1	1	1	1
28	V	2	4	4	4	2	2

Quantifiable Factors

Salary

As reported previously in the exit interview data, teachers felt the salaries at the TSC were more favorable than other surrounding districts. However, that does not mean the salaries are high enough to keep teachers in the district or in the profession.

According to the building-level administrators, 82% feel that salary has had a Minimal to Moderate Significance on teacher retention in the TSC, whereas 18% feel salaries have a Very Significant impact on teacher retention. Of those who feel salaries are a Very Significant factor in teacher retention, there was not a large discrepancy between Newer Administrators (20%) and Veteran Administrators (17%). The sentiment of the administrators was very close in all three categories with Veteran Administrators ($m = 2.39, sd = 1.27$) feeling salary was more impactful toward teacher retention than the Newer Administrators ($m = 2.20, sd = 1.30$). The difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = -.304, df = 26, p = .764$).

Table 3

Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Salary on Teacher Retention

Rating Category	Minimally Significant		Significant		Very Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	3	10.70	1	3.60	1	3.60
Veteran Administrators	13	46.40	6	21.40	4	14.20

Benefits

Data from the teacher exit interview showed that 87% of departing TSC teachers felt their benefits package was more favorable than other local districts. Just like salary, being better than neighboring districts does not necessarily mean the package is competitive against the private business world and also does not mean benefits are not a reason for a teacher to leave the district or the profession. According to the building-level administrators, 96% feel that the benefits package has had a Minimal to Moderate Significance on teacher retention in the TSC, whereas only 4% feel benefits have a Very Significant impact on teacher retention. Of those who feel benefits are a Very Significant factor in teacher retention, there was not a large discrepancy between Newer Administrators and Veteran Administrators, with the Newer Administration showing 0% and the Veteran Administrators only having 4% of their peer group reporting this way. The sentiment of the administrators was again very close in all three categories. The biggest difference is that all Newer Administrators fell into the Minimal Significance category, whereas the Veteran Administrators did have 9% of respondents in the Moderate Significance category and 4% in the Very Significant designation. Veteran Administrators ($m = 1.61, sd = .84$) felt benefits had a more significant impact on teacher retention than the Newer Administrators ($m = 1.40, sd = .55$). The difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = -.528, df = 26, p = .602$).

Table 4*Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Benefits on Teacher Retention*

Rating Category	Minimally Significant		Significant		Very Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	5	17.90	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	20	71.40	2	7.20	1	3.60

School Culture/School Climate

Data from the teacher exit interview also indicated departing TSC teachers felt school culture and school climate could be better in some instances. While this metric was not measured on the exit interview, school culture and climate were items teachers leaving the district openly criticized and may have contributed to their eventual exit. Cohen et al. (2009) found school climate to be a contributing factor in teacher attrition. According to the building-level administrators, 77% feel that the school culture and climate has had a Minimal to Moderate Significance on teacher retention in the TSC, whereas 23% feel school culture and climate have a Very Significant impact on teacher retention. Of those who feel culture and climate are a Very Significant factor in teacher

retention, there was a large difference of opinion between Newer Administrators and Veteran Administrators. Zero percent of the Newer Administration group felt this way while their peers, the Veteran Administrators had 22% of their group reporting this characteristic as Very Significant. Like salary and benefits, school culture and climate showed a small disparity in those who rated it as Moderately Significant as well, with 7% of the Newer Administrator group and 14% of the Veteran Administrators choosing this designation. Overall, the Newer Administrators seemed to recognize that school culture and climate can impact teacher retention, while the Veteran Administrators, with much more experience, have witnessed first-hand the significance culture and climate can truly have on teacher retention. While the responses varied more on this subject, the overall data suggests Veteran Administrators ($m = 2.39, sd = 1.31$) felt school climate and culture had a more significant impact on teacher retention than the Newer Administrators ($m = 2.20, sd = .84$). The difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = -.311, df = 26, p = .758$). Because the numbers appeared to defy the results of the t -Test, a Chi-Square Test of Independence was also conducted and found that Veteran Administrators were more likely to rate culture and climate as minimally significant as shown in Table 5. However, the relationship between administrator experience level and the significance of culture and climate on teacher retention was not statistically significant at the .05 level ($X^2 = 6.13, df = 4$). Thus, administrator experience and rating are independent of each other.

Table 5

*Building Administrator Rating of Significance of School Climate and Culture on
Teacher Retention*

Rating Category	Minimally Significant		Significant		Very Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	3	10.70	2	7.10	0	0
Veteran Administrators	13	46.40	4	14.30	6	21.50

Communication from Central Office

While there was no data from the exit interview on the topic of communication from the central office, there is some merit to the belief that the way “upper management” communicates with and to employees can impact how long they stay in a position or with an organization. The researcher included this metric due to multiple occurrences in the exit interviews as well as several first-hand accounts of this occurring in other districts when meeting with new hires. Comments such as, “If you are not happy here, go work somewhere else,” were heard frequently enough to know it is a concern of teachers. Even though this metric was not mentioned in the exit interview, poor central

office communication can frustrate employees especially when the communication is demeaning, embarrassing, or unprofessional in nature and is a reason for a teacher to leave the district or the profession. According to the building-level administrators, 100% feel that the central office communication has had a Minimal to Moderate Significance on teacher retention in the TSC. While 0% feel central office communication has had a Very Significant impact on teacher retention, 7% of administrators overall, and 9% of Veteran Administrators, feel there is at least a Moderately Significant impact on teacher retention. There was not a large discrepancy between either group across the three rating categories; however, it should be noted that the Newer Administrator group did not have one participant rate this factor as Moderately Significant or Very Significant. The statistical analysis shows Veteran Administrators ($m = 1.57, sd = .66$) felt communication from the central office had a more significant impact on teacher retention than the Newer Administrators ($m = 1.40, sd = .55$). The difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = -.52, df = 26, p = .609$).

Table 6*Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Central Office Communication on Teacher Retention*

Rating Category	Minimally Significant		Significant		Very Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	5	17.8	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	21	75.00	2	7.1	0	0

Corporation Policies and Procedures

Like the question on central office communication, there was no data from the exit interview on the topic of corporation policies and procedures. Employees oftentimes desire for their employer's ideals and beliefs to align with their personal beliefs. An example of this is Nguyen et al. (2019) found a correlation between increased teacher turnover when accountability policies were implemented under No Child Left Behind. Current policies getting passed regarding gender and sexuality may influence a teacher's decision whether to continue working in a district or not. Teachers also strive to work for a district that uses good judgment and common sense when implementing policies and

procedures. When the policies and procedures do not align with the thoughts of the employee or are not implemented in a fair and consistent manner, it can impact how long employees stay in a position or with an organization. Even though this metric was not specifically mentioned in the exit interview by teachers, corporation policies and procedures can frustrate employees especially when they feel burdensome or are cumbersome, leading to a feeling of adding to the workload unnecessarily. According to the building-level administrators, 93% feel that the corporation policies and procedures have had a Minimal to Moderate Significance on teacher retention in the TSC. While only 7% feel corporation policies and procedures have had a Very Significant impact on teacher retention, 14% of administrators overall, and 17% of Veteran Administrators, feel there is at least a Moderately Significant impact on teacher retention, with 9% of Veteran Administrators considering the impact Very Significant. There was a notable discrepancy between two groups across the three rating categories, most glaringly that again the Newer Administrator group did not have one participant rate this factor as Moderately Significant or Very Significant, while the Veteran Administrators had 17% of their group deem corporation policies and procedures as Moderately Significant or Very Significant. While there seemed to be greater variation in ratings, the data showed Veteran Administrators ($m = 1.91, sd = 1.04$) felt district policies and procedures had a more significant impact on teacher retention than the Newer Administrators ($m = 1.60, sd = .55$). The difference between the two means is not statistically significant at the .05 level ($t = -.647, df = 26, p = .524$).

Table 7

Building Administrator Rating of Significance of District Policies and Procedures on Teacher Retention

Rating Category	Minimally Significant		Significant		Very Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	5	17.80	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	19	67.80	2	7.10	2	7.20

Qualitative Themes

The qualitative questions within the questionnaire were written with the intention of pulling out very specific information from the building administrator participants. The first three questions focused on the leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of the central office administrators. These questions delved into not only current central office administrators at the TSC, but also central office administrators from other districts in which the participants have worked. The administrators also had a chance to provide feedback on attributes, actions, and behaviors that building-level administrators would like to see from central office administrators. Similarly, the second three questions

focused on programs and initiatives in the TSC that are supported by central office administrators. These open-ended questions gave participants a forum to share which district programs and initiatives they feel positively impact teacher retention. The administrators also were given an opportunity to share which programs and initiatives they would like to see implemented as well as those they have seen be successful in other districts.

Because of the structure and intentionality of the questionnaire, there were clear themes for each question and specific answers, or very similar answers, were repeated multiple times. For the set of questions regarding leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors, the responses could predominantly be categorized as social-relational or financial. The questions addressing district programs and initiatives were more focused on employee well-being, support, and compensation.

Leadership Attributes, Actions, and Behaviors

Social-Relational. The first set of questions was focused on the attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office administrators. The intent of the questions was to better understand the characteristics that positively impact teacher retention. The results were very clear that central office administrators who demonstrate strong social-relational skills are believed to positively impact teacher retention. These findings align with the principles of transformative leadership theory. Administrators listed these skills not only as their expectation, but also as strengths for the district. Nearly half of the participants shared at least one characteristic that is related to forming relationships and engaging

with teachers in their response to the question about what actions, attributes, and behaviors are currently exhibited that positively impact teacher retention. This is important because while other tangible items were mentioned, it is the intangibles that are difficult to measure but can carry much weight. It was noted as important to make teachers feel valued and to give them a sense of belonging. To create this atmosphere, time must be taken to establish relationships. It was noted that the assistant superintendent for personnel takes time to meet individually with every new teacher to the district. Some summers that can mean well over 100 thirty-minute meetings getting to know teachers. This is done to allow the teacher to feel a connection in the central office and to be able to put a face to a name. Administrators appreciated the fact that the TSC recognizes its employees through various newsletters, celebrations, and programs. The support the district gives the buildings through having high expectations yet allowing the autonomy for the building to function as its own entity and have charm and personality that set it apart from other schools is well received. Principals and assistant principals like when they are asked their opinion, or share their viewpoint, and it is authentically listened to and considered. While the central office administrators are far removed from the classroom, they maintain an understanding and empathy for what teachers are doing on a daily basis. Being visible and accessible to both administrators and teachers is very important to success. Leaders who are approachable and embrace the opportunity to interact with staff are appreciated. Teachers like the fact that TSC central office

administrators ask their stance on topics, involve them in change, and always make time for a one-on-one meeting when a request arises.

Financial Support for Resources and Programs. The second theme that emerged from the questionnaire responses was centered around financial resources, be it compensation in the form of salary and benefits or the fiscal backing of programs. The building administrators placed more value on the support programs than on personal compensation. Nearly one-third of the participants listed resources and programs under the question asking about leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors, clearly showing the value. SEEDS, Supporting Educators Entering District Service, is a program to support first- and second-year teachers who are new to the TSC. There is an instructional coach dedicated to assisting these new teachers acclimate to a large district and helping them with the trials and tribulations of being a first-year teacher. The superintendent hosts a Future Administrators Seminar in which teachers who are considering becoming an administrator can attend quarterly meetings to gain an understanding of what being an administrator is like. He has different guest speakers at each session who share their experiences and perspectives, such as seated principals, the administrative cabinet, and various directors. The district supports Conscious Discipline as a framework for student discipline which includes progressive discipline but also some restorative practices. The district supports a “coach”, a TSC teacher, in each building to work with the staff and provide training. The wellness program in the district is called INtegrate and focuses on the well-being of the staff. INtegrate covers everything from hydration, to sleep, to

mental health, and is as basic as offering water at meetings and providing fruit options when donuts are provided in a meeting. INtegrate works with TSC's neuroscience educator to focus on mental brain state, self-regulation, and understanding the why behind student and staff behaviors. In support of teachers, and addressing the teaching shortage, TSC has a Grow Your Own cohort to help people who want to teach special education obtain a bachelor's degree in education or, if they already have a bachelor's degree, to complete a transition to teaching program at no cost to the individual while working for the district. Related to the Grow Your Own program is the ASSET program. ASSET is a state-funded project to allow teachers to add special education licensing to their teaching license. To do so, the district must pay for the lodging, meals, and substitute costs necessary to attend the training sessions. TSC has approximately 100 special education teachers out of 835 certified staff which is indicative of why teachers value the support they receive in working with students. TSC offers a multitude of professional development through a coaching cadre. A team of instructional coaches at each level work with teachers and provide training through a train-the-trainer model which allows the district to provide access to professional development to more teachers in an economical way. The district administrative team has made an effort to build and sustain a new teacher orientation program that is second to none that is relished by both teachers and administrators.

As positive as the feedback was, the goal was to garner constructive criticism to improve and be cognizant of how the attributes, actions, and behaviors impact teacher

retention. The building administrators made recommendations for improvement that also fit into the theme of social-relational. More collaborative decision-making was noted as an area for growth. Teachers need to feel like they are part of the solution to become invested in the school or the district. Once they are invested, they tend to stay. Gathering teacher input was another opportunity for the district leadership to grow. Whether through informal meetings, surveys, or committee work, involving teachers in the decision-making process makes them feel valued and respected. When teachers are involved in the process, it naturally leads to a sense of more transparency and builds consensus within the district. Visibility made both the list of positives and the list of development activities. Building administrators would like to see central office administrators in the schools more often and do more classroom speaking to students and lead professional development opportunities within the various schools as a way to increase visibility.

District Programs and Initiatives

The second set of questions was focused on the district program and initiatives that are born out of the district office and implemented by central office administrators. The intent of the questions was to better understand the programs and initiatives that positively impact teacher retention. The results of this set of questions was more varied and finding common themes was much more difficult, especially as it related to what the administrators would like to see implemented to positively impact teacher retention. Principals and assistant principals keyed in on three components when assessing

programs and initiatives. They reiterated their praise for programs that supported the mental well-being of teachers, programs that lent support to new teachers, and initiatives to improve compensation for teachers whether it be in the form of salary or benefits. There was almost no difference in how frequently these items were mentioned, solidifying their value in retaining teachers.

SEEDS (Supporting Educators Entering District Service). One of the most popular programs amongst participants was the SEEDS program. SEEDS, as mentioned briefly previously, is a connection between an instructional coach dedicated solely to the success of first- and second-year teachers. Currently, the program is led by a former TSC teacher and Indiana Teacher of the Year, Kathy Nimmer. She checks in on new to TSC teachers via email, site visits, and quarterly gatherings. Kathy provides a book for a book study as well as organizes professional development activities throughout the year in addition to her Wednesday Wisdom newsletter filled with tips for success. Kathy arranges for former Teacher of the Year awardees from across Indiana and other states to speak with new teachers. Most importantly, Kathy is the role model/mentor these teachers can go to when they are struggling, and she will make sure they get the resources and support they need to be successful.

Salary and Benefits Package. Another frequently mentioned initiative on the list was the compensation, or salary and benefits, the district offers its teachers. In the greater Lafayette area, the TSC is near the top in salary offered. Five years ago, and four years before it became an Indiana law, TSC worked to create a compensation table that started

new teachers at \$40,000. Currently, new teachers' starting pay is \$46,606. TSC teachers typically would have to move to the Indianapolis area to increase their salary. Due to the competitive salary, the district retains teachers. The benefits package for teachers in the TSC is very robust, with many offerings to benefit teachers. Aside from affordable health insurance, the TSC supports a wellness clinic for any person on TSC's health insurance to use free of charge. The doctor visits as well as the medications are free of charge. Regardless of insurance election, all TSC employees and their households have access to First Stop Health, a telemedicine provider, free of charge. The TSC pays for all but a dollar (two dollars for a family) for dental and vision insurance. The norm in school districts is these products are typically voluntary, with the employee paying the entire cost. While those referenced set TSC apart from the competition, the district also contributes similarly to other districts in paying all but one dollar toward long-term disability insurance, all but one dollar toward a \$50,000 life insurance policy, and puts 1.5% of a teacher's salary into a 401a account.

INtegrate (Wellness Program). The other commonly mentioned program focuses on the well-being of the staff. TSC's wellness program, INtegrate, has been seen as a value add for all staff members. The program has been in place since 2016. Almost all of TSC's 20 buildings participate in the program. To participate a school must sign an "all-in" pledge, meaning they commit to uphold the initiatives that are prioritized by INtegrate. Examples include: having water available at meetings as a choice for hydration, supporting exercise through programs such as Workout Wednesdays, and

participation in building-level and district-level challenges. Every “all-in” school has a “champion” to lead the initiative in the building with the largest schools having two champions. The champions participate in quarterly steering committee meetings led by TSC’s Benefits Manager. A small stipend is given to each champion each year to compensate them for the work they do. Each year INtegrate has a new theme and focuses primarily on that theme. Some past themes have been hydration, mental health, exercise, stress management, and meal preparation. INtegrate helps teachers not only take care of and feel better about themselves, but it also helps them feel like they are part of something bigger, which helps with teacher retention.

Teacher Well-being. As for programs and initiatives the building administrators would like to see implemented, the responses were much more widespread but still fell into the themes of mental well-being, professional support, and compensation. From the perspective of mental health and well-being, a revised calendar was suggested. TSC has followed a very traditional school calendar, while neighboring districts have gone to a calendar featuring a one-week long fall break. It has been noted that the longer break could be beneficial to the mental well-being of teachers, especially when a short break is inserted in mid-February to offset the long stretch from early January to late March without a break. Administrators also feel that utilizing e-Learning days could provide a nice change of pace or give respite from the daily stress of classroom teaching and help retain teachers.

Professional Development. In the realm of professional support, participants would like TSC to offer more professional development opportunities for staff. The current model utilizes a large portion of the professional development budget to pay for instructional coaches. Some administrators would like to see more flexibility in the professional development opportunities for teachers while others would like to add more instructional coaches so teachers could get more individualized professional development from the coaches. Related to the professional development concern is the time TSC sets aside within the contractual day for professional development, IIB, or Individual Improvement Block. Most elementary and middle schools have IIB time two to three days a week for 30 minutes at a time, while the high schools meet one day per week for 50 minutes. Some building administrators would like to restructure this time to allow for a longer session one day per week and others would like to move to a different model, such as Professional Learning Communities. The sentiment is the current model is deemed cumbersome by teachers and is not as productive and beneficial as it could be.

Potential Compensation Opportunities. As good as the compensation is at TSC, it is never good enough and can always be better. Participants in the questionnaire feel the district should look at compensating teachers for their accumulated sick days. Presently, teachers are not compensated; although they are given a 401a contribution in lieu of compensation, they feel they are not compensated and have a “use them or lose them” mentality causing higher staff absence rates than necessary. Another area of compensation adjustment is related to paying special education teachers additional dollars

due to the nature and time demands of their work. With an increasing number and intensity of special education students, building administrators feel special education teachers will stay in their roles if extra compensation is paid for the position.

Summary

In summary, this chapter highlighted the findings of the questionnaire completed by building-level administrators to accentuate the attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office administrators as well as the programs and initiatives they lead which impact teacher retention. The principals and assistant principals emphasized the social-relational skills of central office administrators play a key role in making teachers feel valued and respected while giving them a sense of belonging to the district. Being accessible, approachable, empathetic, and genuine were all descriptors used by the participants to identify attributes that positively influence teacher retention. Teacher compensation can impact a teacher's decision to stay in a district or in the profession; therefore, it is important for central office administrators to commit to increasing salary and benefits to remain competitive within the profession. While a competitive salary is extremely important, so are telehealth programs, clinic access, and affordable dental and vision insurance. Being able to provide resources across the district to assist teachers is just as important as compensation. Hiring special education teachers and instructional assistants to meet the needs of students and alleviating stress and pressures on teachers was noticeable. Unique to the TSC, the neuroscience educator who works with teachers

and students to regulate brain state and center emotions has been seen as a great benefit to teachers, but it comes with a price.

Administrators mentioned several programs and initiatives in the TSC that impact teacher retention positively:

- SEEDS - Instructional coach dedicated to year one and two teachers in the district
- INtegrate - TSC's wellness framework
- Conscious Discipline - Corporation-wide student discipline system
- Future Administrators Seminar - Aspiring administrators program ran by the superintendent
- Grow Your Own - Teacher licensing program for instructional aides

As good as the programs and initiatives are, competitive pay and benefits surfaced again in this area as factors which positively impact teacher retention. One such benefit suggested was re-examining the district school calendar to incorporate longer breaks, specifically a one-week fall break and a day or two in February to break up the long stretch from early January to spring break in late March. Participants also recognized a need to allow teachers more choice and flexibility in professional development opportunities.

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to take a unique look at the teacher shortage and examine factors that impact teacher retention. Specifically, this study was focused on how the central office administrators in the TSC impact teacher retention through the lens of a building administrator. Through a questionnaire distributed to every building-level administrator in the district, the researcher aimed to find the attributes, actions, and behaviors of central office administrators that were viewed as positive forces. Equally as important, the participants were asked to identify attributes, actions, and behaviors they would like to see from the district leadership as well as the characteristics they have witnessed in other districts that they deemed successful. The questionnaire also delved into district programs and initiatives that the central office administrators have implemented or supported both in principle and financially. These questions were asked in the same way, relying on the participants to list the district programs and initiatives they feel are most valued by the teachers to support retention. They were also asked about programs and initiatives they would like to see implemented as well as programs and

initiatives they witnessed in other districts and thought would be successful in the TSC and positively impact teacher retention.

The overarching question for this research project was: What is the impact of central office administrators on teacher retention? By reviewing the teacher exit interview results, the researcher was able to compose questions for the questionnaire that aligned with and expounded upon the exit interview data. All of the questions on the questionnaire were designed to line up with and answer the three research questions driving the study.

Discussion of the Results

The questionnaire consisted of 15 questions in total. The first four questions were demographic in nature to learn how much administrative experience the participants had and how many districts they had worked in, including the TSC. One aspect of the data review and analysis was to understand the sentiments of the administrators as a whole, whereas another component of the study was to determine if the perceptions of newer administrators differed from that of veteran administrators. The group of Newer Administrators were those with less than five years of administration experience and the Veteran Administrators were those with five or more years of experience. Questions five through nine were quantitative in nature and were designed to have a rating from Not Significant to Extremely Significant assigned to the following factors: salary, benefits, school climate and culture, central office communication, and district policies and procedures. After tallying the data, SPSS was used to run independent samples *t* tests for each of the five areas to determine if the Newer Administrators answered the questions similar to the Veteran Administrators. The variance was examined first and then the

statistical significance between the two means was analyzed. To do thematic coding of questions 10-15 of the questionnaire, an Excel spreadsheet was used to categorize and tally responses. After listing all responses on the spreadsheet, similar responses were grouped together by theme and put into categories.

What current actions and practices of Tippecanoe School Corporation central office administrators are deemed most effective by building administrators to positively impact teacher retention?

Several actions and practices of central office administrators were listed by the participants as positively impacting teacher retention. Central office administrators demonstrating the human touch was very popular. This was described as being social-relational and encompasses making employees feel valued and giving them a sense of belonging and connection to the school district. This is done through empowering teachers to lead within the district and especially at the building level. Supporting teachers when they are struggling and recognizing them when they are excelling makes teachers feel valued and appreciated. Good central office administrators are visible and accessible. They meet with teachers and are good listeners who provide the autonomy for teachers to teach and do not micromanage because they understand what it is teachers do and can empathize with the demands of the job.

As important as the social-relational elements are, the fiscal components of central office leadership cannot be overlooked. Finding resources to be able to offer programs and initiatives to support teachers while continuing to boost salary and improve

benefits is very important. The teacher exit interview data as well as the results of the questionnaire indicate that the TSC has a strong salary and benefits package. 82% of teachers and building administrators felt favorably about salary in the TSC. 96% of administrators felt favorably about the benefits package offered to teachers, whereas 87% of teachers felt the same way. Fiscal support is more than salary and benefits. The programs the TSC offers are viewed very favorably by the participants. Providing enough special education staff and support staff to meet the needs of the students and alleviate the workload on teachers made a positive impact. Providing mental health resources in the form of a neuroscience educator as well as an employee assistance program is valuable to teachers. Programs that directly support teachers in the classroom are recognized as worthy. TSC's SEEDS program, which provides guidance, mentoring, and support for first and second year in the TSC teachers, was highlighted as providing support for teachers and helping to retain teachers. The TSC supports teachers in their professional development growth and in becoming licensed or expanding a license through the Grow Your Own program and by supporting teachers who complete ASSET. INtegrate, TSC's health and wellness program for staff, helps teachers realize it is acceptable to focus on their well-being and commit to putting themselves first in order to best serve their students.

Only 7% of the participants who completed the questionnaire felt that district policies and procedures have a very significant impact on teacher retention, whereas 68% felt there was little to no significance in this area. Not one participant indicated

communication from the central office was very significant in a teacher's decision to leave. In fact, 93% claim this factor has very little significance in a teacher's decision to leave a district.

What actions and practices do building administrators indicate central office administrators should implement to positively impact teacher retention?

The overall results of the questionnaire were affirming that central office administrators in the TSC conduct themselves in a manner that positively affects teacher retention. This includes the interactions with teachers and the implementation of programs and initiatives across the district. The participants in this study were able to point out opportunities for improvements that will not only benefit the central office administrators in the TSC, but those in all leadership positions in schools. The two main themes shared by the building administrators are based around the ideas of collaborative decision making and overall visibility in the schools. Providing more transparency when communicating from the district office can lend credibility to the communication. Teachers are more likely to support an initiative or policy when they understand the background and the communication has been transparent. The more visible central office administrators are in the buildings, the more opportunities for relationships to form, which increases trust in leadership.

Under the umbrella of collaborative decision-making falls gathering teacher input, transparency, and improved communication. Gathering input from teachers is part of making them feel valued and invested in the district. When giving teachers a voice in

district-level decisions, teachers gain a sense of belonging and can more readily support district initiatives because they had a voice in shaping the outcome. Two very specific areas mentioned by the building administrators were professional development opportunities and the school calendar. The TSC has chosen to use Title II funds intended for professional development to implement an instructional coaching cadre. Instructional coaches are prevalent at every instructional level; however, most buildings share an instructional coach, with the exception of the largest buildings. The idea behind this model is that the instructional coaches get trained and then pass the knowledge on to the teachers. The principals have expressed a need for more coaches so they are not shared. This suggestion would provide more professional development for teachers. The school calendar in the TSC has been established by a committee consisting of central office administrators, principals, teachers, parents, and school board members. While the committee approach is dictated by board policy, the district has pushed to maintain a traditional school calendar over the years and the committee, albeit differently composed each year, has agreed to a consistent calendar. The feedback from the participants indicates it may be time to take a deeper look at a calendar with an earlier start date to accommodate a week-long fall break and a short break in February for the sake of teacher retention.

The principals and assistant principals would like the central office administrators to be more visible in the schools. Simply making more site visits was recommended as an approach that could be implemented. Building administrators would like central office

administrators to visit more classrooms and talk to students in the classroom setting as well. Another recommendation was for the administrators from the central office to lead the professional development blocks at the school on occasion. The participants feel more visibility results in getting to know the teachers so they feel more valued. While interactions with the teachers was noted as a positive attribute, the increased visibility provides an opportunity to strengthen trust and communication.

What are the perceptions and experiences of building administrators regarding central office administrators' influence on teachers' overall job satisfaction?

The building administrators feel the central office administrators can and do impact teacher job satisfaction. This is predominantly influenced by the attributes, actions, and behaviors of the central office administrators and the programs and initiatives they implement and support across the district. Communication from the central office to the teachers (93% Slightly Significant) and the policies and procedures (86% Slightly Significant) put in place by district administration was deemed to have very little impact on teacher retention. Based on the data, these factors do not significantly impact teacher job satisfaction. Central office administrators do impact job satisfaction in how they compensate teachers. While the availability of funding is not always in the control of the administration, choices on where to spend available resources is. A competitive salary and benefits package was viewed as a key component in teacher retention in the TSC. Additionally, the implementation of programs that teachers' value has proven to be a factor in teacher retention according to the participants in the study.

The teachers value programs such as INtegrate, SEEDS, Conscious Discipline, Grow Your Own, and the Future Administrators Seminar because these programs are designed to support teachers whether it be professionally as teachers, personally through addressing their physical and mental well-being, or simply helping them become better at their craft and preparing them for advancement opportunities within the district.

As great as the programs, initiatives, and compensation may be in positively impacting teacher job satisfaction, the building administrators indicate it is the interactions with and social-relational connections that truly impact teacher job satisfaction. When teachers feel valued and respected, they tend to enjoy their job more. Teachers want to feel listened to and know that their superiors understand what they are doing in the classroom on a daily basis so they can empathize with them when they need help solving a problem. These items are hard to measure. It is difficult to put a number on how someone makes you feel. When teachers do not feel valued, respected, or listened to, their job satisfaction naturally decreases.

The participants in this study feel job satisfaction is good but could be improved upon. Finding ways to be more collaborative with teachers to give them input in decision making across the district is one way this could happen. Transparency in decision making and communication is another way central office administrators could increase teacher job satisfaction. By being in the schools more and increasing visibility, the teachers will inherently feel the central office administrators are more connected to them, which enhances trust and job satisfaction as a result.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature and Theoretical Framework

All participants in the study, whether Newer Administrators or Veteran Administrators, expressed that how teachers feel in their job is just as important as the compensation they receive for performing their job. There was no statistically significant difference between the way the two groups rated any of the five quantitative factors. The results of the study fell right in line with the literature around teacher retention and transformative leadership theory. Salary and benefits were found to be very important factors in retaining teachers. Guarino et al. (2006) found a correlation between higher salaries and retention rates in the United States. Teachers did not go into teaching for the lavish lifestyle and large paychecks, rather they want to feel like they are being compensated fairly and that the district prioritizes providing a competitive salary and benefits package. Shuls and Flores (2020) noted Brill and McCartney (2008) found that moderate salary increases are only marginally effective when it comes to teacher retention and there are better, more cost effective, measures districts can take to increase retention. The programs, supports, and resources districts provide to teachers are nearly as important as the salary and benefits. Programs, such as mentoring initiatives and employee wellness programs, that focus on the support and growth of teachers are held in high regard and can be implemented with little cost to the district. Teachers want to work for leaders who value them, make them feel like a part of a school family, and empower them to be leaders in the school. This falls in line with the tenants of transformative leadership theory. Bass and Riggio (2006) noted that teachers are inspired and motivated

by transformational leaders who value their work and challenge them to exceed their own expectations. The researcher has coined the term social-relational to describe the characteristics teachers seek in their administrators. Leaders who can communicate, collaborate, empathize, sympathize, and empower teachers in a professional environment are valued. DeMatthews et al. (2022) found teachers desire to work in schools with high professional expectations and at least some level of administrative support. Because teachers have significantly more interaction with their principal than central office administrators, districts need to focus on hiring principals who exude characteristics of transformational leadership theory. Not only will principals who have good personality, managerial skills, and strong social skills improve teacher performance when they empower and recognize teachers, but they will increase teacher job satisfaction (Ardliana et al., 2021). Teachers who are satisfied with their job are less worried about chasing a higher salary and are more likely to remain in place.

Limitations

Limitations in this study include that the study will only occur in one school district, the Tippecanoe School Corporation (TSC) in Lafayette, Indiana. While the questionnaire expanded across all levels of school (elementary, middle school, high school), it did not question anyone outside of the TSC. While the voluntary questionnaire will be offered for all building-level administrators in the corporation, the results will likely be coded into those administrators with many years of experience and experience in another district compared to those who are newer to administration. These bounds are

being set as a means to make sure that all participants have the ability to speak freely and have the time to share their feelings about teacher retention and the role of the central office administration. It is predictable that there could be vast differences between the experiences of elementary teachers and high school teachers; therefore, all instructional levels will be included in the survey. Involving all levels will provide an all-encompassing viewpoint of the district.

Another limitation is that teachers are not being interviewed directly because the focus of the study is to gain perspective on how building-level administrators feel the current practices of central office administrators impact teacher retention in addition to learning what additional practices building administrators would like to see implemented to positively impact retention of teaching staff. Surveying teachers directly may seem like a logical way to get this information; however, the data could be skewed depending on the participation rate in specific school buildings compared to others. Additionally, the focus of the research is to learn about leadership practices and building leaders would be more qualified to speak of leadership practices than teachers. It is likely that if a principal has had multiple teachers share a common theme when leaving, it will be shared through the open-ended response, whereas surveying teachers who are current employees may not bring that common concern to the forefront because they are employed by the district.

Implication of the Results for Practice

The results of this study link back to what the researcher learned in kindergarten, and it is still being taught today; follow the golden rule! Treat others as you would like to

be treated. That mantra can be seen in classrooms across the world today. The participants reiterated that how people are treated is the biggest factor in teacher retention. When central office administrators take the time to invest in getting to know their teachers and engage with them and interact in a personal manner, the teachers feel a level of trust and commitment to the district. The old adage that people will forget what you told them, but they will always remember how you made them feel was proven true in this research. The results support the idea that teachers prefer transformative leadership over transactional leadership. Teachers want leaders who know them, empower them, trust them, and understand their world in the classroom. It is for that reason the districts should place a premium on hiring building administrators who are transformative in nature. They will naturally form relationships with teachers and lead through consensus building. Teachers are more likely to remain in a district where transformative leadership theory is practiced across all levels of leadership. Collaborative leaders are valued in today's less trusting and more skeptical society.

While it was demonstrated how important the interpersonal relationships are in transformative leaders, the tangible items such as salary and benefits cannot be overlooked. Although salary and benefits were not significant factors in teachers departing the district, if the school corporation does not keep pace with the area districts, they could become factors. One potential strategy is to focus collective bargaining on driving up teacher salaries. While health care costs are continuing to increase exponentially year-over-year, not every teacher takes the health insurance offered by the

district. A variety of reasons could be behind this, such as new teachers who are typically 22 or 23 years old may remain on their parents' health insurance until age 26, or a spouse may have a great insurance option. Either way, putting money toward insurance does not benefit all teachers; however, putting dollars toward salaries goes directly to teachers and increases their retirement pension at the end of their career due to a higher reportable salary. When at the bargaining table, central office administrators should work to encourage a settlement that benefits all teachers equally. Those who do not take a benefit should not take a penalty compared to their peers.

Before bargaining a contract, a collaborative leader may consider getting a sense of what the teachers as a whole desire. The district must, by law, bargain with the exclusive representative of the school corporation, or teacher's union. It is likely this group represents the opinion of all teachers across the district well, but it is impossible to know. Seeking teacher input on all matters is important, not just in bargaining. Teachers want and need to be included to enhance their sense of belonging and their loyalty to the corporation. Including teachers on committees to make decisions is one way to gain their input. Another option is through surveys. A quick informal survey can give a central office administrator valuable information at their fingertips. More importantly, by sending the survey, the teacher was asked to provide their opinion, and regardless of the end result, the teacher had a say in the outcome. Teachers appreciate when the leadership seeks their opinion. As it relates to teacher retention, the use of stay interviews is recommended. Stay interviews engage the teachers who are with the corporation as

opposed to exit interviews who collect the opinions of teachers leaving the district. The value of stay interviews is the participant can provide valuable insight about what the district is doing well and what could be improved. When the advice of the teacher is realized, the teacher certainly feels like their voice dictated change in the district.

Teachers want to see their central office administrators in the schools on a regular basis. Visibility is an opportunity for growth in the district and when teachers see their district leaders in their school, not only does it show they care, but it also gives teachers an opportunity to interact with upper management which for some teachers may rarely happen. The interaction will likely take place in the teacher's classroom, if not in the office, and should put the teacher at ease being in a comfortable and familiar environment. One strategy to implement is visiting every new teacher's classroom at least one time during the year to check in with them and see how they are doing and ask what they need to be successful. This can be a very brief visit and can be accomplished by one person, such as the assistant superintendent of personnel. A more detailed and time demanding strategy is to follow up with these teachers in year two of their tenure with the district for a 15-20-minute conversation. The purpose of this conversation is to see how they have acclimated to the position and to see if they feel positively about their experience in the district. Additionally, valuable information can be gleaned from a personal conversation just by asking what more they need to be successful. This strategy would need to be shared across many district leaders but could even be done via virtual

meeting if time demands it. However, a virtual meeting would not increase visibility in the schools.

Implementing the Results

It has been stated that TSC has a program in place with an instructional coach dedicated to new teachers in the district, the SEEDS program. It was also noted that TSC follows a building champion model to help convey the beliefs and thoughts of the programs that support the staff. This model is used in the implementation of the Conscious Discipline framework, the neuroscience philosophies, and to empower teacher leaders of the INtegrate wellness initiative. Additionally, the TSC has adopted and maintained an instructional coaching model to support teachers and provide professional development to help teachers grow professionally. The district implemented Stay Interviews in January of 2024. Although this was implemented prior to this study being conducted, the surveys do show the district values the opinion of the teachers who create the magic in the classroom. Some of these initiatives have been made possible due to grants from various community organizations such as North Central Health Services assisting to fund a mental health liaison and the neuroscience educator positions. In the late Spring of 2024, the TSC was selected to receive a \$226,000 grant from the Indiana Department of Education to further build upon some of the practices and programs presented in the research findings.

SEEDS Expansion

One key component of the grant is the funding allowed the district to hire a second person, or assistant director of SEEDS, for one semester. This was paramount because the current director is retiring in December and it will allow for a more seamless transition to the new director. The one semester of working together will allow an overlap period to share the accomplishments and opportunities for growth as well as an introduction to approximately 80 new teachers so the new person can be set up for immediate success.

Professional Development

Because of the blessing of the grant, the district was able to send 10 first- or second-year teachers to the National Teacher Leadership Conference in Denver, Colorado and another 10 to the Get Your Teach on Fest Conference in Orlando, Florida. Investments such as this show teachers the district is committed to them as teachers and prioritizes helping them grow as professionals. This is precisely what was suggested by the study, finding ways to get more teachers out to professional development. The grant funding allowed the district to do this during the summer when there is no drop off of instruction and no costs associated with substitute teachers.

Mentoring

Additionally, the grant allowed the TSC to expand on the building champion model that was referenced when discussing the Conscious Discipline framework as well as the INtegrate model. The district will now be able to fund, through a stipend, a teacher mentor “champion” in every building across the district. While each school already does

its own form of mentoring and assigns veteran teachers to new teachers, this grant allows the district to fund a position in each building and connect it to the SEEDS program for oversight.

The grant was sought out by the district because of a belief that the SEEDS program was unique and powerful, but with more funding would come more opportunities for growth and excellence in the classroom, and ultimately, better teacher retention. The thought, planning, and intentionality in which this grant was implemented goes to show a high level of dedication to the teachers of the TSC.

Recommendations for Further Research

Should this study be replicated in the future, it would be advisable to follow a focus group format for data collection instead of a questionnaire. While the questionnaire served its purpose on the quantitative demographic and measurable factor questions, too often the responses were brief, one-word answers in which the participants did not provide enough detail to the researcher to fully understand the intent. This caused some interpretation to be factored into the coding. The focus group would allow for more detailed answers where the researcher could get more specific information, making coding the responses more manageable.

Two small adjustments could be made to the topic of research to gain more perspectives. First, rather than focusing the comparison on newer administrators versus veteran administrators, the research could compare the sentiments of administrators versus current teachers. A compare and contrast model would be interesting to see what

level of significance comes from each respective group of professionals. The second twist on this study that could reveal interesting findings is to look at central office impact on building administrator retention. The applicant pool for building principals and assistant principals seems to have gotten weaker over the years of the teacher shortage. It makes sense that with lesser quality teachers, the quality of administrator applicants would drop.

Education is inherently reliant upon having enough good people to fill the important roles of teachers. It is important to continue studying every potential factor as to why teachers are leaving the profession.

Conclusion

In elementary school, students are taught to treat others with respect, dignity, and kindness. This philosophy serves adults just as well as it does kids. Ultimately, teachers want to feel valued and respected for doing the tough job they do. They want their leaders to be visible, collaborate with them, and ask for their input when making decisions that impact them. Teachers appreciate central office administrators who work hard to provide them with a competitive salary and benefits package and implement programs and initiatives that support them as professionals, but also as teachers. Simply put, teachers want to feel like they are an integral part in making a difference in the lives of students. It is up to the administrators to create an environment that fosters this atmosphere. When this happens, teachers will stay.

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Appendix A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN INDIANA

The Impact of Central Office Administrators on Teacher Retention

IRBNet ID Number: 2144895-1

Informed Consent Document

Online Survey

You are invited to participate in an online research study on how the actions, attributes, and practices of central office administrators impact teacher retention. This study is being conducted by *Doug Allison through the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Southern Indiana and is being sponsored by Dr. Elizabeth Wilkins, also from the Educational Leadership Department at the University of Southern Indiana.*

Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be a part of the study.

What will happen if I take participate?

Your participation will take approximately 15-20 minutes of your time. You will be asked to complete an online survey about your perceptions of the reason(s) teachers have left the district. Some of these questions will ask you to rate how strongly you feel an indicator is linked

to teachers leaving the district and others will be open-ended to allow you to elaborate on the areas you perceive to be beneficial and those you would like to see instituted. Your participation will benefit your school, the school district, and the greater community by providing valuable insight that will provide for better central office leadership practices which will help retain teachers and maintain consistent high-quality education in our schools and community.

What are my options?

Your decision to participate is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you do not wish to complete this survey, simply close your browser. Participation in the survey is anonymous, however, you can withdraw from the study any time prior to submitting your survey by closing this browser. While the survey is anonymous, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed/maintained. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

How will my information be used?

The survey will be anonymous and as such no identifying information will be collected. Only the researcher, Doug Allison, will have access to the collected data which will be stored on a flash drive in the Personnel Office at the Tippecanoe School Corporation Central Office. The data will be maintained for a period of seven (7) years before being destroyed.

What are my risks?

There are no known risks of participating in this study beyond those that exist in daily life.

May I be eligible for compensation?

No compensation is being offered for participation in this study

Who can answer my questions about this study?

If you have questions about the study or encounter a problem with the research, contact the researcher, Doug Allison at daallison@eagles.usi.edu

For questions about your rights as a research participant or to discuss problems, complaints, or concerns about a research study, or to obtain information or offer input, contact the University of Southern Indiana Office of Sponsored Projects and Research, 8600 University Blvd., Evansville, IN 47712, 812-465-7000, rcr@usi.edu.

The research team members are not acting as agents of the University of Southern Indiana and do not have authority to bind the University. Any opinions, findings, or recommendations expressed in this study represent the researchers' own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Southern Indiana.

If you desire, please save or print a copy of this consent form for your records.

Please confirm your consent choice:

I give my consent to participate in this research study, and I am of 18 years of age or older. If you consent to participate in the study, click "Continue". If you do not consent, do not submit the survey.

Appendix B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS or SURVEY QUESTIONS (Qual)

1. How many total years have you worked as a school administrator (principal, assistant principal, dean of students)?

0-4 years

5-9 years

10-19 years

20+ years

2. How many years have you worked as a school administrator in the TSC?

0-4 years

5-9 years

10-19 years

20+ years

3. How many years have you worked as a school administrator in districts other than the TSC?

0-4 years

5-9 years

10-19 years

20+ years

4. How many school districts have you worked in as a school administrator?

1 district

2 districts

3 districts

4+ districts

5. Regarding teachers that have left the TSC who worked in your building over the last 5 years, how significantly do you believe salary impacted their decision to leave the district?

Not Significant

Slightly Significant

Moderately Significant

Very Significant

Extremely Significant

6. Regarding teachers that have left the TSC who worked in your building over the last 5 years, how significantly do you believe the benefits package (excluding salary) impacted their decision to leave the district?

Not Significant

Slightly Significant

Moderately Significant

Very Significant

Extremely Significant

7. Regarding teachers that have left the TSC who worked in your building over the last 5 years, how significantly do you believe school climate and/or culture impacted their decision to leave the district?

Not Significant

Slightly Significant

Moderately Significant

Very Significant

Extremely Significant

8. Regarding teachers that have left the TSC who worked in your building over the last 5 years, how significantly do you believe communication from the central office impacted their decision to leave the district?

Not Significant

Slightly Significant

Moderately Significant

Very Significant

Extremely Significant

9. Regarding teachers that have left the TSC who worked in your building over the last 5 years, how significantly do you believe corporation policies and procedures impacted their decision to leave the district?

Not Significant

Slightly Significant

Moderately Significant

Very Significant

Extremely Significant

10. What current leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of TSC central office administrators positively impact teacher retention?

11. What leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors could be implemented by central office administrators to positively impact teacher retention?

12. What exemplary leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors have you witnessed from district leaders you have worked with do you feel should be exhibited at the district level to positively impact teacher retention?

13. What current district programs and/or initiatives in the TSC positively impact teacher retention?

14. What district programs and/or initiatives should be implemented in the TSC to positively impact teacher retention?

15. What district programs and/or initiatives from other districts in which you have worked could be implemented in the TSC to positively impact teacher retention?

Appendix C

CODE BOOK/MATRIX (Qual)

What current leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors of TSC central office administrators positively impact teacher retention?		
Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
3	11	Make employees feel valued and sense of belonging, recognizing staff, support, not micromanaging, listening, understanding what teachers do, visible/accessible, meet w/new teachers
2	10	Providing resources - special ed help and mental health, SEEDS, Mentors, Future Admin, Conscious Discipline, Integrate, GYO/ASSET, New Teacher Orientation, Professional Development
	7	Monetary bonuses, Good salary, Benefits, Contract
	2	Communication
	2	Personable and friendly, know and interact with staff
	2	Responsive, Answer questions, Work out issues
	1	Integrity
	1	Collaboration with TEA

	1	Autonomy
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What leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors could be implemented by central office administrators to positively impact teacher retention?		
Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
2	8	Overall Visibility - More site visits and classroom speaking, lead IIB
1	6	More collaborative decision making, teacher input, transparency and communication
	4	Celebrate teacher successes
1	2	Relationship Building w/Teachers
	2	Hire additional staff, more diverse staff
	2	Advocacy
1	1	Go to PTO for leaves, sick day compensation
1		Built in PD
	1	More teacher work time
	1	More corp-wide activities
	1	Change calendar - 2 wk breaks
1		e-Learning

What exemplary leadership attributes, actions, and behaviors have you witnessed from district leaders you have worked with do you feel should be exhibited at the district level to positively impact teacher retention?		
Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
1	7	Accessible, Approachable, Empathetic, Genuine, Assist & help through problems
1	6	Visibility, get to know people so they feel valued
1	2	Communication
	2	Transparency
	2	Celebrating successes
	2	Promote a sense of inclusivity
	1	Adequately support schools
	1	Build consensus
	1	Help people grow

What current district programs and/or initiatives in the TSC positively impact teacher retention?

Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
2	8	Competitive pay and benefits structure
1	8	SEEDS mentorship program
2	7	Integrate (wellness program)
2	1	Conscious Discipline
	3	Added support staff (RBT's, SSS's, Instructional Coaches)
	2	Grow Your Own program
1		Community engagement
1		Neuroeducation
1		New teacher orientation
	1	Professional Development offerings
	1	Classroom technology
	1	Corporation newsletter
	1	Principal autonomy
	1	Future administrator seminar

What district programs and/or initiatives should be implemented in the TSC to positively impact teacher retention?		
Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
	2	Balanced or revised calendar with longer breaks
1	1	More flexibility in PD opportunities
1		Childcare assistance
1		Better maternity and paternity leave
1		Grade level meeting with central office administration
1		Expanded new teacher orientation
	1	Community Partnerships as perks for staff
	1	Formal Teacher-to-teacher mentoring program
	1	Annual review of evaluation process
	1	Expanded health clinic access
	1	Smaller class sizes
	1	HVAC Improvements
	1	Additional ED and ES programming
	1	More Instructional Coaches
	1	Increase compensation for Special Ed teachers
	1	Increase salary for veteran teachers

	1	More alternative ed programming for disruptive students
	1	Continue finding ways to show teachers are appreciated
	1	e-Learning Days
	1	Compensation for sick days
	1	Restructure IIB/staff development time

What district programs and/or initiatives from other districts in which you have worked could be implemented in the TSC to positively impact teacher retention?		
Years of Administration Experience (Frequency)		
0-4 Years	5+ Years	Responses
	4	Revised student calendar - longer breaks
	2	More PD for staff
1		Review amount of testing and use of data
1		Better teacher evaluation tools
	1	Professional Learning Communities
	1	Building-level teacher-to-teacher mentors
	1	Compensation for sick days
	1	Compensation for teachers who do more than is asked
	1	CO Admins cover a teacher's class for a day/half day/period
	1	Keep increasing compensation/benefits

	1	Continue Positive Culture
	1	e-Learning Days

Appendix D

ADDITIONAL TABLES (Qual)

The following tables represent the complete data set that was consolidated into tables 3-7 for simplified reporting purposes:

Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Salary on Teacher Retention

Rating Category	Not Significant		Slightly Significant		Moderately Significant		Very Significant		Extremely Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	2	7.10	1	3.60	1	3.60	1	3.60	0	0
Veteran Administrators	7	25	6	21.40	6	21.40	2	7.10	2	7.10

Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Benefits on Teacher Retention

Rating Category	Not Significant		Slightly Significant		Moderately Significant		Very Significant		Extremely Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	3	10.70	2	7.20	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	12	42.80	8	28.60	2	7.20	1	3.60	0	0

Building Administrator Rating of Significance of School Climate and Culture on Teacher Retention

Rating Category	Not Significant		Slightly Significant		Moderately Significant		Very Significant		Extremely Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	0	0	3	10.70	2	7.10	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	8	28.60	5	17.90	4	14.30	5	17.90	1	3.60

*Building Administrator Rating of Significance of Central Office Communication on
Teacher Retention*

Rating Category	Not Significant		Slightly Significant		Moderately Significant		Very Significant		Extremely Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	3	10.70	2	7.10	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	12	42.90	9	32.10	2	7.10	0	0	0	0

*Building Administrator Rating of Significance of District Policies and Procedures on
Teacher Retention*

Rating Category	Not Significant		Slightly Significant		Moderately Significant		Very Significant		Extremely Significant	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Newer Administrators	2	7.10	3	10.70	0	0	0	0	0	0
Veteran Administrators	9	32.10	10	35.70	2	7.10	1	3.60	1	3.60