

TEACHER MORALE AND TEACHER RETENTION
IN A RURAL SCHOOL:
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

By

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Abstract: Teacher morale affects a school district on many levels. This study seeks to explore areas why teacher morale lacks, while reviewing practices that may create an increase in teacher morale in Oklahoma public school districts.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this era of increased accountability, school leaders face complex challenges in attempting to balance the tasks of meeting organizational goals and maintaining the *esprit de corps* of the learning environment. Teacher morale serves as an essential aspect of cultivating a positive work environment. Although vitally important, the notion of morale holds ambiguous connotations. For example, the basic term, morale, can refer to either a person or group, and Senechal, Sober, and Hope (2016) posit that it is not clear whether it holds the same general meaning collectively and individually.

The literature on teacher morale reflects the same vagueness (Evans, 1997; Hart, Wearing, Conn, Carter, & Dingle, 2000). For example, Baughman (1996) reflects the collective perspective by explaining teacher morale in terms of “a school environment where faculty perceives a collective sense of friendliness, openness and trust” (p.21). Rowland (2008) focuses on individual teacher feelings about the environment that can affect their actions as well as the motivation and achievement of students. Also, in the literature, teacher morale can be used interchangeably with terms such as “stress,

motivation, engagement, organizational cohesiveness, organizational commitment, job involvement, and depression” (Senechal et al., 2016, p. 10).

While teacher morale remains vitally important to school success, teacher morale and job satisfaction across the nation is at its lowest point in 25 years (Santos, 2012; Senechal et al., 2016). Recent education reform across the country negatively influences teacher morale. For example, education policies, mandates and technologies that promise to revolutionize teaching and education result in increased teacher stress (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014; Ward, 2015). These reforms, coupled with increased demands of non-teaching assignments, have led to a decline in nationwide teacher morale (Ward, 2015). Consistent with teacher morale across the nation, teacher morale in Oklahoma continues to decline (Eger & Habib, 2015) as well.

The Importance of an Effective Teacher in Every Classroom

Research indicates that an effective teacher stands as the strongest predictor of student success (Darling-Hammond, 2000). Teacher morale possesses the potential to impact every aspect of the educational process (Darling-Hammond, 1997, 2000; Houchard, 2005; Stand for Children Oklahoma, 2016). Therefore, administrators must monitor the morale of teachers especially as it affects the school community (Houchard, 2005).

Research indicates elevated teacher morale increases job performance and motivation. However, in recent years, Oklahoma public school teachers experienced an unparalleled level of low morale. Schools battle teacher shortages (Kiker & Emeagwali, 2010), negative perceptions of the public (Green, 2012), and limited financial resources. Public perception of teaching as a profession also influences teacher morale. Although teachers are required to hold a college degree, and many actually hold advanced degrees, they do not receive the pay,

respect and recognition afforded to other professions. Heick, (2013) indicates the perception teachers are treated as professionals in the same way as are engineers, doctors and farmers is ludicrous. This viewpoint, coupled with demands on teachers to increase test scores is only part of the low morale problem.

Problem Statement

Teacher morale is essential to job satisfaction in the retention of teachers when measuring public school efficacy. According to Protheroe (2006), teachers speak about the personal satisfaction derived from assisting students in their learning. This job satisfaction leads to increased teacher morale. Teachers in stable school environments predictably exhibit higher morale than those experiencing high turnover (Noddings, 2014). In 1997, Perie and Baker reviewed data from a study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics and found that the ‘most satisfied’ teachers considered their schools as supportive, safe, autonomous environments (Protheroe, 2006).

However, high teacher morale may not be the primary reason for teacher retention. The results of a study by Roth, Assor, Kanat-Maymon, and Kaplan, (2007) finds that motivation for teaching relates directly to both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation of the teacher (Bieg, Backes & Mittag, 2011). These motivators may augment teacher morale, which may be reflected in increased teacher retention.

One possible reason teachers may have high morale in some instances yet not in others may be linked to the support of administration. Perie and Baker (1997) reported that when teachers perceive a lack of administrative support for their work, they lack motivation to do their best in the classroom; and when teachers work in unsatisfactory working conditions, they are more likely to change schools or to leave the profession altogether. In a

staffing study conducted by Whitener, Gruber, Lynch, Tingos, Perona, and Fondelier (1997), data analyzed from respondents showed that teacher resignations increased due to dissatisfaction with teaching as a career. Some teachers transferred to another school location, citing dissatisfaction with their previous school. One issue that significantly influenced their decision to leave the profession was determined to be insufficient support or lack of acknowledgement from school administration (Protheroe, 2006).

This study seeks to explore teacher morale and teacher retention in a rural public school setting where teacher turnover is virtually non-existent. Personal satisfaction with factors outside the classroom may be the reason for this. This also may be due to a range of other school-related issues including expectations of administration or students, class sizes, teacher pay, work hours and environment, and teacher preparation.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates.

Research Questions

1. How do teachers describe the morale in this school?
2. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher morale?
3. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher decisions to remain in the profession and remain at this school?
4. How does self-determination theory explain teacher morale and retention in this school?

5. What other factors led to teacher longevity in this school?

Epistemology

This qualitative case study utilizes a post-positivism epistemology to gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on teacher morale and teacher retention in this school. Findings will be analyzed using the theoretical framework of self-determination theory (SDT) to address teacher motivation to remain in the profession and to remain in this school.

Theoretical Perspective

Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) developed self-determination theory as a way to explain individual motivation for behavior. According to SDT, (Deci & Ryan, 2000), the three key psychological factors of autonomy, relatedness, and competence help to explain why individuals remain motivated to persist in reaching goals. By concentrating on the primary psychological predisposition regarding intrinsic motivation and integration, the self-determination theory focuses on questions of why people do what they do, as well as benefits associated with this type of socially regulating behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These three factors-autonomy, relatedness, and competence-must be satisfied to experience a sense of well-being (Guay, Senecal, Gauthier, & Fernet, 2003). Research conducted over the course of the past 25 years has shown that autonomy can explain human behaviors including morale (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Guay, et.al., 2003; Vallerand, 1997). For example, teachers experience relatedness as they build personal relationships within their schools. Those who experience a level of relatedness to their school, their position, or their administration team tend to remain

in their current school. Each of these factors creates a vital element in self-determination theory, which is used to describe the rationale for the study.

Procedures

Explanatory case study design, as described by Yin (2004), allows for making direct observations and data collections within the natural setting of the school being studied. According to Yin (2004), explanatory case study methods are appropriate when research seeks to explain why this phenomenon occurs within the school. Research on the issue of teacher morale and retention explains the relationship between why teachers stay or why teachers leave the profession. This qualitative explanatory case study utilizes a post-positivist epistemology to gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on teacher morale and teacher retention in this school.

The population will be public school teachers in Mealer Elementary School, with a criterion sampling of teachers at that school who have taught there for at least ten years. The teacher turnover rate in this district is markedly lower (<5%) than the national average of 16% (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Mealer Elementary School District was purposefully selected as the study site due to the extremely low teacher and administration turnover rate. Figure 1 shows a ten-year teacher attrition rate at the school. Teachers who were categorized as retired are no longer teaching; those who left either moved from the area or chose to teach in another school district.

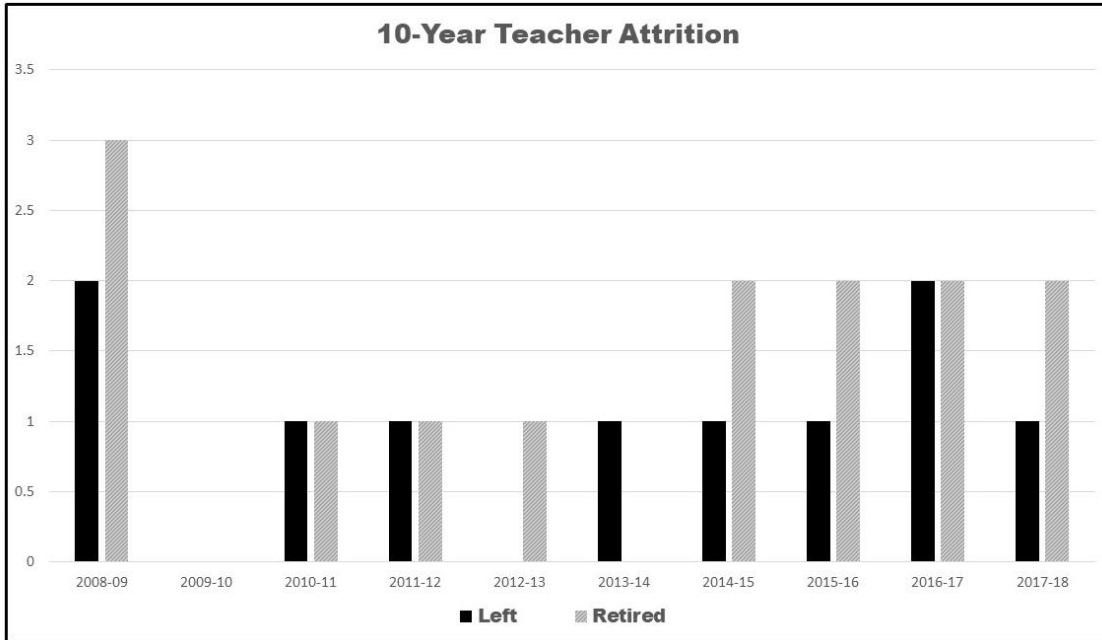


Figure 1. Ten-year attrition rate at Mealer Elementary.

Purposeful sampling as described by Yin (2011), is “the selection of participants or sources of data to be used in a study, based on their anticipated richness and relevance of information in relation to the study’s research questions” (p. 311). Most teachers in this building have been employed in this building for over a decade. The brick school building occupies a block of land in a rural setting in a Midwestern state. Although it subsists as a Title I school with limited financial resources, the community provides financial support of the school. Data will be collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and administrators, and through collecting and analyzing artifacts.

For this study, the researcher employed methods to check for accuracy to ensure construct validity and reliability. Those techniques included constructing validity through triangulation of evidence obtained from multiple sources, internal validity using conventional analytical techniques, external validity through systematic generalization, and reliability through case study protocols (Yazan, 2015). Sources of evidence included documentation,

archival records, interviews, both direct and participant observations, and analysis of artifact collection (Yin, 2004).

Significance of Study

Practice

This study is potentially significant to practice because it seeks to understand teacher perceptions concerning key areas to improve working conditions, culture, and morale of a school community. Research indicates that a teacher's level of commitment and level of teacher morale remains vital to the decision to stay in the profession (Corbell, 2008; Rots, Aelterman, Vlerick & Vermeulen, 2007; Weiss, 1999). By measuring morale and applying results to the lens of self-determination theory, valuable data may be obtained which may direct improvements in administrative support of teachers. This study will contribute to the educational research base because increasing teacher morale is an important feature of school districts. Not only does enhanced morale involve monetary savings through higher teacher retention, it also impacts the lives of teachers, students, and the continuity of a community. This study has the potential to provide teacher insight concerning how to reduce attrition in public education.

Theory

Research detailing self-determination theory has been extensively studied within the realm of education practice (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Nonetheless, teacher morale and retention continue to be a problematic issue to resolve (Hasty, 2007). This study will provide additional perspectives of how SDT may explain teacher morale and maintain teacher retention, as well as creating a foundation for additional research that may inform education policies.

Research

Understanding teacher morale and retention has been limited by focusing on individual decisions (Scheopner, 2010). Research in the field of teacher morale demonstrates the importance of individual and communities of educators in every school, as they hold the power to create schools that substantially better the quality of the future lives of their students and future generations (Thapa, Guffey, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013). Consequently, findings from this study will provide insight concerning teacher perspectives about factors that have encouraged them to remain in the profession and in the same building for an extended period of time. Research indicates that administrators play a pivotal role in maintaining a positive school culture in light of increased pressures on education as a whole (Richardson, 2014). Results from this study may also provide insight into how school leaders can work with teachers to enhance teacher morale within a building despite the pressures they face (Eyal & Roth, 2011).

By identifying specific factors that create a positive work environment in Mealer Elementary School, other school leaders may be able to replicate those factors, thus creating a more harmonious environment for teachers and students, while lowering the incidences of teacher turnover.

Definition of Terms

Atmosphere. For the purpose of this study, atmosphere is defined as the mood or tone of the school.

Autonomy. For context of this study, autonomy is regarded as freedom from external control of administrators.

Climate. For purposes of this study, climate is defined as quality and character of a school.

Competence. For purposes of this study, competence is defined as being able to do something efficiently or successfully.

Extrinsic Motivation. For purposes of this study, extrinsic motivation is defined as doing something because it leads to a separable outcome (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Incentives. Direct or indirect benefits offered as intrinsic motivators (World Bank, 2009).

Intrinsic Motivation. For purposes of this study, intrinsic motivation is defined as doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Job Satisfaction. For the purpose of this study, job satisfaction is regarded as how a teacher feels about his or her job.

Leadership. For purposes of this study, leadership is defined as the ability to lead others.

Locus of causality. For purposes of this study, locus of causality refers to the perception of whether the origin of the reasons for their behavior is externally or internally regulated.

Morale. For the purposes of this study, morale is defined as the mental and emotional condition of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand (Merriam-Webster, 1995).

Motivation. For purposes of this study, motivation is defined as the willingness of teachers to proactively achieve a goal.

Motivators. For purposes of this study, motivators are incentives given to teachers.

Negative Motivators. For purposes of this study, negative motivators are references as threats or punishment by administrators.

Relatedness. For purposes of this study, relatedness is defined as being connected or related.

School Culture. School culture is defined as the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, including written and unwritten rules that influence every aspect of how a school functions (Abbott, 2013).

Teacher Morale. “A school environment where faculty perceives a collective sense of friendliness, openness and trust” (Baughman, 1996, p.21).

Teacher Retention. For purposes of this study, teacher retention refers to a teacher who begins his or her teacher career and remains in the profession for five or more years (Darling-Hammond, 2003). Also, teacher retention refers to the ability of a school system to keep, or retain, teachers employed (Ingersoll, 2001; Richardson, 2014).

Limitations

Limitations to this study included a small number of respondents due to the small rural school setting. This study was administered to a small number of career teachers, therefore limiting the possibility of replicating the results. Updating demographic information in a timely fashion may be a potential limitation of this process. Observation limitations may include the possibility that the researcher may unknowingly affect data collection (Patton, 2002). Other limitations may include time constraints, personal bias of both research subjects and researcher, or personal reflections of respondents during the

interview data collection. Further limitations included highly subjective data may have been collected from research participants.

Summary and Organization of the Study

This study is structured into six chapters. Chapter One introduces the study with a statement of the problem, purpose of the study, and research questions. The theoretical framework involved in this study is self-determination theory developed by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (1985, 2000).

Chapter Two contains a review of literature to provide clarity of the research topic. These topics were addressed: teacher morale, attrition and retention, student achievement, teacher supports, best practices, and leadership behaviors affecting teacher morale. Chapter Two also included how self-determination theory plays into teacher morale and teacher retention.

Chapter Three presented a detailed explanation of the research methods to be utilized in this study. This included participant selection, data collection, and data analysis techniques. Chapter Three also contained an explanation of trustworthiness of findings and limitations of the study.

Chapter Four included findings from analysis of these data and descriptions of participants selected. Findings from analysis of data collected through interviews, observations, and other artifacts was featured in this chapter.

Chapter Five included a discussion of the findings through the lens of self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Chapter Six included conclusions, implications and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Key topics discussed in this literature review include: (a) the current high-stakes policy environment and its effects on learning; (b) teacher retention and teacher shortages; (c) teacher morale as a result of policy environment; (d) the relationship between teacher morale and student achievement; (e) factors influencing teacher morale; (f) leadership behaviors affecting teacher morale; (g) school climate affecting teacher morale; (h) past research on teacher morale; (i) best practice models for improving teacher morale; and (j) self-determination theory as it relates to teacher morale. The goals of this literature review are: (1) to recognize and support elevating teacher morale to retain teachers; (2) to illustrate the importance of increasing teacher morale to increase student academic achievement; and (3) to demonstrate that additional research on teacher morale is needed.

Understanding Teacher Morale in the United States

Current High-stakes Policy Effects on Learning

Teacher morale is a much discussed but seldom researched topic in public education (Senechal, et al., 2016); therefore, it is difficult to tell how, if at all, high-stakes policies affect teacher morale. High-stakes education policy includes standardized

guidelines that work to provide systematic organization to a school district. According to Zoch (2017), this multifaceted social practice consists of various layers of bureaucracy.

In 1983, the National Commission on Excellence in Education reported in *A Nation at Risk* that standards-based reform caused school accountability measures, including high-stakes testing. These standards intended to hold students, teachers, and school districts accountable for meeting certain benchmarks of academic performance (Valencia & Villarreal, 2003; Zoch, 2017). High-stakes education policy and school reform measures continue to be influenced by the passing of the neoliberal ideologies contained in No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Ball, 2009; Hursh, 2007; Sturges, 2015; Zoch, 2017). Since that time, standards-based reform efforts continue to be proposed to enhance academic performance in public schools throughout the United States (Zoch, 2017).

High-stakes policies associated with NCLB undermine school cultures by altering working conditions (Stearns, Banerjee, Mickelson & Moller, 2013). The focus on high-stakes testing and increasing accountability measures because of NCLB, family responsibilities, low salaries, and stressful working conditions take a toll on educators. This stress causes some schools to offer professional development to train teachers how to deal with stress associated with job responsibilities (Botwinik, 2007).

High-stakes testing policies represent a philosophy emphasizing improving test scores and enhancing these outcomes through sanctions or rewards (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). Research finds high-stakes strategies may raise targeted test scores in the short term; however, these strategies produce a magnitude of unintended negative consequences in the long term (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). This creates a detrimental

effect for teachers, students, and schools. High-stakes testing undermines best teaching practices and student engagement (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). Studies verify high stakes education policies reinforce disadvantageous behaviors. These actions range from dishonesty and cheating at all levels in the school system (Kohn, 2000; Nichols & Berliner, 2007) to rote memorization to improve test scores (Jones, et al., 2003; Ryan & Weinstein, 2009).

Research examined how testing requirements created from accountability policies affect teachers' instructional practices (Zoch, 2017). Accountability serves as a disincentive or punishment for schools to improve student academic performance (Zoch, 2017), and some researchers ascertain emphasis on assessment and accountability, compels some teachers to leave the profession (Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 2003; Kersaint, Lewis, Potter, & Meisels, 2005; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). With this focus on a higher level of accountability, teachers may experience greater work related demands and more pressure to perform. These additional requirements become fatiguing, causing teacher morale to decrease or even leave the profession (Hardy, 1999; Rowland, 2008; Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

Teacher Retention & Shortage Issues

National teaching shortages. Public schools across the nation face a teacher shortage (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). Research shows that despite the working conditions, a staffing crisis exists in public schools (Botwinik, 2007), which had led to potential problems with teacher retention (Aragon, 2016).

Teaching, a socially responsible occupation which is highly accountable and bureaucratic, is demanding intellectually, emotionally, and physically, (Sachs, 2003), as

well as intensive and unrelenting (Mackenzie, 2007). Discouraged by the lack of funding, resources, and programs students and teachers feel discouraged, demoralized, and at fault (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). Added to that, demands upon teachers continue to increase, but compensation and career advancement offers little improvement (Kelly, 2000; Mackenzie, 2007). Consequently, the field of education suffers from a higher attrition rate than do other professions (Dove, 2004; Hasty, 2007).

A lack of understanding of what teachers experience on a daily basis can contribute to the low status of teachers. The public assumes anyone can teach, with teaching regarded as “women’s work--a half-step above child care” (Johnson, 2000, p.21), with short working days and several months off in the summer (Mackenzie, 2007). This corresponds with the thought that everyone knows what teachers do because they attended school as a child (Mackenzie, 2007). Many politicians talk about the poor quality of teachers without having any concept of what teachers actually do on a daily basis (Levy-Pordes, 2016).

Teacher turnover has been a predicament for education over the past four decades (Botwinik, 2007; Hasty, 2007; Tye & O’Brien, 2002). Teacher status began declining in the late 1970s (Crowther, 2003), and by the late 1990s, morale reached its lowest point (Dinham & Scott, 1998; Mackenzie, 2007). For the past decade, educational policy in the United States worked systematically to diminish the teaching profession and public education (Marchant, 2016; Martin & Mulvihill, 2016.)

Numerous studies conducted over the past 20 years tried to determine why teachers leave the profession, especially within the first few years (Richardson, 2014). Research conducted by Certo and Fox (2002) focused on high attrition rates and reasons

why teachers left the profession (Richardson, 2014). Ingersoll and Smith (2003) collected data from teachers exiting the profession and they found dissatisfaction with teaching played an integral reason for teacher attrition (p.32). *The American Research Journal* (p. 499-534) cited teacher dissatisfaction as the main reason teachers left the profession (Ingersoll, 2001). Aragon (2016) reported many teachers cite overall job dissatisfaction, loss of autonomy, limited feedback, little recognition, and lack of advancement as morale deflators. These factors contribute to educators reporting higher levels of stress and dissatisfaction with their jobs than at any other time in the past 25 years (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Harris Interactive (2013) stated over half of all teachers experience job stress frequently throughout the work week (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Of those teachers who leave the profession, many report demanding work environments that negatively influence their morale as the key reason for departure (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). Changes to teaching conditions, including increased expectations, accountability, responsibility, and administrative demands lead to stress overload and burnout (Hoyle, 2001; Mackenzie, 2007; Sachs, 2003). Researchers found a teacher's level of commitment and morale played a pivotal role in choosing to remain in the education profession (Corbell, 2008; Rots, Aelterman, Vlerick & Vereulen, 2007; Weiss, 1999). Reasons to leave the teaching profession included economic concerns, dissatisfaction with teaching conditions, lack of resources, accountability demands, lack of administration support, and decreased public appreciation (Darling-Hammond & Shields, 2016; Martin & Mulvihill, 2016).

A growing body of research indicates highly effective teachers are at least as likely to stay in schools than their less successful colleagues (Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, Ronfeldt, & Wyckoff, 2011; Goldhaber, Gross & Player, 2007; Hanushek & Rivkin, 2010; Murnane, 1984; Ronfeldt, Loeb, & Wyckoff, 2013). Attrition remains highest in schools with lower pay, lack of administrative support, lack of teacher autonomy, and frequent student misbehavior (Boyd, et al., 2009; Ingersoll, 2007).

Oklahoma's teaching shortage. Teacher shortages trouble education leaders across all states (Aragon, 2016); Oklahoma is not immune to this quandary. Per the National Center for Education Statistics, during the 2012-13 school year, Oklahoma spent an average of \$7,912 per pupil in public schools, ranking it 49th in the nation (Robson, 2014). Across the state, teacher shortages appear in all departments and grade levels. School districts across the state find it difficult to hire and retain effective teachers, even in traditionally easy-to-staff positions and geographic locations (Oklahoma Educator Workforce Task Force, 2014).

In 2014, Oklahoma teacher attrition occurred at a rate of 16%. Among new teachers in Oklahoma, approximately 35% exit their school after the first year (Hendricks, 2015). Attrition rates rise significantly in schools with a low socio-economic base, and Oklahoma is home to many of these districts. This increasing teacher scarcity reflects a condition that has plagued Oklahoma public schools for years. Oklahoma pays teachers virtually the lowest salary as compared to other states (Robson, 2014). The ridiculously low pay, coupled with other problems, created a major issue for school districts to attract and retain quality teachers (Robson, 2014).

A 2016 survey conducted by the Oklahoma State School Board Association (OSSBA) stated, “The combined impact of budget cuts, too few prospective teachers and teachers opting for other careers or out of state teaching jobs is even worse than a year ago when schools had about 1,000 vacancies after eliminating 600 teaching jobs,” (p.11). To keep good teachers, we must utilize tactics to achieve the unfulfilled promise of public education (Nieto, 2003). With all of this, it is no wonder recruiting and retention remain problems in the teaching profession (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016; Weingarten, 2016).

Policies Influencing Teacher Morale

Employees in virtually any industry expect job satisfaction, but a teaching career offers more: acknowledgement as a professional, growth, teaching autonomy, and increased responsibility (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016). A school not only produces learning; it offers a place where teachers work collaboratively, plan and teach creatively, with the end goal of producing caring, competent students who will live successful lives and contribute to an ever-changing society (Noddings, 2014).

Teachers need access to the instruments, time, and confidence to be most effective in the classroom. Teachers deserve to work in respectful, professional environments, and their compensation should reflect the significance of their profession (Weingarten, 2016). Maintaining high morale becomes difficult when teachers feel neither respected nor trusted (Noddings, 2014). The assertion that public education fails to accomplish its potential led to systematic assessments and performance appraisals, which serve to further reduce teacher morale (Mackenzie, 2007). Teachers feel increased pressure due to public scrutiny when accountability and testing are mentioned (Farmer, 2011, p.28).

Accountability pressures may demoralize teachers (Finnegan & Gross, 2007) as do decreases in autonomy and flexibility (Ingersoll, 2007; Loeb & Estrada, 2004; Szczeziul, 2009). Further, accountability pressures can decrease levels of commitment to the profession (Ingersoll, 2007; Mintrop, 2003).

Increased expectations, along with increasingly negative public perception of schools, add to a reduction of teacher morale (Farmer, 2011). With increasing responsibilities, expectations, and mandates from both state and federal government, teachers struggle to maintain positive morale (Farmer, 2011).

A poll released by Teach Strong, a coalition aimed at elevating the teaching profession, found nearly three quarters of Americans believe teachers are undervalued in terms of how they are supported (Weingarten, 2016). Teachers' identities are deeply ingrained in their teaching, and hence in their perseverance to remain in the profession, regardless of public perception (Nieto, 2003). Because of this willingness to stay, teachers continue to make a significant impact on student achievement and school quality (Scheopner, 2009).

Benefits of High Teacher Morale

Student achievement. Researchers and policymakers frequently assert teacher attrition harms student learning (Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). However, little research has been done to study the effects of teacher turnover on student achievement. Mackenzie (2007) reported teacher satisfaction directly links to student achievement. Recent research supports the claim that low teacher turnover enhances student achievement (Noddings, 2014; Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). Teacher morale greatly affects student learning, the growth of the school, and the well-being of the teacher (Houchard, 2005; Mendel, 1987).

Teachers undoubtedly have the single-most impact and influence on student learning (Chetty, Friedman, & Rockoff, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2000; National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, 1996; Richardson, 2014). Although not as significant as factors such as familial issues, teacher quality proves to be one of the most essential factors in guiding student achievement (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Goldhaber, 2002). Growing research shows a direct link between teacher quality and student achievement (Ingersoll, 2007). When teachers possess high morale, learning becomes more effective for students (Houchard, 2005; Miller, 1981). When teachers experience high morale, they positively influence students and their school (Rowland, 2008). Studies show experienced teachers with high morale more capably raise student achievement (Harris & Sass, 2011; Hendricks, 2012; Papay & Kraft, 2011; Rockoff, 2004).

Administrators expect teachers to accomplish more in a typical school day than ever before, and these expectations seem to be expanding exponentially (Houchard, 2005; Lumsden, 1998). For example, teachers create lesson plans and teach those plans to an entire class, track student progress and present the information to parents, create tests, reinforce classroom rules, work with school administration prepare students for standardized tests, and manage discipline issues, in addition to 'other duties as assigned,' (Meier, 2017). Current education policy trends reduce teacher morale, with teachers frequently blamed for low test scores. However, many factors affecting student achievement remain beyond their control (Noddings, 2014).

Literature insinuates teacher efficacy relates directly to high morale (Mackenzie, 2007; Ramsey, 2000). Researchers Megan and Robert Tschannen-Moran (2014) report on

focusing on students, making learning meaningful, treating one another with respect, valuing honesty, being appreciated, having clear expectations, and having positive working conditions increase on teacher morale while increasing student academic achievement.

Satisfied staff. Schools are social institutions (Getzels & Guba, 1970; Gunbayi, 2007) where teachers lean on one another to achieve academic goals for their students. Research supports a link between staff cohesion and community to student engagement and achievement (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Bryk & Schenider, 2002; Johnson, Berg, & Donaldson, 2005; Little, 1982; Louis & Marks, 1998). Bryk and Schenider (2002) found the quality of relationships and trust between teachers, and between teachers and students predicts student achievement (Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). When teacher morale is high in a school, teachers feel good about themselves and their teaching, which in turn positively influences student academic achievement (Mackenzie, 2007; OEDC, 2000; Young, 1998). Additional factors, such as safety, esteem, and group affiliation may also impact teachers' morale needs (Brion, 2015).

High teacher morale may be a result of empowering teachers (Strasser, 2014). When teachers feel appreciation, when they feel heard, and when they feel supported, morale often elevates (Blackburn, 2015). Shilland (1949) reported adequate compensation increases the probability of achieving high morale (Brion, 2015). Brion (2015) suggested unmet personal needs contribute to low morale, and salary may not be the only need represented.

Factors influencing morale differ from teacher to teacher (Evans, 1998; Houchard, 2005). The extent to which schools relate to teacher morale and job satisfaction depends

upon the personal attitudes of each teacher (Houchard, 2005; Keeler & Andrews, 1963). Teachers find it difficult to develop satisfaction or high morale for any element of their work if they feel undervalued (Evans, 1998; Houchard, 2005).

Resentful staff. Teachers may negatively influence students and the school with negative feelings about the school (Rowland, 2008). Negative feelings stem from a variety of sources. Some educators experience resentment because they must produce increased results with fewer resources (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Government reforms, overwork, bureaucracy, larger class sizes, unruly students, underfunded schools, and low pay may not necessarily be the most significant causes of negative attitudes (Evans, 1998; Wakeman, 1999). Many educators experience increasing student discipline issues (Buckingham, 2003) leading to higher stress levels, decreased job satisfaction, and lower morale (Mackenzie, 2007).

In a study conducted by associate professor John Pisciotta and released by Texas Public Policy Foundation, public school teachers reported a significant decline in morale at their schools (Corwin, 2001). Schools with low teacher morale exhibit inconsistent discipline policies, unsupportive leadership, and impatience from the community (Andrew, Parks, & Nelson, 1985; Rowland, 2008). A growing body of research concentrates on reasons teachers leave education: a lack of support from administration (Ingersoll, 2000; Liu & Meyer, 2005; MacDonald, 1995; Madsen & Hancock, 2002; Tye & O'Brien, 2002), inadequate mentoring (Kelley, 2004), poor facilities and teaching materials (Buckley, Schenider & Shang, 2005), and lack of adequate compensation (Ingersoll, 2000; Kersaint, et al., 2005; Liu & Meyer, 2005; MacDonald, 1995; Stinebrickner, 2001; Tye & O'Brien, 2002). In addition, teachers cite low levels of

student motivation and a lack of teacher input in the school as reasons they leave the profession (Stolpa-Flatt, 2006).

A condescending public mindset concerning education and an implication of a failing public education may play a part in the reduction of teacher morale (Kelly, 2000; Mackenzie, 2007). Teachers with low morale consider problems as failures, while teachers with high morale consider problems as an opportunity for personal growth (Mackenzie, 2007; Ramsey, 2000). Also, teachers with low morale may experience decreased productivity and disengagement from their job, their colleagues, and their students (Mackenzie, 2007).

Increasing rates of teacher attrition negatively impact student achievement, especially among minorities or economically disadvantaged students (Grissom, 2009). In addition to presenting challenges to the successful execution of instructional programs (Guin, 2004), teacher turnover may impair student achievement (Ronfeldt, et al., 2013). Some schools experience perpetual teacher turnover which contributes to lower staff morale and reduced student academic achievement, which further increases attrition (Barnes, Crowe, & Shaefer, 2007; Ingersoll, 2007). Indicators of demoralization of the teaching profession include poor working conditions, increased work load and expectations, low compensation, and other job-related stressors (Andian, 1990; Blackbourne, 1990; Farmer, 2011; Garner, 1985; Gold, 1990; Hofkins, 1990; Houchard, 2005; Luckner & Hanks, 2003; Raferty & Dore, 1993).

Getzels and Guba (1957) suggested increased pressure in just one area may cause teacher morale to decline (Brion, 2015). Evaluation systems designed to eliminate underperforming teachers may result in teachers feeling unappreciated, thus increasing

teacher stress (M. Tschannen-Moran & R. Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Teachers experiencing low morale may take additional sick leave, seek employment elsewhere, and develop a pessimistic attitude toward students, teaching, and the education system (Independent Education Union, 1996; Mackenzie, 2007). Morale has been progressively declining while work has become more of an imposition than a calling for many educators (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Teachers seem more susceptible than other employees to experience burnout (Fernet, Guay, Senecal & Austin, 2011). Koerner (1990) reported low staff morale result from “professional lives that have little meaning; from muddled goals and demands that stretch resources-both human and material-to be the breaking point” (Houchard, 2005, p. 24).

Factors Influencing Teacher Morale

Evans (2001) ascertains understanding what influences teacher morale, job satisfaction, and motivation remains key to improving these matters. Although separate from teacher morale, job satisfaction plays a key role in morale. Brion (2015) reports that Locke (1968) defines job satisfaction as a “pleasurable emotional state” (p.10), while Ho (2006) defines job satisfaction as a “kind of subjective well-being” (p. 174). Brion (2015) further states that Coughlan’s (1970) research brands job satisfaction as “work attitudes” (p. 40). Literature indicates increased employee morale creates a more productive workforce (Neely, 1999).

Issues contributing to job satisfaction for teachers include: administrative leadership and support, a positive school culture, teacher autonomy, and student behavior (Perie & Baker, 1997). Job satisfaction relates to trustworthiness and affects teacher

morale (Farmer, 2011); appreciated teachers experience higher morale (Lumsden, 1998). As teachers gain new perspectives, their motivators may change (Senechal, et al., 2016).

Maier, Midgley and Urdan (1993) stated, “People are more personally invested in their work when they have a voice in what happens to them, and their work has meaning and significance in contributing to a higher purpose or goal,” (Lumsden, 1998, p. 2). Motivating factors mentioned by teachers included recognition, career advancement, professional development, and financial incentives (Baylor & Ritchie, 2001). Evans (2001) states three main morale boosters for teachers include: (a) realistic expectations, (b) relative perspective, and (c) professionalism orientation. To increase morale, teachers may need recognition and appreciation, self-efficacy, and a sense of purpose (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

Teacher motivation researchers concerned themselves with discovering why teachers work to accomplish specific goals (Brion, 2015). Teachers who choose education as a career path do so because they want to transform the world (Stopla-Flatt, 2006). When teachers experience collegiality, it contributes to a common purpose and a sense of well-being (Noddings, 2014). Noddings (2014) also suggests teachers prefer a collaborative and accommodating school culture over other methods of support. Commitment to a school often determines the level of teacher morale (Gunbayi, 2007; Royal, 2012). Aspects of teaching which are deeply satisfying or deeply dissatisfying may impact morale and motivation, and therefore contribute to retention or exit from teaching (Rhodes, Nevill, & Allan, 2004). Taking on additional roles and responsibilities can increase teacher morale and improve teacher retention (Behrstock-Sherratt & Rizzolo, 2014). Lortie’s (1975) conclusion that positive feedback from students may be

more important to teachers than increasing compensation. The desire to work with students inspired most teachers to enter the profession (Metropolitan Life, 1990; NEA, 1992; Weiss, 1999).

Other studies mention the lack of student discipline as the second most frequently cited reason teachers mentioned for leaving the profession (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Wynn, Carboni, & Patel, 2007). Teachers who receive little support from administration while handling discipline issues or who have difficulty handling discipline problems in the classroom may experience lower morale and leave the profession (Rowland, 2008; Tye & O'Brien, 2002).

Low teacher morale indicates basic human needs are unmet (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Mackenzie (2007) reported teachers with twenty years' experience were more likely to describe morale as lower now than when they began their career, while teachers who had been teaching fewer than ten years suggested morale had always been low. Teacher motivation or lack thereof directly relates to the extent of job satisfaction (Evans, 1997; Rhodes, et al., 2004). In 1963, Blocker and Richardson reported lack of administrative leadership, failure to evaluate work, lack of policy, classroom interruptions, and poor faculty communications causes lower teacher morale. Little has changed in regard to declining teacher morale since that time. Schools with the most academically and socioeconomically disadvantaged students frequently suffer negative effects of teacher dissatisfaction and withdrawal (Senechal, et al., 2016). Rowland (2008, p.14) reported, "Low staff morale results from professional lives that have little meaning; from frustration and the inability to change what is happening," (Wentworth, 1990).

Frustration with increasing class size fosters low teacher morale. Student behavior issues, availability of instructional materials, and increased accountability standards for those increasing class sizes may explain the relationship with lower teacher morale (Weiss, 1999). The inability to teach and manage the class effectively may lead to a reduction in motivation and teacher morale (Fernet, et al., 2011). Student misbehaviors increase teacher job dissatisfaction and reduced morale (Friedman, 1995; Stearns, et al., 2013).

Researchers also found autonomy in the classroom negatively affects teacher morale (Zoch, 2017). In addition, Zoch (2017) found lack of autonomy in the classroom altered teacher pedagogy in ways that conflicted with best practices. Studies show that classroom autonomy is a major factor in determining level of job satisfaction because it demonstrates to whether educators are treated as professionals (Walker, 2016).

Researchers point out connections between morale and status, administrative leadership, compensation, increased workload, public perceptions, and student well-being (Mackenzie, 2007). Mackenzie (2007) purported teachers have been demonized, undermined, and blamed for the consequences of the lack of funding, resources, and programs students and teachers need to succeed. However, while some suggest workload as a major factor in increased teacher stress and lower morale (SEETRC, 1998), others disagree, claiming teachers can manage the additional burdens and increased workload (Day, 2000; Eltis, 1997; Mackenzie, 2007).

Stress and burnout. Stress may lead to teacher attrition (Hasty, 2007; Larwood & Paje, 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003). Stress also affects teacher morale. It can “result in emotional and physical fatigue and a reduction in work motivation involvement, and

satisfaction,” (Stenlund, 1996; Lumsden, 1998, p.1). Lumsden (1998) suggested that increased levels of stress may result in depletion of one’s idealism, sense of purpose, and enthusiasm. Additionally, Pyhalto, Pietarinen, and Salmela-Aro (2011) contend the relationships teachers build with their students and with the larger school community negatively influence teacher burnout due to the personal emotional investment (Fernet, et al., 2011). Teacher experience and dissatisfaction also relates to teacher burnout and attrition (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001; Rhodes, et al., 2004; Senechal, et al., 2016). Other studies suggest burnout may be triggered by stressful factors stemming from increased classroom responsibilities (Fernet, et al., 2011). Stress may be one factor contributing to teacher burnout and attrition (Larwood & Paje, 2004; Mearns & Cain, 2003). A lack of resources and materials exacerbates this problem, which may serve to increase teacher attrition rates (Borman, 2008; Ingersoll, 2007). Leitner (1992) reported that burnout may reflect a crisis in teacher self-efficacy, although conclusions about burnout causes cannot be definitively determined (Fernet, et al., 2011).

Teacher attrition may be related to adverse working conditions (Hasty, 2007; National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003; Plash & Piotrowski, 2006). Reasons given for teacher departures included school conditions, class sizes, inadequate resources, lack of advancement opportunities, lack of administrative support, student discipline issues, time restrictions, and low salary (Betancourt-Smith, Inman, & Marlow, 1994; Billingsley & Cross, 1992; Darling -Hammond, 1996; Futrell, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Langdon, 1996; National Center for Educational Statistics, 1997; Richardson, 2014; Yee, 1990). Attacks on teacher tenure and pensions negatively impact attrition as well (Martin & Mulvihill, 2016; Hasty, 2007).

Other reasons given for teacher attrition include lack of various supports. In one study, researchers report a lack of institutional support as the primary source of teacher attrition (Brill & McCartney, 2008). In another study, the third most frequently cited reason teachers gave for leaving the classroom—behind compensation and student discipline—was insufficient support from administration (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Wynn et al., 2007).

Working conditions. Parks (1983) asked:

How does one compensate professionals for inadequate books and supplies, large classes, disruptive students, public criticism, limited assistance, increased duties, and the lowest salaries paid to highly educated personnel in the nation? How does one lead a group in which morale is so low that over 40 percent of survey respondents would not again select teaching as a profession and 57 percent are definitely planning to leave, will leave if something better comes along, or are undecided about staying? (Lumsden, 1998 p.1).

Royal (2012) listed compensation as a primary boost to morale, while teachers' feelings of a sense of belonging and importance ranked second. Certo and Fox (2002) established the main reasons teachers leave the profession to be low salary, lack of administrative support, and a lack of planning time (Richardson, 2014). Chevalier and Dolton (2004) suggested wages, workload, and work hours as reasons teacher leave, with the average teacher work week being 52 hours (Hasty, 2007). Teacher salaries are a major 'status factor' (Kalantzis & Harvey, 2002) and have not kept pace with other professions (SEETRC, 1998; Mackenzie, 2007). Three-fourths of teachers mentioned low

salary as the primary reason for their departure (Ingersoll & Smith, 2003; Richardson, 2014).

Leadership Behaviors Influencing Teacher Morale

Although morale is ultimately something one provides from one's self, morale can be enhanced and cultivated by administration (Houchard, 2005). Leadership serves as one of the most powerful influences upon teacher morale, job satisfaction and motivation (Evans, 2001). Studies show teacher morale can be enriched by guidance from school leadership (Eyal & Roth, 2010). Leadership remains as one of the most common characteristics of a successful school influencing teacher morale (Waters, et al., 2003; Evans, 2001). The leadership generated by administrators significantly directed how teachers feel about their jobs (Evans, 1998, 2001).

Brion (2015) reports one aspect of teacher morale examined by researchers is the influence administration can have on teachers. Studies conducted by Napier (1966) and Ellenburg (1972) found school administrators could boost morale simply by supporting teachers. Other researchers concur that an administration team plays a crucial role in the climate of the school and in the morale of that school's teachers (Butt, Lance, Fielding, Gunter, Rayner, & Thomas, 2005; Evans, 1997; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005; Rhodes, et al., 2004; Rowland, 2008; Mackenzie, 2007). Thus, leadership from administration plays a critical role in forming teacher morale. Further, researchers determine administrators should possess the following behaviors: outgoing, friendly, organized, fair, enthusiastic, available, and be a good listener (Andrew, Parks & Nelson, 1985; Rowland, 2008).

School climate and environment. Ellenburg (1973) examined administrators' efforts to improve the climate of their school since school climate plays a major role in determining the level of teacher morale (Royal, 2012; Richardson, 2014). School administrators should consider how to best utilize collaboration, how they might remove obstacles to collaboration, and how they may provide support, given that teacher collaboration and mutual support may raise teacher morale and facilitate teacher professional learning (Rhodes & Beneicke, 2002; Rhodes, et al., 2004). When a wholesome school climate exists and teacher morale is high, "teachers feel good about each other, at the same time, feel a sense of accomplishment from their jobs" (Blackburn, 2015; Hoy and Miskel, 1987; Lumsden, 1998, p. 1).

Research shows that effective schools possess strong leadership and administration support (Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992, Randolph, 2007). School leadership strongly influences teacher motivation, morale and job satisfaction (Evans, 1998). Therefore, schools need to consider the abilities and personalities of potential administrators when making hiring decisions. Administrators should also consider the extent of their endeavors to promote positive interpersonal relationships within their schools (Rhodes, et al., 2004).

Appreciation and support from administration. Miller (1981) states, "administrative behavior is a highly important factor in facilitating good staff morale" (p. 483). Miller adds the key in creating positive staff morale involves the power of the school leader's behavior (Blackburn, 2015). Teacher morale must be enriched, developed, and nurtured by creative, receptive principals (Houchard, 2005). Researchers believe morale of teachers increases simply by the teachers' perception of whether the

administrator recognizes and appreciates them (Ellenburg,1972; Houchard, 2005; Napier, 1966).

Leadership and encouragement from administrators are important factors influencing teachers' attitudes about their work environment (Brown, Gonzalez, and Slate, 2008). When administrators clearly convey their expectations, enforce school rules, provide needed instructional materials, and when teachers receive fair treatment and recognition for a job well done, teachers are more likely to have high morale and to be committed to their teaching (Weiss, 1999). Principals can also improve teacher morale by supporting teachers in a variety of ways. Effective administrators guard instructional time, "assist teachers with student discipline matters, allow teachers to develop discipline codes, and support teachers' authority in enforcing policy" (Blase and Kirby 1992; Lumsden, 1998, p.2).

Research shows when administrators use methods to enhance teacher empowerment, teacher morale also increases (Eury, Snyder, & Melton, 2011; Terry, 2000). Principal support and encouragement adds another crucial element of school leadership. Blase and Blase (1994) stated teachers receiving praise from their principal showed increased self-efficacy, self-esteem, and experienced greater motivation (Rowland, 2008). Teachers who receive positive feedback on their teaching by their supervising administrator report higher levels of job satisfaction, higher morale, and increased motivation than those whose did not (Evans, 1998; Houchard, 2005).

Effective leadership styles. Principals must understand they possess tremendous power over the morale of their teachers in addition to the many other roles of the position (Rowland, 2008). Principals' deeds and daily routines influence teacher morale in their

school (Hunter-Boykin & Evans, 1995; Lester, 1990; Rhodes, et al., 2004; Rowland, 2008). Essential tasks of administrators include building and maintaining school morale (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). The effectiveness of a principal could be measured not necessarily by how well he or she manages, but by one's ability to motivate employees by increasing their morale (Neely, 1999).

Brion (2015) mentioned leadership styles can positively or negatively direct teacher morale. Ellenburg (1972) believed "the administrator – his attitudes, his policies, his procedures, his understanding of the individual teachers, and his philosophical approach to problems – seems to be the major factor in teacher morale" (as cited in Brion, 2015, p. 42). Effective school leaders understand how to use appropriate leadership methods and how to affect positive change (Waters et al., 2003).

Administrators make choices about balancing the personal needs of their teachers and the district's expectations imposed upon them, and effectively balance each in a different way as the mediator between the teacher and the organizational goals (Brion, 2015).

Student achievement. Just as school leaders can affect positive change on student achievement, they can also have negative impact on student achievement. Research conducted by Ellenberg (1972), Miller (1981), Lumsden (1998), and Houchard (2005) demonstrate positive relationships between student achievement and teacher morale (Farmer, 2011). A major finding in recent research affirmed the building administrator remains directly responsible for developing and maintaining teacher morale, which links to high productivity and high student achievement (Randolph, 2007). Teachers' perceptions of self-efficacy strongly influence teacher dedication, and principals at the most rigorous schools tend to show, through common goal setting and

positive feedback, the student academic achievement relates directly to work set forth by teachers (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Rosenholtz 1989).

Negative outcomes and attrition. School leaders cannot fully counteract society's negative view of teachers (Rhodes, et al., 2004); however, the ability of teachers to trust their administrations has a great influence on their decision to remain in the education profession (Brill & McCartney, 2008). When principals concentrate on the wrong school issues, they may negatively impact teacher morale (Waters, et al., 2003). If an administrator shows lack of concern about teacher well-being, teacher morale may suffer (Cook, 1979; Kurth, 2016). In addition, teacher morale may decrease if their administrator's behavior is contrary to the teacher's expectations (Brion, 2015), if teachers feel they are not treated as professionals, are underappreciated, or are overworked by their administrators (Rowland, 2008).

School Culture Factors Influencing Teacher Morale

Ellenburg stated, "Morale affects more than just productivity or student achievement. It is one of the factors which may determine whether a school functions at its best, demanding and receiving the utmost from its students, or whether the school plods along happy just to see the passing of another day," (Houchard, 2005). Gary Phillips from the Center for Improving School Culture, describes school climate as "beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize a school in terms of how people treat and feel about each other; the extent to which people feel included and appreciated; and rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality" (Deal & Peterson, 1993, p.1; Blackburn, 2015). Organizational cultures in schools are critical because they express how teachers interact with one another and with their students (Powers, 2009;

Stearns et al., 2013). Two factors important to teacher morale are organizational culture of the school and the socio-demographic composition of the school (Stearns et al., 2013).

Building an atmosphere of mutual respect is critical for schools (Hirsch & Church, 2009). Support from colleagues and administrators remains the most significant determinant of a teacher's decision to stay or leave (Barnett, Fuller & Williams, 2007; Ingersoll, 2007). Teachers' perceptions about their work environment directly link to their choice to remain at a school. That makes improving school morale a primary school-improvement strategy (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014).

School organizational climate signifies the shared perceptions of staff members regarding the culture or character of the establishment (Sandford & Self, 2011). One of the most essential models to improve a school happens by improving teacher motivation, which may be changed by feelings about the school or the culture provided by the school (Evans, 1997; Hunter-Boykin & Evans, 1995; Rowland, 2008). Schools with strong organizational cultures typically employ positive and charismatic principals, clear objectives, systematic organizational structures, recognition practices, effective communication, collegiality, and higher expectations for students (Cheng, 1993; Stearns et al., 2013). Studies suggest the organizational culture of schools has important implications for teacher job satisfaction (Gamoran et al., 2000; Lee et al., 1991; Lee & Smith, 1996; Louis & Marks, 1998; Perrachione et al., 2008; Renzulli et al., 2011; Stearns et al., 2013). Ma and MacMillan (1999) reported organizational culture played an important part in teacher fulfillment. Little research consensus exists, however, regarding which aspects of organizational culture are most closely tied to teacher job satisfaction (Stearns et al., 2013).

Researchers support the opinion teacher success embeds and reinforces in appropriate school cultures (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Harris, 2005; Johnson & Kardos, 2002; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Pech, 2009; Richardson, 2014; Wenzel, 2009). In reference to the school environment, Peterson and Deal (1998) defined school culture as, “The underground stream of norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals that has built up over time as people work together, solve problems, and confront challenges. This set of informal expectations and values shapes how people think, feel, and act in schools,” (as cited in Richardson, 2014, p. 27).

The organizational culture of schools has been found to be a stronger and more consistent predictor of teacher job satisfaction than many measures of independent teacher characteristics (Culver et al., 1990; Ma & MacMillan, 1999; Moore, 2012; Stearns et al., 2013; Weiss, 1999).

In addition to organizational culture, various aspects of the socio-demographic composition of the school connects to teacher job satisfaction. The increasing diversity of the student population received scholarly focus in recent years (Ingersoll & May; Stearns et al., 2013).

Bolman and Deal (2002) stated teachers should feel safe, possess a sense of belonging, and feel appreciated by their school administrators and students (Farmer, 2011). Teachers personally invest in their work with a school when they have a voice in what happens to them, and if their work contributes meaningfully and significantly to a higher purpose or goal (Maehr, Midgley, & Urdan, 1993; Farmer, 2011).

Teachers have the power as a group and as individuals to greatly influence a school’s environment. When teachers feel positively about their position, they provide

tremendous positive influence on their students and their school (Rowland, 2008). The school community must also nurture, support, and value teachers to preserve their professional satisfaction and morale, and to ensure student academic success (Lumsden, 1998). It remains crucial for educational leaders to be cognizant of issues affecting teacher morale and how those issues may affect student achievement (Rowland, 2008). Teachers' most important job creates a culture of learning, one in which every student grows. For that to occur, administrators must increase motivational aspects that contribute to teachers' job satisfaction (Hoerr, 2013).

Research on Teacher Morale

Studies Measuring Teacher Morale

Research on teacher morale as it relates to teacher retention includes a collection of literature covering decades of research (Scheopner, 2010). Early research on teacher morale by Hand in 1948 showed factors involving teacher morale (Royal, 2012). In one of the earliest studies of teacher morale—a questionnaire survey of nearly 1800 American teachers—Chase (1953) found, “When teachers’ expectations are fulfilled with regard to the leadership of administrators and supervisors, their morale soars; when their expectations are disappointed, morale takes a nose dive,” (Evans, 2001). Guba (1958) confirmed this reasoning in his study, stating, “morale has been defined simply as a state of satisfaction,” (Brion, 2015). In another study, the explanation for morale found consistency through three approaches which considered the historical development of the morale as a concept, its colloquial usage, and its explicit definition by experts. This study defined morale as a "forward-looking and confident state of mind relevant to a shared and vital purpose,"(Smith, 1966, p.145). Mathis (1959), though, completed research exploring

associations between salary and morale only to discover “no significant difference in morale level was found between schools grouped on the basis of type of salary schedule” (Brion, 2015, p. 17).

Hoppock (1933) administered four simple attitude scales to 500 teachers. This study still stands out as one of the most competent ever conducted concerning teacher morale (Blocker & Richardson, 1963). Stedt and Fraser (1984) reported one of the most useful and dependable methods for measuring teacher morale was that of the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (PTO), developed by Bentley and Rempel (Houchard, 2005). The Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire (Rempel & Bentley, 1970) included subjects ranging from rapport, workload, salary, satisfaction, teacher status, community support, to curriculum (Brion, 2015).

The Employee Inventory as designed by researchers in the Industrial Relations Center focused on identifying “factors underlying employee morale,” (Baehr, 1958, p.158; Brion, 2015, p. 24). Blocker (1963) considered studies which investigated only one cause a disservice to the field of education research, implying that job satisfaction studies have already revealed morale results from many interrelated factors (Brion, 2015, p. 14).

Surveys may start with inquiries as simple as paper evaluations, interviews, or group discussions (Koerner, 1990). Formal inventories such as the Purdue Teacher Opinionnaire, the NASSP School Climate Survey, and the Behavioral Morale Checklist offer a variety of monitoring and measuring teacher morale (Houchard, 2005).

Teacher morale reached a 25-year low in 2012. According to the most recent MetLife Survey of the American Teacher (Harris Interactive, 2013), just 39 percent of

teachers reported satisfaction with their chosen profession, down from 62 percent in 2008 (Behrstock-Sherratt & Rizzolo, 2014). According to the MetLife Survey conducted in 2012, teacher satisfaction declined to its lowest point, while stress among teachers amplified since 1985 (Blackburn, 2015).

Research-based Best Practices to Improve Teacher Morale

Coffman (1951) observed teacher morale is not one factor which can be measured; rather it is a combination of assorted parts, “any one of which may be focal for a particular teacher” (Brion, 2015, p. 331). Rempel and Bentley (1964) confirmed this finding and noted, “one of the few points of agreement among recent investigators of morale in other fields is that morale is multidimensional” (Brion, 2015, p.13).

Self-Determination Theory

Relating Self-Determination Theory to Teacher Morale

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Niemiec et al., Ryan & Deci, 2000) articulates a macro-theory of human motivation, emotion, and development utilizing factors that either accelerate or deviate growth-oriented processes in individuals. Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000, 2007) identified the core elements underlying sustainable motivation (Stone, Deci & Ryan, 2008). Their findings suggest basic motivation needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence are innate rather than learned (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schuler, Sheldon & Frolich, 2009). Self-determination theory assumes human nature contains the predisposition to be curious about one’s environment and interest in increasing one’s knowledge (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009).

Self-determination theory evolved over three decades of research, and where each component of the framework received experiential confirmation before being included in the theory (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Although somewhat different from other earlier motivation theoretical frameworks, SDT remains congruous with findings of psychologists such as Harlow (1958) and White (1959) (Ryan, Sheldon, Kasser & Deci, 1996).

In addition to these works, Porter and Lawler (1968) also fabricated a model of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which built upon Vroom's (1964) expectancy-valence theory (Gagne & Deci, 2005). In that model, Porter and Lawler (1968) suggests creating a positive work environment would lead to increased employee performance based upon both intrinsic and extrinsic compensations, leading to higher levels of fulfillment (Gagne & Deci, 2005). This serves as a catalyst for other research which confirms and refines the study of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation as they relate to motivation and morale (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Mitchell, 1974). Gagne and Deci (2005) notes that SDT is not a stage theory, therefore individuals do not move through one stage to reach another. Figure 2 shows a representation of how the features of SDT coexist.

Figure 2: Features of Self Determination Theory

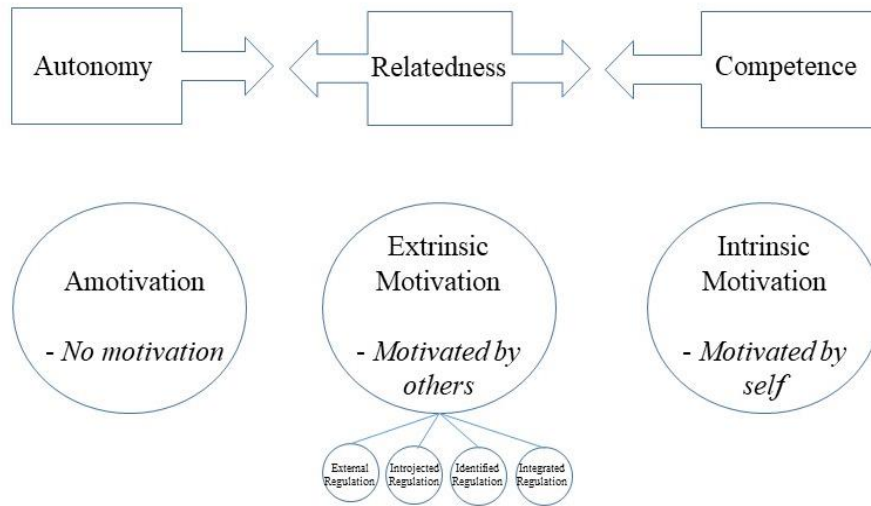


Figure 2. Visual representation of the features profiled in Self Determination Theory. Adapted from the SDT Continuum by M. Gagne and E. Deci, 2005, p. 336 as cited in "Self-determination theory and work motivation" by Gagne and Deci, 2005, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26, 331-362.

Because self-determination theory promotes an interest in learning, experiences, and security (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009), SDT demonstrates successful application in fields such as education, healthcare, psychotherapy, sports, and human resources management (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Katz, Kaplan, & Gueta, 2010; Ryan & Deci, 2017; Stone et al., 2008). Self-determination theory suggests interpersonal styles of leaders and administrators stand to increase motivation and morale of employees (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Self-determination theory also addresses motivation in relation to enhanced performance, happiness, and contentment within organizations (Deci, Olafsen, & Ryan, 2017). Self-determination theory implies psychological welfare of an employee directly links to the type of motivation a person feels to perform job-related responsibilities. These motivation types – autonomy, relatedness, and connectedness – each have differentiated catalysts and trepidations (Deci et al., 2017). This method proves effective

in creative and experiential tasks (McGraw, 1978) that current employers require (Stone et al., 2008).

Within SDT, individuals have innate tendencies to integrate learning and to develop new skills (Ryan & Weinstein, 2009). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985), explains different motivation types based on the different goals that give rise to an action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Deci (2009) suggested taking ownership of commitment to a reform may occur when teachers or students have their basic psychological needs met through self-determination theory components. A foundation of SDT assumes that environmental causes remain critical to morale because they may facilitate motivational elements (Fernet, et al., 2012). Given this mixture of intrinsic and extrinsic factors, it is obligatory for school leaders to create the conditions within their schools to enhance the quality of teachers' professional lives, promote increased job satisfaction, and prompt teachers to stay in the profession (Rhodes et al., 2004).

Autonomy. Dworkin (1988) labeled autonomy as endorsing one's actions at the highest level of self-reflection (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Filak and Sheldon (2003) stated, "Autonomy is not independence or total freedom, rather an internal acceptance of, and engagement with, one's motivated behavior," (as cited in Domenech-Betoret, Lloret-Segura, & Gomez-Artiga, 2013, p. 235). Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002) clarifies human motivation in which autonomous motivation creates the need for optimal goal-setting and reaching of those same goals.

Autonomous motivation suggests freedom of personal choice (Fernet, et al., 2011). Autonomy for one's behaviors draws from the supposition of locus of causality rather than being manipulated by external forces (DeCharms, 1968; Van den Broeck,

Ferris, Chang & Rosen, 2016). Autonomy is not necessarily considered independence, although it is shaped by choice, resolve, and a sense of freedom (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Stone et al., 2008). Sustainable motivation is called autonomous because it emerges from one's self and creates cooperation and action (Stone et al., 2008). Autonomously controlled activities typically equate to intrinsic motivation (Deci, et al, 2017).

When individuals are autonomously motivated, they experience higher levels of job satisfaction and morale (Gagne & Deci, 2005). When employees understand the value and objective of their jobs, feel autonomy in performing those duties, and receive positive feedback, they appear more likely to become even more autonomously motivated, which allows the employee to experience higher morale (Deci et al., 2017).

Relatedness. Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) describe relatedness as the experience of having satisfying and encouraging social interactions with others (Stone et al., 2008). Relatedness maintains the need to love and be loved by others (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Filak and Sheldon (2003) stated, "Relatedness occurs when one feels connected to, or understood by, others," (as cited in Domenech-Betoret 2013, p. 235). This internalization of emotion provides a sense of belongingness and connectedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Competence. Competence encompasses the belief that one can influence crucial outcomes (Stone et al., 2008). Following White (1959), SDT outlines competence as a sense of mastery over the environment and development of new skill sets (Van den Broeck et al., 2016). Competence occurs when one experiences self-efficacy (Domenech-Betoret et al., 2013). Ryan and Deci (2000) suggest that students and teachers will more likely embrace a goal if they understand it and see the relevance for success.

Motivations. Motivations of individuals differ extensively due to the psychological needs of each individual (Leal et al., 2011). Individuals not only possess differing amounts of motivation, they also hold varying types of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Lens, Matos and Vansteenkiste (2008) suggest SDT makes a distinction between motivational factors by asking the questions *what* and *why* (Leal et al., 2011, emphasis added). Further, SDT focuses on the amount of intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation one holds, rather than on the total amount of motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Besides the motivation types discussed above, self-determination theory can be factored into three distinct categories: amotivation, extrinsic motivation, and intrinsic motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Leal et al., 2011). Amotivation distinguishes from extrinsic and intrinsic motivation by the absence of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic motivation is motivated by others, while intrinsic motivation is motivated by self (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Amotivation. According to Deci & Ryan (2000) amotivation is the state of lacking an intention to act. A person lacks motive to accomplish goals when in amotivation. This is similar to learned helplessness. Amotivation results in not seeing value in an activity (Ryan, 1985), not feeling capable of achieving the goal (Deci, 1975), or not possessing the foresight to embrace the preferred consequence of the action (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Seligman, 1975). Lacking motivation parallels the lack in self-determination (Gagne & Deci, 2005). When a person experiences amotivation, he or she has no intention to embrace positive behaviors (Leal, Miranda, & Souza Carmo, 2011).

When experiencing amotivation, Guimaraes and Bzuneck (2008) reports “there is a devaluation of activity and a lack of perceived personal control” (p.103).

Extrinsic Motivation. Self-determination theory suggests extrinsic motivation can be internalized, meaning that by acquiring and accepting new values or goals, people become independently motivated to engage in behavior that expresses these values and goals (Fernet et al., 2011). Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviors performed to obtain some outcome separable from the activity itself (Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT proposes that extrinsic motivation can vary greatly in how it is autonomous (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

External regulation. External regulation lacks the least autonomy or self-governance of the four sub types of extrinsic motivation (Deci et al., 2017). A person seeks to avoid punishment or seeks to receive rewards in this type of regulation (Deci et al., 2017; Leal et al., 2011). Within the confines of SDT, when external forces initiate a behavior, it is considered to be externally regulated (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Such behaviors continue ineffectively once the manipulating force has been removed (Vansteenkiste et al.,2006).

Introjected regulation. Introjected regulation describes a type of extrinsic motivation individuals experience by performing deeds they feel pressured into doing to avoid anxiety or guilt (Leal et al., 2011; Ryan & Deci, 2000). It also includes ego-boosting activities or self-derogation (Niemic & Deci, 2009). In this regulation, people seek approval of others and concern themselves with achieving recognition and status (Deci et al., 2017).

Identified regulation. Identified regulation exists when a person accepts personal regulation due to recognition of the importance of a behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These behaviors present because the person sees value in adapting to those behaviors (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Individuals experiencing this type of external motivation assert self-regulation and flexibility in selecting and continuing those behaviors (Deci, et al., 2017).

Integrated regulation. Ryan and Deci (2000) describe the most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation as integrated regulation. This motivation occurs through self-exploration by causing new ideals to synchronize with one's personal values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This type of motivation stands as the most mature and desired extrinsic behavior (Deci, et al., 2017). Extrinsic motivation thus contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which refers to doing an activity simply for the enjoyment of the activity itself (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic Motivation. Intrinsic motivation is defined as the doing of an activity for its fundamental satisfaction rather than for some other reason because they are naturally interesting and enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Niemic & Ryan, 2009; Schuler et al., 2009). Motivation, therefore, rests in the behavior itself (Deci & Ryan, 2009; Deci, et al., 2017). According to SDT, intrinsic motivation consists of individuals achieving a goal because they find self-satisfaction in carrying it through (Leal et al., 2011). It is important to note that intrinsic motivation only occurs for goals that have value for the individual (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Intrinsic motivation remains typically autonomous (Gagne & Deci, 2005), due to the internalized nature of action.

Various researchers apply the SDT framework to intrinsic motivation in educational contexts (Niemic & Ryan, 2009) with intrinsic motivation emerging as a valid source of learning that can be categorized by educators and administrators (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Ryan & Stiller, 1991). Intrinsic motivation occurs when individuals are internally engaged and goal-oriented (Deci et al., 2017). SDT posits that intrinsic motivation sustains by meeting basic psychological needs for independence and competence in an individual (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). This internalized motivation transforms the individual to the extent that motivation becomes an integral part of that person's character (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers and administrators must use those internalized constructs to begin morale transformation (Deci, 2009). The SDT reformation approach begins with the understanding educators possess innate psychological needs to feel competent, related, and autonomous regarding their teaching profession in order to relate high morale to others (Deci, 2009). The intrinsic function achieved through job satisfaction can be explained by SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002) since satisfying psychological needs heightens well-being and increases job commitment (Hackman & Oldham, 1980; Van den Broeck et al., 2008). Deci, Olafsen and Ryan (2017) suggest teachers can be intrinsically motivated for at least portions of their job, and when thus motivated, teachers tend to exhibit those attributes.

Intrinsic motivation, as applied through the lens of self-determination theory, suggests teachers with a high need for achievement seek opportunities to improve upon current job skills (Brunstein & Heckhausen, 2008; McClelland, 1985; Schuler et al., 2009). Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000) found employees whose work environments met their psychological needs produced more on the job (Stone et al., 2008). Work atmosphere that

satisfies the three basic psychological needs boost employees' intrinsic motivation and foster complete internalization of extrinsic motivation, which in turn creates opportunity for positive work-related results (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Job responsibilities allows for problem-solving, challenge, value, options, and involvement to achieve this level of autonomy through intrinsic motivation (Gagne & Deci, 2005).

Self-determination theory as it applies to teacher morale explains why teachers do what they do every day. Psychological health depends on satisfying the need for autonomy, relatedness and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Teachers who are intrinsically motivated find inspiration from teaching for the pure joy of teaching. Teachers who are extrinsically motivated are persuaded more from external rewards, such as a bonus or an extra planning period.

Chapter Two Summary

Chapter Two presented a review of the literature establishing the need for this study. First, the literature review presented current morale issues faced by many public-school teachers. Next, the literature review addressed factors impacting student achievement. The chapter examined research studies that have studied teacher morale. The chapter concluded with research on Ryan and Deci's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory framework. The utility of SDT explored what motivates teachers to stay at a school. Teachers who remain in the profession are motivated by internal and external motivators, which are described utilizing self-determination theory. Self-determination theory does not offer a tailored approach to systematic education reform, but it does provide a framework that may be utilized in conjunction with effective reforms presented by others (Deci, 2009).

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Chapter Three details the methodology used in this case study. This study explored the perceptions of educators to discover what specific leadership practices contribute to teacher morale and longevity in the school district. Through this investigation, I hoped to gain insight into specific leadership practices that influence a teacher's decision to remain employed in the district. The following components were utilized to provide a synopsis of the research design: research questions, participant selection, data collection, data analysis techniques, researcher role, trustworthiness of findings, and limitations of the study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates.

Research Questions:

1. How do teachers describe the morale in this school?
2. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher morale?
3. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher

decisions to remain in the profession and remain at this school?

4. How does Self Determination Theory explain teacher morale and retention in this school?
5. What other factors led to teacher longevity in this school?

Research Design

Epistemology

This qualitative case study utilizes a post-positivism epistemology to gain a better understanding of teacher perceptions of the influence of leadership practices on teacher morale and teacher retention at Mealer Elementary School. Teacher morale is multi-faceted and complicated to define; therefore, qualitative case study procedures are helpful in analyzing these complexities. Case study methodology is an appropriate design for this study because case study research seeks to explore topics not easily covered by other methods (Yin, 2004).

Yin (2004) explained, “All methods require reviewing the literature, defining research questions and analytic strategies, using formal data collection protocols or instruments, and writing good research reports. However, case studies call for at least one additional skill...” That additional skill requires the researcher to resolve conflict of the case being studied by doing the data collection and analysis simultaneously (Yin, 2004). Kvale (2007) suggests qualitative methodology is an appropriate approach to qualitative research because it does not require a specialized research setting to develop understanding and to explain social phenomena from the inside.

Post-positivism recognizes that all observation is fallible and has error and that all theory is revisable (Rodriguez-Pardo, 2013). This description of post-positivism suggests that a reality exists, but reality is deficient and probable. Reality in this study is constructed by teachers through their experiences with administrative leadership. In relation to the present study, knowledge will be constructed by teachers through the interview process.

Yin (2009) suggests the case study include an inclusive method of integrating accumulation of data and data analysis. Yin (2009) defined case study as:

an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study inquiry copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis (p.18).

Studying this case could not occur without considering the context, the culture and climate of the school, and the personal histories of educators involved in this study. Understanding the culture and climate of the school requires researching and analyzing perspectives from administration and teaching staff. Cultural mores and values cannot be adequately conveyed through surveys. Therefore, multiple variables must be considered which require the need to identify a theoretical framework prior to data collection and analysis (Richardson, 2014).

Methodological Procedures

Participant Selection

The sample for this study was purposefully selected from a rural elementary school in the Midwest with high teacher retention rates. This school was chosen because teachers tend to get hired and stay for the duration of their career. Over the past ten years, the attrition rate, including both retirees and teachers who moved, has averaged < 3 per year. The selected school is located in a small rural farming community, with fewer than 2,500 residents within the 0.83 square mile town, according to the latest census figures. The elementary school is located in a socioeconomically disadvantaged area of a four-state region in the Midwestern part of the United States. The total student enrollment for the Mealer Elementary School is 505. Of these students, approximately 100 students transfer in from neighboring districts. The building employs 26 teachers, and more than half meet criteria for participation in the research study, employment at the school for ten years or longer.

Participants were selected from a pool of available and willing participants who had at least ten years' teaching experience in Mealer Elementary School, utilizing criterion sampling techniques. Seven teachers identified by the survey who met the criteria specified for the study were included in the research process. Patton (2001) described criterion sampling as "selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (p. 238). Currently nearly half the teacher population employed by Mealer Elementary School fit research criteria for inclusion in the study. Criterion sampling was used to select participants from the population sample because no other prior knowledge was known about the teachers prior to the first interview meetings. This

sampling method was used for the process of identifying a population and development of case selection not based upon prior knowledge of participants (Dexter, 2015). The purpose was not to foster representativeness, but to increase credibility with the study findings (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). To recruit participants, I sent an email to the principal to gain written permission to contact teaching staff. Once that permission was obtained, teachers were contacted via email through their school email addresses provided by the participant through a survey link included in the email. That email included the study's purpose along with other commitment and research details. Once the study participants were identified, an email was sent to explaining the research process. The small sample size was consistent with qualitative research studies (Dexter, 2015; Merriam, 2009; Stake, 2010; Yin, 2009).

Data Collection

Yin (2014) asserts six major sources of evidence may be used to support case study research: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artifacts. This case study involved interviewing seven career teachers to collect qualitative data by conducting in-depth interviews focused on guided questions, utilizing field observations, and by collecting physical and supplementary documentation including detailed field notes. The seven teachers were purposefully selected from a public school in the Midwestern part of the United States, with a faculty population of approximately 26, and a student population of 505. This research site was selected due to its accessibility and proximity to the researcher, who resides in a contiguous county. The results and data give a deeper insight into the impact of morale and administrative leadership as it relates to longevity at this school. The main criteria for

participation sought teachers who had been employed at this school for over ten years. All seven participants volunteered willingly, and selected their own pseudonym for the study. The researcher did not know any of the teachers in the study prior to the study.

Evidence collection took place over the course of the fall semester 2018 at Mealer Elementary School. It occurred in the ‘real world setting’ of a school day to gain an up close examination, which Yin (2014) described as a characteristic of qualitative inquiry. Data collection was done through personal observations, direct observations, interviews, document collections, archival records, and physical artifacts. Yin, (2014) explained that one data source does not have an advantage over another (p.105). Additionally, those sources of evidence are complementary and serve to enhance the others. Identification of strengths and weaknesses of data collection sources serve to support the study as affirmed by Yin (2009) and Creswell (2009).

In order to discover how teacher morale is influenced by school leadership, and its relationship to longevity, these procedures were followed to collect data for this qualitative study. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the Oklahoma State University IRB committee (approval ED-18-149). After receiving IRB approval, the principal at Mealer Elementary School was asked for permission to conduct the research and approval was granted. Once approval was granted, an invitation was sent via email to the faculty at Mealer Elementary to solicit their assistance as participants in the study. A link to the survey was included in the email. When a faculty member favorably responded to the request, an email was sent to the email address that teacher provided in the survey. That email scheduled the appropriate interview time and date. On the day of

the initial interview, prior to any interview session, a consent form (Appendix D) was thoroughly explained and signed by both interviewee and interviewer.

Direct observations. Observations were conducted during site visits. This data included documentation collected from activities, events, and various settings within the school building. During these meetings, field notes were taken on a blank questionnaire (Appendix E). Each observation/interview session lasted for approximately 45 minutes. Observation notes were used to compare to interview transcripts to determine the accuracy of what the interviewees reported. During these meetings, field notes were written to document specific details that could not otherwise have been reported, such as surroundings, ambience, etc.

Having multiple types of data available allowed for triangulation by utilizing data to determine themes. Yin (2009) described themes as patterns across collected data sets as they relate to research questions.

Interviews. According to Yin (2009), interviews serve as one of the most important features of case study data collection. I contacted the principal via email at Mealer Elementary School to solicit his support to allow me to conduct the study at his school. He agreed, and we scheduled a face to face meeting to review my plans in more detail. Because of the nature of my study, Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies require all interviewees to sign a consent form (See Appendix A). After university permission was granted to commence the study and proper forms were completed, participants were selected, and teacher interviews were scheduled.

Yin (2014) stated the interview is one of the most important sources of evidence for a case study (p. 110). A structured survey interview protocol allowed responses to be

evaluated through systematic data analysis. Interviewees provided ample dialogue due to their responses to open-ended questions. Prior to each interview, the purpose of the study was explained, and confidentiality of participant responses was ensured. Participants were also told they had the right to discontinue the interview at any time. After consent was given, and questions were answered, the interview, using IRB approved questions (Appendix B) commenced. The guiding questions were used to facilitate these dialogues. Questions focused on teachers' perceptions of morale, leadership and longevity at the school. Seven interviews were conducted in a face-to-face format for approximately 45 minutes each. These sessions were recorded on an audio recorder and transcribed by the researcher within five days using Microsoft Word. Subsequently, those audio files were deleted and destroyed. Pseudonyms, selected by each participant, were used in the transcripts to maintain confidentiality. In order to ensure reliability and validity, participants reviewed the transcript of their interview. Changes were made at their guidance to add clarity or to change wording. Member checking procedures allow a researcher to improve accuracy, credibility, and validity of the recorded interview (Creswell, 2012). Additionally, member checking also allows critical analysis of the findings and content of the interviews (Creswell, 2012). Field notes were taken during the interview process in addition to the audio recordings.

Documentation. Documents collected included school demographics provided by the Mealer Elementary School website, the local Chamber of Commerce, and information contained on the state department of education website. Additional documents included correspondence between the principal and teachers, emails from participants after the

interviews were complete, and announcements posted in the school. Field notes were taken during interviews and visits on campus.

Physical artifacts. Photographs and audio recordings were obtained when the study was underway. Physical artifacts included photographs of the school, classrooms, bulletin boards, community involvement, student work, or other elements that showcase teacher morale.

Archival records. Census records, maps, and statistical data were obtained from internet searches and the Chamber of Commerce. Those were used to discuss demographics of the community and the school.

Data Analysis

Yin (2014) described the analysis of case study data as, “one of the least developed aspect of doing case studies,” (p. 133). According to Yin (2014), “data analysis consists of examination, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or otherwise recombine evidence to produce empirically based findings,” (p.132). Further, Yin added, “Analyzing case study evidence is especially difficult because the techniques still have not been well refined. You can start your own analysis by ‘playing’ with the data and searching for promising patterns, insights or concepts-the goal being to define your priorities for what to analyze and why,” (2014, p. 132). This process was utilized for the duration of the study.

Organize, prepare and read data. By completing my own transcriptions, I was able to recall specific details from the interviews and observations. Organization and preparation of the data documentation served to maintain accuracy as well as provided rich details that may have been previously overlooked. Data was organized in a large

notebook in chronological order. I reviewed data periodically to better understand the detailed representations from participants, and to correctly report those findings.

Code data. After completing interviews, transcripts were disaggregated and then coded to discover major themes, utilizing axial coding techniques espoused by Glaser and Strauss's Constant Comparative Method (1967). Coding involved typing each transcript and color coding the font for each specific interviewee. Those were then printed onto index cards, with one question or subject printed per card. Those cards were then placed in subject groupings, where themes emerged.

Generate themes or categories. After coding was completed and note cards were created, I organized data into categories based upon highlighted notations. Themes emerged as I completed this process. As themes materialized, both themes and notecards were categorized according to the research question it related to. This focus aided in creating a workable outline for reporting findings. Data observations were triangulated with document analysis to improve consistency and to uncover discrepancies in the findings. Multiple forms of data collection supported the idea that leadership was a factor on teacher morale; however, some minor discrepant data did emerge. These incongruences will be discussed later in this section. Triangulation validated the data via use of multiple forms of data sources, including interviews, observations, field notes, and follow-up emails. Triangulation was used to minimize any possible bias on the part of the participants or the researcher. The main concern was that all respondents would report the same thing, thus not providing a wide view of perceptions from teachers.

Convey findings and interpret meanings. The data for this qualitative case study were analyzed according to eight major emerging themes. The following themes

regarding the personal experiences of the research participants emerged in their descriptions of morale issues, administration support, autonomy, competence, motivation, atmosphere, relatedness, parent and community support.

Findings were presented in an amalgamation of narrative summary along with tables and charts. The written account included a description of participants in the study, along with a detailed description of themes uncovered in the study. Tables and visual representations provided aid to interpret meanings of the study.

Researcher Role

Researcher Bias

I graduated with an undergraduate degree in Organizational Management. I worked in the healthcare field as human resources (HR) and financial accounting manager for a few years where I learned how to work in a professional environment. This part of my career came to an end when my direct supervisor demanded that I change HR records to misrepresent facts. I refused, and realized that my personal ethics would not allow me to work for someone with such little regard for truth. While I was unemployed, an educator friend suggested that I become an alternatively certified teacher. At first I declined, but later changed my mind. I had no trouble passing all certification exams, and within a year, I was an alternatively certified teacher. My first teaching position was in the school district where my children attended school. It was a low performing school in a rural community, very similar in size to the school in my study.

I taught there for a half year, but the position was eliminated when the state faced economic issues. I then obtained a teaching job at an even smaller, more remote rural

school. I taught there for three years. Again, I was faced with unscrupulous supervisors, and I chose to leave. After a year back in the business world, I was hired at a larger rural school in an adjacent county. One thing I was most impressed with was the quality of teachers in the district. Many of them were National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT) and/or had obtained their master's degree. I had been there only a short time when I began my quest to become an NBCT. As soon as I finished that certification, I began my master's degree. Fifteen years after I obtained my bachelor's degree, I completed my master's degree in Secondary Education. I was employed by the larger rural school for nine years. During that time, I had both good and bad administrators. The school superintendent changed three times, and the high school principal changed twice while I was there. The district experienced both high and low teacher morale and significant teacher turnover. The defining moment for selecting my dissertation topic came while working at the school when teacher morale and teacher retention was at a low point. I realized that if I was feeling the loss of morale, other teachers must be experiencing it, too. I wanted to know why schools experience these effects, and I was especially interested to find a school that did not have these issues.

My business world and school teaching experiences both taught me the importance of high employee morale. I am aware of my preconceived opinions regarding how leadership affects teacher retention, and how morale plays an important role in that choice. I was careful to analyze data with trustworthiness and credibility, as evidenced by following proper university research protocol. Further, I followed qualitative research procedures and federal policy in conducting and reporting my findings.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were utilized regarding data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation to ensure trustworthiness and credibility. This research study was based upon the assumption that participants answered questions truthfully and completely during the interview (Dexter-Mackey, 2015).

Data collection ethics. Ethical considerations addressed in qualitative research include institutional review board (IRB) approval, informed consent assuring confidentiality and anonymity (Yin, 2014), gaining access to respondents, mutual benefits for researcher and participants, and interview protocol.

First, I completed the IRB process to obtain authorization from the university to begin the study. Next, I created an informed consent form for participants to sign which acknowledged their rights were protected during this study. I received verbal approval from the principal to conduct my study in his building, so I followed up with a statement to obtain written permission from the principal. I then scheduled suitable observation times with participants which created the least disruptive distractions during their school day. I also offered participants copies of transcripts, findings of the study, and the final document upon completion of the study. Interview protocols were closely followed to ensure neutrality in participant responses. I was cognizant not to mislead or direct participant responses. Prior to the study, I did not know participants.

Data analysis and interpretation ethics. Great care was taken to ensure confidentiality of all sources during the study. This was done by allowing participants to select their own pseudonyms, securing all data, and ensuring accurate interpretation of

data collected (Creswell, 2009). Confidential information was kept in a locked file cabinet in my home.

Quality of Research Design

Yin (2011) suggests presenting multiple sources of evidence as a basis for trustworthiness and credibility. Yin (2009) suggested four design tests for establishing quality findings in qualitative case studies to include credibility, trustworthiness, data dependability, and confirmability (p.32).

Credibility

To establish credibility in this study, I took into account intricacies involved in the research topic, as well as addressed issues not easily explained via the research. Member checks were utilized to verify documents and conclusions were a true reflection of participants' experiences and statements. Trustworthiness of the validity and understanding of the study were represented by factual reporting of participant dialogue and responses (Dexter-Mackey, 2015; Maxwell, 1992).

Data verification via triangulation was achieved by gathering documentation from participants, as well as from email correspondence, websites, administrators, and observations. This provided a more accurate portrayal of the information gathered and reported.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness provided detailed descriptions from the planning stages to the interviews and observations. Trustworthiness refers to the extent to which the results of qualitative studies can be generalized to other settings (Richardson, 2014). In order to

establish transferability, the researcher included context appropriate statements so the reader may identify with both the setting and the study’s findings. This was done through rich descriptions of the setting, participants, research design, and results so the reader can best establish the applicability of this study to another setting.

Dependability and Confirmability

Repeating or replicating a study is referred to as dependability; whereas confirmability represents the degree to which findings would be consistent with another interpretation of findings. (Richardson, 2014). To meet dependability and confirmability conditions, all data information, including notes, transcripts, recorded interviews, emails, and observations were available for auditing purposes. After the completion of the study, the researcher made judgments about potential for bias. Table 1 contains a graphic representation of trustworthiness criteria.

Table 1

Trustworthiness Criteria and Examples

CREDIBILITY		
Criteria/Technique	Result	Examples
Prolonged engagement	Spending time with teachers in their building & with data during analysis	In the field December 2018; follow-up communication via email, meetings and telephone calls
Persistent observation	Direct observations and keeping field notes improve accuracy of data collected	Observation of participants and school culture during data collection meetings
Triangulation	Data verification	Data was obtained via interviews, observations, documents, websites, and email

Peer assessment	Impartial perspective and guidance from colleagues	Follow-up emails were sent to clarify themes identified during data collection
Member checks	Verify documents and conclusions to ensure research findings were a true reflection of participant experiences	Selection of school site based on the number of career teachers in a rural school district
Criterion sampling	Criterion sampling was used to locate information-rich data	Selection of school site based on the number of career teachers in rural school district

TRANSFERABILITY

Criteria/Technique	Result	Examples
Thick, rich description of methodology	A dense description of research methodology and results for other researchers to trace methods used	Observations of school culture; historical documentation; education experience of participants
Applicability	A dense description of research methodology and results for other researchers to trace methods used	Demographic descriptions formed an integral part of findings
Referential adequacy	Data that was archived and used in analysis	Quotes from participants, district website, school communication distributions

DEPENDABILITY/CONFIRMABILITY

Criteria/Technique	Result	Examples
Access to audit trail	Allow auditor to determine trustworthiness of study via chain of evidence	Interview notes, field notes, artifacts, and emails are available for review
Reflexivity	Researcher collected data used in the research	Interview notes, field notes, artifacts, and emails are available for review

Limitations of Study

The presence of the researcher is one limitation regarding interviews of participants (Creswell, 2009). Also, criterion samples, unlike random samples, cannot be

generalized to an overall population (Richardson, 2014). Further, I am employed as an educator in a different school district and have personal experience with morale and retention. Therefore, I must be able to understand my biases as much as possible for the accuracy of interpreting and reporting findings. As the researcher, I was the primary instrument of the research. I also attempted to redirect potential roadblocks by not presuming participant's responses or rationale. Researcher self-control was necessary to avoid bias (Richardson, 2014).

Chapter Three Summary

Chapter Three provided a review of the methodology used to conduct this study. Case study design was selected for this study to accentuate participants' responses to teacher morale and retention issues (Dexter, 2015; Meyer et al, 2009; Shouppe & Pate, 2010). The case study design allowed research participants an opportunity to express their experiences in an unrestricted format (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008; Yin, 2009).

In addition to stating my role in the research process, potential areas of researcher bias were addressed due to my background and personal experience related to teacher morale. Trustworthiness was defined along with examples of how the findings were valid and credible.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION OF DATA

Chapter Four presents the narrative portrait of this study based on collected data. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates. This chapter describes the school, the district's mission and vision, the school's initiatives and programs, and tells the story of the school selected.

Mealer Elementary School

District Profile

Mealer Elementary School is a rural elementary school in the northeastern part of the state. The district area encompasses fifty-seven square miles and is five miles north of the nearest city. The school district has three school sites: one pre-kindergarten to fifth grade elementary school, one sixth to eighth grade middle school, and one ninth to twelfth grade high school. The district serves more than 1,500 students. Mealer Elementary School enrollment for the 2016 – 2017 school year was 505 students. The school serves a population of approximately 70 students with special needs, and approximately 75 students were identified as English Language Learners (ELL). Almost

25% of the lower elementary students receive remediation assistance. The district is considered indigent with over 80% of the students in the district qualifying for free or reduced meals.

The community has an estimated population of just under 3,000 residents. It has few employers, and most workers travel to nearby towns or across state lines to find gainful employment. The poverty level for the town is 30.9%, which is double the state average.

The original brick elementary school was constructed in 1960. Additions to the original facility were completed in 1964, 1977, and 1982. In 1968, an annex was built of pre-engineered metal with a brick veneer. This building received an addition in 1991. A multi-purpose building was built at Mealer Elementary School at a cost of \$400,000 in 1996. Funding for the addition came from a \$300,000 bond issue coupled with \$100,000 from the school district's building fund. The building consists of a gymnasium/multi-purpose game room, two kindergarten classrooms, restrooms, storage closets, and an office. In 1998, a modular two-classroom building with restrooms was installed at the west end of Mealer Elementary School. In 2001, a kitchen remodel, cafeteria expansion, and office addition of 2,947 square feet was completed at the school.

District Mission Statement and District Philosophy

According to the district's website, Mealer Public Schools encourage students to learn 'how' to learn in a complex society, to be effective communicators and to be responsible, respectful members of the global community (Mealer School website, 2019).

The district's philosophy states:

We believe in excellence in education for each student as best suits his/her needs, capabilities, and aspirations. Opportunity for learning is basic to our democratic heritage, and becomes an individual right to be nurtured, protected, and advanced through public education. We commit ourselves to timely curricular and extra-curricular selections which stress academic disciplines, vocational development, aesthetic appreciation, physical development, moral objectives, social efficiency, and productive citizenship. We recognize and encourage community interests, needs, and organizations which influence and complement educational purposes. We stress the critical need to learn ‘how’ to learn in a complex society while retaining the traditional values and a respect for proper authority. We believe in the individual worth of each student and in his future as a functioning citizen in today's society. (Mealer School website, 2019)

District Programs and Initiatives

Mealer Elementary School district initiatives and programs that potentially have the most impact on student learning include going one-to-one with Chromebooks for third, fourth, and fifth graders, integrating an online learning management system called Power School, creating a Bright Futures program, after school tutoring, and establishing a Boys and Girls Club for after-school care. There is also an accelerated reader program to promote literacy.

School Setting

Mealer Elementary School is part of Mealer school district and scored a C- (72) on the A-F report card released by the State Department of Education for the 2015-2016 school year. Mealer Elementary School received 10 out of 10 bonus points for

maintaining a student attendance rate >95%. The student population at Mealer Elementary School consists of 43% Caucasian, 31% Native American, 18% Hispanic, 1.2% Asian, 0.6% Black, and 6.2% two or more races. There are approximately 32 teachers and staff at Mealer Elementary, including one principal (Mr. Phillips), one assistant principal (Mr. Russell), one counselor, one librarian, one school secretary, and 26 classroom teachers (Mealer school website, 2019).

Physical structure.

Mealer Elementary School is a traditional one-story dark red brick building, with a beige metal roof. It is located ten blocks north of the high school. Although the building is almost 60 years old, it is in good condition considering its age. The outside perimeter doors leading into the building remain locked for student and staff safety. Certain staff members have keys to lock or unlock the security gates as needed. The sidewalk to the main entrance to the building is flanked with park benches, and is easily identifiable, as it faces the street that runs in front of the school. The front walkway and the sidewalks behind the main building are covered with a metal roof to protect children and staff during inclement weather.

The school's mascot sits atop the large marquee sign in the school yard near the school entrance. The entrance opens into a small foyer and a second set of locked metal double doors that open into the interior of the school (see Appendix C). Visitors check in at the secretary's window where they produce a photographic form of identification and sign in on a clipboard. The main office is located immediately to the left as visitors enter into the interior of the school. It is identified with a small sign just above the single door

entry into the office. Located to the left of the secretary's office is the head principal's office. The secretary's office is a frenetic place, but it is decorated to elicit tranquility.

The wall decorations, which include the words 'laugh', 'dream', 'memories', 'faith', and 'love' are large and inspirational. Many of the teachers and both administrators express their personal religious beliefs, and are not shy about professing their faith. After checking in at the window, visitors walk into a massive cafeteria area. To the left of the cafeteria is a long hallway that houses the lower grades and one fifth grade classroom; exiting the east doorway in the cafeteria leads to another long hallway, which houses the upper grade classrooms. The library is located in an annex building, accessible by exiting the right hallway on the north side. That annex also houses both computer labs, special education classes, the speech room, a storage room, and two of the fourth grade classrooms. Just down the hall on the right, and to the right, is the assistant principal's office, the counselor's office, and a conference room. The gymnasium, which also houses two pre-kindergarten classrooms, is located at the east end of the building, while the kindergarten classrooms and a safe room are located in a new building on the west end of the main building. The music room is a standalone modular building immediately east of the annex.

The playgrounds are located north of the annex building. The playground has typical playground equipment for children to play on. Although the Parent Faculty Club donates much of the equipment, some of the newer equipment was obtained when a neighboring district closed. Wood chips are placed under the equipment. This, along with frequent use by students has led to holes under the merry-go-round, swings, and the zip line, which creates mud holes that remain for days.

School and Team Structure.

The school and team structure of Mealer is similar to other schools in the area. Each grade level is its own Professional Learning Community (PLC), although at Mealer, they do not actually use this classification. Grade level teachers are tasked with creating and following a grade-level pacing guide. These teams are responsible for not only the content and learning standards for that grade, they also are responsible for presenting a specific learning strategy at staff meetings. Faculty meetings are held twice a month after school in the school library.

An example of the building layout is shown in Figure 3.

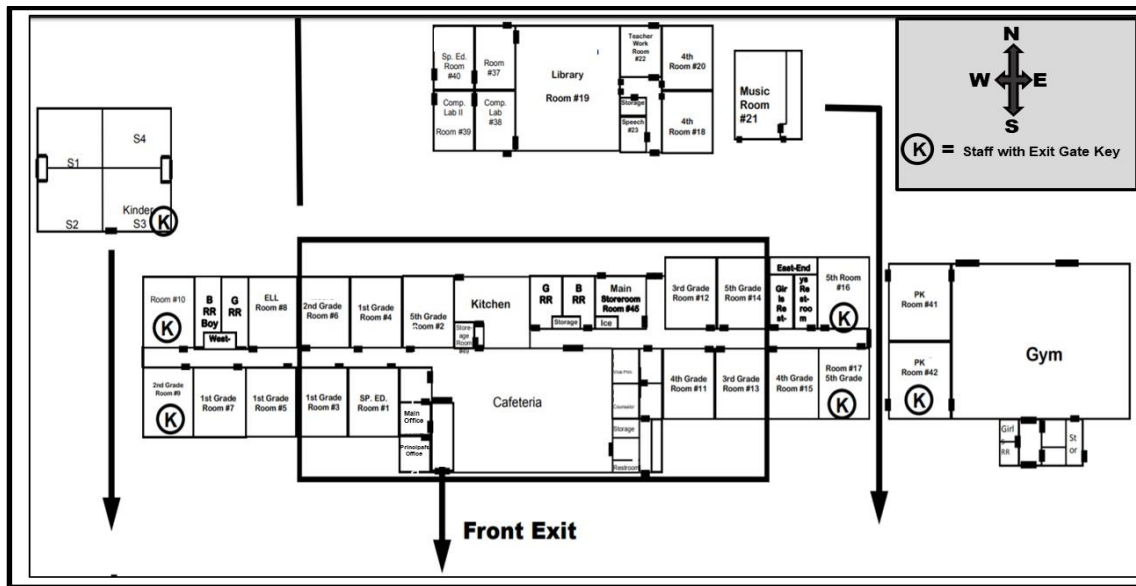


Figure 3. Floor plan of Mealer Elementary School. (School principal provided map, 2019).

Participants

Teachers were recruited to participate in this case study based on years of service. All teachers with more than ten years of service at this school were recruited to

participate. Although almost half the staff qualified, seven teachers responded and all seven were interviewed for this case study. Demographic data were limited and were collected at the time of the in-person interviews; however, to ensure the participants' confidentiality, only years of service were requested. Upon review of the demographic information, it was noted that some participants could be easily identified. Identifying information pertaining to age, sex, race, or grades taught were not essential to the research protocol, therefore it was not included. Data collection was accomplished through in-person interviews, with follow up questions answered via e-mail. See Table 2 for participant profile summary.

Table 2

Participant Profile Summary – Participants were selected based on willingness to participate in the study and length of service at Mealer Elementary School.

Name	Years at Mealer Elementary
Buff	26
Dena	20
Denise	10
Julie	17
Kathryn	12
Kris	14
Sally	25

Relationships

Leadership. Mealer's administration team consists of one head principal (Mr. Phillips) and one assistant principal (Mr. Russell). Each of these leaders have served in their respective capacity for more than twenty years. They share duties including supervision of the teaching staff and students.

In addition to supervisory duties, Mr. Russell serves as the district special

education director, where he is responsible for 150 students with special needs. The school counselor, Julie Russell, services the entire elementary school.

Mr. Phillips has 24 years of experience in the district. He had been the assistant principal at the high school prior to working at the elementary school. When Mr. Phillips was hired as the head principal at the elementary school, he was hired to correct staffing issues. There had been an ongoing issue with staff tension and collegiality. His first challenge was to improve the culture of the school. Prior to his hire, staff gossip and negativity abounded. One of the first issues Mr. Phillips addressed was to cease the negativity through conducting tough conversations with those involved. Open lines of communication have created a more trustworthy and supportive work environment for both students and staff. He encourages positive relationships between teachers and students as well. Mutual respect is a driving force behind any changes he makes in how the school operates. Every decision is centered around what is in the best interest of students.

In an effort to keep staff informed of school events, Mr. Phillips sends out emails, text messages, and newsletters. He updates the school calendar in a timely manner. He also makes a concerted effort to remain organized through use of the Remind application on his phone and the calendar on his computer.

Mr. Phillips described the atmosphere of Mealer Elementary as upbeat and comfortable. He mentioned the frequent laughter heard in hallways and classrooms as a gauge of the building's morale. Together, the principals seek to improve upon the elements already in place. As a school leader, Mr. Phillips stated, "I hope it is a non-threatening environment, but at the same time the expectations are high from across the

board,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

One way Mr. Phillips influences the morale and staff longevity in the building is through conscientious hiring decisions. His interview process includes a thorough review of reference checks. “We do a really good job of vetting and hiring the best,” stated Mr. Phillips (personal interview, December 10, 2018). He seeks to hire the best candidate he can find for the job. He mentioned the fact that many teachers on staff are native to the Mealer community. He made a point to say that just because someone graduated high school from Mealer, that did not ensure them a job there after college. Mr. Phillips reiterated:

If two people are the same as far as qualifications and...my gut feeling is... references and everything says they’re equal on paper and in person, I probably am going to take the one that’s from Mealer for that loyalty. Not probably...I would. (interview, December 10, 2018)

He stated the school board always followed his recommendation for a hire, and that it did not create a discord within the community.

Mr. Russell has been an assistant principal with the school for 21 years. The son of a minister, Mr. Russell attended school in several states, in both small and large school districts, before graduating from high school in South Dakota. Following graduation, he completed his undergraduate education at a private Christian college. He met and married his wife, and they relocated to the rural Mealer area when he was hired as assistant principal.

His philosophy of leadership echoes that of Mr. Phillips. As a team, they do not micromanage the teaching staff. Mr. Russell seeks to improve relationships by building

teachers up and encouraging professional growth. In his daily interactions with both students and staff, Mr. Russell stated, “I try to be fair, consistent and visible. You know, be friendly, smile, and address people when we meet,” (interview, December 10, 2108).

Faculty. Mealer Elementary employs a teaching staff of 26 (School Website, 2019). Over half of these teachers have been employed in the district for more than ten years. Seven of those teachers elected to be part of this study. Most of them either graduated from this district or graduated from a school within ten miles of Mealer. Many of the teachers at Mealer have taught there for the entirety of their careers.

The elementary school appears to be split into two groups: the upper elementary teachers, and the lower elementary teachers. Julie referred to it as cohesion between the upper and lower grades, because they (upper versus lower grades) are the ones who naturally work together to achieve educational goals. When asked about the relationships among teachers, survey participants had differing perspectives. Sally admitted the school does have cliques, but that she does not partake in them. When asked what the relationships were like among teachers, Sally mentioned that once she gets to her room, she forgets everyone exists except for her students.

The relationships of the teachers at Mealer appears to be professional and supportive. Buff described the school as being very cohesive. She also stated they were like a family, which was reinforced by Kathryn. Buff said, “We care about each other. We help each other. We pray for each other, and that’s a big thing in our school. Both our principals are Christian men, and so, they’re not afraid to stand up for what they believe in.” (interview, December 10, 2018). Buff also mentioned that Mealer teachers support one another both in and out of school. Kathryn, who attended Mealer as a student, and

returned to teach there stated that all teachers and staff work well together. She added, “They (teachers) made it feel like it was a home. And it’s still the same way,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Teacher Perceptions

Perceptions about morale. Teacher perceptions of morale depends upon the teacher asked. All research participants expressed their perspective on what they believe teacher morale encompassed. Some teachers find it high, while others say it is at an all-time low. Julie was positive in her assessment. She used the phrases ‘supportive’, ‘encouraging’ and ‘collaborative’ to describe her views on teacher morale at Mealer. When asked for their definition of morale, teachers shared a similar point of view. Every teacher interviewed related that morale is a feeling or attitude towards one’s workplace environment. Five participants described morale with only positive attributes. Teacher morale has been a topic of conversation both in and out of school. Dena commented, “I was just talking to another teacher at one of the other schools about this very thing (teacher morale).”

When asked to elaborate on morale, Buff added, “I think it (teacher morale) depends on the teacher’s attitude.” Sally stated, “As far as teacher morale goes, I have noticed that each teacher’s own confidence level attributes to their own morale. I think it’s your own personality how you relate to people. Some things that bother other people, I just blow off. It’s no big deal.”

Kris summed the morale as the following:

I think morale is high, for the most part. We feel like we are a family and we band together when one of us needs something. There are ebbs and flows, just like with

anything. When we feel we aren't being heard about something in particular, the morale kind of sinks some, depending on how important we feel the issue at hand is. We have definitely had good years and bad years and I would say the indicator for the ebb and flow is how we feel that our voice is mattering or how we feel our worth is valued at the time. But the last couple of years have been back up, in my opinion, (interview, December 10, 2018).

The majority of participants related only positive attributes in their definitions, such as “sense of caring...and fun, rewarding, family atmosphere, upbeat, and doing it for the kids.” Sally, however, was non-committal but made the observation that when a teacher has a strong personality, they have high morale; when they have low confidence, they have low morale. Buff acknowledged that morale reflected teachers’ attitude: “Most of the teachers are proud of what they are doing, but we do have several who are very negative towards teaching in general,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Both administrators and several teachers viewed morale as being high at Mealer Elementary. “We have had a few years where it was not great, but I feel like with everything there is always ups and downs,” Kathryn reported (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris echoed this opinion by stating, “I think morale is high, for the most part.” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Perceptions about retention. While having teachers remain employed in a school for the span of a career is a concern of many administrators, at Mealer this is not an issue. Administrators at Mealer hire the best candidate they can find, and teachers choose to stay. Mr. Phillips even reported that some teachers come *to* Mealer just to work for him. He reported that one of those teachers told him, “I came here because of you,”

(interview, December 10, 2018).

Teachers had differing reasons for staying at Mealer. Julie mentioned a combination of both the school and the community support as her reason for remaining in the area for two decades. She said, “I am happy and I feel this school and this community have been a blessing, or we wouldn’t have been her for this many years. When I’m done with my career and I’m retired, I will look back and in a positive way, think that it was a great, great place to be,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Sally appreciates the work environment at Mealer. She came to Mealer because her own children attended school there. She stayed because she “loves it,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Dena, too, mentioned how much she loves working at Mealer. She also declared it was the students who keep her coming back.

The bonds are tightly connected within the staff at Mealer Elementary. Although several teachers mentioned they had thought of leaving, the support and close friendships they have formed at Mealer keep them there. The general consensus was that “it’s family”. Buff succinctly stated, “I think we’re like a family. We have some really good people working here,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris made the connection of teachers who were raised in Mealer coming back to teach there as a reason many stay. “We are just hometown girls. It’s just...it’s...it’s a family” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn echoed those sentiments with, “It’s just a work family. You work around them more than sometimes your own family so you develop this special little bond,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Morale Matters at Mealer

Collegiality and Cohesiveness

Teachers work well together at Mealer. When asked about relationships between teachers, many liken it to collegiality and cohesiveness. Sally mentioned that she advises younger teachers on how to handle school issues. Some of the newer teachers are her former students, and Sally speaks to them the way she did when she had them as a student. She said, “I tell them ‘you’re not here to be their best bud. Teach those kids. That’s your responsibility’,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris reiterated the collegiality and cohesiveness exists building wide. She disclosed, “I just feel like everybody works together, and everybody wants everybody to be successful,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Buff shared that when a new teacher arrives that may not fit in, teachers work with them to make them feel welcomed. Buff compared the teaching staff to a cohesive family. Julie supported this by saying, “Definitely, you know, there’s more cohesion between upper and lower grades,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Julie shared other ways teachers work together as a family unit. She stated:

“Everyone brings their favorite snack that we can enjoy together. We have a flower fund. A lot of teachers get together and do activities outside of school, like go to one of the local bookstores and have a paint party,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Kathryn revealed that although staff members in opposite ends of the building do not see one another regularly, they still have good relationships. Dena shared that she works well with her teammates, and they try to keep their students on the same track academically. Dena said, “We stay on the same stories and try to get to pacing so we try

to stay on the same stories and on the same math lessons,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Denise enjoys working at Mealer because she teaches next door to her best friend. The two of them are competitive with their students, and they provide support both in and out of school. Denise laughingly shared that she and her best friend both went home sick the previous day. She said, “They probably thought we were faking it,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Denise also shared that while Mealer is not perfect, it is a good place to work and live. “Every place is going to have its faults and I think most of the people here know what the faults are and accept them,” Denise stated (interview, December 10, 2018).

Most of the teachers grew up within a few miles of Mealer, and many of the current staff members graduated from Mealer as well. Several teachers mentioned the primary reason they returned to Mealer was in fact because it was home. Buff reported that although she did not grow up in Mealer, she lived in a nearby town as a child. Now that she lives and works in Mealer, she has deeper a connection to the community. Teachers seem to enjoy living in the community. Dena shared, “This is home to us, and me, I’m too old to go anywhere else,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Denise shared that she grew up and graduated from Mealer, and now lives in an adjacent community. Kris’ mother taught at Mealer when Kris was in high school. Her draw to Mealer included this sentiment, “These walls were the same ones that I saw when I was little. So, I mean, that’s my draw to here is just being able to come home,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Several teachers stated, “This is where I’m supposed to be.” Participants admitted to loving work. For example, when asked about why she stayed, Kris stated, “I love my job. I love coming to work, and I love what I do. It makes it a lot easier to get up in the morning and makes it more fun.” Denise enjoys her job as well and offered this reason, “I’m fortunate. I get to teach next door to my best friend,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Sally added, “I love it! I like this job,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Administration Support

Administrators are held in high esteem at Mealer. As they walk down the hallways, students and staff acknowledge them and offer a greeting. The regard the principals have for staff and students is evident in the respect that is given. Both Mr. Phillips and Mr. Russell profess their faith in God publicly, and many teachers mentioned both men pray for the staff on a regular basis. Buff added, “We pray for each other,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris stated, “I feel like I am totally supported. I feel like they are always looking for ways to help us be better,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Julie mentioned she was glad there were two administrators to go to for support. She had this to say, “The principals have different personalities and depending on the situation there’ll be some that will come to one and some that will come to another depending on who’s free,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn appreciates the support from administration. She mentioned that as long as there is a need and a good reason for it, the principals will meet those needs. She stated, “Whatever we ask for as long as we can validate why we need it, he’s willing to give it to us,” (interview, December 10, 2018). One of the participants mentioned that Mr. Phillips is usually the first one at school, and oftentimes is the last one to leave.

Kris has been in other districts where the administration support was nonexistent. She appreciates the efforts of the current administration, and had this to say, “When other people get upset with the administration here, I usually am quick to say, ‘listen guys, you don’t know how bad it can be. You know, be grateful for what we have,’” (interview, December 10, 28). Sally, too, has worked under other administrators, and she is thankful for both Mr. Phillips and Mr. Russell. She stated, “I don’t have a problem with them at all. We have I would call a respectful disagreement. I’m allowed to voice my opinions, they will voice theirs,” (interview, December, 10, 2018).

Mutual Support

Teachers at Mealer are more than just colleagues; they are also friends. The care and compassion when one is going through a difficulty is important to the other teachers, and they are quick to lend assistance. Kris spoke about the positive support teachers give and receive. She shared, “The communication and appreciation of each other is wonderful,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Julie shared that when she was experiencing a personal challenge, the teachers pitched in to help. She stated, “It’s more than these are my colleagues. You know, I care when they’re going through something. We just kind of look out for each other,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Dena added, “We all get along good, and are supportive, and if you need me, say ‘help,’” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris reinforced that by saying, “I just think it’s great the way everybody kind of pitches in and wants everybody else to be successful,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

The essence of community is another important feature for those teaching at Mealer. Julie grew up in a large metropolitan area and experienced culture shock when

she relocated to the area with her husband. She has adapted well, and recognizes that community pride is pivotal to her happiness. Julie said, “Community events are really important to our town,” (interview, December 10, 2018). She stated the community responds to needs of both students and staff. “I feel like there’s enough sense of community that everyone wants to help out if we have a student or teacher that has some kind of serious issue going on,” Julie added (interview, December 10, 2018). The community-mindedness of the school is summed up by Julie, “people care about people,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Dena mentioned her relationships with former students. She said, “It’s just fun to see them and how they turn out. I don’t know what I’d do without them,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Students are important to Kris, as well. She said, “You want to pull your hair out when you’re with them, but you’d take them home in a heartbeat,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris succinctly stated, “I just figured everybody was like us,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Buff shared her thoughts by adding, “I think we have something special,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Sally wrapped it up by expressing, “I love it, absolutely love it!” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Giving Free Reign

Mr. Russell allows teams to create their own duty schedule. This freedom permits teachers to monitor students at times they select, as long as duties are covered. Flexibility to arrange the lessons or work load is important to the teachers at Mealer. Julie mentioned her viewpoint in prioritizing her work day. She said, “My philosophy is kids are first—kids before paper,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Denise likes the ability to create her own expectations. She verbalized her thoughts by saying, “They just leave me alone and

kind of let me do my thing,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn feels completely autonomous in her classroom, and she had this to say, “They pretty much give us free reign,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris added, “I find a lot of stuff on my own. I don’t feel limited in anything that I do,” (interview, December 10, 2108). Sally reiterated that sentiment by sharing a story about half listening in a meeting where Mr. Phillips told the staff they had to teach the same thing. She asked him to clarify what he said. He responded by saying it might come to that, but for the present, to continue doing what she was doing. Sally then said, “I feel lucky that way. I mean, I am very comfortable because I get very bored easily, so I know the kids do,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn shared, “...they kind of give us the freedom to run our rooms the way we want to run them,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Remaining Effective in the Classroom

Teachers at Mealer are skilled professionals and seek to better themselves. Kathryn explained, “They trust that we’re professionals and know what we’re doing,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Mr. Phillips encourages teachers to become experts by learning unique teaching structures, and then sharing those in biweekly staff meetings. Each grade level is assigned a meeting date to share a teaching strategy with colleagues. Although these meetings may run long, the information shared is invaluable. Dena made the observation that teachers want to remain effective in the classroom. She said, “We’d like to do things to stay current,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Julie shared her insight on teachers sharing resources. She stated, “The more ideas and people working together I believe the better outcome you’re going to have,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn capitalized on that thought by adding, “if we have to come together and work

and bounce ideas off or have something we need to talk about, we have that opportunity,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Teachers at Mealer participate in a variety of professional development opportunities. Last year, the kindergarten teachers attended a week-long training in Las Vegas. Dena mentioned that although the teachers shared their experiences with the rest of the staff when they returned from the training, she wishes her grade level teachers could attend something similar. She said, “We’d just like to do something like that, you know, more...when we get up-to-date (teaching strategies),” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Dena expressed her challenge when students did not understand the lesson. She stated, “You’re like, ‘how can I do that better’? There’s not a handbook for it. If it didn’t work, you do it over,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris assists students who are struggling in their regular classrooms. She stated, “Maybe I know a different way to teach. The activity is pretty set, but the way we go about it can be changed if needed,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Purpose and Meaning

Dena said, “There’s no big hoopla for teachers. There’s no recognition or anything like that,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Dena did mention though, her passion. She exclaimed, “I don’t have a life outside of this...except the grand kids!” (interview, December 10, 2018). Although these teachers are dedicated professionals, they do enjoy time away from school as well. Buff stated, “We love snow days. We love days off, but when we’re here, we’re here. It’s about them (the students),” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris added, “I enjoy coming to work. And that’s not to say I don’t

like my weekends and my breaks (laughter),” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Following up the comment from Kris about enjoying her work, she also stated, “I get bored easily and I miss my kiddos and I want to come back,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Julie reported feeling a sense of worth by doing her job. She stated, “I feel satisfaction in my job in what I do...you know, that’s a positive thing obviously of feeling good about what I do and making a difference,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Dena stated, “Trying to make this world a better place for (the students) ...if you teach one kid, if you impact one kid, you feel like you’ve done something,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Buff shared, “I just think we have compassionate teachers. We have great teachers who are here for one reason, and that’s the kids,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Sally finds sanctuary in her job. She has taught first, second, and third grade while at Mealer, although the moves were not her choice. She shared that a previous administrator told her she had a job, but not a choice in which grade she was assigned. After several years in another grade, she finally convinced Mr. Phillips to allow her to return to the grade she currently teaches, and she is content to stay there. Sally had this to say, “I am very comfortable here, but I think it is due to my own personality,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Chapter Four Summary

Chapter Four explained the current perceptions of morale by teachers at Mealer Elementary School. Participants’ descriptions of their experiences were analyzed through the lens of self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2002). Data indicated

that teachers are both extrinsically and intrinsically motivated to remain employed at Mealer Elementary. Furthermore, data suggested that administration support played a key role in this decision.

Chapter Five presents emergent themes, which are identified and discussed.

Chapter Six presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions utilizing the framework of self-determination theory. Chapter Six also contains the conclusion of the study. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed. Recommendations for further research are also discussed.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF DATA

The purpose of the study is to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates. The theoretical framework selected for this study draws from the self-determination theory espoused by Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000, 2002) and includes the following topics: autonomy; relatedness; competence; and both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Chapter Five presents an analysis of the data through the lens of these motivational elements as they apply to Mealer Elementary School.

Summary of Themes

In this qualitative case study, six themes emerged across the interviews and data collection that described how teachers perceive leadership impacts morale and longevity at the school. Table 3 shows how those themes correlate to the research questions and theoretical framework of self-determination theory proposed for this study.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	EMERGENT THEMES
Q1. How do teachers describe the morale in this school?	Morale Issues – Proximity to Home & Personal Satisfaction
Q2. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher morale?	Administration Support
Q3. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher decisions to remain in the profession and remain at this school?	Autonomy Competence
Q4. How does self-determination theory explain teacher morale and retention in this school?	Motivation – Intrinsic & Extrinsic
Q5. What other factors led to teacher longevity in this school?	Relatedness

Morale at Mealer Elementary**Morale**

Several factors, as evidenced by research collected in this study, influence teacher morale. Teachers at Mealer Elementary intimated their morale as a personal confidence in how they perceive themselves in relation to their teaching tasks. High morale, an integral part of pedagogical and psychological growth of teachers; creating an environment where teachers experience it and creates an atmosphere of continued teacher longevity (Evans, 2001). Teachers participating in this study reported their morale was high due mainly to how they felt about themselves. Opinions varied from teacher to teacher, so what one teacher considered to be high morale may not necessarily represent

the viewpoint of another. Self-determination theory addresses morale through the initiation and regulation of a teacher's behavior (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Teachers remain ultimately responsible for their own morale and how it impacts their work performance. Teachers referenced two areas that influenced their morale: proximity to home and personal satisfaction.

Proximity to Home

Mealer Elementary is a low socio-economic school, so it makes one wonder why teachers stay. Teachers reported they like working at Mealer because it feels like home and it is literally close to their actual home. They stay because they like the people. Julie stated, "It's fun. It's rewarding. It's challenging. It's home," (interview, December 10, 2018).

Personal Satisfaction

Teachers at Mealer do not teach for fame or fortune; rather, they teach for the personal satisfaction they receive from helping students in the district. Many of the participants reported they want to inspire students to a higher level of achievement. Helping children escape from a life of impoverishment was an underlying theme for why teachers chose to teach at the school. Others shared their love for their students and their job.

Teacher Morale Through the Lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory (SDT) subscribes to the assumption that humans are inherently motivated to develop and accomplish goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). While individuals engage in challenges intended to deepen their understanding, they are also motivated by the social constructs of their environment (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Satisfying

the innate need for autonomy, relatedness and competence serve to empower one's natural developmental motivation tendencies (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Morris, 2018). Data collection incorporated examples of each of these three psychological needs as they related to teacher morale.

As Table 4 illustrates, self-determination theory reveals motivation along a perceived locus of causality, which represents a person's perception of whether the cause of their behaviors stems from a free choice -or by peer pressure (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Reasons teachers stay at Mealer fall along this continuum.

Table 4

Self Determination Theory Continuum of Motivation

AMOTIVATION		EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION			INTRINSIC MOTIVATION
No Regulation	External Regulation	Introjected Regulation	Identified Regulation	Integrated Regulation	Intrinsic Regulation
Activity not valued	Obtains external reward	Done to ease guilt or anxiety	Personally important tasks	Mimics intrinsic motivation	Done for the pure enjoyment of reaching a goal
Person may feel incapable of change	Least autonomous	Achieves pride or strokes ego	Supports a greater good	Tasks are assimilated to self	Self-determined tasks
Autonomy		Relatedness		Competence	
Locus of Causality					

Note. Self-determination Theory Continuum of Motivation. Adapted from "The 'what' and 'why' of goal pursuits." Deci & Ryan (2000). *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 237.

Teachers are among the most motivated individuals in the workforce. Teachers were asked to elaborate on why they do what they do, and why they stay at Mealer. Answers ranged from intrinsic to extrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators included job satisfaction, personal desire to be at the school, and making a difference in the lives of

their students. Extrinsic motivators included words of affirmation to the teachers, expressions of love and respect from the students, and a bond to the community. Not one teacher mentioned their salary when discussing why they teach at Mealer Elementary School.

Amotivation

Amotivation refers to a lack of desire to complete tasks, feeling apathetic, having poor concentration, and having no interest in social activities. Amotivation stems from not valuing an activity (Ryan, 1995), not feeling competent to perform the task (Deci, 1975), or not believing it will result in the desired outcome (Seligman, 1975). Teachers at Mealer Elementary did not mention personal apathy; however, some teachers mentioned parental apathy regarding education of their children.

Extrinsic Motivation

Extrinsic motivation refers to behaviors performed to obtain some outcome separate from the activity itself (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). Within the broad scope of external motivation, Deci & Ryan (1985) identified four distinct behaviors: external; introjected; identified; and integrated forms of regulation (Deci, et al., 1991). Data collected suggested that teachers at Mealer Elementary were influenced to some extent by extrinsic motivation. From avoiding the teachers' workroom to refusing to participate in exclusive work groups, participants acknowledged that extrinsic motivators influenced teachers. Monetary rewards are considered to be an extrinsic motivator, but no teacher suggested this as a reason they work, which is not surprising. Other areas of extrinsic motivation that teachers referred to included their physical work environment and working conditions.

Participants described their own classroom environment as comfortable and home like, but did not perceive it to be a motivator for them to work. The only reference to working conditions mentioned by participants did not address the actual culture, but made a statement about having to attend lengthy staff meetings. Those meetings were described as a waste of time.

External regulation. External regulation is the least autonomous type of extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2002). These behaviors are enacted to obtain a reward or to avoid punishment. Such behaviors are poorly maintained once the controlling contingencies have been removed (Vansteenkiste, et al, 2013; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009). Externally regulated undertakings are described as those done when a person either performs a duty to avoid punishment or to receive a reward (Deci & Ryan, 2000). External regulation has an external perceived locus of causality (Deci & Ryan, 2002) due to pressure from others. However, external regulation may stem from feeling compelled to do so from self-initiated pressure such as the relationship teachers have with their students.

Classroom teachers spend a great deal of time with students. Due to the time investment spent at school, relationships become essential to management of the classroom. Putting students' needs first resonated with the teachers. Teachers mentioned former students as another reason they remained at Mealer Elementary School. Becoming immersed in school events cemented the students' importance. Kris stated, "I mean, the kids just love you like you are a celebrity or something, and they see you at Wal-Mart and come running and want to hug you and love on you," (interview, December 10, 2018). Teachers made special bonds with some students, and those relationships served to

reinforce resolve to remain at Mealer Elementary School. Teachers stay after contracted hours to ensure their students' safety and well-being. Dena admitted to loving on students and feeding them snacks until parents could get to the school after a long day. "I guess it's my passion...it's my life," she said (interview, December 10, 2018).

Introjected regulation. Introjected regulation behaviors are performed to avoid guilt and shame, or to seek approval, or protect one's ego (Deci & Ryan, 2002). These behaviors are enacted to satisfy internal needs such as self-aggrandizement or the avoidance of self-derogation. It is an interesting form of motivation because it encompasses "taking in a regulation, but not fully accepting it as one's own" (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.72). This type of extrinsic motivation was represented in the relationships teachers have with stakeholders in the community.

Teachers were asked about how collaboration with parents and community impacts their individual classroom. Teachers stated they are proactive in keeping parents informed of school events and projects through the use of technology and newsletters. In addition, the school initiated a Parent Faculty Club. The purpose of the Parent Faculty Club is to create the best possible learning environment for MES students. It is designed to cultivate an effective relationship between the community and the school (School Handbook, 2019).

Kris shared that although there is a strong parent base, it is like any group where the few carry the many. Buff articulated that only two parents attend the Parent Faculty Club and that teachers are the ones who keep the club going. She admitted that parents are hard to reach, and it is difficult to get parents involved. This fluctuates from year to year, according to Denise. Kathryn attributed it to socioeconomics. The underlying

culture of parental illicit drug usage and grandchildren being raised by grandparents played into the socioeconomic instability of students at Mealer. Sally suggested that lack of parental support stemmed from the ages of the parents. Many of the parents are young, and school seems to not be important to them. Denise suggested it was due to complacency.

Identified regulation. Identified regulation behaviors are completed because they are considered valuable or essential (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). This type of extrinsic motivation is more self-directed because it includes a conscious effort of behavior regulation and acceptance of the behavior that is personally important (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p. 17). According to deCharms, (1968), identified regulation has an internal perceived locus of causality. Therefore, this form of behavior regulation is categorized as relatively autonomous (Niemic & Ryan, 2009).

Self-determination theory depicts relatedness as an individual's desire to feel connected to others or to experience a sense of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2004; Morris, 2018). This need is satisfied when individuals self-identify as part of a group, experience a sense of commonality, and develop close relationships (Van den Broeck, et al., 2016). Identified regulation creates a sense of belonging and relatedness with others who are part of the school (Deci, 2009). Many teachers come to the school and never leave. If they leave, many of them desire to come back. The work environment is only part of the reason; another reason is the people.

Julie recognized that the upper elementary teachers and the lower elementary teachers were unified in their desire to achieve educational goals. She acknowledged this was due in large part to shared plan times where teachers work together to develop

lessons correlated to state standards. Assisting one another is paramount to the success of teachers at MES.

One teacher reiterated prayer envelops the teacher relationships, thus creating more compassion for one another. Buff shared the staff prays for one another, and that compassion is key to their relationships (interview, December 10, 2018).

When asked for specific illustrations of how teachers support one another, Julie revealed that older grades read to the younger grades. The school participates in a Polar Express day where teachers and students wear pajamas and watch the movie. When someone on the staff is sick or in the hospital or loses a family member, flowers are sent by the staff. There are also times teachers engage in whole-school activities.

Contentment with the work relationships was mentioned by two teachers. Sally stated that she felt comfortable at Mealer Elementary and trusts that she has respect from co-workers and administrators. Buff likes her colleagues, and they bring her a high level of comfort as well. Kris expounded on teacher-teacher relationships by sharing that everyone works together to be successful (interview, December 10, 2018). Kris found her best friend at school. She revealed that they have known each other their entire lives because their families knew one other. They became closer friends after they started teaching together. Their camaraderie at school created a friendly competitiveness between their classrooms. Kris and her best friend encourage their own class to out-perform the other class, whether it is in academics, sports, or fundraising ventures. Working collaboratively was a resonating subject among all study participants. They acknowledged having peers to work and share with made them more effective teachers.

Participants reported having satisfying and social relationships within the familial atmosphere of the building. The familial atmosphere is directly linked to the length of service the administrators and teachers have served in the district. Not only have most of them worked for the district for the majority of their long careers, but they also spend more time with one another than they do their own families. Many of the teachers have worked their entire career at Mealer, and have never had other administrators, thus adding to the familial associations.

Kris eloquently stated that in this small town, teachers either know everybody or they are related to everybody. One research participant addressed the family connection by referring to the rampant nepotism. She shared that it was district-wide hiring practice. The superintendent and his wife both work in-district. The assistant principal and the elementary counselor are a married couple. A niece of the superintendent teaches at the elementary. An elementary teacher is the sister to another teacher at the middle school. Two other elementary teachers are cousins. There are other familial relationships in the district, which gives it a deeper connection to family. This association to family ties brings about an extraordinary appeal to remain in the small district.

Teachers take ownership of the school. Out of eight teachers on one end of the hall, six are Mealer graduates. Many of the other teachers graduated in neighboring towns, and Mealer is close to their homes. Teachers take ownership of the school due to pure convenience. Buff made a point of sharing that her motivation to stay at Mealer Elementary was that it is close to her home and she is close to retirement. Kris attended school at Mealer, and feels a special connection. She mentioned the interconnection

between colleagues having lived in the area most of their lives. She also reported that although she left for college, she returned to Mealer as soon as she possibly could.

Dena suggested the reason they feel related is because it is where they live and where they want to stay. She reiterated that it is home for most of the teachers, and she felt as though she was too old to go anywhere else. Denise echoed that sentiment, and vehemently stated that nothing in the area would tempt her to leave.

Accepting new teachers into the group is a goal of many of these career teachers. Although Mealer has a low staff turnover, the few new teachers have been embraced wholly. Kathryn reported that new teachers have been impressed with how welcomed they feel because staff members are so accepting. When there is a cohesiveness, teachers feel comfortable. Buff agreed with that by sharing there are really good people working at Mealer. If someone is hired that does not fit in, teachers work on them until they do.

Data suggested that leadership at Mealer Elementary practiced what Evans (2001) referred to as a 'teacher-centered' style. This type of administrative support focuses on the individuals that make up the staff instead of focusing on the staff as a whole. Self-determination theory suggests positive administration support is associated with teachers' being more satisfied with their jobs and displaying other positive work-related attitudes (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Teachers at Mealer supported this premise.

A strong indicator of the atmosphere of a school is teacher buy-in to leadership's initiatives. Teachers who feel respected and cared for by administration exemplify a willingness to embrace, support, and teach school values (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers at Mealer subscribe to this by their affirmation of support for administration. Teachers hold both Mr. Phillips and Mr. Russell in high regard, and most teachers feel supported

by them. This support resonated throughout many of the interviews, specifically when it related to how caring and considerate the principal is when dealing with them. Working for administrators who support their teachers was an external driving force behind why many of the teachers reportedly stay at Mealer. Buff went as far as adding that Mr. Phillips is *the* reason she remains employed at Mealer. She also acknowledged his professionalism in dealing with administrative issues. Kathryn mentioned the fact that whenever a teacher or a staff member encounters a personal emergency, Mr. Phillips is one of the first to start a monetary collection, or creating a crisis intervention for the family in need.

As far as feeling supported by both administrators, most teachers stated they felt secure enough to approach any subject with the principal. If there were issues, a compromise could be reached via effective communication. Furthermore, both administrators lead by example. Kathryn seeks them out for advice on how to manage specific situations that she is uncertain of. She stated they tell her how to handle the issue.

Denise does not seek assistance from administration often, but when she does, they offer support of her ideas. She mentioned that she started a new school-wide project based learning experience when she came to Mealer, and they encouraged her to proceed. After more than ten years later, the project is a major undertaking, and she is in charge of making the event happen.

Part of the leadership support the MES administrators offer comes in the way of their own personal faith. When speaking to the principals, it becomes apparent they both are strong in their Christian beliefs, and this faith directs how they manage teachers on a

daily basis. Teachers respect the administrators. Julie agreed with this assessment, and added her own opinion about the administration's professionalism and expectations. She feels that they care a lot about state standards and making sure that standards are taught. Teachers are held to high expectations, but they also deal fairly with staff and students. They want an environment that, when people come into the school, things are run well and are orderly.

In addition to a strong faith and high professional expectations, the principal provides support to his staff members. Kris shared that she felt supported by administration, even when they encountered a difference of opinion. She acknowledged they found ways to work through issues, and maintained a level of professionalism (interview, December 10, 2018).

There were differing opinions about the support teachers receive from the principal. One teacher reported that in addition to not feeling supported by administration, teachers also are not invited to participate in decision-making processes. She felt as though her opinion was inconsequential. Another teacher thought teachers were played against one another.

There is a collective unspoken trepidation among the teaching staff at Mealer. Instead of discussing it, teachers avoid it by not inciting wrath of the administrators. Based upon history of past teachers who opposed the leadership, teachers are fearful of losing their jobs or retaliatory measures taken to promote their exit. With that being said, teachers are not unhappy enough to leave. The other positive factors mentioned are enough to overcome any negative emotions teachers may harbor against school administrators.

Integrated regulation. Integrated regulation offers the foundation for the most autonomous form of extrinsically motivated behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2002, p.18). Like identified regulation, integrated regulation is relatively autonomous (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). This type of extrinsic motivation is reached when the choice underlying the behavior is in concordance with other structures within one's self (Deci & Ryan, 2002). With integrated regulation, individuals have a sense that behavior is an essential part of who they are, that it originates from their personality, and is self-determined (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Integrated regulation is directly linked to a teacher's competence.

In self-determination theory, competence is comprised of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and talents, with the capability to perform daily classroom duties with a high level of excellence. Self-determination theory posits teachers have a desire to build their competence to develop mastery over responsibilities that are important to them. Deci & Flasse (1995) stated, "the feeling of competence results when a person takes on and, in his or her own view, meets optimal challenges," (p.66).

Having a professional knowledge of state and national standards is an expectation of teachers. Effective teachers have a deep professional understanding of their content areas, curriculum, and students. Although evaluations are conducted on a routine basis, teachers do not require those results to guide their daily classroom expectations. Denise stated, "You know your standards, and you know what you're supposed to teach," (interview, December 10, 2018). Sally supported that assessment by stating, "As long as I'm teaching the standards, I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to do, no matter how I do it," (interview, December 10, 2018).

One expectation for teachers is ensuring lesson plans are completed thoroughly and timely. Kathryn mentioned that as long as teachers have an overview of what they are doing, and standards are in objectives, the administrators do not really question the plans. “They trust that we’re professionals and know what we’re doing,” Kathryn emphasized (interview, December 10, 2018). Denise added, “They have their expectations as far as when lesson plans are going to be turned in, and they allow us to make it happen,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Professional development is one way teachers experience professional competence and growth. The administrators support teachers attending educational conferences to stay relevant in today’s educational setting. Teachers are eager to learn and implement best classroom practices and are willing to give up summer breaks to do it. Dena shared that she and her colleagues would like to attend professional development to stay current on best practices in teaching (interview, December 10, 2018).

Continuing education is another way teachers showcase their competence and skill. Kathryn mentioned that she would like to go back to school. She is contemplating her options and is creating a plan to see if it is feasible in the foreseeable future. Kathryn expressed her desire to attend graduate school in order to achieve a higher level of responsibility within the school district.

Growth in teacher evaluations also is a part of teacher competence. Teachers take these seriously, and use them to guide professional growth. One teacher mentioned her recent evaluation. “He even made the comment from the time I’ve started until now, he’s seen so much growth.” Julie stated, “There’s definitely room for growth,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

According to Deci & Ryan (2009), individuals want to experience competence in what they do (p. 558). Teachers at Mealer embrace this desire for self-improvement. One example given by participants of competence was through the desire to attend professional development training. Teachers understand the necessity to be competent in their craft. With higher purpose, teachers demonstrate higher-quality learning outcomes for both self and students.

Competence emerges from a sense of self-worth and personal value. In classroom contexts that support educator competence, teachers tend to be more inclined to value academic success for themselves and for their students (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). One teacher in the study acknowledged her teaching abilities by admitting that although she was a good teacher, she recognized her faults and knew where the potential for professional growth existed.

Embracing competence includes the belief that one has the ability to positively influence outcomes (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000, 2002). Dena shared a story of a student who could not grasp a concept, so she kept using different ways to express it. One day, she read the class a story, and that particular student was the only one who understood the meaning, and then he proceeded to explain an even deeper concept to the class. That was a defining moment for both Dena and her student, for when she changed her teaching approach, the student was able to comprehend an element that had eluded him for quite some time. This experience fueled her passion for teaching.

Intrinsic Motivation

Intrinsic motivation refers to behaviors performed in the absence of external incentives that are inherently interesting and enjoyable (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Niemi &

Ryan, 2009). Self-determination theory suggests that autonomy directs intrinsic motivation, thus influencing a person's free will to do something solely for personal satisfaction. Evidence collected in this study suggests that intrinsic motivation in teachers relates positively to morale and longevity. When a person is intrinsically motivated, they act for the fun or challenge entailed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Autonomy in the classroom is an area where teachers feel empowered.

Teachers at Mealer feel satisfied and capable in what they do, thus satisfying the need for intrinsic motivation. They find a sense of joy and contentment in the accomplishments of their students and colleagues. They also genuinely enjoy working at Mealer and with the staff they know and love. All teachers involved in this study report being drawn to Mealer because of the way it makes them feel. They found a sense of worth. The teachers feel as though they are making a difference in the lives of their students. Julie called it the "most rewarding time ever" (interview, December, 10, 2018). They also experience a high level of job satisfaction.

Autonomy in the classroom plays a large role in a teacher's morale at Mealer. For example, teachers reported having freedom to teach curriculum utilizing a variety of strategies specific to their own teaching style as a factor in their morale. There were no scripted lesson plans. Teachers are the experts in their classrooms, and they want to be treated as professionals. Participants were asked to describe their perspective on how leadership practices influenced their decision to remain in the profession and in the classroom. Teachers expressed their opinions on having freedom to do what they want to do when they choose to do it. Sally said, "I feel very comfortable. I know I have to follow the state standards. This is one thing I love about working here," (interview, December

10, 2018). Sally also mentioned the freedom to teach in a way that was comfortable to her, and said no one had told her she could not teach in that manner. As long as academic standards are taught, administrators leave the teaching to the classroom experts.

Other teachers revealed the importance of teaching the state and/or national standards. Buff said, “I know what I go by... my academic standards. I know what they expect of me. And so far, I don’t think I’ve let them down. I’m a people pleaser,” (interview, December 10, 2018). She went on to add, “It’s very professional. But, it’s professional in a way that allows you to be creative. They (Mr. Phillips and Mr. Russell) allow you to use your own ideas. They let you go to workshops. They encourage it... anything that will benefit your students or benefit you as a professional,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Part of allowing teachers to have autonomy is their ability to be creative or on the cutting edge of educational pursuits. Julie stated, “If you have something you want to do and you think it would be good school-wide or a parent thing, they’re open to letting you do your thing,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Kathryn expressed the creativity and diversity in the classroom as “freedom to run our rooms the way we want to run them,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Lack of proximity to the central office allows some teachers a welcomed opportunity for self-sufficiency. When asked about how teachers maintain autonomy in their workday, Kris said, “I make my own schedule and schedule my own meetings. I don’t feel limited in anything that I do. I make all the decisions in my room,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Julie echoed similar sentiments, “I can pretty much arrange my

schedule. There are no set things in how I arrange it, just as long as I do the things that I need to do,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Time management and organization were other areas affecting autonomy in the classroom. Dena and Denise both mentioned the school’s focus on reading and math. Both of those subjects are taught in 90-minute blocks every day. Dena said, “I think the biggest thing is of course time management, because we have to teach 90 minutes of uninterrupted reading, and 90 minutes of uninterrupted math,” (interview, December 10, 2018). Denise said, “I try to stick with the 90 (minutes of reading and math). They just leave me alone and kind of let me do my thing,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Each teacher at Mealer Elementary is encouraged to decorate her classroom for comfort as well as to enhance learning for students. Kathryn mentioned how autonomy allows her to create a comfortable and comforting classroom. One way she does this is through flexible seating. She stated, “They’re (students) here with me eight hours a day. I want them to feel like this is their home and make them feel comfortable,” (interview, December 10, 2018).

Sally has a colorful reading garden tucked into the corner of her room, complete with a garden arch and picket fence. Stuffed tigers (the school mascot) guard the entrance, and serve as listeners for independent reading by her students. Sally’s personal desk area is decorated with family photos and memorabilia. Sally’s walls have low bookshelves. Books surround students, bringing the focus to literacy to the forefront. (Appendix F). Sally mentioned the sensory overload her room provides to students; however, she is comfortable there, and it represents her love for her students and for their learning.

Kathryn practices autonomy in her choice of décor, as well. Her room is tidy and well-organized. A peaceful aura emanated from it as I walked in. As it was close to the Christmas break, Kathryn had a fireplace showing on the Smartboard. Soft holiday music played in the background to create a soothing ambiance. Dark curtains covered the windows, creating a soft glow in the room. Motivational posters lined the walls to reinforce classroom expectations (Appendix G).

Kris' classroom looked like a kaleidoscope. Color was everywhere – on the curtains, on the walls, on the bookshelves, on the storage containers that line the shelves, on the bulletin board. The door is painted a brilliant blue. Kris revealed that bright colors that make her happy. She surrounds her students and herself with sights and sounds that bring a sense of comfort. There was an air freshener to provide olfactory stimulation along with photos of her family on her desk. Each of these expressions of autonomy, especially as it related to creating ambiance and feelings of home, is just one example of how teachers at Mealer capitalized on their freedom of expression in the classroom to enhance learning for their students, while at the same time bringing joy and satisfaction to themselves.

Summary

Chapter Five presented and analyzed data collected through interviews, observations, document reviews, and artifacts. This information is analyzed through the lens of self-determination theory advocated by Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000, 2002) and includes the following attributes: autonomy; relatedness; competence; extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Through analyzing data collected at Mealer Elementary, themes

emerged regarding the manifestations of self-determination theory components. Chapter Six presents findings of the study through answering the study's research questions. Implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed and recommendations for future research are offered.

CHAPTER VI

FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates. Using the lens of Deci & Ryan's (1985, 2000) self-determination theory, the school was studied using intrinsic and extrinsic motivations for morale as a benchmark. Data analysis and data collection occurred throughout the research process. Triangulation of data was accomplished by seeking multiple forms of data sources, including interviews, observations, field notes, interview transcripts, artifacts, criterion sampling, and rich description. Peer review from colleagues and member checks from participants in the study also provided triangulation validation.

Chapter Six presents findings of the study through answering research questions. Conclusions are drawn from the findings and implications for research, theory, and practice are addressed. Recommendations for future research are offered followed by a summary of the study.

Findings

The primary findings of this qualitative case study were that all research participants experienced specific issues that directed their perceptions of administration

leadership. When analyzed together, administration support, teacher morale, and teacher retention promote basic needs satisfaction, intrinsic motivation, and fully internalized extrinsic motivation for teachers, which in turn, for the most part, have encouraged longevity, job satisfaction, positive work attitudes, responsibility, and psychological well-being. The findings in this study were consistent with other studies on teacher morale indicating that administrative support may encourage teacher longevity in a school (Liu & Meyer, 2005; Madsen & Hancock, 2002; Tye & O'Brien, 2002; Ingersoll, 2000; Kersaint, et al, 2005).

While most teachers reported positive morale, there were some teachers who described morale as being low at Mealer. Teachers who reported low morale intimated the reason was due to a lack of support from administration. This lack of support stemmed from ill feelings from previous years' contract negotiations. The result of those negotiations was several good teachers left Mealer, and those who remained were fearful of losing their jobs. Therefore, teachers either avoided it as a topic of discussion, or mentioned it and then retracted their statements.

Research Question 1. How do teachers describe the morale in this school?

Most of the research participants reported that morale was high at Mealer Elementary School. Many teachers reported morale was linked to attitude and personal job satisfaction. Results from this study supplement literature that suggests teachers not only deserve to work in a respectful and professional environment (Weingarten, 2016), but also in one where teachers work collaboratively, teach creatively, and provide meaningful educational experiences to their students (Noddings, 2014). Furthermore, findings also support the literature regarding common advantages to high teacher morale

and reinforce the data identifying administration support (Houchard, 2005; Miller, 1981), personal satisfaction (Lumsden, 1998), and collegiality (Noddings, 2014), as significant motivators that promote teacher morale and longevity. Regardless of which teacher answered, the response was almost identical. Teachers enjoy working at Mealer Elementary for a variety of reasons, and that leads to high teacher morale.

The implication of this theme is that although morale is high for most teachers, there are some teachers who do not share that sentiment. Interview participants reported that currently the morale is high, but in the past, this was not the case. Some of the past morale issues were precipitated by workloads and unrealistic expectations.

Research Question 2. From teacher perspectives, how do leadership practices influence teacher morale?

Research (Houchard, 2005) found that morale can be cultivated by administration, and the theme of administration support was the second theme that came to light during this research. High performing schools have administrators who can articulate a vision and help teachers grow professionally (Eury, Snyder, & Melton, 2014). Administrators reinforce support by expressing empathy and focusing on strengths (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2014). Kersaint, et al., (2005) found that increased administrative support positively impacted teacher retention. Leadership remains one of the most powerful influences on teacher morale (Evans, 2001, 1998; Waters, et al., 2003).

The vast majority of teachers at Mealer Elementary feel supported by the administration. This stems from being treated as a professional, being offered opportunities for professional growth and improvement, and basic human empathy. Treating one another with such high levels of respect created a sense of family. Several

teachers mentioned the family connection when responding why they stay. Although nepotism is rampant in the district, in this case it seems to be a help rather than a hindrance to the success of educators.

Another topic of conversation included the administrators' faith. Multiple teachers mentioned the administrators are Christian men, and thus allow those beliefs to direct daily interactions with others. This was evident in not only the dialogue, where teachers and mentioned reliance on prayer, but also in the décor in the office. Subtle reminders to seek guidance from God hang on the walls, and there was a peaceful aura in the midst of the holiday chaos.

Research Question 3. How do leadership practices influence teacher decisions to remain at the school?

A number of studies have been conducted over the past twenty years to determine why teachers leave the profession (Richardson, 2014). Teachers surveyed at Mealer Elementary reported a variety of reasons as to why they remain. The third and fourth themes to surface during the study were autonomy and competence – both elements of self-determination theory.

Autonomy. Autonomy suggests personal freedom (Fernet, et al., 2011). Teachers at Mealer Elementary reported ample opportunities for autonomy in their work. Teachers are allowed autonomy to decorate their classroom to accommodate their own personal styles. They also are given freedom to construct lessons that utilize their gifts and talents, as long as those lessons are aligned with state educational standards. Teachers reported they collaborate to incorporate cross-curricular learning for their students, which incorporates the ultimate level of autonomy in the classroom. Due to this freedom,

creativity runs rampant throughout the school. Students have a variety of meaningful learning experiences both in and outside of class, which reflects the autonomy teachers are allowed in creating those lessons.

Competence. Competence is having the knowledge or ability to accomplish something successfully. Competence subscribes to the belief that one can influence life situations (Stone, et al., 2008). At Mealer Elementary, this is an expectation, not a bonus. Administrators expect teachers to not only know their subject content and state standards, but to appropriately and thoroughly teach those to students. Additionally, administrators fully support teachers in attending professional development conferences and workshops. Once attendees return to school, they lead a staff meeting where they share their newly gained knowledge. This not only promotes competence in the trainer, it also increases knowledge for the rest of the staff.

Research Question 4. How does self-determination theory explain teacher morale and retention in this school?

Self-determination theory (SDT) reinforces the belief that teachers are motivated by personal growth and interest in learning (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Teachers at Mealer expressed views associated with both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, which hold a place of prominence in discussing teacher morale. The importance of promoting conditions that support these feelings within the culture of the school cannot be overstated.

Extrinsic motivation is described as behavior performed to obtain an outcome separate from the activity (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). Multiple extrinsic motivational factors were mentioned as reasons teachers maintained high morale. For example, Buff

made the statement that she loves being at school, but she really enjoys her time off. She went so far as to say, “I really love snow days!” It was interesting to note that no one mentioned salary as a motivator. Dena mentioned the outward displays of affection she received from students as extrinsically motivating to her.

Intrinsic motivation is described as doing something for the fundamental satisfaction of doing it (Ryan & Deci, 2000). It was apparent throughout the study that teachers at Mealer Elementary School were intrinsically motivated by job satisfaction, a desire to be at school, and by making a difference in the lives of students. One participant stated, “I love my job and making a difference.” The administrators support other intrinsic rewards through words of affirmation.

The psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness that Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000) contend are essential factors for nurturing one’s natural tendencies for personal growth clearly relate to teacher morale and retention at Mealer Elementary through the evaluation of motivations reported in this study. These needs were addressed by participants, who reported how each of these affected their morale.

Autonomy. Strategies for enhancing autonomy included providing choice and meaningful rationales for learning activities, and minimizing pressure and control (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). It was important that administrators provide teachers meaningful feedback and materials to promote success and feelings of efficacy. Autonomy was achieved by teachers through creativity in the classroom, with both lesson preparation and in choice of personal décor. Teachers also acknowledged making their own duty schedule and organizing their time was instrumental in creating high teacher morale.

Competence. Teachers have an inherent psychological need to feel competent in relation to their environment (Deci, 2009). Strategies for enhancing competence include providing meaningful feedback and challenging tasks (Niemi & Ryan, 2009). It has been shown that increased perceptions of competence raise one's sense of internal motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), and feelings of competence arise when a person takes on a challenging task and then meets their personally designated challenge (Deci, 1995). The need for competence implies that teachers seek to be effective when interacting with their environment (Guay, et al., 2003).

In this study, teachers acknowledged competence through professional knowledge and skill by creating meaningful lesson plans and teaching state mandated standards. Teachers also mentioned professional development as an integral part of their competence.

Relatedness. Teachers feel a sense of relatedness with their peers, students, and administrators (Deci, 2009). Administrators and teachers work together to facilitate and incorporate strategies to improve teaching and learning within their school (Deci, 2009). Teachers and administrators must adopt structures and implement them within the school (Deci, 2009). Strategies for enhancing relatedness include conveying warmth, caring and respect to teachers (Niemi & Ryan, 2009).

Mealer's culture is based on respect and collegiality. At Mealer, this was accomplished through relationships with administration, staff, students, and stakeholders. Teachers repeatedly mentioned how the school unit felt like home and functioned as a family.

Research Question 5. What other factors led to teacher longevity in this school?

The final element of self-determination theory is relatedness. Relatedness occurs when one feels connected to others (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The atmosphere at Mealer Elementary is similar to the typical elementary--students whispering too loudly in the hall, teachers rushing to get copies from the office between classes, and administrators taking care of the latest emergency. But the aura is different. It does not feel frenetic, although there is chaos everywhere. Teachers have taken ownership of not only their students, but the entire school. Teachers lend assistance, often without being asked. They see a need and they fill it. Students who were not in a specific teacher's class greeted the teacher in the hallway with hugs and smiles. The atmosphere feels like home, which is exactly how several of the teachers describe it.

Relationships with other teachers and staff, students, and family aid in creating the home-like atmosphere at Mealer Elementary. There is a strong sense of belonging. Research participants mentioned how everyone welcomes newcomers to the staff. There is a camaraderie within the work family, and they support one another both in and out of school. The small town environment allows everyone to know everyone else.

Students at Mealer Elementary are polite and friendly. Teachers reported that although student achievement may be lacking in some areas, the students are performing at an average rate, according to the latest statistics from the state department. Putting students' needs ahead of their own was a recurring topic. Many teachers report they stay after hours to ensure students' safety until a parent or guardian can pick them up. Teachers also provide snacks or appropriate clothing for students when the situation warrants. The most compelling statement regarding relatedness was made by Kris, who stated, "...kids just love you like you are a celebrity or something..."

Research participants vacillated on parent and community support. Some mentioned support was good; others mentioned it was weak, and they could do better. The school has a Parent Faculty Club which intends to create the best possible learning environment for students. One participant mentioned the socio-economic level of the community as a gauge for support. She stated some years are better than others. Another teacher mentioned the lack of parenting skills of the parents directly related to how supportive they were to the school. It was noted by all research participants the parent and community support had room for improvement.

Conclusion

Since this is a qualitative study, one cannot conclude from this research that there is a cause and effect relationship between leadership and morale. However, there was evidence of a mutually supportive relationship among leaders and teachers, and this in turn, has bearing on the overall cultural atmosphere of the school. Study findings revealed that some themes were more instrumental than others in determining a teacher's choice to remain at Mealer Elementary, depending upon that teacher's experiences and perceptions. Therefore, the reasons teachers stayed was a result of the interaction of all factors combined. For example, important factors expressed by teachers included administration support, living and working in the Mealer district, and autonomy. Teachers enjoy living in the district and they remain in the school even though there are limitations in the community and its resources. Having autonomy to make decisions in the day-to-day operations of their classroom was important to teachers at Mealer. Having the support of peers both in and out of school was impactful for teachers. Teachers

appreciated the familial feel of those relationships, and many stayed because of the close bonds those relationships offered.

Another conclusion drawn from the findings was that salaries were not motivating factors. No one mentioned salary or benefits as a reason to stay at Mealer, even though surrounding districts have a higher salary schedule. The low socio-economic make-up of the community did not impact any of the teachers' decision to remain at Mealer. This conclusion contradicts findings of other studies (Betancourt-Smith, Inman & Marlow, 1994; Billingsly & Cross, 1992; Darling-Hammond, 1996; Futrell, 1999; Ingersoll, 2001; Langdon, 1996; and Richardson, 2014) which showed salary was the main reason teachers chose to remain at a school.

Implications

The implications for the findings of this case study were presented by five research questions. The remainder of this chapter addresses the significance of these implications.

For Research

This study highlights the need for additional research into teacher morale and administration leadership as they relate to longevity at the school. Throughout this study, participants stated they have something special. It would be interesting to understand why teachers in other locales choose to remain at their school, and to see if they too, "have something special." Two recommendations for future research include (a) quantitative research comparison study of the middle school and high school in the district, and (b) a qualitative case study using purposeful sampling to select participants based upon similar

demographics. Showcasing the results of those similar studies would increase attention to the small collection of current research that focuses on teacher morale as it relates to longevity.

For Theory

Findings demonstrate that self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) is pertinent to the context of teacher longevity. Applying SDT in this way provides a structure for considering the barriers and supports regarding teacher retention in public schools and furthers the scope of the theory. Finally, this study supports the idea of morale impacting a teacher's decision to remain in a school district due to the continued support of school administration.

For Practice

There are multiple implications for practice to those working in public schools. First, administrators responsible for supporting teachers should consider the importance of a teacher's sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as those factors directly impact morale. Second, this study may be beneficial to career educators, especially at the school and school district where it was conducted. This study could provide insight into how longevity affects not only the school, but also the impact on the community as a whole. Also, the feeling of 'home' this school community experiences could provide guidance to positive relationship-building for other schools. Finally, both school leadership and teachers need to be cognizant of the many factors that influence a teacher's morale, whether it be positively or negatively impacted, and use this study to make needed changes to eliminate any morale collapse in the school.

Recommendations

The results of this research study provided an in-depth view into the perspective of elementary teachers' morale issues and the roles administration played in their decision to stay at that school. Further studies should be conducted to collect additional data to gain a more thorough understanding of how administrative leadership influences a teacher's decision to remain employed at a school. There is also a need for further research on this topic; therefore, the recommendations for future studies are based on the methodology and results of the qualitative case study. The results of this study will be shared with administration and staff of Mealer Elementary School. Sharing the results will demonstrate the influence leadership has on teacher morale at the school. This sharing and review of data may motivate other teachers to remain in the district for the duration of their careers. A better understanding of teacher morale and leadership influences may help to cement the commitment of administration to continue to support all teachers, especially career teachers.

Summary

Mealer Elementary has a collaborative and stable teaching staff. The administration has focused on creating a supportive, autonomous, and relationship-based school where most teachers come and choose to stay until retirement.

Chapter Two reviewed the literature on teacher morale and the factors that influence a teacher's choice to stay in a job. Chapter Three described the qualitative case study methodology selected for this study. Mealer Elementary was selected for the study based on the low teacher attrition. Data collection occurred during the fall semester of the

2018-2019 school year, and included interviews, observations, artifact collection and review, and website information. Data collected were analyzed using methods of triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Selection of self-determination theory was done prior to conducting the study, and provided a lens through which to analyze teacher responses. The epistemological perspective used to guide this study was post-positivism.

Chapter Four presented a thick, rich description of Mealer Elementary. Chapter Five analyzed these interactions through the lens of self-determination theory espoused by Deci & Ryan (1985, 2000, 2002, 2009), and featured the following: autonomy, relatedness, competence, intrinsic motivation, and extrinsic motivation.

Findings confirmed that one single factor was not responsible for improving teacher morale, but rather a combination of factors contribute to a teacher's decision to remain employed at the school. Some elements were more influential than others, such as intrinsic motivation, which is the origin of inspiration for teachers to teach.

Findings also revealed that teacher morale was enhanced by supportive administration. Administrators encourage teachers to the point where teachers want to teach for them. Understanding the school cohesiveness contributes to the school leadership's ability to create a familial atmosphere where staff and students feel welcome. Chapter Six concluded with implications for research, theory, and practice and recommendations for future research. This study adds to the available research on teacher morale and leadership practices. This study shows that there is a connection between teacher morale and leadership practices that influences a teacher's decision to remain at that school.

Overall, this study supported and expanded the literature base regarding teacher morale and teacher retention. While the participants' perceptions of their own morale varied from positive to negative, the majority of participants viewed the administration leadership favorably, and noted they were the reason teachers remain. In the end, participants clearly stated leadership practices do in fact direct a teacher's decision to stay at a particular school for the entirety of their career. This study also shows self-determination theory to be applicable to teacher retention and indicates that administration leadership can be important in teachers' decisions to remain employed at a school for an extended period of time.

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APPENDIX A

Consent form from IRB

ADULT CONSENT FORM OKLAHOMA STATE UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE:

TEACHER MORALE AND TEACHER RETENTION IN A RURAL SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

INVESTIGATOR:

Elsie C. Morris, Doctoral Candidate, School Administration, Oklahoma State University

PURPOSE:

This study will examine the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates.

PROCEDURES

Potential participants will complete a short online questionnaire to determine if they fit the study parameters. This study is designed to last approximately 2 hours. The time will be divided by a 5 minute online survey, a 1 hour interview, and a 30 minute follow up, as needed. Notes will be written during the interview and follow up, if needed. An audio tape of the interview and subsequent dialogue will be made.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION:

There are no known risks associated with this project which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

BENEFITS OF PARTICIPATION:

If you are interested, we will send you a copy of the results of the study when it is finished.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

The records of this study will be kept private. Any written results will discuss group findings and will not include information that will identify you. Research records will be stored on a password protected computer in a locked office and only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Data will be destroyed three years after the study has been completed. Audio tapes will be transcribed and destroyed within 5 days of the interview.

CONTACTS :

You may contact the researcher at the following addresses and phone numbers, should you desire to discuss your participation in the study and/or request information about the results of the study: First Name Last Name, Ph.D., _____ Hall, Dept. of _____ Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078, (405) ____-____. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer, you may contact the IRB Office at 223 Scott Hall, Stillwater, OK 74078, 405-744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu.



Approved: 12/05/2018
Expires: 12/04/2019
Protocol #: ED-18-149

APPENDIX B

Survey Protocol Directions

Dear Participant:

Thank you for agreeing to share your experiences for the research study *Teacher Morale and Teacher Retention in a Rural School: A Case Study*. Your participation may benefit researchers, other school administrators, and the school districts who employ them.

The first step of this study involves identifying participants for the study utilizing an online survey:

SURVEY MONKEY –

How many years have you taught at Mealer Elementary School?

Are you willing to answer questions related to your employment at Mealer Elementary School?

What pseudonym would you like to use for the study?

What email address would you like to be contacted through?

Thank you again for participating in this study.

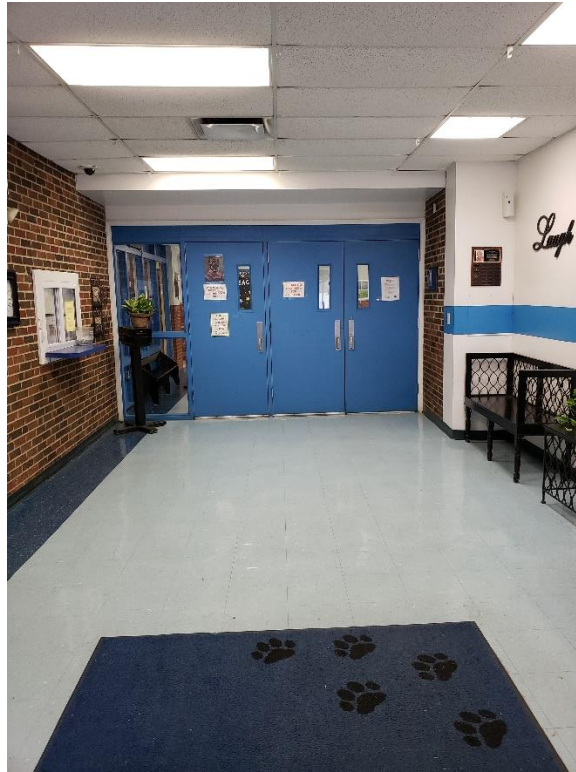
Sincerely,

Elsie C. Morris
Doctoral Candidate, School Administration
Oklahoma State University



Approved: 12/05/2018
Expires: 12/04/2019
Protocol #: ED-18-149

APPENDIX C



Front entrance of Mealer Elementary School



APPENDIX D

Participant Consent Form



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, HEALTH AND AVIATION

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

TEACHER MORALE AND RETENTION IN A RURAL SCHOOL: A CASE STUDY

Key Information

Study Purpose: The purpose of this study is to describe the interrelationship of teacher morale and leadership practices within a rural school with high teacher retention rates.

Major Procedures of the Study: You will be pre-screened via Survey Monkey online survey. Once identified as a participant, you will be contacted via email to set up an interview time. The interview will be audio recorded.

Duration of Participation: The data collection will occur from November 2018-December 2018.

Significant Risks: There are no known risks to participation other than those encountered in everyday life.

Potential Benefits: Your participation may benefit researchers, other school administrators, and the school districts who employ them.

Compensation: None

Background Information

You are invited to be in a research study of teacher morale as it relates to teacher retention in a rural school. You were selected as a participant because you have been employed at Alexander Elementary School for more than ten years.

We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

This study is being conducted by: Elsie Morris, Oklahoma State University doctoral candidate, College of Education, Health and Aviation, School Administration, under the direction of Dr. Ed Harris, School of Educational Foundations, Leadership and Aviation, Oklahoma State University.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following things:

1. The online survey is a pre-screener for participating in the interview process. If you agree to participate in this project, please answer the questions as best you can. It should take 3-5 minutes to complete. Please follow the link to the survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WWKN9Z2>.

SURVEY MONKEY QUESTIONS:

- How many years have you taught at Alexander Elementary School?
 - Are you willing to answer questions related to your employment at Alexander Elementary School?
 - What pseudonym would you like to use for the study?
 - What email address would you like to be contacted through?
2. You will be contacted via the email address you provide to set up an interview date/time.
 3. I will visit you at your school and visit with you about your morale. This meeting will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. You will be audio recorded.
 4. If follow-up questions are needed, I will contact you via email for an additional meeting time.

Participation in the study involves the following time commitment: The interview process will last no more than one hour of your time.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

There are no known risks associated with this project, which are greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life.

There are no direct benefits to you. More broadly, this study may help the researchers learn more about teacher morale as it relates to teacher retention and may help future researchers, school administrators and others in employment decisions when hiring staff.



Approved: 12/05/2018
Expires: 12/04/2019
Protocol #: ED-18-149

Compensation

You will receive no payment for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a code number/pseudonym. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

We will collect your information through in person interviews, audio recordings, and your pre-screening online survey. This information will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a restricted-access office on an encrypted flash drive. Any identifiers will be destroyed by February 28, 2019. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the code list linking names to study numbers will be destroyed. This is expected to occur no later than February 28, 2019. Audio recordings and other data collected will be destroyed by February 28, 2019. The audio recordings will be transcribed. The recording will be deleted after the transcription is complete and verified. This process should take approximately six weeks. This informed consent form will be kept for three years after the study is complete, and then it will be destroyed. Your data collected as part of this research project, will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

The research team works to ensure confidentiality to the degree permitted by technology. It is possible, although unlikely, that unauthorized individuals could gain access to your responses because you are responding online. However, your participation in this online survey involves risks similar to a person's everyday use of the internet. If you have concerns, you should consult the survey provider privacy policy at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/mp/legal/privacy-policy/>.

It is unlikely, but possible, that others responsible for research oversight may require us to share the information you give us from the study to ensure that the research was conducted safely and appropriately. We will only share your information if law or policy requires us to do so.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your participation in this research is voluntary. There is no penalty for refusal to participate, and you are free to withdraw your consent and participation in this project at any time. The alternative is to not participate. You can skip any questions that make you uncomfortable and can stop the interview/survey at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate in this study will not affect your employment.

Contacts and Questions

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the protection of human research participants at Oklahoma State University has reviewed and approved this study. If you have questions about the research study itself, please contact the Principal Investigator at (918) 507-1614 or elsie.morris@okstate.edu. If you have questions about your rights as a research volunteer or would simply like to speak with someone other than the research team about concerns regarding this study, please contact the IRB at (405) 744-3377 or irb@okstate.edu. All reports or correspondence will be kept confidential.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have my questions answered. I consent to participate in the study.

Indicate Yes or No:
I give consent to be audiotaped during this study.
 Yes No

I give consent to be contacted for follow-up in this study or future similar studies:
 Yes No

Written Informed Consent:

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Signature of Investigator: _____

Date: _____



Approved: 12/05/2018
Expires: 12/04/2019
Protocol #: ED-18-149

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

1. Please explain your educational background.
2. Explain what the work atmosphere is like at Mealer Elementary School.
3. How has the atmosphere changed since you have been working here?
4. Describe the student-teacher relationships at MES.
5. Describe the teacher-teacher relationships at MES.
6. Describe the teacher-parent/community support at MES.
7. Describe the administration-teacher relationships at MES.
8. How are you allowed to make decisions in your daily teaching activities?
9. What issues do you consider when making decisions in the classroom?
10. Describe how kinship with your colleagues and students create a cohesive work environment.
11. Describe how you control your work environment.
12. How would you characterize the administrative leadership at MES?

APPENDIX F

Interview Questions

Pseudonym: _____

1. Please explain your educational background.
2. Explain what the work atmosphere is like at Mealer Elementary School.
3. How has the atmosphere changed since you have been working here?
4. Describe the student-teacher relationships at MES.
5. Describe the teacher-teacher relationships at MES.
6. Describe the teacher-parent/community support at MES.
7. Describe the administration-teacher relationships at MES.
8. How are you allowed to make decisions in your daily teaching activities?
9. What issues do you consider when making decisions in the classroom?
10. Describe how kinship with your colleagues and students create a cohesive work environment.
11. Describe how you control your work environment.
12. How would you characterize the administrative leadership at MES?
13. What are the most memorable examples of administrative support you have had at Mealer Elementary School?
14. What other information would you like for me to know about MES that I have not asked yet?

APPENDIX G

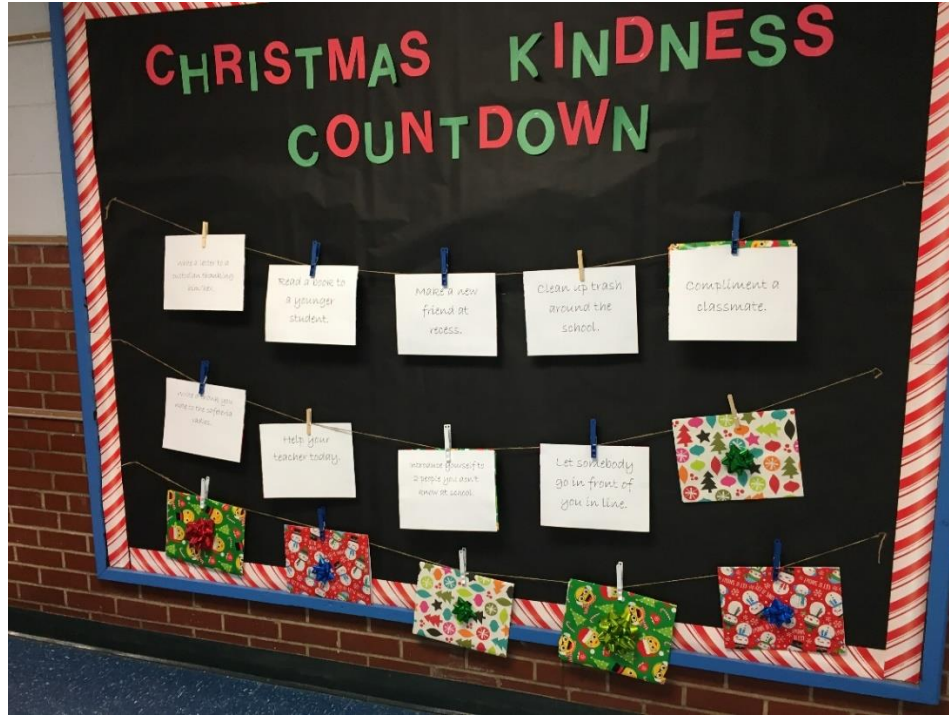


Sally's Reading Garden

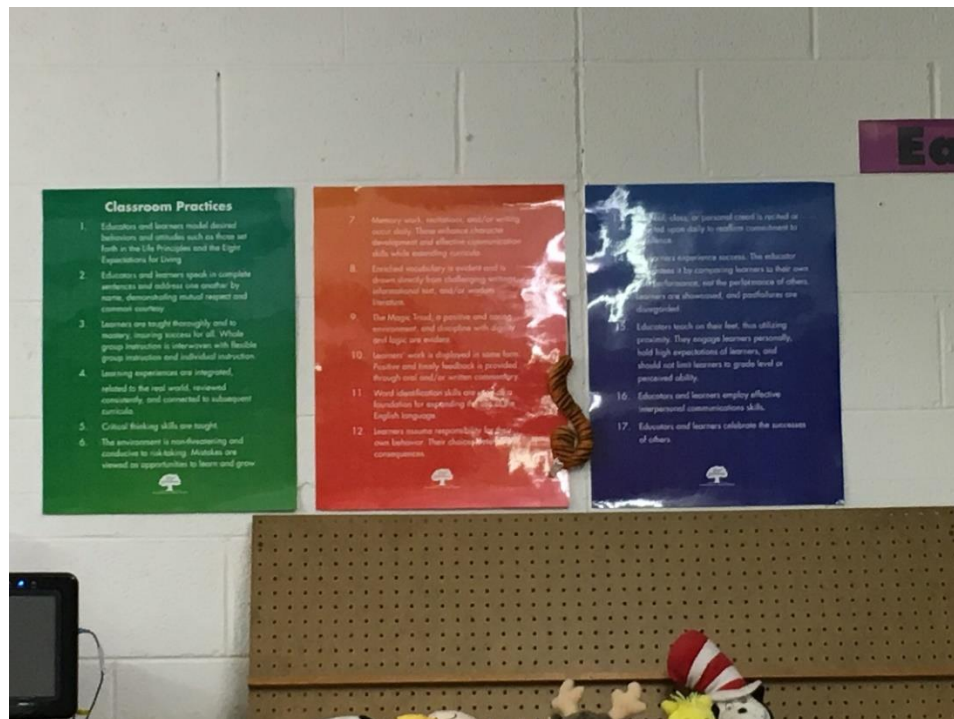


Kathryn's Classroom

APPENDIX H



Motivational Posters



VITA

Elsie C. Morris

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Dissertation: TEACHER MORALE AND TEACHER RETENTION IN A RURAL
SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

Major Field: School Administration

Biographical:

Education:

Completed the requirements for the Doctor of Education in School
Administration at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in May,
2019.

Completed the requirements for the Master of Science in Secondary Education
at University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas in 2012.

Completed the requirements for the Bachelor of Science in Organizational
Management at John Brown University, Siloam Springs, Arkansas in 1997.

Experience:

Joplin Schools – 2016 - Present

Franklin Technology Center –Special Services Coord. 2018 – Present

Joplin High School – Family & Consumer Sciences Instructor 2016 - 2018

Jay Public Schools – 2015 - 2016

Jay Middle School – Reading Language Arts Instructor

Tahlequah Public Schools – 2006 – 2015

Tahlequah High School - Family & Consumer Sciences Instructor

Professional Memberships:

National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT) 2011 & Kappa Delta Pi

National Education Association

Missouri Education Association & Joplin National Education Association

ACTE & MoACTE