

EVOLVING JOB DEMANDS: HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TAKE CARE
OF THEMSELVES TO SUPPORT THEIR RESILIENCY AND RETENTION

By Heidi A. Lindsay

A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education
in Educational Leadership

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

Approved:

Frank Davidson, Ed.D., Chair

Karen Benson, Ph.D.

Andi Furlis, Ed.D.

Thomas Hughes, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

EVOLVING JOB DEMANDS: HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES TO SUPPORT THEIR RESILIENCY AND RETENTION

HEIDI A. LINDSAY

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. Work intensification and subsequent stressors for school principals are not a recent phenomenon; however, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and staff coupled with the pandemic-era national political climate have created an unprecedented context for educational leaders. There is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress, including female school leaders who are more susceptible to job-related stress, and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. The aim was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention.

Participants included eight female elementary school principals within two districts located in the Phoenix metropolitan area. This qualitative study captured data from participants through a preliminary demographic survey and one-to-one interviews. Interviews were semi-structured with questions aligned to the three research questions guiding this study. Research question 1 addressed principals experienced with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic. Findings revealed participant well-being is being negatively impacted by job-related stress, and this stress has worsened since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Stressors of staffing and balancing teacher well-being, student discipline, parents, district initiatives, rebounding from the pandemic, and personal tragedies all surfaced as themes. Job-related stress was found to negatively impact participants within and outside of the workplace

through moods, behaviors, feelings of isolation, impacts to relationships with loved ones, and inability to disengage. Research question 2 addressed the coping strategies used by participants to mitigate job-related stress. Participants identified multiple ways they cope with the stress they experience which included the themes of establishing boundaries, time with family and friends, exercise, and reflection/mindsets. Research question 3 addressed whether stress-coping experiences influenced their desire to remain in their role. While the majority of participants described their deep commitment to the educational field, they shared how their stress-coping strategies are not enough to support a desire to remain in their principal roles long-term.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would have not been possible without the support from so many. I would like to express my gratitude to the following:

- To my Committee Chair, Dr. Frank Davidson, whose professional guidance, support and feedback, and constant encouragement helped me get to the finish line. Thank you for encouraging me to pursue this important research topic.
- To my Committee, Dr. Thomas Hughes, Dr. Karen Benson, and Dr. Andria Furlis, your wisdom and mentorship have meant so much to me throughout the doctoral program, and through our shared profession.
- To Dr. Edie Hartin, the editor of all editors! I am blessed to have been one of your lasts before your well-deserved retirement.
- To my NAU doctoral cohort, wow, did we do something productive during the pandemic! Thank you for being my accountability partners, I'm so proud of you.
- To my work families, Imagine Schools and the Higley Unified School District, for their support, encouragement, and grace throughout this process. You know who you are!
- To my fur babies, Oliver and Rosie, for taking this journey with me as my faithful study buddies.
- And, finally, for those who've helped with my own stress mitigation; my loving family, my amazing friends, Orangetheory Fitness, and the Dave Matthews Band.

“Come and relax now

Put your troubles down

No need to bear the weight of your worries

Just let them all fall away”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
Statement of the Problem.....	5
Purpose of the Study	7
Research Questions	7
Significance of the Study	7
Definitions of Terms	8
Acronyms Used.....	12
Assumptions.....	12
Limitations	13
Delimitations.....	13
Summary	14
Organization of the Study	14
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW	16
Evolution of the Role of School Principal	18
An Evolving Role	18
Work Intensification	18
Impact of COVID-19	19
Stress and Burnout	21
Theory of Stress	21
Occupational Stress of School Principals	23
Burnout	24
Compassion Fatigue.....	25
Sacrifice Syndrome, Dissonance, and Power Stress.....	26
Social Support.....	27
Principal Retention.....	28
Impact of Turnover	28
Competitive Salary.....	32
Expanding Challenges	33
Policy Implications	34
Coping with the Stresses of Leadership.....	35
Mindfulness.....	36
Mindful Leadership.....	37
Self-Care	40
Social Emotional Learning for Principals.....	41

Researcher Conceptual Framework	44
Summary of Literature Review	45
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY	47
Restatement of the Problem	48
Restatement of the Research Questions	49
Research Design.....	49
Population and Sample	52
Informed Consent.....	53
Data Collection Procedures.....	54
Instrumentation	55
Data Analysis	57
Coding.....	58
Reliability and Validity	59
Reflexivity.....	60
Summary	61
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS	63
Participant Information	63
Research Question 1 (RQ1) Results	66
IQ3	67
Staffing and Balancing Teacher Well-Being	67
Student Discipline	70
Parents.....	71
District Initiatives.....	73
IQ4	75
Supporting Staff Well-Being	75
Rebounding.....	76
Personal Tragedies	78
IQ5	78
Exhaustion.....	79
Short Tempered.....	79
Significant Health Issues.....	79
Other Symptoms	80
IQ6	80
Mood and Work Behavior Changes.....	80
Feelings of Isolation.....	81

IQ7	83
Family	83
Unable to Disengage	84
RQ1 Summary	86
Research Question 2 (RQ2) Results	88
IQ8	89
Established Boundaries	89
Reflection/Mindset.....	93
Other Findings	95
RQ2 Summary	95
Research Question 3 (RQ3) Results	96
IQ9	96
Love	96
Open to Other Opportunities in the Education Field	97
Changing Roles	98
RQ3 Summary	100
Chapter Summary	101
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	103
Summary of the Study	104
Summary of the Findings and Conclusions	105
Implications and Recommendations for Practice	109
Recommendations for Future Studies	110
Closing Remarks	111
REFERENCES	112
APPENDICES	
APPENDIX A: NAU IRB APPROVAL	119
APPENDIX B: DISTRICT APPROVALS.....	121
APPENDIX C: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT APPROVALS ...	128
APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, SCRIPT, AND QUESTIONS.....	131
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION.....	134

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
1 Wells' Leadership Actions.....	39
2 Research Questions, Sources of Information, and Data Analysis	62
3 Participant Demographics.....	65
4 Participant Identified Stress Levels	66

LIST OF FIGURES

FIGURE	PAGE
1 The Prosocial School Leader	44
2 Conceptual Framework of Principal Vulnerability	45
3 Conceptual Framework of Principal Resiliency to Stress.....	45

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to all of the devoted school principals I have had the opportunity to serve past, present, and future. I am humbled by your service to students, staff, and the community.

This work is also dedicated to my family. To my parents, Bob and Linda, who have always supported my aspirations and have provided encouragement at every step.

To my Lily, I strive to model for you that with determination, hard work, and belief in yourself, you can do anything you set your mind to accomplish.

To my supportive and loving husband, Zach, this achievement would have not been possible without your encouragement and help. Thank you for always being my cheerleader.

I love you all more than words.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Responsibilities and expectations of school principals have intensified considerably during the lifespan of American schooling. From being a “principal teacher” in the 1920s, principals in the 2020s are responsible for, among other things, increasing student achievement levels while valuing unique learning styles and special needs, supporting their faculty to improve their practices, keeping students and staff safe from harmful external and internal forces, addressing the mental health needs of students and staff, and working with limited resources and lean budgets. Principals are highly vulnerable to occupational stress as they lead in an environment in which many of the stressors are unpredictable, uncontrollable, or both. While education leaders accept that the very nature of the principalship comes with an acceptance of increased stressors, they often fail to recognize the toll stress takes on their well-being and their job effectiveness. Although stress impacts beginning and veteran principals, urban and rural principals, male and female principals, and so on, there is evidence that female leaders serving in urban, high poverty areas are more vulnerable than others (Dake, 2021; Steiner, et al., 2022).

Along with growing accountabilities, school principals are also leading during a time in which K-12 education in the United States has become highly politicized over issues such as equity and justice, school choice, student discipline, technology integration, curriculum, social emotional learning, and funding. While principal preparation programs are designed to instruct aspiring leaders in education law, supervision, curriculum development, leadership theory, school finance, etc., much of the learning comes from daily experiences. This includes learning to lead during times of crisis. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic brought new meaning to crisis management in K-12 education. Educational leaders had to immediately respond to government lockdown orders in response to the fears of the spreading COVID-19 virus and

develop new approaches to provide instruction and other school services to students remotely, a monumental task that exposed inequities of the system. McLeod & Dulsky (2021) described the beginning of this unprecedented experience:

Although principals and superintendents are used to handling smaller crises such as fights in the hallway, a leaky boiler, irate parents, disagreements over budgetary choices, or even a scandal concerning a local educator, most school leaders have never dealt with a crisis of this scale and this scope for this long. Even the immediacy of larger crises that often force school closures—such as a large snowstorm, a hurricane, or a school shooting—typically expires after a few days or weeks. Like no other crisis before, the COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated the deficiencies of our educational systems and the lack of administrator preparation regarding crisis leadership.

Coupled with the pandemic, educators also found themselves navigating the national reckoning with racial and social injustices and divisive elections, from the federal level to their local school boards. School leaders are contending with how to meaningfully address social justice and political differences. A 2021 study by the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) demonstrated how the principalship is changing:

The principals said that the pandemic, policy violence, and hate crimes highlighted schools' roles in creating more socially just communities. First, students living in poverty and students of color were disproportionately affected by the pandemic and faced new limitations when attempting to get to school or access virtual learning. Second, many principals said that the national conversation about racism divided some communities and prompted educators to question their beliefs about whether or how schools may have contributed to such inequities. As one Minnesota principal said, 'Most of our faculty are

White, and we serve a mainly Black community. So, when [the George Floyd murder] occurred, we looked at ourselves and questioned ourselves.’ (as cited in Clifford & Coggshal, 2021, p. 7)

The pandemic and societal issues are having an impact on student well-being and teacher retention. In May 2022, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported 70% of U.S. public schools have reported an increase in students seeking mental health services since the start of the pandemic, and 76% of schools also reported an increase in staff voicing concerns about their students exhibiting symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and trauma (para. 1). Concurrent with the pandemic, spikes in job resignations across multiple industries eventually dubbed the “Great Resignation” began in 2020 (Smith, 2022). This phenomenon has significantly impacted the United States education system with educators leaving the field in record numbers. August 2022 news headlines sounded the alarm with a reported 300,000 teachers and other staff leaving the field between February 2020 and May 2022, a nearly 3% drop in that workforce, and a proportionate number of teacher vacancies heading into the 2022-2023 school year (Dill, 2022, para. 2).

A Forbes 2021 article provided insight as to the vicious cycle of teachers who are overworked and not able to devote the time needed to connect and reconnect with their students. Loss of connection was experienced by many students during the pandemic impacting their social emotional health. Without connection, students’ learning and performance also suffer, leading to more teacher burnout (Perna, 2021). Perna warned of three immediate issues that will have long term impacts in education’s future of a drop in: young people entering the profession, education quality, and student graduation rates.

School principals are feeling the weight of these challenges. According to a 2022 RAND Survey, 85% of principals report frequent job stress and 48% report burnout (as cited in Steiner et al., 2022, p. 5). In comparison, 73% of teachers and 35% of other working adults report frequent job stress (p. 5). These figures are consistent with the 2021 RAND survey data suggesting the toll the pandemic has taken on the well-being of educators (p. 5). The sources of their stress stem from filling vacancies, supporting the mental health and well-being of teachers and staff, and addressing students increased academic and social-emotional needs. The survey's outcomes reported principals (and teachers) have worse well-being than other working adults, and that well-being was especially poor among female principals (and teachers) including those of color, and those serving high-poverty schools (Steiner et al., 2022). Consistent with 2021 results, there is a connection between job-related stress, lack of ability to cope, and retention. Those who report stress, burnout, and are not coping well are more likely to leave their position, regardless of their background characteristics. (Steiner et al., 2022). However, the survey also found that two-thirds of the educators who report frequent job-related stress state they are coping well (p. 18). Positive relationships with their colleagues as mental health supports help them cope with the stress of their jobs. As part of the recommendations for district leaders, RAND (2022) suggests a renewed focus on building supportive culture, camaraderie among staff, and that educators are provided resources and opportunities to support their mental health and well-being and that these resources are long-lasting, not just as a response to the pandemic. Although a growing number of employers, including school systems, provide mental health supports, many educators don't know about them or were unsure if/how to access (as cited in Steiner et al., 2022).

The pandemic has caused significant tragedy and challenges for people across the globe, and there has been an increased awareness about the importance of mental health and well-being. Although there is a drastic need to improve treatment and access to mental health resources, the general conversation, encouragement, and support for taking care of one's mental health needs have grown (Bork & Gendelman, 2020). Bork & Gendelman (2020) advocated:

Leaders from all sectors need to talk about and help normalize the communal trauma that many Americans, both infected and not infected with COVID-19, may experience as the country begins to recover. Mental health issues affect all of us, either directly or indirectly through family members, friends, colleagues, or others. (p. 9)

One of the recommended universal approaches to addressing post pandemic mental health include promoting mental health wellness and reducing distress through adequate sleep, healthy diet and exercise, mindfulness-based programs (i.e., yoga), and awareness about mental health issues (Vadivel et al., 2021). While the conversation of the importance of taking charge of one's own well-being is becoming more common, more support and information is needed for educators. As an example, this principal summarizes the challenge:

I am good at professing. I am horrible at doing it myself. I just haven't been able to figure out how to do it. I always want to take that stress and anxiety off the shoulders of those with whom I'm working.... I haven't been able to figure out how to release it from myself yet. I haven't had a break since the pandemic started—and that's by choice. I am more of a caretaker of others. (Sullivan, 2022, Searching for a Salve section, para. 8).

Statement of the Problem

The work intensification and subsequent stressors for school principals are not a recent phenomenon; concerns for the levels of stress principals experience on a daily basis have been

studied for the last 40 years (Wells, 2013b, p. 335). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and staff coupled with the pandemic-era national political climate have created an unprecedented context for educational leaders. As will be illustrated in Chapter 2, there is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. The NAESP 2021 study suggested that the role of the principal has evolved significantly since the onset of the pandemic and that principals have identified the need, in part, for more opportunities to learn how to manage stress and engage in self-care under conditions of uncertainty (Clifford & Coggshal, 2021). Despite this, historically, school leaders tend to reason that their personal sacrifice is important for the success of the students, staff, and school they serve and often neglect self-care behaviors for the sake of their work (Ray et al., 2020).

Are principals at greater risk of neglecting their own well-being now following the pandemic than they were with full plates ahead of the crisis? It is an important consideration for principal retention as four of every 10 expect to leave the profession in the next three years (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2021). The ways in which school principals are navigating job-related stress, specifically females who are more vulnerable to occupational stress, demands attention. While job-related stress is widespread among all principals, female principals, and those of color, report worse well-being than their peers (Steiner, 2022, p. 22). Additionally, principals serving in high-poverty elementary schools are less likely to report resilience than their peers in nonurban and secondary schools (Steiner, 2022, p. 18). Therefore, attention on the well-being of female elementary school principals, including those of color, serving students living in high poverty is needed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. The researcher chose this form of investigation to better understand the current stressors affecting school leaders, how those stressors impact them within and outside of the workplace, how they cope with those stressors, and if stress is impacting their desire to remain in their role. By interviewing female elementary principals in communities within the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area, the researcher described the occupational stress and self-care strategies employed to support well-being and resiliency. The aim was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided this investigation of school principals' occupational stress and personal well-being.

1. What are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in?
3. Do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role?

Significance of the Study

The 2021 Wallace Report found that the impact of an effective principal is broader and stronger than previously thought and called for new renewed attention on research of school principals (Grissom et al., 2021). Their findings confirmed the way principals approach school leadership directly affects schools' outcomes. This study adds to the body of literature on school

principal wellness and retention and support growing research on COVID-19 pandemic implications in K-12 schools. This study demonstrates relevancy across industries as the United States continues the conversation around the importance of mental health and well-being. Educational leaders are aware of how their own practices and leadership traits may impact their overall job satisfaction, effectiveness, and length of service in the field. This research adds to the literature in providing educational leaders with an enhanced understanding of how their peers identify and combat stress to support principal well-being and retention. Those supporting the ongoing development of school principals may find opportunities to weave findings into organizational practice and professional development.

Definition of Terms

The following terms and definitions are applicable to this phenomenological study.

Burnout: Burnout is a syndrome resulting from chronic workplace stress that is not successfully managed. It includes feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion, increased mental distance from one's job, or feelings of negativism or cynicism related to one's job; and/or reduced professional efficacy (World Health Organization [WHO], 2019).

Bracketing: Also known as epoché, bracketing is the process of suspending one's preconceptions or learned feelings about a phenomenon to experience its essence (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

Coding: The process of aggregating the text or visual data into smaller categories of information, seeking evidence for the code from data in the study, and assigning a label to the code (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Compassion Fatigue: Daily exposure to others' trauma which may result in secondary-traumatic stress is known as compassion fatigue, and is summarized as the weariness that comes from caring (Johnson, 2020).

Emotional Intelligence: Emotional intelligence drives leadership performance through an array of skills and characteristics within two competency domains; personal and social. Personal competence includes self-awareness (strengths, limits, and confidence) and self-management (emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative, and optimism). Social competence includes social awareness (empathy, organizational awareness, and service) and relationship management (ability to motivate, influence, develop others to support growth, changes, conflict, collaboration, teambuilding, and building of relationships) (Goleman, et al., 2002).

Essence: Essence within phenomenology is the commonality of the experience across research participants, the invariant structure of an experience (Johnson & Christensen, 2019).

Horizontalization: The data analysis process in which researchers go through data and highlight significant statements or quotes that provide an understanding of participant's experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

In Vivo Coding: The process of coding in which label names are the exact words used by participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Member Checking: A technique for exploring the credibility of results from data collection. Data are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Mindfulness: Mindfulness is defined as a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting feelings, thoughts,

and bodily sensations (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Boyatzis & McKee (2005), described it as “the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences inside the self—body, mind, heart, spirit—and to pay full attention to what is happening around us—people, the nature world, our surroundings, and events” (p. 113).

Phenomenology: Phenomenology is a qualitative research method that seeks to find the common meaning of a concept or phenomenon experienced by several individuals.

Phenomenology includes a strong element of philosophy (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Phenomenological Reduction: Phenomenological reduction is the intentional consciousness the researcher takes to suspend (bracket) judgements to focus on the analysis of experience (Peoples, 2021).

Power Stress: Power stress is chronic stress that occurs when leaders feel additional pressure when their work is personally important, risky, and has others watching or critiquing as the leader seeks to make the right decisions and influence others (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Resiliency: Resilience is the capacity to face adversity, setbacks, and trauma, and then recover in order to live life fully. Resilient leaders are able to sustain their energy level under pressure, cope with disruptive changes, and adapt accordingly (Murphy, 2011).

Resonant Leadership: Resonant leadership involves emotionally intelligent leaders who are present and mindful of their emotional needs, have the ability to inspire hope, show great compassion and empathy for their staff, and all the while being in tune with the issues around them (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005)

Sacrifice Syndrome: Sacrifice syndrome happens when leaders are cut off from relationships and support and are struggling with dissonance and distress, which is contagious and spreads (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Self-care Practices: For purposes of this study, the researcher has kept the definition open to be answered by participants; however, it is noted that many studies mention the practice of mindfulness as a self-care practice to reduce stress (Klocko & Wells, 2015; Mahfouz et al., 2019; Mahfouz & Richardson, 2021; Ray et al., 2020, Wells, 2015).

Social Intelligence: Social intelligence is a set of interpersonal competencies, built on specific neural circuits, that inspire people to be effective. The brain's mirror neurons enable a person to reproduce the emotions he or she detects in others and, as a result, have an instant sense of shared experience. Social intelligence encompasses both interpersonal awareness and social ability (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008).

Stress: Stress is defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain and is the body's response to something that requires attention or action. While everyone experiences stress, the way people respond varies, impacting well-being (WHO, 2021).

Structural Description: A structural description is a description of the context or setting influencing how participants experienced a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Textual Description: A textual description is a description of what the participants experienced during a phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Themes: Also known as categories, themes are broad units of information that consist of several codes aggregated to form a common idea (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transcendental Phenomenology: Transcendental Phenomenology is a type of phenomenology that focuses on the description of the experience of participants. The researcher sets aside their own experiences (called epoché or bracketing), as much as possible, in order to have a fresh prospective of the phenomenon. Lived experience data are analyzed utilizing

phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meaning (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Well-Being: Well-being is the state of being happy, healthy, or prosperous (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Work Intensification: Work intensification describes the increased efforts that individuals must put into their jobs as a result of either economic or societal pressures (Green & McIntosh, 2001).

Acronyms Used

MBSR: Mindfulness-based stress reduction

NAESP: National Association of Elementary School Principals

NASSP: National Association of Secondary School Principals

SEC: social and emotional competencies

SEL: social and emotional learning

STS: Secondary-traumatic stress

WHO: World Health Organization

Assumptions

It was assumed that in order to explore lived experiences of school principals coping with stress, phenomenology was the most appropriate methodology for this study. It was assumed that there is vulnerability for participants to talk about their mental health, including stress, as public stigma and self-stigma exist regarding mental health issues. Therefore, the researcher ensured privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality for participants and utilized data collection through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. While it was assumed that participants were honest and reflective about their experiences, the stigma around mental health may have impacted

transparency. Finally, the assumption was that each participant would complete the study, but they were offered the opportunity to exit at any time if needed.

Limitations

There were a few limitations that impacted this study. The sample size was small and not randomized, limiting generalizability. Additionally, the sample did not include any female principals of color, and each participant's school had varying percentages of Title I students determining poverty level.

Interviewer bias was an additional potential limitation. The researcher supervises principals as a core responsibility in her profession and has also served as a school leader previously. Within transcendental phenomenology, the researcher suspends bias and judgements utilizing epoché (bracketing) to focus on the studied phenomenon, in this case the lived experiences of elementary principals coping with occupational stress. Bracketing can be difficult because interpretations of the data always incorporate the assumptions the researcher brings to the topic (van Manen, 2014). Therefore, it is important that the researcher explicitly stated her reflexivity to the topic and utilized member checking to ensure accuracy, credibility, validity, and transferability of the qualitative data gathered through the interview process.

Delimitations

Within phenomenological research the emphasis is on the exploration of the phenomenon with a group of individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this research methodology and the short duration of the study limited the participant sample size to eight participants. Furthermore, the purpose of the study was geared toward experienced, female, elementary school principals. Only female principals with three or more years, preferably five, in the role participated to give a rich sense of on-the-job stress verses

collecting data from principals experiencing “new job” stress. Finally, due to the need to interview participants, the researcher limited the study to participants within the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. All the factors limited the data source and, therefore, generalizability.

Summary

The increasing workload of school principals further fueled by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic has left the majority of principals dealing with occupational stress. A 2022 RAND study found that 85% of principals experience job related stress, compared with 73% of teachers, and 35% of other working adults (as cited in Steiner et al., 2022, p. 5). These figures are consistent with the 2021 RAND survey data, suggesting the toll the pandemic has taken on the well-being of educators (p. 5). There is an identified need for principals to learn how to manage stress and engage in self-care under conditions of uncertainty (Clifford & Coggshal, 2021, Steiner et al., 2022). There is a call for renewed attention on research of school principals due to tremendous impact they have on school outcomes (Grissom et al., 201). The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. The aim was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention. The researcher chose this approach to better understand the current stressors affecting school leaders, how those stressors impact them within and outside of the workplace, how they cope with those stressors, and if stress is impacting their desire to remain in their role.

Organization of Study

Phenomenology researcher and writer Clark Moustakas (1994) recommended specific chapters in creating a research manuscript including introduction, review of the literature, conceptual framework, methodology, presentation of the data, and a summary including

implications and outcomes. These chapters are organized to guide the reader through key features of the study in a structured format. In the next chapter, Chapter 2, a review of the literature including the evolving role of school principal, stress and burnout, principal retention, and coping with the stresses of school leadership is fully explored. In Chapter 3, the specific methodology for this study is defined including detailed explanations of the research design, sampling, instrumentation, and analysis. Transcendental phenomenology methodology requires specific practices that impact data collection and reporting and are described. Chapter 4 presents the findings and analysis from data collected from participants. This chapter includes examples, visualizations, and interpretations. Finally, Chapter 5 presents a summary of the study and findings, conclusions, as well as discusses implications, limitations, and recommendations. The study concludes with final remarks.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

The role of the school principal has evolved substantially over the last three decades, as have the demands, leading to high levels of stress, burnout, and shortened tenure. Principals carry increased responsibilities and pressures, which intensified during the age of school accountability, and have been exacerbated by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Research demonstrates that effective principal leadership is pivotal to both improving schools and advancing school achievement. For example, in a 2013 Wallace Foundation report entitled *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* found that principal leadership is “second only to classroom instruction among school-related factors that affect student learning in school” (p. 5) due to principals directly impacting conditions that support effective teaching. Additionally, principals significantly affect levels of well-being among students, teachers, and staff (Mahfouz et al., 2019). Dr. Jolanta Burke, a psychologist specializing in positive psychology applied in education, defined well-being as “a journey of promoting and improving individuals’ mental health and conditions, so that they can contribute to the school communities’ overall well-being, and vice versa” (2021, p. 6). When leaders neglect their own well-being, or when they withdraw from their role, it can negatively impact their performance (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Therefore, similar to parents putting on their own oxygen mask first on an airplane, it is essential that principal well-being is prioritized to support both effectiveness and retention.

Each year in the United States, roughly 6% to 7% of principals change schools, while another 9% to 12% exit the profession (Goldring & Taie, 2018, p. 3). These statistics are more pronounced in urban schools serving high numbers of students of color living in poverty (p. 3). Pre-pandemic, the results from a 2018 survey of principals in Washington, D.C. indicated that

67% of principals plan to leave their jobs within the following five years citing extreme stress, job insecurity, and lack of funding as rationale (Moore, 2018, para. 1). Since the start of the pandemic, trends continue to be worrisome, with four of every 10 principals expected to leave the profession in the next three years (NASSP, 2021). As highlighted in Chapter 1 of Steiner et al. (2022), female elementary principals are of particular concern,

Female principals were more likely to report experiencing frequent job-related stress and burnout than male principals. This difference remained significant after we statistically controlled for school characteristics and is consistent with our January 2021 findings. We did not ask about caregiving or other family responsibilities in the survey, but we hypothesize that these factors may play a role. (p. 6)

As a result, the country is facing a significant challenge of losing a growing number of school principals who become overwhelmed, neglect their well-being, are not able to manage job-related stress, and eventually burnout, or leave the profession entirely.

The purpose of this study was to examine how female school principals respond to their current work demands, identify stressors, and take care of their own well-being to support their resiliency and retention. The literature review is divided into five sections:

1. Evolution of the Role of School Principal
2. Stress and Burnout,
3. Principal Retention,
4. Coping with the Stresses of Leadership,
5. Researcher Conceptual Framework, and
6. Summary of the Literature.

Evolution of the Role of School Principal

An Evolving Role

The role of the principal has changed considerably. Initially, the role of the principal was primarily composed of school operational duties such as scheduling and maintenance, and had little to do with academic program oversight (Catano & Stronge, 2006). However, as a result of the standards movement, high-stakes testing, teacher and principal evaluation, and school accountability, the principal role in present day is much more complex and demanding (Beausaert et al., 2016; Catano & Stronge, 2006; Wells, 2013b). In addition to legislative mandates, principals are also responsible for school culture, communication with parents, external community partnerships, and ensuring compliance with various state and federal agencies. The success of the school principal in the United States relates not only to how well they manage the building and maximize resources, but it also includes the effectiveness of instructional leadership, leading change, and managing expectations from multiple stakeholder groups (Brinkmann et al., 2021; Catano & Stronge, 2006).

Work Intensification

Green & McIntosh (2001) introduced the term *work intensification* to describe the increased efforts that individuals must put into their jobs as a result of either economic or societal pressures. They assert that increased efforts can present themselves through longer hours spent on the job, greater work effort during a set time period, or a combination of both of these. Wang et al. (2018) translated this idea as it relates to school principals' growing workloads and demands and compared principal work intensification to levels of job satisfaction. "Not only is the work intensifying, but the very nature of school administration is changing—the position is becoming less desirable, especially to new principals" (p. 85). Accountability, and the pressure

to improve schools, has the unintended consequence of increasing demands on principals, which makes the job more stressful and less attractive (Ray et al., 2020). School leaders are working longer hours, getting less sleep, are more dehydrated, have poor diet practices, exercise less regularly, and spend less time with loved ones than the general population (Ray et al., 2020). The growing work intensification is concerning for principal well-being and retention.

According to a study of over 2,000 elementary and secondary school principals in Ontario, Canada, role changes, added responsibilities, and increased demands equated to lower levels of principal job satisfaction and commitment (Wang et al., 2018). Annette Walker (2019) described these added demands as “the influence of politics on policy, as changes in government can derail the support school leaders need to execute their core leadership and management duties” (p. 59). It is important to note that this study was pre-pandemic. In addition to concerns around job satisfaction, work intensification issues may also lead to stress-related health issues which is outlined further in this literature review (Walker, 2019; Wang et al., 2018).

Impact of COVID-19

Work-intensification for school principals took on a whole new meaning amidst the COVID-19 global pandemic in 2020. It is worth noting that even pre-pandemic, most school leadership preparation programs were already misaligned with the current challenges facing leaders, including crisis management (Harris & Jones, 2020; Wilson, 2021). Literally overnight, in March 2020, principals across the world led unprecedented transitions as schools were closed to in-person learning due to fears of the spreading virus. “With sudden shifts in response to this crisis, school leaders have found themselves with either no playbook or a very limited one, to mitigate the challenges of leading a school during COVID-19” (Wilson, 2021, p. 2).

At the onset, schools were disrupted globally with 1.6 billion young people experiencing a deviated approach to education (Harris, 2020, p. 321). Principals who relied on staff meetings, car pool lines, hallway conversations, and classroom visits to connect with students, staff, and parents, were suddenly forced to lead and operate schools from behind a screen or on the phone. Among many other issues, principals faced insufficient online learning infrastructure, teachers' lack of experience in online technology use and pedagogy, inadequate planning time to make important decisions, inequities in students' home environments to support online learning, and distress and concerns coming from multiple stakeholder groups (Liu, 2020).

In a few short months, educationalists around the world have been jettisoned into a rapid reassessment of everything they valued, knew, and trusted. No country, no context, no education system has escaped the invisible hand of COVID-19. Compared to the sheer force and momentum of this global pandemic, decades of education reforms have hardly made any impression at all, barely left a dent on schools and school systems. (Harris, 2020, p. 322)

COVID-19 worsened well-being issues and underscored how education inequity greatly affects those in society who need it most (Harris & Jones, 2020). These concerns weighed heavy on school principals (Cash et al., 2020). The debate around COVID-19 and schools, which principals often found themselves in the middle of, has been highly polarizing. Some sought the possibilities to re-position and re-model education, some wished for a rapid return to normalcy, and others realized the middle ground that there is insufficient data to decide whether a new form of education is arising or the old form is just resting (Harris, 2020).

When it became allowable to have students and staff return to the building, a new myriad of challenges faced principals including implementing mitigation strategies, revised scheduling,

staffing, and addressing learning loss. Despite the chaos, the responsibility to meet the needs of students, parents, and teachers while remaining calm and confident has remained the same (Burwell, 2021). “School leaders are working tirelessly to ensure that for the learners in their care, emotional, social, and mental-well-being is nurtured and supported. The scale of their effort and the extent of the leadership challenge are colossal and relentless” (Harris, 2020, p. 322). The pandemic highlighted the fact that schools have never just been institutions of learning, rather they are extensions of the home that are vital to the well-being of the student (Cash et al., 2020).

Many principals were reported as responding positively as the process of educating children continued on during the pandemic despite the lack of predictability, certainty, and lack of end in sight (Harris, 2020). This may have been attributed to characteristics such as *resiliency* (Murphy, 2011). However, principals also reported negative emotions such as anxiety, feelings of being overwhelmed, sadness, stress, frustration, uncertainty, and worry (Bracket et al., 2020). As the COVID-19 pandemic dragged on during the next three academic years, related challenges and stressors such as stakeholder illness, student learning loss, and a growing teacher shortage plaguing the United States continue to threaten the well-being of students, teachers, and school leaders. In this next section, the theory of stress and burnout and the impact on leaders, such as school principals, is explored.

Stress and Burnout

Theory of Stress

The concept of stress in the medical arena was first explored by medical doctor and researcher Hans Selye in the 1960s (Beausaert et al., 2016). The word *stress* is used in physics to refer to the interplay between a force and the resistance offered to it, and Selye (1907-1982) first used the term in the medical field to describe “the non-specific response of the body to any

demand” (Tan & Yip, 2018, para. 1). Tan & Yip (2018) outlined Selye’s *general adaption syndrome*, which included three stages of response to stress; alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. In the alarm stage, a person is in the “fight or flight” stage, a psychological response that causes increased heart rate, the release of the stress hormone cortisol, and a boost of adrenaline. After the alarm stage, the body begins to repair itself by normalizing heart rate and blood pressure and a reduced release of cortisol. However, if the stressful situation continues over an extended period of time, the body remains on high alert and eventually adapts to cope. This stage, called the resistance stage, may be shown through symptoms of irritability, frustration, and poor concentration. If this stage continues too long, it leads to exhaustion. Also known as *chronic stress*, in the exhaustive state, a person can be drained of their physical, emotional, and mental resources which limits the body’s ability to fight stress. Symptoms of the exhaustion stage include fatigue, burnout, depression, anxiety, and decreased stress tolerance. A person suffering from this stage may also have a weakened immune system and are at risk for stress-related illness.

According to Pearlin’s *Sociology of Stress* (1989), stressful experiences can generally be traced to surrounding social structures and people’s location within them. Important social structures include social institutions and the arrangement of roles and status within. Leadership roles within these social institutions necessarily consist of regular experiences of a host of conditions and expectations that exert a structuring force on experience. Because the role persists over time, the experiences within them tend to repeat. When these experiences are threatening and problematic, they may result in stress. Stressors are often divided into life events or more enduring or recurrent life problems, called *chronic strains*. Life events, also considered short-term or acute, such as COVID-19, could be a change that was undesired, unscheduled, non-

normative, and uncontrolled causing stress. Chronic strains may come as a result of issues rooted within institutionalized social roles. The issues are long lasting because of the persistence of activities and inter-personal relationships associated with the role. Therefore, scientists studying stress would consider a leadership position, such as a school principal, a role involving chronic stress with likely periods of *acute stress* (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Occupational Stress of School Principals

The role of the principal requires a balance of multiple expectations and competing forces (Wells, 2013b). It has been criticized that the role of the principal is too big for one person due to job demands and lack of sufficient resources (Wells, 2013a). This is considered *role overload*; a type of chronic strain that exists when demands on energy and stamina exceed the individual's capacity often found in occupational roles (Pearlin, 1989). Individuals who grow accustomed to increasingly elevated levels of stress are less capable of identifying their own physical, cognitive, and emotional overloads (Ray et al., 2020). Stress factors are significant in the way principals view their jobs and the possible resulting health concerns (Wells, 2013a). For example, in a 2018 Australian survey, one out of three principals were considered seriously distressed with their mental and physical health at risk (Horwood et al., 2019). Principals reported working too many hours to support a healthy lifestyle, working an average of 56 hours per week. Compared to the general population, principals reported 1.5 times higher job demands, 1.7 times more stress, 1.6 more times burnout, 2.2 times more difficulty sleeping, and 1.3 more times more depressive symptoms (Horwood et al., 2019, para. 7). According to the survey, the two largest sources of stress for principals are the quantity of work and the lack of time to focus on teaching and learning. When reviewing the literature, however, there were additional stressors principals named including staffing, supporting teacher and staff well-being, supporting student academic

learning due to lost instructional time during COVID-19, supporting student mental health and well-being, and implementing COVID-19 mitigation strategies (Steiner, 2022). The NASEP study confirms these stressors and adds the stress of crisis management (such as COVID-19 and threats of school violence) and social media and communications management which includes navigating multiple social media channels among families and the community within a highly politicized environment (Clifford & Coggshal, 2021).

Burnout

As described earlier, chronic stress may lead to *burnout*. According to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s most recent definition, burnout is a “syndrome conceptualized as resulting from chronic workplace stress that has not been successfully managed” (2019, para. 3). The WHO's International Classification of Diseases diagnostic manual (2019) outlined three symptoms of burnout:

1. feelings of energy depletion or exhaustion;
2. increased mental distance from one's job or negative feelings towards one's career;
3. reduced professional productivity (para. 3).

Burnout is a cumulative process exhibited by emotional exhaustion and withdrawal related to increased workload and institutional stress (Figley, 1995b). Burnout has serious consequences for school principals, and their respective schools, when they are emotionally exhausted it is difficult to be an energetic leader responsible for providing vision for change and growth (Wells, 2013b).

While the last decade of research indicates that a significant number of school principals suffer from stress and burnout and lack programs of assistance or identified interventions (Wells & Klocko, 2018), a Finnish study of 420 school principals found low levels of work stress and

burnout symptoms (Tikkanen et al., 2017, p. 1). Tikkanen et al. (2017) attributed these results, in part, to high use of *proactive self-regulation strategies* which buffer exhaustion and work-related stress among principals. Proactive regulation strategies will be explored further later in this chapter.

Compassion Fatigue

Due to the nature of their role as helping professionals, school principals may also experience regular exposure to daily events-based trauma. Daily exposure to trauma may result in secondary-traumatic stress (STS), also known as *compassion fatigue*, the weariness that comes from caring (Johnson, 2020). Compassion fatigue researcher Charles Figley (1995a) described four criteria that contribute to compassion fatigue:

1. being an empathic helper;
2. having experienced some painful or traumatic event in our own lives that are unresolved, and in turn, are activated by similar reports of pain for trauma in others;
3. choosing to work directly with the painful or traumatic events of children; and
4. taking care of others and neglecting or being unaware of our own feelings and needs.

(p. 15-16)

Individuals suffering from compassion fatigue may experience issues with sleep, relationships, moodiness, being overwhelmed, and depression (Hertel & Johnson, 2020). Hertel and Johnson (2020), described their observations sharing that they've "seen school leaders' symptoms run the gamut: from being able to unable to unplug their phones to having trouble delegating tasks to exhibiting negative self-talk to needing to be a 'fixer' of all problems" (p. 2). While caring for children coping with trauma is essential, over-caring to the point of neglecting one's own well-being can be self-destructive leading to exhaustion and being overwhelmed and resentful (Hertel

& Johnson, 2020). While there are some common symptoms between burnout and compassion fatigue, the clear difference is that burnout emerges over time while compassion fatigue has a faster recovery and is less severe if it is recognized and managed early (Figley, 1995b).

Sacrifice Syndrome, Dissonance, and Power Stress

When leaders neglect their own well-being and sacrifice too much of themselves for too long, they can become trapped in what Boyatzis & McKee (2005) called the *sacrifice syndrome*. They describe this term further:

Leadership is exciting, but it is also stressful. And it is lonely. Leadership is the exercise of power and influence—and power creates distance between people. Leaders are often cut from support and relationships with people. Our bodies are just not equipped to deal with this kind of pressure day after day. Over time, we become exhausted—we burn out or burn up. The constant crises, heavy responsibilities, and perpetual need to influence people can be a heavy burden, so much that we find ourselves trapped in the Sacrifice Syndrome and slip into disquiet, unrest, and distress. (p. 6)

Leaders falling into the sacrifice syndrome, not only may experience symptoms of stress and burnout, they also may become *dissonant*, lacking harmony with those they serve. Leaders who become dissonant may be volatile, reactive, unaware, and cause fear, frustration, and antagonism for those they serve (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Boyatzis & McKee (2005), theorized that dissonance occurs as a result of a unique brand of stress they dub *power stress*:

For people who head organizations, choices are rarely crystal clear and communication and decision making are incredibly complex; and such people often must lead with ambiguous authority. Add to that the loneliness that comes with being the person at the top, and you have the formula for power stress. In the last several years, we have

observed leaders experiencing power stress day after day, fighting fire after fire—and then scraping themselves off the floor each evening. They go from occasional episodes of power-related stress to almost daily experiences of it. Ultimately this leads to a form of chronic stress. (p. 7)

In addition to prolonged periods of power stress, dissonance may also occur when leaders are attempting to cope with their stress by what Boyatzis & McKee (2005) named defensive routines, bad habits that keep the leader in denial about what is really going on within and around them. Finally, dissonant behaviors could actually be encouraged in the leader's own organization, which is becoming increasingly common due to pressures of achievement and lack of feedback (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005). Additionally, some leaders are intrinsically motivated by the idea that their personal sacrifice is important for the school communities they serve (Ray et al., 2020). In this study of self-care practices of school principals in Arkansas, findings indicated that if leaders are “healthy and at ease with the demands of the job”, they fear the perceptions of others in that they aren't working hard enough or sacrificing enough for the betterment of the school (p. 447). Ray et al. (2020) calls for additional research to make sense of, or challenge, this “deeply embedded school culture of self-sacrifice at the expense of all else” (p. 447).

Social Support

Principal stress may result from the imbalance between the demands a principal faces and the resources available for dealing with those demands, rather than from the demands alone (Wells & Klocko, 2018). In a longitudinal study from 2011-2014, over 3,000 Australian principals were surveyed as to whether changes in social supports from colleagues, supervisors, and/or the broader community affected levels of stress and burnout (Beusaert et al., 2016).

Researchers went from the premise that “theoretical models of stress claim that the perception of resources, such as social support, along with level of demand, predict the experience of stress” (Beausaert et al., 2016, p. 352). The findings highlighted the importance of principals having social supports from colleagues to deal with daily demands, and prevent burnout in the long run. Unexpectedly, the researchers also found that the more support a principal has from the community, the more likely they are to exhibit burnout symptoms. The possible explanation for this is what they call “the downside of empathy” (Beausaert et al., 2016, p. 360). Essentially, when principals feel supported by their community, they may become more connected to the community which makes them more susceptible to the stressors of that community. This was especially apparent for elementary school leaders as they are more often part of a smaller community than secondary leaders. Another finding from the Beausaert et al. (2016) study, suggested that social supports cannot always buffer burnout, and might interact with individual and contextual factors.

As shown, the role of the school principal has evolved and intensified considerably over the last three decades, and the impact of stress and burnout has many negative impacts on the health of an individual. Next, the literature will demonstrate how stress, burnout and other working condition concerns are impacting retention of school principals. Additionally, the literature will show how declining retention rates result in significant costs to a school and district, from both financial and overall school effectiveness perspectives.

Principal Retention

Impact of Turnover

A national survey conducted in 2017 found that 18% of public school principals had left their position since the year prior, and in schools serving students with high-poverty the turnover

was 20% each year (Levin et al., 2019, p. 3). Likewise, data collected in 2019 suggested that nearly half of new principals leave their schools after just three years, while nearly 20% leave every year (Superville, 2019, p. 2). If they remain in the field, many of these leaders are trading difficult-to-lead high poverty schools, for more affluent schools (School Leaders Network, 2014). Principals cited the ranked conditions that influence turnover:

1. working conditions (which include multiple and growing needs from students and parents and insufficient resources),
2. inadequate compensation (at times lower than teacher salaries),
3. accountability (which include federal, state, and local policy and practices),
4. lack of decision-making authority, and
5. obstacles in participating in professional learning opportunities. (Levin et al., 2020, p. 6)

Principal turnover leads to school instability, and at best it may be short-term. For example, a study in North Carolina showed principal turnover is associated with lower test scores, school proficiency rates, and teacher retention (Harbatkin & Henry, 2019). While Harbatkin & Henry (2019) found that estimated effect sizes were small, they continued for three years after the principal's departure. It is important to note, that not all principal turnover is harmful to school performance. If a low-performing/ineffective leader is replaced with a high-performing leader, the benefits will outweigh the costs.

However, when losing multiple principals in succession (known as “churn”), there is a compounding effect. This “churn” more commonly occurs in schools serving high numbers of low-income, low-performing, and/or students of color (Béteille et al., 2012). Often, these schools are more difficult for principals to lead as a result of few resources, more student discipline

issues, less parent involvement, and more pressures from federal and state accountability policies on standardized tests. These factors make the schools less desirable in attracting effective and experienced principals (Yan, 2019). Yan (2016) reported that 60%-70% of principals working in schools with high numbers of students of color are more likely to transfer to another school than those principals serving in schools with the lowest quartile of percentage of students of color (p. 93). Challenges with retention of high-quality and experienced principals contribute to inequity in the country's educational system. A statewide longitudinal study on leadership retention and teacher attrition in Texas found that teacher turnover spiked in schools with principal turnover, and the effects were greater among urban, high poverty schools with low average teacher experience, and in schools experiencing chronic principal turnover (DeMatthews et al., 2022).

In addition to the negative impacts of student achievement and teacher retention, principal turnover also has a financial cost for the district. The School Leaders Network (2014) outlined these costs in their report:

Conservative estimates of the cost to develop, hire, and onboard each principal is \$75K. For a typical urban school district with 110 schools, investments made to draw retention to the same rate as typical affluent schools (20% turnover) would save the district 330K annually. Increasing principal retention rates to that of affluent schools can save U.S. school districts \$163 million annually. And applying these efforts to just the largest 500 districts (2.8% of nation's districts) would save nearly \$100 million annually currently allocated for principal replacement costs. (p. 4)

The 2014 report continues with a breakdown of principal replacement costs that include sample pipeline (preparation programs), human resources (hiring), onboarding (technical knowledge and early career coaching), and continuing education (professional development). For

example, in 2010, costs associated with principal preparation programs ranged from \$20,000 to \$42,000 per aspiring principal while more current projections indicate that the most effective programs range between \$50,000 to \$100,000 per individual (p. 5). While the report warns that there are not easily accessible figures specifying hiring costs of principals, they estimate that districts spent \$5,850 per hired principal, which does not include onboarding or training. Nationally, high poverty districts spent \$36 million on hiring costs, which may have included signing bonuses as a recruitment strategy. For example, Chicago offered \$25,000 to high quality out-of-town principals to sign contracts in 2012 (p. 6). When researching transitional training (including internships and mentoring), schools and districts spent as much as \$50,000 to \$85,000 per intern depending on the region of the county (p. 7). Onboarding costs for new principals are divided into two categories,

1. technical onboarding to learn district policy, and
2. early career support from mentors and coaches for the first two years.

The costs of onboarding vary dramatically by district, but formalized programs can cost as much as \$5,500 to \$7,500 per principal (p. 7). Furthermore, investments are made into the continuing education of school principals. Of the one-billion-dollar annual federal allocation for professional development for teachers and leaders, 9% of the funding is used to support school principals (p. 8). Finally, the report considers the impact principal turnover has on a student's future earnings. A 10% reduction in principal turnover in high poverty schools, while also improving principal effectiveness over time, has the potential to affect a student's future earnings by 30K (p. 9). This equates to an estimated \$469 million in additional taxable revenue locally using an average urban district serving 72,000 students (p. 9).

While this report is somewhat dated, it is still one of the most commonly cited articles that relate to the financial impact of principal turnover. This could be due to lack of research done on the principal labor market. Yan (2019) shared that compared to the amount of literature on teacher labor markets, the principal labor market has been under researched. However, that could soon change as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic as many educators (principals and teachers) continue to leave their positions. Pre-pandemic, 8% of teachers left the profession annually, and 50% quit before retirement (Abitabile, 2020, para. 1). This number is growing and varies by state. For example, according to the *Arizona State Funding Project: Addressing the Teacher Labor Market Challenge* report (Education Resource Strategies, 2018), 24% of Arizona teachers are leaving their schools each year (p. 38). This average is likely much higher in schools where there has been principal turnover, compounding the effects on student growth and achievement. Conditions are worsening as indicated by the September 2022 report from the Arizona School Personnel Administration Association stating “26.6% teacher vacancies across the state remain unfilled while 41.7% of vacancies are filled by teachers who do not meet state’s standard certification requirements” (para. 1).

Competitive Salary

As mentioned, Levin et al. (2020) stated that following working conditions, inadequate compensation is the second highest indicator influencing turnover, especially in schools with high poverty. This claim corroborates with Yan’s (2019) study that found that principals with beneficial job contracts, tenure system, and higher salary were less likely to transition, and schools with a positive disciplinary environment lowered the odds of principals moving to another school, especially in schools with high concentrations of students of color. These similar findings become especially relevant in recent years due to concerted efforts to raise teacher

salaries in states such as Arizona. Former Arizona governor Doug Ducey launched a 2018 initiative, “#20X2020”, to increase teacher salaries by 20% by the year 2020. While many districts and schools included support staff (including administrative) raises in their plans, the initiative was focused on teacher salaries with layers of accountability embedded. At times, 10-month teacher salary levels encroach on 12-month administrator salaries. For example, according to the Arizona auditor general, in fiscal year 2021, the state reported that the average Arizona teacher salary is \$56,349 (2022, para. 1). According to the Arizona School Board Association’s annual salary survey report, 56% of respondents reported that for first year assistant principals, typically 12-month contracts, salaries range between \$60,000-\$70,000 (2022, p. 63).

Expanding Challenges

Salary is part of the concern of working conditions of principals, but there have been additional and more recent expanding challenges threatening principal retention. According to the 2022 RAND study, exposure to school violence; harassment on COVID-19 safety policies; harassment about teaching race, racism, and bias; experiences with racial discrimination; and lack of active involvement in district decision making are significantly positively related to principals’ intentions to leave their current jobs (Steiner et al., 2022) For example, an increase in student behavioral challenges in schools is a growing concern. Students have struggled to acclimate to in-person learning after two years of disruption due to the pandemic. According to a recent Wall Street Journal article, school psychologists across the country experienced the same number of mental-health complaints and behavioral issues in the first three months of the 2021-2022 school year that used to occur over an entire school year (Chapman, 2021). According to the NCES (2022), there was a total of 93 school shootings with casualties within K-12 schools during the 2020-21 academic year, more than any other year since data collection began. The

same report showed that cyberbullying is almost double in 2019-2020 compared with 2009-2010, 16% versus 8% (para. 1).

Combining these expanding challenges with the concern of ongoing work intensification described earlier, and considering elementary principals are often the sole administrator on a school campus, the threat of losing principals poses a significant threat. A quote from Sullivan (2022, para. 10) epitomizes this concern,

The principals have been the glue that has kept education together in recent years, said Tabari Wallace, the superintendent's special advisor on principal engagement at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction. The reason principal mental health is so concerning today is principals pour into the vessels of everyone else—students, teachers, central office staff. But who is meeting the needs of the principal?

Policy Implications

When addressing the concerns leading to principal turnover, there are both local and state/federal policy and practice implications. Locally, Levin et al. (2020), stressed the importance of districts in attending to working conditions and school needs, supporting adequate and equitable principal compensation, creating or sustaining helpful mechanisms for principal feedback, evaluation, and mentoring, providing principals with appropriate agency and support in decision making, and removing barriers to professional development. These recommendations are similar to the School Leaders Network Report (2014) which suggested investing in ongoing professional development, engaging principals in meaningful networking opportunities, providing one-to-one support, restructuring central office roles and policies to improve working conditions. In addition to these recommended local practice and policy considerations, policymakers at the state and federal level can take steps to support principals by assessing and

helping improve working conditions for principals, supporting local efforts to improve student supports, enable adequate and equitable principal compensation, creating or expanding programs that underwrite the cost of high-quality principal preparation, and by supporting local efforts to develop effective school leaders by increasing investments in high-quality professional development (Levin et al., 2020).

While supportive structures focused on principal retention are being advocated at the local, state, and federal level, individually principals may manage job demands mitigating the impacts of stress and burnout. Earlier, Tikkanen et al. (2017) referred to personal approaches to mitigate stress as pro-active regulation strategies. Principals equipped with a well-defined set of cognitive, social, and psychological ‘personal learning resources’ show promise in being more successful and effective (Leithwood et al., 2019, p. 11). While these personal strategies can be supported in part through wellness programs adopted by schools and districts and principal preparation programs, the habits and traits are developed from within. This development supports *mindful leadership*; leaders are empowered to grow in their ways of being as integrate components of mindfulness with emotional intelligence, social intelligence, and resonant leadership (Wells, 2015).

Coping with the Stresses of Leadership

In this section, a review of leadership coping strategies and skills and aligned school leadership models is explored. Dake (2021) advocated:

Successfully building these skills is an inside-out process. First, school leaders should identify the particular stressors that impact their personal and professional life. Then, in conjunction with strong mentor programs, they should reflect on the leadership practices

to identify which approaches and strategies may mitigate these negative experiences.

(p. 14)

Mindfulness

Mindfulness is defined as a mental state achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment while calmly acknowledging and accepting feelings, thoughts, and bodily sensations (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d.). Boyatzis & McKee (2005) described it as “the capacity to be fully aware of all that one experiences inside the self—body, mind, heart, spirit—and to pay full attention to what is happening around us—people, the nature world, our surroundings, and events” (p. 113). McKee et al. (2008) expanded, “People who deliberately practice mindfulness are consciously self-aware and self-monitoring; they are open and attentive to other people and the world around them” (p. 45). Until recently, mindfulness was not a popular concept but its acceptance and popularity has grown to the point that users can now track mindfulness minutes on their iPhone. Mindfulness practices are being explored on a personal and professional level, with many reports and studies in areas of medicine, education, business, and industry (Wells, 2015).

Jon Kabat-Zinn was a scholar and founder of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1989 and was the creator of the Center's mindfulness-based stress reduction program (MBSR) as a clinical treatment for stress reduction. Kabat-Zinn (2003) provided a working definition of mindfulness as “the awareness that emerges from paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally to the unfolding of experience moment by moment” (p. 145). Mindfulness stems from the core of Buddhist teaching but it is also rooted at the heart of other ancient Eastern teachings. Kabat-Zinn (2003) explained that mindfulness is always supported within a larger conceptual and practice-based

ethical framework oriented toward non-harming. It is a way in which Buddhists would use transmutation from suffering through meditative practices that “calm and clarify the mind, open the heart, and refine attention and attraction” (p. 146). Kabat-Zinn (2003) shared that over the 40 (now 60) years, Buddhist traditions, including mindfulness, have taken root in western cultures. To practice mindfulness, Kabat-Zinn (2003) stressed that adoptions of Buddhist philosophy, religious teaching, or culture are not needed and techniques are not difficult nor require preparation. Rather, mindfulness can be practicing through meditation, walking, sitting, breathing, body scan, and yoga.

Mindful Leadership

While research is limited on mindfulness for educational leaders, mindfulness and mindfulness practices are linked with indicators of social and emotional intelligence when engaging with other people (Goleman et al., 2002). Therefore, as a leadership theory, mindfulness for educational leaders connects foundations of mindfulness (Kabat-Zinn, 2003), emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2000), social intelligence (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2008), resonant leadership (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005), and neuroscience (Davidson & Begley, 2012). Researcher and education leadership professor, Dr. Caryn Wells (2016) stated, “Mindful leadership involves qualities of compassion, listening, being with, awareness, acceptance, trust, and patience—all strongly associated with emotional intelligence factors such as empathy and self-awareness” (p. 112). Her work with graduate students aspiring to be school principals connects mindfulness constructs with varied leadership actions as shown in Table 1 (Wells, 2015, p. 6). Wells (2015) argued that as these constructs are practiced in the school workplace, leaders display characteristics associated with social and emotional intelligence. Those characteristics are what gets observed by others, which may positively influence school culture.

Rather, than focusing on *ways of doing*, the focus is *on ways of being* as leaders demonstrate being fully present, listening to others as opposed of thinking of a reply, accepting situations as reality, feeling compassion for another or self-compassion for one's own mistakes, practicing patience, and releasing feelings and thoughts from the past.

Wells asserted that through the practice of mindfulness, leaders can subtly and dramatically change the way they engage with and present to others. Murphy (2011) also advocated that the practice of mindfulness as it helps with developing mental qualities of accepting your discomfort, watching your thoughts come and go, and taking care of yourself. Additionally, he described four other important leadership qualities that can be cultivated through mindfulness training including situational awareness, task attention, poise, and resilience. Murphy (2011) stated that in emotionally-charged situations, many leaders show up as their “Reactive Self”, responding reflexively with unproductive thoughts, feelings, and actions. Rather, if leaders show up as their “Balanced Self”, they notice what is happening around them, like they are watching from the outside, and they no longer have a desperation to escape the discomfort. They are able to balance emotion with reason, see the entirety of the situation, and respond calmly, clearly, and intentionally (p. 40). He stressed to leaders that in order “to regain your perspective and productivity, consider relinquishing control of your inner drama” (p. 40).

Table 1*Wells' Leadership Actions*

Leadership Actions	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Creating Vision	Awareness, being fully present, patience, listening, trust, equanimity, letting go, non-striving, non-judgement, non-reactivity
Building Culture	Listening, non-judgement, trust, equanimity, awareness, compassion, self-compassion, patience, letting go
Communicating	Listening, awareness, non-judgement, patience, equanimity, compassion, self-compassion, trust, letting go, non-reactivity
Influencing	Awareness, compassion, non-judgement, acceptance, non-reactivity, patience, trust
Getting buy-in	Patience, awareness, non-judgement, listening, trust, equanimity, compassion
Modeling the change	Being fully present, listening, awareness, equanimity, letting go, non-reactivity, self-compassion
Reculturing the organization	Patience, awareness, being fully present, equanimity, trust, non-reactivity, listening
Building collaboration	Being fully present, non-judgment, compassion, trust, listening, letting go
Building capacity within the organization	Compassion, non-judgement, listening, being fully present, patience, acceptance
Developing common goals	Patience, awareness, listening, being fully present, letting go, beginner's mind
Resolving problems, conflict	Patience, listening, being fully present, awareness, compassion, non-judgment, letting go
Evaluating performance	Awareness, patience, trust, listening, compassion, letting go, non-reactivity

Table 1 (continued)

Leadership Actions	Relation to Mindfulness Constructs
Encouraging transformation	Patience, listening, trust, compassion, awareness, equanimity, being fully present
Recognizing others	Awareness, compassion, listening, being fully present, letting go, patience
Inspiring others	Patience, listening, compassion, equanimity, trust, self-compassion, being fully present, non-reactivity
Serving others	Compassion, awareness, trust, self-compassion, listening, non-reactivity, patience, equanimity, letting go

(Wells, 2015)

Self-Care

In order to lead and take care of others, one must lead and take care of themselves. While existing research has been geared toward coping strategies and skills for principals dealing with stress, there is less literature on efforts and approaches that address principals' basic human needs of self-care (Ray et al., 2020). Wells & Klocko (2018) claimed that the term is not embedded within educational leadership literature as it is mostly associated with psychological and counseling occupations. For example, they point to examples of physician research sharing that physicians who cared for themselves were more resilient; focused and less likely to leave their industry or commit errors (p. 166).

Ray et al. (2020) acknowledged the emerging research on the role of mindfulness as an approach of self-care; his study was to explore the well-being of 470 principals of Arkansas and how their job demands made adopting healthy habits challenging. Drawing from existing research, Ray et al. (2020) grouped self-care strategies into life habits utilized prior to stressful encounter (healthy eating, regular exercise, sleep), relaxation methods after the stressful

encounter (exercise, yoga, meditation, massage), and problem-focused coping or emotional coping as the stressful encounter occurred in real time. Findings from the Ray et al. (2020) study showed that many principals “seemed to place little value on mindfulness practices or struggled to include them in regular routines,” with 47% of respondents having never tried them before (p. 444). Similar to the studies of Oskolkoff (2019) and Hutchinson (2019), administrators place value on self-care, but acknowledge it is an area for continued growth. This finding links to the Wells & Klocko (2018) argument that “self-care is simple in its concept and challenging to enact because it involves an intentional plan on wellness” (p.166). In referring back to physician research, they also struggled to engage in self-care activities even though the practice improved their levels of resiliency (Wells & Klocko, 2018). Ray et al. (2020) correlated this challenge to the judgment-action gap (the difficulty a person has moving from knowing to doing) which has large implications as to how individuals navigate their personal and professional lives. Furthermore, many participants were unclear as to how their role promoted personal self-care and felt incapable of changing their role to meet the need to take care of themselves. Ray et al. (2020) called for further research that measures the self-care practices of school leaders to verify the findings of this study, which may contribute to a stronger foundation of the role of self-care with principal effectiveness.

Social Emotional Learning for Principals

A school leader’s emotional health shapes that of his/her school community. This concept, named *emotional contagion*, occurs when individuals reciprocate the emotions that they observe in those around them (Lyons & Schneider, 2009). As staff experience events, leaders share their emotions. Therefore, leaders must monitor their emotions and the impacts they are having on those around them which connects to the concepts of mindfulness and emotional

intelligence. Dake (2021) pointed to research connecting emotional contagion with leadership styles highlighting transformational leadership as positively correlated with higher relational, motivational, and emotional leadership outcomes. As a result, transformational leaders consider the emotional well-being of others and provide necessary supports, while building individual and collective self-efficacy. “Appealing to their emotions, building self-efficacy, and reframing stressful situations as growth opportunities all appear as transformational leadership practices” (Dake, 2021, p. 15).

Social and emotional learning (SEL) integration into K-12 curriculum has received significant attention in the last several years as a result of growing social inequities, violence, bullying, and aggression; all of which have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. SEL can be organized into three overarching categories:

1. social/emotional interpersonal skills such as mindfulness and social awareness,
2. cognitive regulation skills such as self-awareness and responsible decision making, and
3. emotional competencies such as self-compassion and emotional regulation (Jones & Bouffard, 2012, p. 4).

A 2022 RAND report found that 76% of principals and 53% of teachers nationally reported that their schools used a social and emotional learning (SEL) program or SEL curriculum materials in the 2021–2022 school year (Schwartz et al., 2022). While schools are prioritizing SEL, without guidance and support for educators’ social and emotional needs, results are insufficient (Zieher et al., 2021). Mahfouz et al. (2019) discussed the findings of a 2017 Gallup survey reporting principals believed they lacked the necessary guidance and training to effectively support SEL growth and development of students. As shown, principals must “put

their own mask on first” and develop their own social emotional competencies, before supporting the development of others. Mahfouz and Richardson (2020) stressed this point:

We assert that SEL can help principals develop competencies necessary to cope with the demands of principalship, avoid stress and burnout, and develop effective leadership skills that foster positive school interaction and relationships. We assert that mindfulness, stress, rumination, and reflection are foundational for SEL. (p. 366)

This assertion supported Mahfouz et al. (2019) as they link principal social emotional competencies with the effect on schools:

Research has demonstrated that principals with strong emotional well-being and SECs exhibit effective leadership, develop healthy relationships, and establish family and community partnerships that facilitate effective school-wide SEL implementation. These components are critical to sustaining a caring, healthy, positive, welcoming, and safe school climate that fosters positive social emotional and academic outcomes for students. (p. 7)

Mahfouz et al. (2019) organized these relationships into a conceptual model of leadership: the Prosocial School Leader (Figure 1). This model was influenced by the Jennings and Greenberg (2009) pro-social classroom model that emphasized the correlation between educators’ social emotional well-being and its influence on student achievement.

The prosocial school leader model has two components:

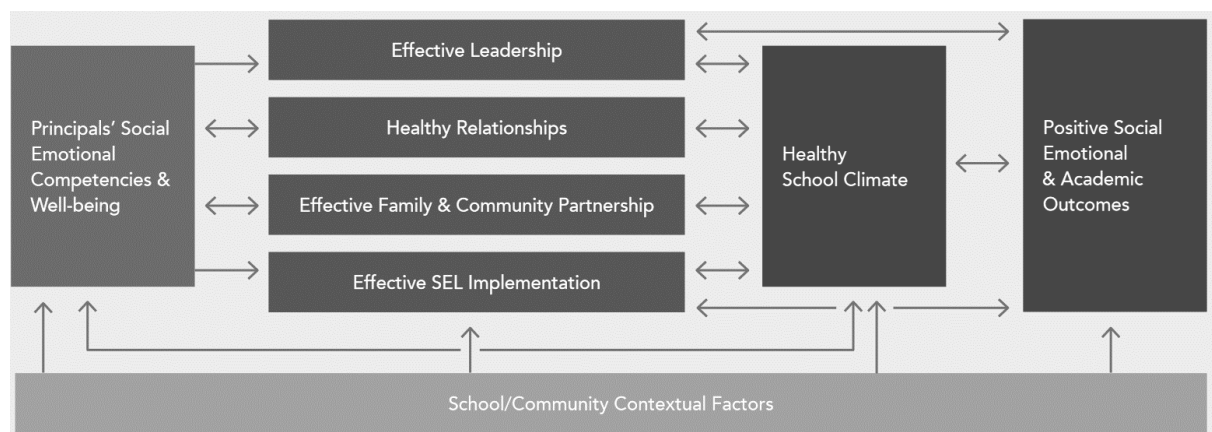
1. the principal’s own social emotional competencies and ability to cope with stress and model caring and socially and culturally competent behaviors within their school community, and

2. a leadership model in which the leader is prosocial with the responsibility to ensure the school community feels safe, cared for, respected, and valued. The principal's social emotional competencies, wellbeing, and leadership build the foundation of a healthy school climate which create conditions for positive social emotional and academic outcomes for students. (p. 3)

Mahfouz et al. (2019) used this theoretical framework to study the SECs of students in principal preparation programs. The study was designed to assess readiness for challenges of the principalship and expand the conversation as to how pre-service programs are supporting well-being of future school leaders. The study, like others, found that the population may not be equipped to deal with the stressors of the principalship and calls for, in part, future research as to how well-being changes during the tenure of a principal.

Figure 1

The Prosocial School Leader



(Mahfouz et al., 2019)

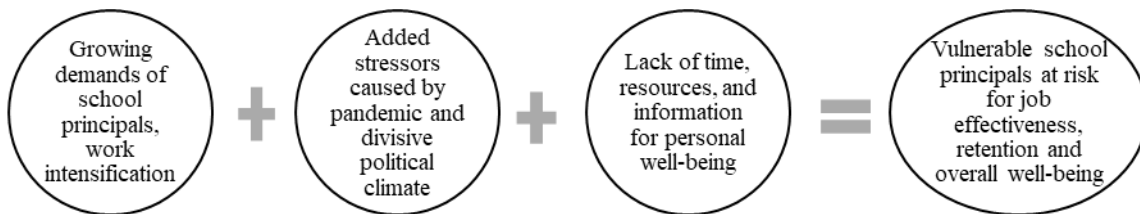
Researcher Conceptual Framework

As a result of the review of the literature, the researcher conceptualized that the ongoing work intensification, coupled with the pandemic and tense political climate, and the lack of time,

attention, information, and resources for stress mitigation are putting a growing number of principals in a vulnerable position. As a result of these conditions, principals are less healthy (physically and mentally), at risk to become less effective in their role, and more likely to leave their position (see Figure 2).

Figure 2

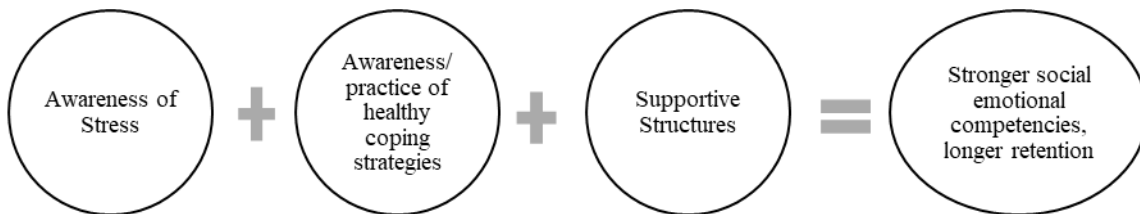
Conceptual Framework of Principal Vulnerability



However, if principals are more aware of their stress, have awareness and practice healthy coping strategies, and have supportive structures around them, they will have stronger social emotional competencies and are more likely to continue in their role longer (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework of Principal Resiliency to Stress



Summary of Literature Review

The demands on school principals have increased dramatically over time, and even more so since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The literature demonstrated that these demands have implications on principals' occupational stress, overall health and well-being, effectiveness, and retention. Recent studies show that female school principals, including those of color,

experience higher levels of stress than other subgroups. The literature also pointed out that principals can mitigate the implications of stress through internal practices such as mindfulness, self-care behaviors prior, during and after stressful encounters, and proactive leadership actions. It also has been acknowledged that more research is needed as to how principals are responding to their current work demands and taking care of themselves so they possess the attributes to take care of others. This review of literature provided strong support to pursue additional research on principal stress, response to stress, identification and use of self-care practices, and how practices are modeled for others.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal wellbeing. There is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. Thus, it is important to look closely as to how school leaders are responding to added stressors since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher's intent was to get a sense of how elementary school principals are coping with stress and if there is an awareness of how those mitigation strategies impact their desire to remain in their role. The aim was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention.

A phenomenological study was believed to be the most appropriate method to answer the research questions because stress is a common phenomenon experienced by principals across schools as demonstrated by the literature review. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research that seeks to understand the human experience (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, phenomenology looks at the data thematically to extract essences and essentials of participant meanings (Miles et al., 2020). This methodology allowed the researcher to identify themes as to how principals are experiencing and responding to occupational stress. The components of Chapter 3 include a restatement of the problem and research questions highlighted in Chapter 1, a description of the qualitative transcendental phenomenology research design used in this study, the method for determining population sample and participants, informed consent, data collection procedures, instrumentation, data analysis procedures, reliability and validity, researcher reflexivity, and a summary.

Restatement of the Problem

The work intensification and subsequent stressors for school principals are not a recent phenomenon; concerns for the levels of stress principals experience on a daily basis have been studied for the last 40 years (Wells, 2013b, p. 335). However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and staff coupled with the pandemic-era national political climate have created an unprecedented context for educational leaders. As was illustrated in Chapter 2, there is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. The NAESP 2021 study suggested that the role of the principal has evolved significantly since the onset of the pandemic and that principals have identified the need, in part, for more opportunities to learn how to manage stress and engage in self-care under conditions of uncertainty (Clifford & Coggshal, 2021). Despite this, historically, school leaders tend to reason that their personal sacrifice is important for the success of the students, staff, and school they serve and often neglect self-care behaviors for the sake of their work (Ray et al., 2020).

Are principals at greater risk of neglecting their own well-being now following the pandemic than they were with full plates ahead of the crisis? It is an important consideration for principal retention, as four of every 10 expect to leave the profession in the next three years (NASSP, 2021). The ways in which school principals are navigating job-related stress, specifically females who are more vulnerable to occupational stress, demand attention. While job-related stress is widespread among all principals, female principals, and those of color, report worse well-being than their peers (Steiner, 2022, p. 22). Additionally, principals serving in high-poverty elementary schools are less likely to report resilience than their peers in nonurban and secondary schools (Steiner, 2022, p. 18). Therefore, attention on the well-being of female

elementary school principals, including those of color, serving students living in high poverty is needed.

Restatement of the Research Questions

Phenomenology research questions require the inquiry must be about experience as lived (Peoples, 2021). Through this study, the researcher sought a deeper understanding of individual principals' experiences with the phenomenon of occupational stress over time, the ways in which principals cope with stress, and the influence of coping strategies on resiliency and desire to stay in their role. Therefore, three research questions guided this investigation of school principals' occupational stress and personal wellbeing.

1. What are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in?
3. Do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role?

Research Design

Phenomenology, both a philosophy and research approach, was originated by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and is an important philosophical movement of the 20th century (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Phenomenology seeks to find common meaning of a concept or phenomenon experienced by several individuals. The basic purpose is to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal *essence*. The researcher collects data from individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and develops a composite description of the

essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Richards & Morse (2013) described phenomenology's underpinnings,

Two major assumptions underline phenomenology. The first is that perceptions present us with evidence of the world—not as it is thought to be but as it is lived. The lived world, or the *lived experience*, is critical to phenomenology. The second assumption is that human existence is meaningful and of interest in the sense that we are always conscious of something. Existence as *being in the world* is a phenomenological phrase acknowledging that people are in their worlds and are understandable only in their contexts. Human behavior occurs in context of the four existentialisms: relationships to things, people, events, and situations. (p. 68)

There are two main theoretical frameworks of phenomenology: the philosophy of Edmund Husserl (transcendental or descriptive phenomenology), utilized in this study, and the philosophy of Martin Heidegger (hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Husserl advocated that phenomenology is a “philosophy without presuppositions”, in which researchers suspend judgements until they are founded on a more certain basis (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 76). Husserl called this suspension *epoché*, also termed as *bracketing*. Peoples (2021) described bracketing as “having this position so that that researcher becomes like a stranger in a strange land—kind of like an alien coming down to Earth for the first time” (p. 30). This intentional consciousness the researcher takes to bracket judgements to focus on the analysis of experience is called *phenomenological reduction* (Peoples, 2021). “Transcendental phenomenology explores the way knowledge comes into being, and knowledge is based on insights rather than objective characteristics, which constitutes meaning” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 71).

Conversely, Heidegger did not believe it possible to bracket one's own experience, each person is in the circumstance (Peoples, 2021). Therefore, hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology is a description of the understanding of the lived experience. Researchers use processes of reflection, writing and rewriting, and thematic analysis to describe and interpret the essence or meaning of the lived experience (Richards & Morse, 2013).

The researcher followed the transcendental research procedures described by Clark Moustakas (1994) within this study focused on the experiences of female elementary principals navigating occupational stress. These procedures provided a structured approach for a novice researcher and consist of identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, collecting data from several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon (usually from in-depth interviews), and then analyzing the data by reducing the information into significant statements or quotes which are then combined into themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Within phenomenology, researchers commonly utilize in-depth interviews to collect data from several individuals and depict their experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2019). Participant interviews engaged in this study provided data responding to two broad questions specific to phenomenology per Moustakas (1994), "What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?" and "What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79). Following the collection of data from each elementary principal participant, the researcher looked for significant statements or quotes utilizing the transcribed interviews that have particular relevance as to how participants have experienced and responded to occupational stress. This process was termed by Moustakas (1994) as *horizontalization*. The researcher grouped these statements into clusters of meaning and developed themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allowed the researcher to identify

individual and group differences, but most importantly, the “fundamental structure of the experience (the essence) for the total group” (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, p. 426). It is in this step that the researcher described the fundamental characteristics that are experienced commonly by most, if not all, participants. The researcher then developed a *textual description* of what the individuals experienced, a *structural description* of how they experienced it, and a combination of textual and structural descriptions to express the overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, validation strategies described by Creswell & Poth (2018) from the researcher’s lens, the participant’s lens, and the reader’s lens were employed and “document the accuracy” of the study (p. 259). Throughout the process, the researcher was attentive to bracketing her own experiences, interpretations, and understandings separately.

Population and Sample

This research study included female elementary principals navigating occupational stress and took place within two districts in the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. In order to find common meaning, participants were carefully chosen individuals who have all experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, a purposeful, criterion sampling method was employed as the researcher selected participants based on specific criteria. Participants are female, currently employed as an elementary school principal, and have held their position for at least three years, ideally five. The researcher was interested in principals’ lived experiences of job-related stress over time, pre- and post-pandemic supporting the need of participants to have at least three years of experience. As previously stated, female leaders serving in urban, high poverty areas are more vulnerable to occupational stress (Dake, 2021). Therefore, an emphasis on selecting female participants who serve in Title I schools was also utilized. If all criteria were met except Title I status, the researcher made exception to ensure adequate sample size. Finally,

participants were selected based on their understanding of the study's purpose and willingness to participate in in-depth interviews. Creswell & Poth (2018) stressed "sample size in qualitative research is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each individual studied." The sample size included eight participants, within the typical range for a phenomenological study (Peoples, 2021). The researcher worked with the appropriate district personnel to determine the most appropriate way to invite individuals who met the criterion to participate in the study.

Informed Consent

It is important to obtain participants' written permission within a phenomenological study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, invited participants were informed of their ethical rights before, during, and after the study. These rights include:

1. the right to be fully informed about the purpose of the study and the involvement and time required for participation,
2. the right to confidentiality and anonymity,
3. the right to ask questions of the researcher,
4. the right to refuse to participate without any negative ramifications,
5. the right to refuse to answer any questions, and
6. the right to withdraw from the study at any time (Richards & Morse, 2013, p. 263-264).

Additionally, participants were informed about what to expect during the research process, what information is being obtained about them, who will have access to that information, and how the information will be used (Richards & Morse, 2013). Consent forms

were provided prior to the study. The forms are stored in a secured location where they will remain sealed for five years. After five years, all participant documentation will be destroyed.

Data Collection Procedures

This study on lived experiences of occupational stress and personal well-being is sensitive in nature and required ethical considerations. The researcher carefully planned for Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval ensuring the protection of human subjects participating in this study. Following approval, the researcher followed guidelines outlined in Creswell & Poth (2018) attending to ethical considerations prior to conducting the study, beginning to conduct the study, collecting data, analyzing data, reporting data, and publishing the study (p. 55-56). The research questions of this study drove the data collection. No data collection began until necessary IRB approval (Appendix A), school district approval (Appendix B), and participant consent approval (Appendix C) were obtained.

Within phenomenology, in-depth interviews are primarily used to collect information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). “For research participants to explore their experience, they must be able to relieve it in their minds, and they must be able to focus on the experience and nothing else” (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, p. 425). Therefore, the researcher adopted procedures outlined by Creswell & Poth (2018) for preparing and conducting interviews. Prior to the interview, each participant completed a preliminary survey that was used to guide the interviews. The researcher took a one-to-one semi-structured interview approach utilizing an interview guide with open-ended questions that were field tested. This approach allowed participants to reflect on their experiences with job-related stress over time (pre- and post-pandemic), how they’ve coped with that stress, and if any perceived stress-management is influencing their desire to stay in their role.

Although the researcher believed that rapport is better established through in-person dialogue, options for in-person or virtual interviews were provided per participant needs. However, all participants chose to do in-person interviews. During the interview, the researcher utilized an iPhone recording app and the researcher took notes about the responses of the participant utilizing the interview guide. Following each interview, the recordings were transcribed utilizing software, reviewed by the researcher and notated, labeled with the chosen participant unique identifying number to protect participant anonymity, and saved on the researcher's password-protected secured hard drive.

Instrumentation

Phenomenological research typically utilizes a combination of instruments for data collection so findings are rich (Peoples, 2021). As stated, a researcher developed preliminary survey and semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to collect data within this study. Additionally, researcher journaling was also utilized for instrumentation for bracketing purposes. This allowed the researcher to think about her thinking "in order to be less dependent on their subjective mind and to see the phenomenon for what it is, the thing itself" (Peoples, 2021, p. 63).

The preliminary survey was distributed using Qualtrics and gathered information on demographics, experience as an administrator, level of stress participants experience, and how they may mitigate stress. The Qualtrics software was utilized with analysis of the information. Survey question topics included the following (a complete list of questions can be found in Appendix D):

- Gender
- Ethnicity

- Age range
- Years of experience as a school principal, total years in administration
- Percentage of free and reduced lunch within their school
- Level of job-related stress experienced, pre-pandemic and post-pandemic (low, medium, high)
- Strategies used to mitigate or cope with job-related stress
- Desired years to remain in their role as principal

This information guided the semi-structured interviews and gave the participant an opportunity to think through their experiences of occupational stress, coping strategies, and how long they anticipate remaining a school principal.

Conducting semi-structured interviews first allows the researcher to create interview questions relevant to the research questions so key aspects are sure to be covered while allowing participants to discuss other information that may end up being relevant (Peoples, 2021).

Additionally, as Giorgi (1965) stated, “Semi-structured interviews allow students to keep a balance between focusing on the research topic and allowing for a disciplined naturalness in phenomenological research” (as cited by Peoples, 2021, p. 53). As stated, participant interviews provided data responding to two broad questions specific to phenomenology per Moustakas (1994), “What have you experienced in terms of the phenomenon?” and “What contexts or situations have typically influenced or affected your experiences of the phenomenon?” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 79).

The open-ended questions allowed the conversation between the researcher and participant to naturally progress and reveal the lived experiences of the phenomenon at hand. Additionally, if a participant responded to the preliminary survey questions that she experienced

the same high levels of stress pre- and post-pandemic, the researcher was able to probe for elaboration. This elaboration was different from a participant who responded that he or she only experiences moderate levels of stress. The pre-determined interview questions guided the progress toward the goal of the study, while the semi-structured approach provided the researcher the flexibility to ask follow up questions for each unique conversation rather than a formal question and answer format (Taylor et al., 2015).

Data Analysis

As data are collected, it was concurrently analyzed. This process energized the researcher as she cycled back and forth between thinking about data collected and strategies for the next interview with the next participant (Miles et al. 2020). Peoples (2021) stated, “Phenomenological data analysis is the process of transcending the mundane nature of each description to reveal the essence of the phenomenon” (p. 58). She further advocated,

The goal of phenomenological data analysis is to present a description from essential themes of an experience in a way that is comprehensible and identifiable to anyone who had had that experience. It should be apparent how one experience of a phenomenon differs from other experiences that are similar. (p. 58)

Phenomenological research is known to have structured, specific methods of data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, this study utilized the Moustakas’ (1994) method represented and presented by Creswell & Poth (2018). The first step included outlining a full description of the researcher’s personal experiences with the occupational stress as a principal and as a supervisor of principals. This reflective thinking exercise helped the researcher set aside personal experiences, attitudes, and beliefs so focus remained on participants. Next, the researcher created a listing of significant statements captured in the interviews as to how

individuals experienced the phenomenon through the process of *coding* (described in detail below). These significant statements (codes) were then grouped into broader units of information called *themes* to create clusters and remove repetition. Then, the researcher developed the *textual description* of what the participants experienced with verbatim examples. Following textual description, the researcher generated a *structural description* of how the experience happened reflecting on setting and context. Finally, the researcher wrote the composite description of the phenomenon that includes textual and structural descriptions, which is known as the *essence* of the experience and the culmination of the study.

Coding

After data were collected, transcribed, and read in its entirety multiple times, the researcher created a list of initial significant statements, lean codes, that expanded as review of the data continue (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher utilized *in vivo coding* which uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data as codes as it is a recommended approach for novice qualitative researchers (Miles et al., 2020). While continuing interviews and subsequent initial in vivo coding for all transcripts, the researcher began a second cycle of coding to develop clusters of meaning and pattern codes. Pattern coding, also known as classifying, is a way of grouping initial codes into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts and it "lays the groundwork for cross-case analysis by surfacing common themes and directional processes" (Miles et al., 2020). In order to do this effectively, the researcher followed the guidance outlined by Creswell & Poth (2018) that included researcher memoing, highlighting noteworthy quotes, creating visual representations, and drafting summary statements reflective of "recurring or striking aspects of the data" (p. 194-195).

Reliability and Validity

Reliability was achieved in this study during key aspects of data collection and analysis process. “Reliability can be enhanced if the researcher obtains detailed field notes by employing good-quality recording devices and transcribing the digital files” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 264). As discussed, interviews were recorded, transcribed by software, and stored in a password protected hard drive. Additionally, Creswell & Poth (2018) advocated reliability with coding stressing that the researcher is “consistent with the resources and time to engage in coding” (p. 264). While “reliability often refers to the stability of responses to multiple coders of data sets” (p. 264) to achieve intercoder agreement, this individual researcher followed Creswell & Poth’s (2018) recommended procedures. These procedures included establishing a platform for coding, developing a code list, applying the code list across data sets, and revising and refining the code list to inform further coding (p. 264-265).

As shared previously, validation strategies described by Creswell & Poth (2018) from the researcher’s lens, the participant’s lens, and the reader’s lens were employed and will “document the accuracy” of the study (p. 259). Miles et al. (2020) warned that “without verification, you’re just another researcher with a hunch” (p. 274). Therefore, prior to initiating the study, the researcher identified her reflexivity to isolate her personal experiences with occupational stress and the role of the school principal. The researcher was able to separate her values and experiences from the participants through clarifying bias and bracketing.

Throughout data analysis, the researcher used interview transcripts to create codes, classify/create patterns, and develop visual representations to generate themes. Within this analysis, the rich textual, structure, and composite descriptions of participants’ experiences were

created to display the context as lived. These rich descriptions are another validation strategy advanced by Creswell & Poth (2021).

From a participant's lens, each was invited to participate through feedback called *member checking*, a recommended validity check within qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2019.) Participants were provided transcripts to check for accuracy. Then, as visual representations and themes from the interviews were developed, participants were invited to provide feedback. "The researcher should have the original participants review the interpretations and descriptions of the experience, especially the statement of the fundamental structure of the experience" (Johnson & Christensen, 2019, p. 426).

Finally, the researcher engaged the reader's lens by having a faculty advisor review the study. The advisor asked questions of the colleague about the methods, the results, and emerging conclusions to support accountability and honesty (Peoples, 2021). This advisor has field experience and qualitative research experience.

Reflexivity

The researcher has 20 years of experience in K-12 education serving in various roles including, but not limited to, elementary teacher, elementary and middle school principal, and principal supervisor. The majority of her professional background involves leadership roles serving students and staff in high poverty K-12 schools in metro Phoenix and the surrounding suburbs. She has had a lens on educator retention, teachers and administrators, leading various initiatives over the years. She experienced occupational stress as she juggled the many responsibilities of operational and instructional leadership serving 800+ students in grades K-8 at a central Phoenix school. After becoming a mother, she moved out of the role into her first district role. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she directly supported principals, staff, and

families with the multiple pivots between remote and in-person learning models and she was directly responsible for planning and communication. She also experienced the challenges principals faced in supporting students with access to academic, nutrition, and social emotional health resources during the height of the pandemic and the multi-year impact it has had on students and staff. Simultaneously, she has experienced the politically charged environment, the growing mistrust toward public schools among the community, and the impact these challenges have on school principals. With a strong background in educational leadership and through the learning experiences afforded her during her masters and doctoral programs, she is in a unique position to study the well-being of school principals. She has expanded her knowledge of various qualitative research methodologies leading her to phenomenology to support this topic of study. While her current role is a supervisor of principals, none of the study participants work with the researcher and only one participant slightly knew her prior to this study. Therefore, this researcher's professional position does not demonstrate a conflict of interest. The validity strategies noted earlier such as member-checking, rich descriptions, peer review, and bracketing were used to minimize bias.

Summary

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. There is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. The sample population was female elementary school principals with at least three years' experience, preferably five, in the role of principal. The data collection included a preliminary survey and in-depth interviews. Data analysis included coding, theming, and developing rich textual, structural, and composite descriptions to

reveal the essence of the lived experiences of these principals. Validity strategies such as researcher reflexivity, bracketing, member checking, rich descriptions, and peer review were used. Chapter Four presents the findings and analysis from the data collection. The research questions, sources of information, and data analysis are found in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Questions, Sources of Information, and Data Analysis

Research Questions	Sources of Information	Data Analysis
1. What are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic?	IQ3, IQ4, IQ5, IQ6, IQ7	Descriptive
2. How do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in?	IQ8	Descriptive
3. Do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role?	IQ9	Descriptive

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

As leaders of their schools, principals are highly vulnerable to job-related stress as the role continues to intensify with responsibility. Often, principals fail to recognize the toll stress takes on their well-being and job effectiveness. While some literature indicates that female school principals, including those of color, are more susceptible to higher levels of stress than males, more research is needed as to how female principals are responding to occupational stress and addressing their well-being. Although educational systems and policies are called upon to provide more support for school principals, principals can also mitigate impacts of job-related stress through practices such as mindfulness; self-care behaviors prior, during and after stressful encounters; and proactive leadership actions. The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. The aim of the study was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention. Chapter Four presents an overview of the sample population, findings for each of the three research questions, and a summary of the textual and structural descriptions of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon of job-related stress, coping strategies, and desire to remain in the role.

Transcendental phenomenology takes individual experiences and separates the phenomenological reduction (textural description) from imaginative variation (background or situation). The data collected within the interviews reflects the participant's textural descriptions, including meaningful quotes and experiences.

Participant Information

This study included female elementary school principals with at least three, ideally five, years of experience in two districts within two of the Phoenix, Arizona metropolitan area. As

shared, female leaders serving in urban, high poverty areas are more vulnerable to occupational stress (Dake, 2021). Consequently, there was an emphasis on selecting female participants who also serve in Title I schools. If all criteria were met except Title I status, the researcher made exception to ensure adequate sample size. As a result, participants for this study were chosen through a purposeful, criterion sampling method. Following IRB approval, the researcher gained approval in two school districts to conduct research. The researcher worked with district leadership in both districts to identify potential participants. Requests to participate in the study were sent via email to 11 principals, and eight positively responded; therefore, the sample size was eight participants, which is within the typical range for a phenomenological study (Peoples, 2021). After providing consent, these eight participants completed a preliminary demographic online survey. Following the completion of the online survey, the researcher scheduled interviews with each participant and provided digital copies of the interview protocol. Interviews were conducted in person, recorded, and transcribed. Significant statements were coded, grouped into clusters of similar meaning, and themed.

Although there are variations, each school in the study had diversity among their student populations, including race and culture, special education, English language learners, and socioeconomic differences. The schools' student enrollment ranged from 415 to over 900, with many of the schools also serving preschool/pre-kindergarten programs, and/or special education self-contained classes for their district. To protect anonymity, each participant is identified by a pseudonym (i.e., P1, P2, P3, etc.). All participants identify as female, white/Caucasian, and range in ages from 30-60+. As shown in Table 3, of the participant principals, five fell into the 6–10-year range of principal experience, one: 3-5 years; one: 11-15, and one: 16+ years. For the

percent of schools' Title I status, the lowest was 18% (P4) to the highest of 100% (P6). The remaining included: 20% (P3), 21% (P7), 35% (P1), 39% (P5), 65% (P8), and 72% (P2).

Table 3

Participant Demographics

Participant	Year Range of Principal Experience	% of School Title I
P1	6-10	35%
P2	6-10	72%
P3	11-15	20%
P4	6-10	18%
P5	3-5	39%
P6	16+	100%
P7	6-10	21%
P8	6-10	65%

As part of the demographic data, the researcher obtained preliminary information about participants' identified levels of stress. Table 4 displays participants' self-reported level of stress (low, medium, high) prior to the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in March, 2020 compared to their current level of stress at the time this survey was completed, sometime during December 2022 and January 2023. As shown in Table 4, pre-pandemic two participants (P3 and P5) stated they had low stress, one participant (P1) said they had low-medium, four participants (P2, P6, P7, P8) said they had medium stress, and one participant (P4) did not report a stress level. At the time of taking the survey, five participants (P1, P2, P5, P6, and P7) stated they had high stress, two participants (P3, P4) said they had medium stress, and one participant (P8) stated

she had low-high stress. Of those reporting both pre-pandemic and current level, six participants reported an increase in their stress level while one stated they went from medium level stress to a range of low-high stress.

Table 4

Participant Identified Stress Levels

Participant	Pre-Pandemic	Current Level
P1	Low-Medium	High
P2	Medium	High
P3	Low	Medium
P4	Not Reported	Medium
P5	Low	High
P6	Medium	High
P7	Medium	High
P8	Medium	Low-High

Note. Currently represents when participants took the survey sometime during December 2022 and January 2023.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) Results

What are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic? In order to answer RQ1, five interview questions were asked: IQ3 (Describe your experience with job-related stress as a school principal.), IQ4 (How is your experience with job-related stress similar and different since before the start of the pandemic? [i.e., intensity and frequency]), IQ5 (How do you know when you are feeling high levels of

stress?), IQ6 (How does job-related stress impact you at work?), and IQ7 (Does job-related stress impact you outside of work?).

IQ3

When participants were asked IQ3 (Describe your experience with job-related stress as a school principal) four themes surfaced: Staffing and Balancing Teacher Well-Being, Student Discipline, Parents, and District Initiatives.

Staffing and Balancing Teacher Well-Being. Seven participants shared concerns related to staffing shortages and balancing teacher well-being. P1 described her experiences of not having a building manager and lacking custodians just before school starting and her need to “roll up her sleeves” to move furniture before the new carpet was installed. During the month of January of 2021, she spent the entire month helping teach a self-contained special education class for a teacher on medical leave stating, “which is hard because if I’m covering a classroom, nobody’s doing my evaluations and not getting my paperwork done.” P7 discussed the stress of not having a math teacher for a significant portion of the first semester, yet felt fortunate to have her librarian step up to fill that role, sharing “I’ve struggled, I just got a math teacher this [second] semester, and I’m like what is happening.” However, this decision left her campus without library special impacting common planning time for teachers, “sixth grade needs the librarian to teach these kids math.” P4 went through the process of her school moving locations, which she shared was incredibly stressful for her staff to do during the pandemic.

So, you have all these people [staff] that have only ever been in one building. Now they’re moved out of the building. They’re also disjointed from their friends and their peers because of COVID. And as much as we try not to have during COVID, that’s where I felt like I was in the middle of the extremists. So, you have people ‘no mask’, others,

‘mask’, and you have teachers that feel that way that really don't want to talk about it, but some of them would talk about it with their friends. And so, you're playing this balancing game of ‘how do you feel about this’, and ‘how can I make you feel comfortable’? And oh, by the way, we're moving them in the middle of all of this. ‘How do you feel about this?’ So, it was a lot of juggling.

P2, P5, P6, and P8 all shared their stress of balancing the empathy for their staff, ensuring job responsibilities are being met, and not pushing too hard or too fast which they fear would lead teachers to resign. This has been more challenging coming out of the pandemic as P5 explained:

And so now it's like putting your foot down where you feel bad, right? Like, I lead with my heart. You know, we're in education where I know my teachers wear many hats and so it's finding that fine line. Where and how do we keep them moving forward? And we've got a teacher shortage, right? So then, we hear from the district, ‘Well don't push too hard because we need them. We don't want them to leave.’ But then, it's well how do I hold them accountable, but not push them too far? It's a constant back and forth.

P6 discussed their stress with staffing in that teachers are not equipped to meet expectations of their teaching role, especially since the start of the pandemic, and it has impacted retention. She shared:

I have found that people are coming out of college with less core teaching knowledge than they used to come out of college with. And I think that has to do with technology. Like 12 years ago, teachers had to create their own lessons and now they're just showing them where to go online to find a lesson that's been created. And so they don't have the

same skills that teachers had before. And with creativity, teaching is an art and a science. And they're not getting a lot of both of those at this point.

P2 and P8, described the stress of teachers giving up, leaving mid school year, and the worry of finding a quality replacement amidst a teacher shortage. P2 illustrated this issue:

So, my teachers get frustrated, they're upset, they're stressed out. Then, they come in here and you see that all, and you just want to take care of them. And because of all that demand that they're seeing, they don't feel equipped to deal with it. They're leaving the profession. I've had more leave in the past two years, who had just come in and say, 'I'm done, here's my two-week notice.' Not even wanting to finish out the year. And so, then you say well, now as the leader, I gotta make sure I find a qualified candidate who can handle this, who can do good instruction, and make sure that these kids are taken care of. And so, I think that a lot of just what the kids are coming in today, and our veteran staff not being equipped to deal with it because they've never had to before, that puts a lot on you. As a principal you have to lead this new era really, and you have to make sure that they're on board and that they can see that the good, and the kids, they're not purposely waking up and wanting to rip the paper in your face. But, how are we helping them, and making sure that your teachers aren't leaving, because the teacher shortage is real.

P8 shared similar concerns:

I have these really great teachers who are like, I don't know if I can do this anymore. And I don't want, I will never make somebody stay in teaching because you cannot say to this job if you don't want to, but they're phenomenal teachers that are talking about leaving, and that makes me tear up because they're so good. They're who we need, it's getting the support for them.

Of note, P8 had to pause the interview with the researcher to intervene with a teacher who was in the process of leaving campus just after the school day began. This teacher ended up leaving for the day due to her own job-related stress related to student discipline.

Student Discipline. Five participants (P1, P2, P5, P7, P8) discussed the stress of student discipline. P2 acknowledged student discipline stress was worse when she was newer in her role, especially in communicating with parents. She spends a lot of time supporting teachers with student discipline. She stated:

Now I see a lot of my stress comes from my teachers' stress as I see that our kids are coming with a lot of needs, and not just academic needs. They're so used to how do we make sure that we are filling in those achievement gaps that we've had for many years as a Title school, but now we see our kids and their emotional needs. And so we are spending so many hours and so much time researching different ways to help our kids with their behaviors. I have second graders who they don't like something that they are asked to do and they run and hide, or they won't go in the classroom, or they run away from you. And we've never had to deal with this before.

P7 also discussed the stress of time it takes to address student discipline issues and how that impacts her visibility around campus causes her stress, "And so you're always thinking that teachers and kids are thinking, 'Where is she?' And you feel bad." P5 shared, "I've had two fights last week, kids are anxious and they're not ready to go home [for winter break], some of them, and so now I have to deal with that." P8 shared how impacts of COVID has specifically impacted the third-grade cohort who were in kindergarten in March, 2020.

So those kids are not typical third graders. They're hands down our hardest group. Anything and everything is a blow up, anything and everything is a big deal. Big

emotions all over third grade. Defiance all over third grade. You know they were home for so long. And parents are trying to work, no fault of the parents, but parents trying to work they got to just do what they wanted. Distractions, talking out, literally just all over the place. Defiance, just they're not going to do it because nobody ever made them for that year and a half. So social emotionally, they're a year and a half behind. They're really like first graders. So that is hands down, our biggest group.

P3 talked about her efforts to be proactive with student discipline. She works with teachers on their school's school-wide approach with positive behavioral expectations, and involves teachers when having to call parents about student misconduct issues. However, she says fighting or physical instances come to her and identified it as a part of job-related stress.

Teachers do a lot of the discipline in their classrooms. We've asked them to do that.

When it comes to fighting, physical issues, that kind of thing, or some of the other big ones, I'll deal with it. But I really try to get them involved because it is the only way they're going to teach them from right and wrong. And not to do it. It really starts in the classroom, and the kids must respect the teachers. If they're [students] are standing in the hallway and doing stuff, they've [teachers] got to make sure they're following the rules.

When I come out [in hallway], I'll also be all over it. I help them out with that. But they [teachers] do a lot of the daily discipline, and we have our school TRAIL which is Team player, Role model, Accountable, Integrity, Learner.

P3 and P1 identified student discipline as a stressor, but linked it to parent communication which is presented in the next theme within identified job-related stressors.

Parents. Four participants (P3, P6, P7, and P1) identified that unhappy parents are a stressor for them. P3, a principal with over 10 years of school leadership experience, stated, "The

parent calls are the hardest for me.” As shared earlier, this includes conversations about student discipline, but also explaining academic programs to parents. P3 stated, “In terms of parent stress, it’s meeting their expectations. Yeah, that’s a big stressor from me, you want to be liked. You want them to love the school. You want kids to love the school.” P7 said she worries about parent perceptions if she isn’t visible, such as being off campus at a meeting or in her office and “the parents are like where are you?” P6 spoke about how the political climate is impacting parents’ trust with the school.

The parent aspect has now become shifted to, I want to say, it's politically driven. I don't know really how to articulate this parent shift. Back 12 years ago, if I build trust at a campus, parents, and I'm not going to say they don't give you a hard time because they give you a hard time, but they trust you. And so, when you call them with discipline, or you call them or something, they trust that you did what you needed to do for their kid, after you've built up that trust. And so that happened here, like I had built up that trust. Then you know, quite very frankly, when Trump became in office, I'm a white woman at a Hispanic school, and so the trust went away because it is perceived that I believe in that way, rather than the person that they've known the whole time. And so, I struggle still with some of that underlining now mistrust, as it is political[ly] driven. It is interesting, I even get kids that will say things to me like, ‘Well, I know you feel like not as much today as like a few years back. But I know you like Trump and my family doesn't like Trump.’ And I'm like, ‘What makes you think that, that I am that way?’ And they don't want to come right out and say, ‘Well, because you're white.’ But I know that's what they're thinking. And I'll say, ‘Is it because I'm white?’ And then they just look at you like, ‘What?’ Well, is that what it is, because it's not true, you hide that, you can't think

that everybody who looks like me has those same things. And so, I've had parents now who are more hesitant to trust in, what I'll call the system, because we have many undocumented families and such. And so, they're a little worried to, whereas before, that was very interesting. And they were here the whole time I have been.

P1 also connected politics and the impact of COVID to stress with parents and stated, "There is a nastiness that came out of people with their stresses, and they'll come in and right away attack the front office." She discussed how she and her team work to deescalate upset parents, but she also feels responsible to protect her staff from mistreatment. She wants parents to understand they "don't realize how hard we work, and pinpoint that no one deserves to be treated like that." P1 also stated that it's hard because those stressors "eat her up" and "whether it's being a female, it's hard to let some of those things roll off." P7 also commented that when she is in her office, she worries about her front office staff, and watches through her door window so she can "see when people aren't kind to them."

District Initiatives. Five of the eight participants (P4, P5, P6, P7, P8) shared that initiatives stemming from the district cause them stress. P6 said she feels pressure to come up with a "niche", something that "makes our school special, so people will select it" and that is difficult when she is trying to recruit families not living in her Title I school's neighborhood "to come to the neighborhood." Two participants (not from the same district) ironically called their district office "The White House." P8 shared that the "White House" causes her stress because the departments at the district office operate in silos and the "right and left hand are not communicating", and the schools "are stuck in the middle trying to make them all meet." She referred to special education, curriculum and instruction, and school safety as examples. She provided an example of lack of communication with training and time away from campus, "So

our director of safety planned training for us yesterday off campus, and today we have half a day of reading training.” P7 also is stressed when being away from campus. The week prior she had been off campus four days, not full days, but when she comes back, she has “all this stuff” waiting for her. P5 discussed the stress that her monthly district administrator meetings cause her.

We go into monthly principal meetings with 150 and our cabinet and everything and everyone's got their own agenda. And I've gotten better about how to stay organized. I would go into those and be exhausted, because I'm like, ‘I can't employ that.’ Yeah, I can't implement all this or I can't go back and do this. And so ... and every department has their own thing. And so how do you pick and choose from there, and what do you go back and share immediately with your staff? How do you put that on the back burner? You know, a lot of those things we didn't get in principal school, right when we got our Masters, and even as an assistant principal like we, you know, you got a little bit of it, but you didn't have a team to support. Coming back to elementary land from secondary, and not having a team, not having those supports. It's hard. I don't have people to bounce ideas off of.

P8 called herself “a guard” trying to “take things back they haven’t even seen yet” meaning that she removes initiatives from teachers’ responsibility before they even know about them. P4 struggled with the district initiative to move school locations during the early stages of the pandemic. The move had been in the planning stages prior to the pandemic, and the decision was made to move ahead. She stated:

So, there was a yo-yoing, going back and forth. Well, then they [district] finally decided to take it to the board and start having the conversations. And then COVID happened.

And district was like, ‘Well, we’ve already started this forward momentum. We’re going to do it anyway.’ I was like, ‘Are you kidding me right now.’ I was like, ‘Oh my goodness gracious. Okay. Sure.’ When we started coming over here [new location] to talk about how we were going to make it work, what it would look like for of remodeling or refacing of the campus, not even thinking about issues. If I hear supply chain one more time, I might lose my mind.

Moving school locations, compounded with the challenges that the pandemic brought to it with supply chain issues and all of the challenges the pandemic brought upon schools in general, greatly impacted this principal’s stress and well-being. It was discussed at length throughout her interview.

IQ4

When participants were asked IQ4 (How is your experience with job-related stress similar and different since before the start of the pandemic? [i.e., intensity and frequency]), three themes surfaced: Supporting Staff Well-Being, Rebounding, and Personal Tragedies.

Supporting Staff Well-Being. Each participant in this study spoke about the additional time they have spent since March 2020 in supporting the individuals and collective staff morale at their respective schools. Collectively, more time was spent on staff teambuilding activities, checking in with individual teachers and staff members, and giving them “TLC” (P4), and more time nurturing school culture. P5 shared, “You kind of had to be a superhero and put your feelings aside and constantly be on the front line helping triage other people’s problems.” P6 discussed stress in supporting teachers who were resistant, saying some teachers “used COVID mitigation strategies to get out of working.” P3 and P2 both described themselves as a “cheerleader” for their staff, while P1 sees herself at times as a “life coach” for her staff. P7

acknowledged, while her stakeholders have experienced trauma and common pandemic challenges such student attendances, her team has also been resilient and she led with the mindset of having them focus on what was within their control and they kept on “moving through it.” P3 started staff pickleball to help relieve stress, “Anything that relieves their stress, relieves my stress.” P8 talked about the stress of how to best support her teachers and staff.

I tried to like Kumbaya, and come up with things that are fun. But then so many times you read on blogs and stupid stuff where teachers are like ‘I don't want that. I don't want to be treated like a kid.’ But you do it because you think it's just a little something for me to show that I care, you know, but what do they want? They want me take things off their plate. Well, I can't do that. That's out of my circle of control. I can't take off IEPs in meetings, I can't take off the fact that you have 26 kids in your class. I can try, like work on it, you know. So, what do we do to support them? You know, more conversations, more this, but if I have a teacher that's like, ‘I just don't think I can do this anymore.’ Okay, then they're going to be miserable and the kids are going to be miserable. It's not like that's okay. So, it's hard. ‘What can I do?’ It's hard. Like I don't, I really don't know. I mean, we talk all the time as principals, you know, get a coffee truck before break just to show appreciation, you know, and little things here and there, free jean day, you know?

Rebounding. Four participants (P2, P5, P6, and P8) talked about the challenges of rebounding to pre-pandemic expectations with both staff and students. P6 shared she feels that teachers “lost their toolboxes”, strategies that they had before that are now lacking, and veteran teachers and experienced teachers new to her school experience “need much more support.” P2

shared the challenge of balancing the need of staff morale (previous theme) with their role as instructional leader/supervisor.

I was hired to be the instructional leader, but right now I feel like I am managing everyone's emotions and making sure they're well and taken care of. I think when COVID hit, we did everything in our power to make sure our teachers wanted to come to work and so we put all this effort into, you know, make sure we do these fun days—culture and climate first—and it fell squarely on my shoulders. And now we're trying to get back into, we are a school and we are here to educate.

P2 also described the challenges of holding teachers accountable to their job responsibilities they had pre-pandemic and balance their happiness and well-being. “Sometimes I put more on my plate so that I don't put more on your plate because I don't want you to get upset, I don't want you to be stressed, and I don't want you to be unhappy.” She does this while she also leads efforts on her campus to becoming an International Baccalaureate (IB) school. P5 shared a similar sentiment, “It got to that point where I had to find that fine line, where are you still empathetic, but where can you hold them accountable? We've got to keep moving forward now.”

As discussed earlier, P8 shared her stress of student discipline as a result of the pandemic. The social emotional needs of students have intensified since the pandemic at her school, and the needs of the kids are more than what a teacher can handle with current class sizes. She stated, “I have these great teachers who are like, I don't know if I can do this anymore.” P5 had an influx of students moving in from states that had longer durations of remote learning. Her stress was defined as supporting the needs of these students, academically, and social emotionally, while knowing her school's “rating” (Arizona school accountability letter grade) may be impacted.

Personal Tragedies. Three participants (P1, P4, and P5) talked about their personal stress during COVID with respect to losing family members. Two participants (P1 and P5) both lost fathers, one of them to COVID, while another participant (P4) lost a grandmother who was “like a mother” to her. Dealing with their personal grief was an added stressor during COVID which led to the complexity of leading during an uncertain and difficult time. P5 described that leading in early stages of COVID “numbed” her to “personal things going on.” P4 shared that when her grandmother died, it was two days before school started in a new location.

And I still showed up here for back-to-school night. I'm like, I just want to see how things are going. And I felt like I was like watching it happen. I was here, but I really wasn't here. It was weird. And I knew as soon as I got in here, I'm like, I need to leave. Like I'm not really engaged in what's happening. But I was like, oh, how are parents going to feel if I'm not there?

P1 lost her father from COVID over Christmas 2021, and acknowledged how supportive her staff and supervisor were.

My staff was great. My boss was awesome, you know, and even when my dad was sick, he [boss] goes, ‘You need to tell your staff, you need to let them know. You’re a human, and they're going to be there, and support you, and understand.’ And that was my saving grace.

IQ5

When participants were asked IQ5 (How do you know when you are feeling high levels of stress?), four themes surfaced: Exhaustion, Short Tempered, Significant Health Issues, and Other Symptoms.

Exhaustion. Three of the eight participants (P2, P5, and P7) described feeling very tired, or exhausted after having a stressful day. P7 shared that when she is really tired, she “doesn’t want to make one more decision.” She feeds off adrenaline all day to “just get it all done”, but then by the time she goes home, “it’s Cheerios for dinner” because she doesn’t have the energy to make one more decision. P2 talked about being tired after a long day, and she just wants to lay down “and be that lazy person.” P5 said stress is “exhausting.” She called herself an “energizer bunny”, but she acknowledged she is stressed when she feels like she has worked too many long, stressful days and she feels tired and overwhelmed.

Short Tempered. Three of the eight participants (P2, P4, and P5) shared that they are tense, short-tempered with people when they are stressed. P4 said she becomes “disengaged”, conversations with people become “task-related versus people-related”, and she is “short with people at times.” P2 shared similar thoughts adding she knows she is stressed when she becomes “grumpy.” P5 said she knows she is feeling stressed because she feels anger “building up”.

Significant Health Issues. Three participants (P4, P5, and P6,) reported that job-related stress caused significant health issues resulting in hospital visits. P6 said, “I actually was very sick last year, and I ended up in the hospital. And I know it was all stress related.” She also shared that she got sick again later in the school year, but went back to work earlier than she should have.

Because the first time after I got out of the hospital, they had me stay home for two weeks because I was really sick. When I went in March, I convinced them to give me the over counter medication, I took a day off, and then I went right back to work. And I shouldn't have, like I shouldn't have, but I couldn't miss at that point. I had a really hard staff last year, they were active in the union, or the association. And so, no matter what I

said last year, they would go straight to the association and so it was really, really, really stressful. It was hard to even manage, because the way our superintendent runs is if the union complains about something, he changes his mind. So, I couldn't even really lead here because I knew if I said something that they had told me to do, if they, my teachers complained to the association, that my superintendent or I reverse it, so it was a cycle all of last year. And so, the stress was like, I couldn't get healthy because of it.

P5 had a “full-blown panic attack” in her office “triggering the next semester of personal health things.” P4 was busy with leading during COVID, dealing with grief from the death in her family, and moving school locations. She said she ignored signs her body was giving her about her health.

I kept ignoring it. And I was like, ‘Well, here's an excuse for this. Here's an excuse for that. Let me ignore this.’ I remember my body finally said, ‘You’re not ignoring it anymore.’ Oh my gosh. So, in October, I finally had to go get it [physical issue] checked.

Other Symptoms. Two participants (P3 and P8) said they know they are stressed when they become “quiet.” Two others (P1 and P6) said they notice they are stressed when they begin to “overeat.” One participant (P6) says she “doesn’t sleep” when she is stressed, and another (P8) becomes “emotional” and “moves and talks very quickly.”

IQ6

When participants were asked IQ6 (How does job-related stress impact you at work?), two themes surfaced: Mood and Work Behavior Changes and Feelings of Isolation.

Mood and Work Behavior Changes. Seven participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P8) shared that job-related stress impacted their mood and behavior at work, although these vary by participant. P3 and P8 said they become “quiet.” P8 told the researcher that quietness is a

“tell-tale sign” for her staff that she is stressed. She also shared that she cleans her desk because it gives herself “a sense of control.” P3 added that she also gets angry, short-tempered, and finds herself struggling with patience. When she recognizes this, she tells herself, “You’re supposed to be the role model here, you can’t get so upset.” P5 reported when she is stressed at work, she becomes overwhelmed and exhausted, and “mentally can’t get there.” For example, if she has been off campus at district administrative meetings, she often returns stressed and struggles to mentally take care of looming issues, including student discipline and school events. P5 said she often has to “put on her game face” to get through the rest of the day. Similarly, P7 said when she is stressed, she “plows through it” and tries not to let it get to her. P4 described how tense she became working through the stress of moving school locations and how it impacted relationships with others. She provided two examples; she lost a valued staff member because their relationship “deteriorated.” Additionally, instead of taking time with students to work through their challenges, discipline became “another task” and she found herself cutting corners in the effort “to get it done.” When P2 is stressed, she becomes frustrated and at times has to close her office door. Earlier in her career, she said she would feel like she “didn’t want to be there.” P1 said stress at work causes her to go into “reflection” and thinking through what can she “do” and how does she “work through this issue.”

Feelings of Isolation. None of the participants in this study had an assistant principal; some of them had support from a dean, which in most cases were part-time. Throughout the interviews, the trend of feeling isolated came up when six participants (P2, P3, P4 P5, P6, and P7) discussed their experiences of job-related stress. P3 shared that when she is stressed, she wants to “confide in someone” and talk through issues. P2 described the same, “I have my secretary I hired when I was in another district and she’s come with me. We’ve been together for

eight years.” Both speak with a trusted front office staff member or instructional coach, and P3 acknowledged that these individuals “aren’t in the position” for shared responsibility of leadership. P7 has a part-time dean, but described how difficult it is some days when he isn’t there to help with discipline or other administrator responsibilities, and it takes her time away from “interacting with kids.” P5 and P6 talked about how difficult it is to miss work due to the lack of another administrator. As described earlier, both participants faced significant health issues. P6 had a retired principal fill in for her while she was gone for an extended time, but the other times it’s her part-time dean or “nobody’s here.” P5 shared that although her enrollment doesn’t support an assistant principal or dean, the responsibilities she has as principal are the same as a principal with higher enrollment. She said, “It’s hard, I don’t have people to bounce ideas off.” Like P5, P3 came from a secondary school and was a part of an administrative team.

That’s the problem with being an elementary principal. Depending on the size of the school, a lot of us don’t have an assistant principal that you can share with. And that’s the biggest shift from high school, I had two other assistant principals, a dean, and an athletic director. I have none of that here.

P4 also shared her feelings of isolation. She talked about missed opportunities for support within her district and principal meetings.

Who do you bounce ideas off? Who do you go to with that? That's not how it's set up to be able to help us either identify or reduce our stress. It's very task orientated, how we handle things. So, it's up to us to figure out how to reduce our stress, when we're not given the tools on how to take care of that.

IQ7

When participants were asked IQ7 (Does job-related stress impact you outside of work?), two themes surfaced: Family and Unable to Disengage.

Family. Six participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P6, and P8) identified their family as being impacted by their job-related stress. P2 shared:

So, I say far too many times that other people's kids get the best of me, and sometimes my own kids get the worst of me. Because if I come home and I've had a long day, or I'm on my third or fourth 10-and-a-half-hour day, with my own kids I just want them to sit down do their homework and they're all running around, I find myself that I'm short with them. I'm more agitated with them, and I will disconnect or disengage from them. So after we eat dinner, if they're playing, I'm on my phone or on social media and I'm not engaging in that conversation with them. I always laugh because my husband says, 'Pretty sure you love your kids first, your job second, I might be third or fourth'.

P4 said that at the height of her stress, when health became an added issue for her, her family would "tip-toe" around her. She said there was a lot "tension" at home because of her stress, and she would "isolate" herself. P5 also described being short and disengaged with her step-children, recalling the night her step-daughter received her college acceptance into the University of Arizona. "It was a long day and I just wanted to go watch a show and tune out, so I didn't engage. I felt bad afterwards." She reported that her family is "on edge" and they "don't know what they're walking into" each night. P1 and P6 both speak about their husbands. P1 said her husband reminds her by saying, "Hey, you know, don't forget about me." P6 said longer hours impact her time with her husband, "I have to worry about my husband. I'm like wait, you

know, he can't wait forever for me.” P8 shared that even though she is tired and wants to “crash” her family needs her.

Once I go home, I like crash, which I don't really get time to crash because you gotta truck a kid here, truck a kid there. But I think, I would go home and I would crash. And then my husband says, ‘Why are you on the couch?’ Like dude, you don't even know the day I had. So, then that's annoying, now I am annoyed at him.

While P3 did not report that her family is impacted by her stress because her husband travels for work frequently and her children are grown and living on their own, she reported that she “shuts down” after a stressful day, and sometimes “fixates” on outstanding work issues which can be “really depressing.”

Unable to Disengage. All eight participants talked about how they are unable to disengage from work even when they're not actually at work. P1 shared:

I'm a workaholic. And so, I do think about it 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So those little things when you know something's going off/going on with a kid or a family. Yeah, it'll be that person that's making a home visit on that, asking how they are doing and dropping off a meal. You know, and whether that's my staff or with kiddos, you know if there's something going on, I try to be up on that. I tend to come in on weekends and do things. So, my mind is always thinking about how can I make things better for my staff and my kids, but I don't do that because I have to, I do that because I love it. And so, you know for me this has become my kids and my family. That's what I did as a classroom teacher, giving the heart and soul. And it's about making a difference. And that's what I love. Having that school culture to do that. There are days that it weighs heavy and that is the time when it's like okay, I need to stop and take time for me.

P2 stated:

When you move into leadership, it becomes part of you. It's who you are, you don't leave that job at the office when you go home. It's with you every single night. If there's a student crisis issue, you're on call 24/7.

P3 detailed, "I get texts at night and they never bother me." She says that she doesn't have little kids at home. She wants the communication and questions "because then my teachers can sleep" at night. She knows a lot of her teachers leave shortly after school for activities with their children. Then they tend to pick up with work at night again and she thinks her style of communication "fits" with her staff. While P4 reported she has since set some boundaries for her personal time, during the summer her campus moved locations and she was only able to "squeeze in a three-day vacation" in which she was still bombarded with work issues. P5 also said she has set boundaries, but:

Being a newer principal, I thought that you had to be working all the time, that was the expectation. Like to be the top principal. You had to make sure you're constantly communicating with your staff. And so that's what I did. And to be honest, I almost got to a point last year where I was like I'm done with this job and I'm going to go into this year, and if people don't like it, then they can fire me.

P6 said her long hours have impacted her time for exercise. While she had set boundaries with her phone by putting it on "sleep mode from 9:00-6:00 every night", but she "checks it all [work phone] weekend", and she works on Sundays, "at least for two hours." P7 stated she also works on Sundays for "a few hours." She doesn't have work email programmed on her phone, but she does work on her computer most weeknights. P8 said she "doesn't know what to do with myself if things aren't constantly going." This means she does texting, emails, and takes calls

before and after work during the week. While she reported she doesn't do "a lot of school" on the weekends, she is "always on."

RQ1 Summary

RQ1 asked what are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic? To answer this question, five interview questions were asked of participants.

When participants were asked to describe their experience with job-related stress as a principal, four themes surfaced: Staffing and Balancing Teacher Well-Being, Student Discipline, Parents, and District Initiatives. Participants described the difficulty of finding qualified and effective teachers amidst a state-wide teacher shortage. They also described the challenge of balancing teacher well-being and retention with the pressure to accelerate learning and "getting back to normal" after three years of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, participants spoke about the increased social-emotional needs of students and incidents of student discipline as a source of job-related stress. They described the importance of being visible, responsive, and proactive to be supportive to both their students and teachers. Parents were also identified as a source of stress for the participants in this study. Participants discussed the challenge of navigating parent expectations and varying political viewpoints. They are also concerned about ensuring staff and parents alike feel supported and valued. Finally, participants said district initiatives are a source of job-related stress. Concerns of lack of alignment, communication, understanding, and support were discussed. Participants also shared their challenges in being a buffer between staff and district initiatives.

Next, the principals were asked to discuss similarities and differences in their job-related stress pre- and post-pandemic, although it is unclear, if COVID "is over." Three themes surfaced

that included participants' lived experiences: Supporting Staff Well-Being, Rebounding, and Personal Tragedies. Participants reported that the time and energy focused on supporting the well-being of individuals and their collective staff has intensified since the pandemic began and has continued. They discussed the challenges of balancing this support with the need to "rebound" from the impacts of the pandemic. One participant, P3, used the expression "triaging emotions" when talking about how stressful it is to support students, teachers, and parents. Additionally, participants feel the pressure to resume "ways of doing business" pre-pandemic and the capacity of their stakeholders to do so. Finally, three participants discussed their personal tragedies of the death of a parent/grandparent during the course of the pandemic. The stress of the job impacted their ability to grieve impacting their well-being. These themes demonstrate how the stress participants experienced was intensified by the pandemic which is consistent with participant self-reported stress levels (shown in Table 4).

The next interview question explored how participants know if they are experiencing a high level of stress. Themes of Exhaustion, Short Tempered, Significant Health Issues, and Other Symptoms emerged from participant responses. While symptoms varied, all participants experienced mental and/or physical symptoms of stress and provided detailed examples of their experiences. These symptoms ranged from fatigue, short-temperedness, and insomnia to physical ailments which caused surgeries, hospital visits, and extended time off of work. It is notable that three of the eight participants of this study indicated they were hospitalized for issues stemming from job-related stress.

The final two interview questions investigated how stress impacts the participants at work and outside of work. At work, themes of Mood and Work Behavior Changes and Feelings of Isolation surfaced, while outside of work, themes of Family and Unable to Disengage rose. The

principalship, for these participants, extends past the work-day. Participants recognized their need to not let their stress be visible at work. They also acknowledged that stress does alter their mood and ways of working at times. They described the feeling of isolation in being a sole administrator at their school, even if they had a dean/part-time dean. They shared it is stressful for them to not have another administrator to problem-solve with or rely on for support. At home, participants are concerned about the effect their job-related stress is having on their family. The mental and physical symptoms of stress they identified are also exhibited to their families, which causes them additional stress. They also described not being able to fully disengage from work including mornings, evenings, and on the weekends. All participants described how their work phone and/or email gets their attention during their personal time.

In summary, study participants have experienced increasing levels of job-related stress since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. This stress has negatively impacted their mental and physical well-being. As leaders of their school communities, they have felt the weight of supporting the diverse needs of their stakeholders while ensuring their schools are successful. Participants reported their job-related stress negatively impacts them at work and at home. Participants have struggled to disengage from their job responsibilities during their personal time as they feel the never-ending pressure and responsibility to be responsive.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) Results

How do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in? In order to answer RQ2, IQ8 (Tell me about your experiences in attempting to mitigate job-related stress.) was asked and four themes surfaced: Exercise, Established Boundaries, Time with Family and Friends, and Reflection/Mindset.

Established Boundaries. Six of the eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, and P7) spoke about the importance of establishing boundaries for themselves and others to mitigate their stress. P1 used the analogy from what people are told on airplanes, “You’ve got to put the mask over yourself because you’re not going to be any good for anyone else, unless you take care of yourself.” She also talked about the importance of modeling that for her staff.

You need to have those conscious reminders when it starts getting like overwhelming where it's like okay, stop. Take a deep breath. You know what you need to do, like, you've got to set boundaries. You know, I know I need to do that. Am I the best person at that? No, but it's best to remind everybody else and being able to recognize yourself. It's kind of like when you're pointing fingers, you know three fingers are pointing back at you. You can see that stress in yourself and in other people. So being that reminder, you need to take a break.

P2, P4, and P7 spoke about boundaries with their work phone and email when they are not at work. P2 shared, “I have my phone on Do Not Disturb at 9:00, and it doesn't go off until I wake up at 4:15 AM. Don't check your emails before bed, it's the worst thing ever. Someone's going to hurt your feelings.” P4 set new boundaries after her school moved locations. She said:

What I started to do, when we moved in here was, I made a promise to myself that I would not work on the computer at home at night. I was infamous for that. Like, okay, this has to be done. But what's interesting about this job is nothing is ever really done. And so that I was, I felt like I was always playing, like, catch up, but I can never get caught up. And so, I was like, what? And I really had to condition my teachers, that if

you send me an email at eight o'clock at night, I'm not, I don't have to respond to that. Is it life threatening? Then I will.

P7 said, “I don’t get email on my phone. Other principals are like ‘How do you do that’?” She said to the researcher, “I just can’t do it to myself.” P3 set boundaries at work with expectations.

So, I think learning to know where the boundaries are includes learning to know what are the absolute musts that you've got to accomplish. And then the others you can slide a little bit. You don't have to have everything as laid out and I think that helps reduce my stress.

Exercise. Seven of the eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, and P8) talked about how exercise or movement helps mitigate stress. P2 and P7 start each morning exercising with friends. P2 shared:

I have a great group of friends and we can hold each other accountable. I'm up at 4:15 every day and I'm at the gym by 4:40. So, we have that morning, not only that workout piece, but just that other group of people that start your day off, who connect with you and who genuinely care about you and love you. So that is the first hour and a half of my day.

P7 stated that she is a marathon runner and discussed her use of exercise.

I'm a runner, and I think it has been super therapeutic. And it works with school schedule because I run early. I have a great group of friends that I've had for many, many years and they're nice enough to meet me at 4:30 in the morning.

During P8’s interview, she shared that she had recently started a 5:00 AM club with her husband and her friend. They “hold each other accountable” to get up at 5:00 “and start moving.”

She said, “I feel like that's been helpful. Just like it gives me an hour by myself to do whatever. And it's been great. And I really enjoy it.”

P1 struggled with stress her first year as a principal and her health suffered. She said that “experience has made me more aware of my own health and working on balance.” During her interview, she shared:

When I first became a principal, I gained nearly 30 pounds that first year, stress eating and not exercising. The next two years I continued to gain weight, another 20 pounds. This was not healthy, which is why I took up doing more walks, hiking, yoga, and biking especially during COVID or times of stress. I do YOGA three to four times per week to deal with stress. Our district's BE WELL program has also been a motivator and something I enjoy participating in. Over the past 5 years, I've lost those 50+ pounds.

P5 said she is “always moving” and “needs fresh air” throughout the day to help mitigate her stress. While P4 shared she “likes to exercise” to mitigate stress, but hasn’t been able to recently due to major surgery and then a broken toe. P3, also was recovering from an injury and uses exercise as an “outlet.” She shared:

I'm looking for an outlet. I love to walk; I love to run. I hurt my foot so I'm going to go back and start running again. I've got to find something to get out of my own head. And that's still that's what I'm, you know, dealing with today.

Time with Family and Friends. All eight participants spoke about how time with their loved ones helps them cope with job-related stress. P1 “schedules time” on her calendar to spend with her mom. She also talked about the support she receives from her loved ones, “I've got a great support network. Whether it's my husband, whether it's my family, but even the staff on

campus, and I think it's just having that culture of family and supporting that has really helped me.” P8 and P4 both spoke about the importance of friendships. P8 shared:

I have a great group of girlfriends. I think I have different pockets of girlfriends from my life. I have my school friends, and then I have my friends with because our kids are friends. Yeah, and then kind of unique, I'm still really good friends with friends from high school.

When speaking of friendships, P4 stated:

I've learned over the years, and that's this job is very isolating. So, who I can share information with? And so, my best friend, she works in the district, but she's not another principal. And it works out really well, because then it doesn't become just a gripe session about this. It's here, 'Let me vent about this.' And then she vents about what she's doing. But then we also, you know, do our crafts together, or we just go watch a movie together. And so, I feel grounded in that.

P6 also spends time with friends to mitigate stress. She finds value in spending time with other principals or others in the educational field.

I do really purposefully keep connections with friends that were or are principals, or people who are in the field that understand. So frequently we'll do like a happy hour after work just to get together. And I'm purposeful at that. I probably will do that every other week with somebody someplace, just to kind of release. Nobody, my husband is not in education, my best friend is not in education. So, no one I socialize with every day, you know, my, my core people, they don't understand. So, I can't release to them.

P2 makes it a priority to take her kids to school in the morning. She shared:

So that's one thing that over the years as I've gotten more into this position and realizing how important my family is also to me. I'm not going to give that up. If I can't take them to school for some reason, like if I have an early morning meeting, then I'm going to pick them up from school. I make that a priority because I won't ever get that time back with my kids.

Both P2 and P3 work closer to home in their current positions. P2 said, "Not working so far away is really helpful." P3 shared that in a previous job she had an hour commute. "I would get to school, be the first person in the morning getting there and I'd be the last one leaving. You can't sustain that." P7 stated she "gets lunch with her daughter" to help her cope with stress, and P5 has a business with her partner and friend, something they started "to decompress" and therefore spends time with them preparing for craft fairs. She has found spending time with them, and "building things for people" as a way to mitigate stress.

Reflection/Mindset. Five of the eight participants (P1, P2, P4, P5, P7) discussed how reflection and mindset are strategies they use to mitigate stress. P1 often spoke of "stopping and taking a breath" throughout her interview. She also said she "gets out of her office", and walks around the school" when she feels stressed. She shared, "You know, I get more done on a walk of thinking than I do by answering all the emails and doing the things. It helps to clear your head and refocus things on what really needs to be important." P2 shared that she listens to podcasts each morning that "support positive mindset" and "it starts the day off in a good mood." Then when she gets home at night, she shared she checks her mindset before going inside to her family, "sometimes you just got to sit in the driveway and check yourself."

P4 talked about the point she noticed the stress she was carrying really started to impact her behaviors at work.

That's when I think I started to have a check with myself. I'm like, 'Where am I emotionally engaging myself?' Because if I'm seeing that everything's coming at me, then how do I look? On the outside? If I feel eh on the inside. So, I started to do a lot of that self-reflection.

After her anxiety attack, P5 started seeing a counselor who helped her with reflection. She shared her experience.

Talking with my counselor, she gave me different analogies in terms of, what your staff is putting on your plate? She helped me see that I've got to be able to compartmentalize and put those things apart. And so, I started kind of reflecting on that. What are those things that I'm bringing...the work emails, the text messages that I'm getting? I reflected, what was I mad about? What are those things that are making me mad? There's some staff that do the same thing this year that they've done before. It doesn't make me mad this year because I've learned to not let it bother me. I don't take it personal[ly] anymore.

P7 spoke to the researcher about mindset and how she reflects when she runs. "I've ran for many years. When I run, I think about work for a little bit. And then I think about how much is out here, okay, just look at the ducks. I think it's just like a mindset." She also spoke about her previous role working in secondary education where "serious things would happen to kids" and she'd work with them to help "make it through" high school. This gave her "perspective" as she shared, "and when I came here, I love the elementary school."

Other Findings. Although not a part of a previous theme, some participants shared further thoughts of note. P3 and P4 also shared they need support with coping strategies. P3 said she is “trying to find new ways to cope.” P4 shared:

I'm still learning for myself, like how to do self-care. But nobody really says what to do for the self-care. They say, ‘to do self-care.’ But nobody gives you suggestions, or ‘here's what you really should do for self-care’, because, again, it's personalized. But even if they had ideas on what to do for that, that would be huge. Because nobody really talks about that.

P8 said she struggles with mitigating stress as well.

I don't think I really do which is the problem. You're going to make me cry. I don't know. I mean, I guess that's probably my problem. But I feel like that's how I've always been, I've always been that type of person. So, I feel like sometimes I thrive better under stress. And I don't know what to do with myself if things aren't constantly going. That's like my personality.

RQ2 Summary

RQ2 asked how principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in. In order to answer RQ2, one interview question was asked related to participants discussing their experiences in attempting to mitigate job-related stress and four themes surfaced: Exercise, Established Boundaries, Time with Family and Friends, and Reflection/Mindset. Participants spoke about the need to establish boundaries so their personal time wasn't as impacted by their job outside of the work day. These boundaries included setting limits on technology (phone and email) and not working as much outside of the work day. Participants stated that they rely on time with friends and family to mitigate stress. They are purposeful about

planning time in their schedules to spend time with loved ones. Many of them reported exercises as a mitigation strategy, and two participants exercise with friends early in the morning. The final theme generated within this topic is Reflection/Mindset. Repeatedly, participants talked about how reflecting on their day and experiences helps them cope, and their mindset makes an impact on how they mitigate stress.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) Results

Do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role? In order to answer RQ3, IQ9 (What are your thoughts about the future in your role as principal?) was asked and three themes surfaced: Love, Open to Other Opportunities in the Education Field, and Changing Role.

IQ9

Love. Six of the eight participants (P1, P2, P3, P6, P7, and P8) used the word “love” when they answered this interview question. P1 said this role “is exhausting, but it’s finding the balance in it.” She shared:

Like who can ask for a better job. I love what I do. And so, it's not a job for me. It's a passion. It's a calling. My future is this because I love it. And so, I don't do this because I have to do it. You know, realistically could I retire right now. I don't. What would I do with myself? I would literally be bored.

P2 said she “truly loves what I do, and I wouldn’t be here if I didn’t.” She is “not going anywhere outside of education.” P3 stated, “I love what I do and I came so late to the game. I wake up every day and want to be here, I love what I do. I love this.” P6 said, I love being a

principal, I love, love being a principal.” P7 spoke about students, “I just love being with the kids.” P8 shared:

I do love it, as much as you made me cry, I do love this job. And I cannot see myself doing anything else. People will say, ‘Oh, will you go to the White House [district office]?’ and like, ‘No, I’ll never go to the White House [district office]’ because I say if you take me away from the kids and the teachers, that’s all the stuff I hate. I hate that stuff. So no, I will always be a site level leader. That’s just my nature.

Open to Other Opportunities in the Education Field. Six of the eight participants (P2, P3, P4, P6, P7, and P8) are open to other opportunities in the education field. P2 shared, “I do know that eventually, I want to be outside of the of the school and move into a different position in education, whatever that may be. I gotta find the fit that will work best for me.” P3, a second career educator, talked about her goals to be a district leader or teach at the university level. She shared:

I say at some point the clock’s ticking, but possibly assistant superintendent. I’ve always said I want to have a very small district and maybe be a superintendent there. So, I need to go for it, and it’s never been a secret that that’s kind of my aspirations. Or do this and then teach online. I love adult learning.

P4 said she “enjoys” what she is doing, but “wants my next challenge.” She can see herself working in a district capacity, potentially within gifted education, but “doesn’t want to lose sight” of leadership at the site level. P6 stated she tells people to “leave when you’re happy” and “probably will apply” for district level positions for the next school year. P7 also pondered seeking a district level position in curriculum in the future, but “goes back and forth” as she enjoys being a principal. P8 considered leaving education after the last two years, but said, “This

is me. What else could I do?” She said she considers teaching at the university level in the future. She stated:

I think maybe when I retire, that I would go back and maybe teach a class like at ASU or the colleges and my strength is culture, culture of a school and building culture. Maybe I'll teach a course on that.

Changing Role. Six of the eight participants (P2, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8) described the way the principalship is changing when discussing their retention. P6, in her 9th year as a principal, shared:

So, I will say the job I do today is much different than the job I did when I first started. And I enjoy what I used to do much more than I enjoy what I do now. And so, what the stressors I have these days are much different than the stressors were 10 years ago. It's not what it used to be, and I'm ready to have a different challenge rather than see the job that I love change to be so challenging that I don't enjoy it anymore.

P2 spoke about how the principalship continues to evolve.

And I always say there's no handbook on this one. There was no handbook during COVID on how to run a school during a global pandemic. And two, there's no handbook to what we're seeing now. With the legislation changes such as no suspensions, Move on with Reading, and now library books, it can go on and on and on. So, there's always going to be something that comes down the pike, there's always going to be someone who wants to come after you.

P2 also shared the support needed for principals.

I think that if we want to keep good people in the position, and we want to make sure that like our principals are well taken care of, is that making sure school districts or

organizations really supports its leaders and really is able to either shelter them or take some of that from them. Making sure that you have that good relationship with your supervisor so that you're able to sit down and say, 'Listen, I need help,' and not to be afraid to ask for help. It's okay to ask for help because this job is hard.

P7 discussed her concern for the changing role and retention. She stated:

I hope that principals do feel supported. And I think that's a layer that is kind of missed. Like, I think we're like, sandwiched in sometimes. Like that, we're such like, hopefully, caretakers that I think if principals aren't supported, I think they will leave the profession. Because I hear that from other people, but I don't know the answer to that.

P5 is not planning to stay in the role as "demands on principals are just, they just continue to be higher." She said, "I know physically, like I can't keep doing this for very long" and she "looks for other jobs all the time." She added, "Sometimes I'm like, I'll just go work at Lowe's at a cash register where I can just ring stuff up. I know that impact's not the same, but it's just, for what, what about your own mental health?" She, like P2, also spoke about changing legislation and how that impacts how the role has changed.

I've had my librarian coming in crying about the new legislation with library books. I just heard we have the new one for our K through five teachers that by 2028 they have to get their literacy endorsement. I feel like some, most of the time, it's not so much being an instructional leader as opposed to triaging and managing things that we're getting from legislation from the district and trying to deliver it to your staff so they don't absolutely hate you at the end of the day. As opposed to me when it's like being in the classroom going doing these things. I feel like I'm always stretched everywhere else.

P8 shared that she thinks the role should be split into a “co-principal” model with one principal to have “managerial/operational” duties and the other principal to have “instructional leader” duties. She stated:

These groups are coming at you like you need to plan for SPED, and you need to plan for the district’s strategic plan implementation for your site, and now you guys need stuff for MTSS with behavior. I know it's all there, but one person’s going to do all of that? Right? And then they [district] says ‘Okay, well we’re taking this off your plate now. Your resource teacher is going to be the lead.’ Well, she has 25-28 students, she can’t take the lead on that. How do you expect her to do that? Yeah, I love the job-sharing idea of a principal role. I think it would be great.

While P4 recognizes the ongoing changes, she discussed the importance of learning, mindset, and moving forward.

But there's always going to be something, you know, curriculum changes, in the middle of this too, like the dust hasn’t even settled. And now our curriculum is being cancelled. And we have to adopt a new textbook. So, there's always going to be something, I'm a firm believer that something's only a mistake, if you don't learn from it. And so that's where I tried to do that self-reflection piece of it. I had to stand in front of my teachers, because I knew that they are going to receive this change in whatever tone I said it, and I flat out told them, ‘Yeah, things happen to us, but at some point, we must figure out how we’re moving forward from that.’ I don't like to be a victim; I want to be a victor.

RQ3 Summary

RQ3 probes whether principals’ stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role. In order to answer RQ3, an interview question regarding participants’ thoughts about

their future role as a principal was asked and three themes surfaced: Love, Open to Other Opportunities in the Education Field, and Changing Role. The majority, six participants, used the word “love” when talking about their role and responding to this question. While they do love the principalship, five of these six same participants also said they are or will be pursuing other options in the educational field. When probed further, the four participants who used the word love and stated they are open to other opportunities in the educational field, also pointed to the changes to the role as being of concern. According to these participants, changes to the role are stemming from legislative or district initiatives. Therefore, the love they have for their schools, their staff, and their stakeholders isn’t enough for at least half of the participants in this study to remain in their role due to changes to the principalship.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 provided participant demographic information and research question findings as a result of the semi-structured interviews with female principal participants. Within RQ1, themes related to job-related stress were identified. These themes included Staffing and Balancing Teacher Well-Being. Student Discipline, Parents, District Initiatives. When comparing stressors prior to those of the COVID-19 pandemic, themes of stressors during/after the pandemic include Supporting Staff Well-Being, Rebounding, and Personal Tragedies. This suggests that the stress participants experience has been intensified by the pandemic which is consistent with participant self-report stress levels. When participants identified how they know they are experiencing high levels of stress, themes emerged: Exhaustion, Short Tempered, Significant Health Issues, and Other Symptoms. Three of the eight participants have been hospitalized for identified job-related stress. The researcher probed how stress impacts the participants at work and outside of work. Themes of Mood and Work Behavior Changes and

Feelings of Isolation surfaced at work, while themes of Family and Unable to Disengage are impacted by job-related stress outside of work.

With respect to RQ2, which asked how principals cope with job-related stress and the specific practices they engage in, four themes were identified: Established Boundaries, Time with Family and Friends, Exercise, and Reflection/Mindset. Participants described boundaries they set, including technology, to limit disruption to personal time. Participants also cope with job-related stress by spending time with family and friends. A focus on exercise and physical health was also generated as a practice to mitigate job-related stress. Lastly, the theme of participant Reflection/Mindset emerged as a coping strategy.

Regarding RQ3, if principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role, three themes were identified: Love, Open to Opportunities in the Educational Field, and Changing Role. Participants have a love for their work; however, the theme of Openness to Opportunities in the Educational Field was also identified. Despite attempts to mitigate stress, the theme of the Changing Role, expanding responsibilities, and pressures, has an impact on participants' desire or lack thereof to remain in the role. Chapter 5 presents the researcher's summary of the study, summary of the findings and conclusions, implications and recommendations for practice, recommendations for future research, and closing remarks.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2021 Wallace Report found that the impact of an effective school principal is broader and stronger than previously thought and called for renewed attention on research of school principals (Grissom et al., 2021). Report findings confirmed the way principals approach school leadership directly affects schools' outcomes. Coincidentally, reports of heightening concerns related to principal well-being and retention were also being issued. For example, the 2022 RAND report found that 85% of principals report frequent job stress and 48% report burnout, as compared to the 35% of other working adults who reported frequent job stress (as cited in Steiner et al., 2022, p. 5). School leaders are working longer hours, getting less sleep, are more dehydrated, have poor diet practices, exercise less regularly, and spend less time with loved ones than the general population (Ray et al., 2020).

As outlined in Chapter 2, the principal role had been intensifying and changing prior to March, 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic, political polarization, and ongoing threats of school violence have added to this intensification. The NASSP (2021) indicated that four of every 10 principals are expected to leave the profession in the next three years. Female educational leaders are particularly at risk as they are more likely to report frequent job-related stress and burnout than male principals (Steiner et al., 2022). The literature, demonstrated within Chapter 2, suggested both local and federal/state policy and practice need to provide better support to school principals which included attending to working conditions. The literature also demonstrated that principals equipped with personal coping strategies show promise in being more successful and effective (Leithwood et al., 2019); however, more research is needed related to how well-being changes during the tenure of a principal. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative transcendental

phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of female elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. The aim was to contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention. The final chapter of this study presents a summary of the study, summary of findings and conclusions, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, and closing remarks.

Summary of Study

Three research questions guided this qualitative study: what are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time, including during the COVID-19 pandemic; how do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in; and do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role? Occupational stress is a common phenomenon experienced by principals. Therefore, the researcher utilized a phenomenological approach to investigate female elementary principals' experiences with job-related stress, coping strategies, and retention considerations. Transcendental phenomenology is a philosophical approach to qualitative research that seeks to understand the human experience (Moustakas, 1994).

Following IRB approval, the researcher obtained permission from two school districts within the Phoenix metropolitan area and worked with district leadership to identify female participants with at least three, ideally five, years of experience in being a school principal. After obtaining participant consent, each of the eight participants in this study completed a preliminary survey providing demographic information and initial perceptions about job-related stress. Next, the researcher met with participants at their respective school locations for a semi-structured recorded interview using a set of questions to guide the conversations. The researcher then reviewed transcribed audio recordings of each interview. Phenomenology looks at the data

thematically to extract essences and essentials of participant meanings (Miles et al., 2020). Thus, utilizing coding, the researcher identified significant statements from the interviews. These statements were grouped into themes that represented participant experiences aligned to the research questions. Finally, a summary or *essence* was constructed from the participants' responses to describe the overall experience of job-related stress, strategies for coping, and the influence on remaining in the principal role.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

The qualitative transcendental phenomenological design led to an insightful study of principals' experiences with on-the-job stress and coping strategies. The eight principals in this study had varying backgrounds of administrative experience and school sizes. Their lived experiences, reactions to, and thoughts about, stress led to four overall themes: staffing and balancing teacher well-being, student discipline, parents, and district initiatives. When comparing stressors prior to those of the COVID-19 pandemic, themes of stressors since the pandemic began included supporting staff well-being, rebounding, and personal tragedies. As described in Chapter Two, the role of the school principal continues to evolve and intensify and the pandemic has contributed to these changes. The themes in this study corroborate that claim as the pandemic intensified these participants' experiences with stress. These principals shared their stress in rebounding from the pandemic and advancing student achievement, while balancing the well-being of their staff and students after three tumultuous pandemic years. Faced with a state-wide teacher shortage, participants discussed their challenges of the pressures of school accountability, district initiatives, and expectations of parents while also addressing the social emotional needs of adults and children. Many of these stressors were consistent with stressors described by other principals in the 2022 RAND Study (Steiner et al., 2022). Sadly, several of

the participants described their experiences of stress while also grieving the recent personal loss of a loved one.

Participants identified common themes of short temperedness, exhaustion, significant health issues, and other symptoms when experiencing high levels of stress. These themes are characteristic of Selye's general adaptation syndrome, which includes three stages to stress: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion (Tip & Yang, 2018). The resistance stage includes symptoms of irritability, frustration, and poor concentration. Consequently, the theme of short-temperedness would be categorized within the resistance stage. Following the alarm and resistance stages of responses to stress, exhaustion may be indicative of *chronic stress* in which individuals may suffer from fatigue, burnout, anxiety, decreased stress tolerance, weakened immune systems, and risk for stress-related illness (Tip & Yang, 2018). As noted earlier, one participant in this study was hospitalized following an anxiety attack and put on medication, while two others were hospitalized for physical ailments requiring surgery. All three participants attributed their health issues were a result of job-related stress. Participants in this study described experiences characteristic of *chronic stress* with periods of *acute stress*, consistent with literature on stress and leadership positions described in Chapter Two.

Participants are impacted by job-related stress at work and outside of work. Themes of mood and work behavior changes and feelings of isolation impacted these principals while they were at work. Participants were aware of how stress impacted their moods and the ways in which they go about their work. Often, elementary principals lead their schools as the sole administrator which contributes to feelings of loneliness and isolation. While some of these participants have support of a dean of students, the theme of isolation still surfaced. Outside of work, themes of family and being unable to disengage were identified by participants. Principals are susceptible

to *compassion fatigue*, the weariness that comes from caring (Johnson, 2020). Individuals suffering from compassion fatigue may experience issues listed above including, but not limited to: moodiness, being overwhelmed, unable to unplug their phones, and issues with relationships (Hertel & Johnson, 2020). Participants shared examples of neglect to their own well-being for the sake of others or their jobs, and how those choices impacted their spouses and families. There is a strong connection between participant examples and the theories of sacrifice syndrome, dissonance, and power stress as defined by Boyatzis & McKee (2005) within the literature review.

When participants identified multiple ways in which they cope with the stress they experience, four themes emerged: establishing boundaries, time with family and friends, exercise, and reflection/mindset. Several of the participants discussed how their daily routines, time with loved ones, focus on their physical health, mindset awareness, and reflective practices help mitigate the stress they experience. While none of the participants utilized the term *mindfulness*, several of them described aspects of mindfulness and mindful leadership practices. Murphy (2011) described the difference between showing up as a “balanced-self” versus a “reactive-self” in stressful situations and how that helps individuals balance emotion with reason, see their entirety of situations, and respond calmly, clearly, and intentionally (p. 40). Within the interviews, participants gave examples of each approach demonstrating the interplay within an individual and differences among participants. Participants also indicated they needed more strategies for self-care and they lack resources and knowledge. None of the participants specifically mentioned social and emotional intelligence competencies as a tool to mitigate stress, as defined by Mahfouz and Richardson (2020); however, as experiences were shared with the researcher, varying degrees of competencies were identified. This indicates that while

participants may possess these competencies, they do not connect them with stress mitigation for themselves.

Most participants in this study used the word “love” frequently when asked about their desire to remain in the role. Generally, educators choose and stay within the profession because of the passion they have for educating children and making a difference. These participants are no different. Largely, they have a calling to serve as educators and remain because of their commitment to their school communities. However, they are considering other options, some sooner than others. Work intensification and the changing role are influencing at least half of the participants’ desire to remain in the role for the duration of their career. Changes they pointed to stem from legislative and district mandates and overall lack of support, both of which negatively impact working conditions. According to the literature, working conditions are the highest contributing factor influencing principal turnover (Levin et al., 2020, Steiner et al., 2022).

As a result of the literature, the researcher developed a conceptual framework displaying the vulnerability of school principals have for occupational stress as described in Figure 2. The researcher also believed that if principals were more aware of their stress, possess knowledge and practice healthy coping strategies, and have supportive structures around them, they would have stronger social emotional competencies and be more likely to continue in their role for longer (see Figure 3).

Following the results of this study, the researcher adds that intentional professional development and mentoring needs to be included as part of the awareness of stress and awareness/practice of healthy coping strategies: recognizing and addressing job-related stress, mitigation strategies including mindfulness, and effective leadership practices designed to advance social emotional competencies and mindful leadership. Additionally, supportive

structures include trusting relationships between the principal and principal supervisor so well-being support may be provided if/when needed.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

The data collected in this study reflects personal accounts of female elementary school principals' experiences within two districts in the Phoenix metropolitan area. This study adds to the body of literature on school principal wellness and retention and supports growing research on COVID-19 pandemic implications in K-12 schools. In revisiting the significance of this study, the research acquired brings forth value and provides further evidence that great attention and action needs to be taken in support of principal well-being. This attention and action should also include a lens on female school principal well-being per the emerging literature, including this study, outlines concern for this specific subgroup. Educational practitioners, district leaders, and local/state/federal policymakers may benefit from this data by attending to the following implications and recommendations for practice.

There needs to be a deeper awareness of the increasing levels of occupational stress that K-12 educational leaders experience and an understanding that stress is significantly impacting principal well-being. It is recommended that school districts and organizations attend to school principal working conditions and principals' identified needs. Additionally, there should be purposeful coherence and alignment among district initiatives across departments to support the needs at the school level. This includes effective communication, school principal voice and feedback, and relevant professional development.

As shown, effective school leaders are critical to school success, and job-related stress is threatening the effectiveness of school principals and their retention. Furthermore, educational legal statutes, policies, and district initiatives have unintended consequences which negatively

impact educator well-being and retention. It is recommended that school principal input be obtained as part of decision making at all levels; local district and state/federal policies and mandates. Additionally, it is imperative that trusting relationships between principals and their supervisors/district leadership are developed, nurtured, and maintained so principals can communicate their needs and receive support if/when needed. Furthermore, school leaders benefit from being a part of a supportive network with other school leaders and providing opportunities for principals to engage in peer mentoring, coaching, and learning together are essential.

Finally, many school principals need support with stress mitigation, self-care, and effective leadership practices that support personal well-being. Therefore, it is recommended that wellness programs are established (or are refined) and are inclusive of all staff, including school principals. It is important that school leaders are provided with professional development and mentorship on recognizing and addressing job-related stress, mitigation strategies including mindfulness, and effective leadership practices designed to advance social emotional competencies and mindful leadership. With studies suggesting that female school leaders, including those of color, are more susceptible to job-related stress than males, increased awareness, consideration, and appropriate supportive structures may be needed and are recommended.

Recommendations for Future Studies

This study sought to capture the lived experiences of job-related stress of female elementary school principals, their strategies of coping with stress, and if those strategies impacted their desire to remain in their role. The methodological design of the study is replicable. It is recommended that there is further study on this topic as there is limited literature

on principal stress and well-being, specifically after the COVID-19 pandemic. To support generalizability, future studies would benefit from the inclusion of a greater number of participants, including those with varying backgrounds, experience levels, and from different geographic regions. Therefore, the following comparability studies are recommended:

- A comparability study of male and female administrators and of diverse race
- A comparability study of principals with varying levels of experience
- A comparability study that includes samples of urban, rural, and suburban principals
- A comparability study that includes various United States' geographic regions.

Additionally, this study would benefit from a mixed-method approach in which participants provided responses that could be quantified and enhanced with qualitative examples.

Closing Remarks

The researcher is grateful for the participation and transparency of the dedicated and thoughtful educational leaders who took part in this study. Their voices, and the voices of school leaders everywhere, need to be heard as part of ongoing educational reform efforts. Ongoing conversation and attention to mental health and well-being across industries is vital. Individuals must be empowered with knowledge about personal well-being and work in environments in which employee wellness is prioritized and supported. The researcher is hopeful those supporting principals and aspiring principals find opportunities to weave findings into professional development and organizational practice.

REFERENCES

- Abitabile, A. (2020). *How school leadership affects teacher retention*. National Association of Secondary School Principals. <https://www.nassp.org/publication/principal-leadership/volume-20/principal-leadership-january-2020/making-teachers-stick-january-2020/>
- Arizona Auditor General. (2022). *Arizona School District Spending-Fiscal Year 2021-Analysis and Data File*. <https://www.azauditor.gov/reports-publications/school-districts/multiple-school-district/report/arizona-school-district-8>
- Arizona School Personnel Administration Association. (2022, September, 20). *Severe teacher shortage in Arizona continues*. [Press Release]. <https://www.aspaa.org/news/617090/Severe-Teacher-Shortage-in-Arizona-Continues.htm>
- Arizona School Board Association. (2022). *Teacher and administrator salary and benefits survey*. <https://azsba.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/FINAL-Summary-ASBA-FY21-Salary-Survey1-4.pdf>
- Beausaert, S., Froehlich, D. E., Devos, C., & Riley, P. (2016). Effects of support on stress and burnout in school principals. *Educational Research*, 58(4), 347–365. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131881.2016.1220810>
- Béteille, T., Kalogrides, D., & Loeb, S. (2012). Stepping stones: Principal career paths and school outcomes. *Social Science Research*, 41(4), 904–919.
- Bork, Rachel H., & Gendelman, M. (August, 2020). *Supporting a nation in crisis: Solutions for local leaders to improve mental health and well-being during and post-COVID-19*. de Beaumont Foundation. <https://www.debeaumont.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/mental-health-action-guide.pdf>
- Boyatzis, R. E., & McKee, A. (2005). *Resonant leadership: Renewing yourself and connecting with others through mindfulness, hope, and optimism*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- Brackett, M., Cannizarro, M., & Levy, S. (2020). The pandemic's toll on school leadership is palpable. Here's what is needed for a successful school year. *EdSurge*. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2020-07-16-the-pandemic-s-toll-on-school-leaders-is-palpable-here-s-what-s-needed-for-a-successful-school-year>
- Brinkmann, J. L., Cash, C., & Price, T. (2021, May). Crisis leadership and coaching: A tool for building school leaders' self-efficacy through self-awareness and reflection. *International Journal of Mentoring and Coaching in Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJMCE-01-2021-0009>
- Burke, J. (2021). *The ultimate guide to implementing wellbeing programmes for school*. Routledge.
- Burwell, T. W. (2021). The impact of COVID-19 on school leadership, e-learning, and student achievement in the United Arab Emirates. *International Studies in Educational Administration*, 49(1), 94-100. <http://cceam.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ISEA-2021-49-No-1.pdf#page=100>

- Cash, C.S., Brinkmann, J.L. & Price, T.S. (2020). Capturing this moment in educational leadership pandemic—cataclysm or crisis. *Educational Planning*, 27(4), 7-23. https://isep.info/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/ISEPVol27.Issue4_.pdf
- Catano, N., & Stronge, J. H. (2006). What Are principals expected to do? Congruence between principal evaluation and performance standards. *NASSP Bulletin*, 90(3), 221–237. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636506292211>
- Chapman, B. (2021, Dec. 9). Schools confront a wave of student misbehavior, driven by months of remote learning. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-student-misbehavior-remote-learning-covid-11639061247>
- Clifford, M., & Coggshal, J. (2021). *Evolution of the principalship: Leaders explain how the profession is changing through a most difficult year*. National Association of Elementary School Principals. <https://www.naesp.org/resources/research-reports/leaders-we-need-now/evolution-of-the-principalship-leaders-explain-how-the-profession-is-changing-through-a-most-difficult-year/>
- Creswell, J. & Poth, C. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches*, (4th ed.). SAGE.
- Davidson, R. J., & Begley, S. (2012). *The emotional life of your brain*. Hudson Press.
- Dake, L. (2021). *Crisis management: Effective school leadership to avoid early burnout*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- DeMatthews, D. E., Knight, D. S., & Shin, J. (2022). The principal-teacher churn: Understanding the relationship between leadership turnover and teacher attrition. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 58(1), 76–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X211051974>
- Dill, K. (2022, June 20). School's out for summer and many teachers are calling it quits. *Wall Street Journal*. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/schools-out-for-summer-and-many-teachers-are-calling-it-quits-11655732689>
- Education Resource Strategies. (2018, May). *Arizona state funding project: Addressing the teacher labor market challenge*. <https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/4001-arizona-state-funding-project-key-findings-presentation-full-presentation.pdf>
- Figley, C. R. (1995a). Compassion fatigue as secondary traumatic stress disorder: An overview. In C. R. Figley (Ed). *Compassion fatigue: Coping with secondary traumatic stress disorder in those who treat the traumatized*. Brunner Mazel Publishers.
- Figley, C. R. (1995b). *Transforming stress through awareness, education and collaboration*. American Institute of Stress. <https://www.stress.org/military/for-practitionersleaders/compassion-fatigue>
- Goldring, R., & Taie, S. (2018). *Principal attrition and mobility: Results from the 2016-17 principal follow-up survey: First look*. (NCES 2018-066). National Center for Education Statistics Working Paper. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2018/2018066.pdf>
- Goleman, D. (2000). *Working with emotional intelligence*. Bantam Books.

- Goleman, D., & Boyatzis, R. (2008). Social intelligence and the biology of leadership. *Harvard Business Review*, 74–81.
- Goleman D., Boyatzis, R., & McKee, A. (2002). *Primal leadership: Learning to lead with emotional intelligence*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Green, F., & McIntosh, S. (2001). The intensification of work in Europe. *Labour Economics*, 8(2), 291–308. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0927-5371\(01\)00027-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0927-5371(01)00027-6)
- Grissom, J. A., Egalite A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021, February). *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research*. The Wallace Foundation. <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis>
- Harbatkin, E., & Henry, G. (2019, October 21). The cascading effects of principal turnover on students and schools. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2019/10/21/the-cascading-effects-of-principal-turnover-on-students-and-schools/>
- Harris, A. (2020). COVID 19-School leadership in crisis? *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(3), 321-326. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JPCC-06-2020-0045>
- Harris, A., & Jones, M. (2020). COVID 19 – School leadership in disruptive times. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(4,) 243-247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2020.1811479>
- Hertel, R., & Johnson, M. (2020). How the traumatic experiences of students manifest in school settings. In E. Rossen (Ed.). *Supporting and educating traumatized students: A guide for school-based professionals*. Oxford University Press.
- Horwood, M., Parker, P., Riley, P. (2019). One in three principals are seriously stressed, here's what we need to do about it. *The Conversation*. <https://theconversation.com/one-in-three-principals-are-seriously-stressed-heres-what-we-need-to-do-about-it-110774>
- Hutchinson, J. (2019). *Work-Life Balance Attributes of Self-Care with Authentic Leaders: A Multiple Case Study* [D.M., University of Phoenix]. <http://www.proquest.com/docview/2272840909/abstract/D6E12AF31434425FPQ/39>
- Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg, M. T. (2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491–525. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654308325693>
- Johnson, M. M. (2020, October). Self-care: The antidote to compassion fatigue. *Educational Leadership*, 78(2), 46-51.
- Johnson, R., & Christensen, L. (2019). *Educational research: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed approaches*. (7th ed.). SAGE
- Jones, S. M., & Bouffard, S. M. (2012). Social emotional learning in schools: From programs to strategies. *Social Policy Report*, 26(4), 1-33. https://www.srcl.org/sites/default/files/documents/spr_264_final_2.pdf

- Kabat-Zinn, J. (2003). Mindfulness-based interventions in context: Past, present, and future. *Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice*, 10(2), 144–156.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/clipsy.bpg016>
- Klocko, B. A., & Wells, C. M. (2015). Workload pressures of principals: A focus on renewal, support, and mindfulness. *NASSP Bulletin*, 99(4), 332–355.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636515619727>
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2020). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership revisited. *School Leadership & Management*, 40(1), 5–22.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434.2019.1596077>
- Levin, S., Bradley, K., & Scott, C. (2019). *Principal turnover: Insights from current principals*. Learning Policy Institute, National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Levin, S., Scott, C., Yang, M., Leung, M., & Bradley, K. (2020, May 4). *Supporting a strong, stable principal workforce: What matters and what can be done*. Learning Policy Institute, National Association of Secondary School Principals.
- Liu, L. (2020). Examining the usefulness of mindfulness practices in managing school leader stress during COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, 5(1), 15-20.
<https://oed.org/index.php/JSARD/article/download/Examining%20the%20Usefulness%20of%20Mindfulness%20Practices/1216>
- Lyons, J. B., & Schneider, T. R. (2009). The effects of leadership style on stress outcomes. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 20(5), 737–748. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2009.06.010>
- Mahfouz, J., Greenberg, M. T., & Rodriguez, A. (2019). Principals' social & emotional competence: A key factor for creating caring schools. *Edna Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center, Pennsylvania State University*.
- Mahfouz, J., & Richardson, J. W. (2020). At the Crossroads: Wellbeing and Principalship Preparation. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 16(4), 360–384.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1942775120933914>
- McKee, A., Boyatzis, R., & Johnston, F. (2008). *Becoming a resonant leader: Develop your emotional intelligence, renew your relationships, sustain your effectiveness*. Harvard Business Review Press.
- McLeod, S., & Dulskey, S. (2021). Resilience, reorientation, and reinvention: School leadership during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Education*, 6.
<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/feduc.2021.637075>
- Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Well-being. In *Merriam-Webster.com dictionary*.
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/well-being>
- Moore, J. (2018, September 4). *Stressed out: Two-thirds of DC principals say they may leave job within 5 years, survey finds*. WTOP. <https://wtop.com/dc/2018/09/stressed-out-two-thirds-of-dc-principals-say-they-may-leave-job-within-5-years-survey-finds/>

- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. SAGE.
- Murphy, J. T. (2011). Dancing in the rain: Tips on thriving as a leader in tough times. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 93(1), 36–41. <https://doi.org/10.1177/003172171109300106>
- National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP). (2021). *NASSP survey signals a looming mass exodus of principals from schools*. <https://www.nassp.org/news/nassp-survey-signals-a-looming-mass-exodus-of-principals-from-schools/>
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2022, May 31). *Roughly half of public schools report that they can effectively provide mental health Services to all students in need*. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/05_31_2022_2.asp
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). (2022, June 28). New NCES data show increases in school shootings and cyberbullying in K-12 schools over the last decade. https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/06_28_2022.asp
- Oskolkoff, N. (2019). Explicit self-care for principals and their teachers: A qualitative transcendental phenomenological study on administrator stress levels [Doctoral dissertation, Concordia University (Oregon)]. In *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/2322209104/abstract/A31B710F10704E8CPQ/1>
- Oxford English Dictionary (n.d.). *Mindfulness*. <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/mindfulness?q=mindfulness>
- Pearlin, L. I. (1989). The sociological study of stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 30(3), 241–256. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2136956>
- Peoples, K. (2021). How to write a phenomenological dissertation: A step-by-step guide. *Qualitative Research Methods, Book 56*. SAGE.
- Perna, M. (2022, Jan. 4). Why education is about to reach a crisis of epic proportions. *Forbes*. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/markcperna/2022/01/04/why-education-is-about-to-reach-a-crisis-of-epic-proportions/?sh=7642525678c7>
- Ray, J., Pijanowski, J., & Lasater, K. (2020). The self-care practices of school principals. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 58(4), 435–451. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-04-2019-0073>
- Richards, L., & Morse, J. (2013). *Readme first for a user's guide to qualitative methods*. SAGE.
- School Leaders Network. (2014). *Churn: The high cost of principal turnover*. <https://www.acesconnection.com/blog/churn-e-high-cost-of-principal-turnover-connectleadssucceed-org>
- Schwartz, H. L., Bongard, M., Bogan, E. D., Boyle, A. E., Meyers, D. C., & Jagers, R. J. (2022). *Social and emotional learning in schools nationally and in the collaborating districts initiative: Selected findings from the American teacher panel and American school leader panel surveys*. RAND Corporation. <https://doi.org/10.7249/RRA1822-1>

- Smith, M. (2022, Jan. 14). *Professor who predicted 'The Great Resignation' shares the 3 trends that will dominate work in 2022*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/01/14/the-great-resignation-expert-shares-the-biggest-work-trends-of-2022.html>
- Steiner, E., Doan, S., Woo, A., Gittens, D., Lawrence, R., Berdie, L., Wolfe, R., Greer R., & Schwartz, H. (2022). *Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools: Findings from the state of the American teacher and state of the American principal surveys*. RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html
- Superville, D. (2019, December 19). Principal turnover is a problem. New data could help districts combat it. *Education Week*. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/principal-turnover-is-a-problem-new-data-could-help-districts-combat-it/2019/12>
- Sullivan, E. (2022, July 6). Principals are on the brink of a breakdown. *EdSurge*. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2022-07-06-principals-are-on-the-brink-of-a-breakdown>
- Tan, S. Y., & Yip, A. (2018). Hans Selye (1907–1982): Founder of the stress theory. *Singapore Medical Journal*, 59(4), 170–171. <https://doi.org/10.11622/smedj.2018043>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2015) *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. (4th ed.). John Wiley & Sons.
- Tikkanen, L., Pyhältö, K., Pietarinen, J., & Soini, T. (2017). Interrelations between principals' risk of burnout profiles and proactive self-regulation strategies. *Social Psychology of Education*, 20(2), 259–274. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-017-9379-9>
- Vadivel, R., Shoib, S., El Halabi, S., El Hayek, S., Essam, L., Gashi Bytyçi, D., Karaliuniene, R., Schuh Teixeira, A. L., Nagendrappa, S., Ramalho, R., Ransing, R., Pereira-Sanchez, V., Jatchavala, C., Adiukwu, F. N., & Kudva Kundadak, G. (2021). Mental health in the post-COVID-19 era: Challenges and the way forward. *General Psychiatry*, 34(1), e100424. <https://doi.org/10.1136/gpsych-2020-100424>
- van Manen, M. (2014). *Phenomenology of practice: Meaning-giving methods in phenomenological research and writing*. Left Coast Press.
- Walker, A. R. (2019). The Impact of principals' work on their well-being. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 190, Article 190. <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjeap/article/view/61706>
- Wallace Foundation. (2013). *The school principal as leader: Guiding schools to better teaching and learning*. <https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/The-School-Principal-as-Leader-Guiding-Schools-to-Better-Teaching-and-Learning-2nd-Ed.pdf>
- Wang, F., Pollock, K. E., & Hauseman, C. (2018). School principals' job satisfaction: The effects of work intensification. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 185, 73–90.
- Wells, C. M. (2013a). Educational leaders describe a job too big for one: Stress reduction in the midst of leading. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, 10(3), 32–45.

- Wells, C. M. (2013b). Principals responding to constant pressure: Finding a source of stress management. *NASSP Bulletin*, 97(4), 335–349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636513504453>
- Wells, C. M. (2015, March). Conceptualizing mindful leadership in schools: How the practice of mindfulness informs the practice of leading. *National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) Education Leadership Review of Doctoral Research*, 2(1), 1-23. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1105711.pdf>
- Wells, C. M. (2016). *Mindfulness: How school leaders can reduce stress and thrive on the job*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Wells, C. M., & Klocko, B. (2018). Principal Well-Being and Resilience: Mindfulness as a Means to That End. *NASSP Bulletin*, 102, 019263651877781. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192636518777813>
- Wilson, A. (2021). Emotionally agile leadership amid COVID-19. *School Leadership Review*, 15(2), 2–20.
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2019, May 28). *Burn-out an “occupational phenomenon”*: International classification of diseases. <https://www.who.int/news/item/28-05-2019-burn-out-an-occupational-phenomenon-international-classification-of-diseases>
- World Health Organization (WHO). (2021, October 12). *Stress*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news-room/questions-and-answers/item/stress>
- Yan, R. (2016). *Principal instructional leadership, working conditions, and principal turnover in K-12 public schools* (Doctoral dissertation, The University of Utah).
- Yan, R. (2019). The influence of working conditions on principal turnover in K-12 public schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X19840391>
- Zieher, A. K., Cipriano, C., Meyer, J. L., & Strambler, M. J. (2021, September 30). Educators’ implementation and use of social and emotional learning early in the COVID-19 pandemic. *School Psychology*, 36(5), 388. <https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000461>

APPENDIX A: NAU IRB APPROVAL



Office of Research Compliance

Institutional Review Board for the
Human Research Protection Program

525 S Beaver St
PO Box 4062
Flagstaff AZ 86011
928-523-9551
<https://www.nau.edu/IRB>

To: Heidi Lindsay, M.Ed.
From: NAU IRB Office
Approval Date: December 8, 2022

Project: EVOLVING JOB DEMANDS: HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES TO SUPPORT THEIR RESILIENCY AND RETENTION

Project Number: 1971828-2
Submission: Response/Follow-Up
Action: APPROVED WITH CONDITIONS
Project Risk Level: MINIMAL RISK
New Approval Expiration Date: November 20, 2027
Next Report Date: January 8, 2023
Review Category/ies: Permission will need to be obtained from school districts and submitted to NAU IRB for acknowledgement before research activities can commence.

This project has been reviewed and approved by an IRB Chair or designee.

- Northern Arizona University maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00000357).
- All research procedures should be conducted in full accordance with all applicable sections of the guidance.
- The Principal Investigator should notify the IRB immediately of any proposed changes that affect the protocol and report any unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others. Please refer to Guidance Investigators Responsibility after IRB Approval, Reporting Local Information and Minimal Risk or Exempt Research.
- All documents referenced in this submission have been reviewed and approved. Documents are filed with the HRPP Office within IRBNet. If subjects will be consented, the approved consent(s) are available within IRBNet upon approval notification from the HRPP Office.

Important

The principal investigator for this study is responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals before commencing research. Please be sure that you have satisfied applicable external and University requirements, for example (but not limited to) data repositories, listserv permission, records request, data use agreement, [conducting University surveys](#), [data security](#), [international](#), [conflicts of interest](#), [biological safety](#), [radiation safety](#), [HIPAA](#), [FERPA](#), [FDA](#), [sponsor approval](#), [clinicaltrials.gov](#), [tribal consultation](#), or [school approval](#). IRB approval does not convey approval to commence research in the event that other requirements have not been satisfied.

To: Heidi Lindsay, M.Ed.
From: NAU IRB Office
Date: December 13, 2022

Project: EVOLVING JOB DEMANDS: HOW ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS TAKE CARE OF THEMSELVES TO SUPPORT THEIR RESILIENCY AND RETENTION

Project Number: 1971828-3
Submission: Response/Follow-Up
Review Level: Exempt Review
Action: ACKNOWLEDGED
Project Status: ACTIVE - OPEN TO ENROLLMENT
New Approval Expiration Date: November 20, 2027
Next Report Date: January 13, 2023

This letter is to acknowledge that conditions of approval have been met.

- Northern Arizona University maintains a Federalwide Assurance with the Office for Human Research Protections (FWA #00000357).

Important

The principal investigator for this study is responsible for obtaining all necessary approvals before commencing research. Please be sure that you have satisfied applicable external and University requirements, for example (but not limited to) data repositories, listserv permission, records request, data use agreement, [conducting University surveys](#), [data security](#), [international](#), [conflicts of interest](#), [biological safety](#), [radiation safety](#), [HIPAA](#), [FERPA](#), [FDA](#), [sponsor approval](#), [clinicaltrials.gov](#), [tribal consultation](#), or [school approval](#). IRB approval does not convey approval to commence research in the event that other requirements have not been satisfied.

APPENDIX B: DISTRICT APPROVALS

Heidi Lindsay

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, December 12, 2022 10:29 AM
To: hs68@nau.edu
Subject: RE: [REDACTED] Request to Conduct Research

Hi Heidi,

This research request is approved [REDACTED] will likely work with you to assist with finding principals. Please let me know if you need anything.

Thank you!

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Executive Director of Accountability, Assessment and Research

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, December 11, 2022 2:41 PM
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: [REDACTED] Request to Conduct Research

The following Request to Conduct Research has been submitted:

Name: Heidi Lindsay

E-mail: hs68@nau.edu

Phone: 602-391-7353

Institutional Affiliation: Northern Arizona University

Research Overview

What is the title of your proposal?

Evolving job demands: How elementary school principals take care of themselves to support their resiliency and retention

What is the purpose of your research?

The purpose of the research is for my dissertation as I am a doctoral student at Northern Arizona University.

Please briefly summarize your research study.

COVID-19 and the concurrent national tense political climate have caused significant challenges for K-12 educational leaders. While occupational stress of school principals has been studied for some time, the current context requires additional research for local, state, and national groups to utilize in support of principal well-being and retention. The findings in this study of the lived experiences of current school principals navigating job-related stress will contribute to the growing research on the importance of mental health of educators.

A phenomenological study is most appropriate method to answer the research questions because stress is a common phenomenon experienced by principals across schools. Additionally, phenomenology looks at the data thematically to extract essences and essentials of participant meanings. This methodology will allow the researcher to identify themes as to how principals are experiencing and responding to occupational stress. The researcher will utilize in-depth interviews to collect data from several individuals and depict their experiences. Participant interviews engaged in this study will provide data responding to the study's three research questions. Participants will complete a preliminary 5-10-minute online survey for the researcher to gather information on demographics, professional experience, and initial perceptions on occupational stress. Next, the researcher will meet with each participant for approximately 60 minutes for a one-to-one in-depth interview using opened ended interview questions aligned to the study's research questions. These interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed.

As shared above, the participants will be female, currently employed as an elementary Title I school principal and have held their position for at least three years, ideally five. The researcher will need to work with the appropriate district personnel to determine the most appropriate way to invite individuals who meet the criterion to participate in the study. Participants meeting the criteria will be invited to participate through email correspondence. Following the invitational email, interested participants will be emailed the Informed Online Consent and the preliminary survey through NAU Qualtrics and coordinate a convenient day, time, and location with the researcher for in-person interview. Ahead of the interview, participants will be sent the informed consent written form and the interview questions. The researcher will collect the consent agreement before the interview and ensure participant agreement prior to interview. Participants will choose a pseudo name during the online survey process which the researcher will use to associate with their data. All correspondence will be done through email or phone calls in which the researcher will keep all details private and secure. Participant interviews will take place in a private location, likely the participant's office. No participant identifiable information will be described in the researcher's dissertation.

Following the collection of data from each participant, the researcher will provide a copy of the interview of the transcript to the participant to check for accuracy. This is not required. Next, the researcher will code the data looking for significant statements or quotes that have particular relevance as to how participants have experienced and responded to occupational stress. The researcher will group these statements into clusters of meaning and develop themes. This will allow the researcher to identify individual and group differences, but most importantly, the common experiences. It is in this step that the researcher will describe the fundamental characteristics that are experienced commonly by most, if not all, participants. The researcher will then develop a description of what the individuals experienced, a description of how they experienced it, and a combination of both descriptions to express the overall essence of principals' lived experiences with occupational stress. To validate findings, the researcher will use research backed validation strategies including feedback from the researcher's lens, the participant's lens, and the reader's lens. Additionally, the researcher will suspend her own experiences and judgements with occupational stress, a core component of phenomenology, throughout the study to minimize bias.

What is the statement of your research problem?

The work intensification and subsequent stressors for school principals are not a recent phenomenon; concerns for the

levels of stress principals experience on a daily basis have been studied for the last 40 years. However, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students and staff coupled with the tense national political climate have created an unprecedented context for educational leaders. There is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. A National Association of Elementary School Principals' (NAESP) report suggested that the role of the principal has evolved significantly since the onset of the pandemic and that principals have identified the need, in part, for more opportunities to learn how to manage stress and engage in self-care under conditions of uncertainty. Despite this, historically, school leaders tend to reason that their personal sacrifice is important for the success of the students, staff, and school they serve and often neglect self-care behaviors for the sake of their work.

When so much is expected of them, are principals more at risk of neglecting their own well-being despite their identified need for support? There must be attention paid as to how school principals are navigating job-related stress, specifically females who are more vulnerable to occupational stress. It is a significant factor when considering school principal retention risks, as four of every 10 expect to leave the profession in the next three years (National Association of Secondary School Principals [NASSP], 2021).

What is your rationale for this study?

The purpose of this study is to examine the lived experiences female school principals serving in Title 1 schools as they navigate workplace stress and personal wellbeing. There is a lack of research concerning changes in principal stress and resiliency after a multi-year global pandemic. Thus, it is important to look closely as to how school leaders are responding to added stressors since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The current literature demonstrates there is a particular concern with female leaders serving in urban, high poverty schools. The researcher's intent is to get a sense of how elementary school principals are coping with stress and if there is an awareness of how those mitigation strategies impact their desire to remain in their role.

What are the major research questions you want answered?

Three research questions guide this investigation of school principals' occupational stress and personal well-being.

1. What are principals' experiences with job-related stress over time?
2. How do principals cope with job-related stress and what specific practices do they engage in?
3. Do principals' stress-coping experiences influence their desire to stay in their role?

What are the major hypotheses of your research? (if none, write N/A)

N/A

Who is the principal investigator?

Heidi Lindsay

List others who will be in contact with the participants and/or data being collected and reviewed. Please include name, affiliation, and contact information.

N/A

Who will be conducting research at the school sites?

Heidi Lindsay

What are his/her/their qualifications to do that research?

I am current doctoral student at NAU and have passed dissertation prospectus hearing and have obtained IRB approval. Additionally, professionally I serve at the Executive Director of Elementary Education in Higley Unified School District and have 10 years of experience supporting and supervising principals.

Who is sponsoring the research? (if none, write N/A)

N/A

When would you like the research to start?

1/9/2023

When do you expect the research to end?

1/31/2023

Which of our research priorities does your proposal target?

To help schools improve

How will the [REDACTED] benefit from your research?

As part of [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] there are attributes of effective leaders and a call for promoting and supporting the personal health of well-being of individuals. The benefit for [REDACTED] participation in this study includes selected principal participants the opportunity to reflect on their occupational stress and the strategies they employ to mitigate stress. This may cause selected principal participants to have a deeper awareness and ownership of their mental health and well-being. This awareness may support ongoing growth in personal health and well-being which may improve overall principal effectiveness. Additionally, the district may use the results of the study to better understand the stressors of a sample of their principals, how this sample is responding to identified stressors, and create dialogue as to additional measures the district could consider to support principals.

Research Methodology: Sample

Please write the number of SCHOOLS needed.

3-4

Please write the number of STUDENT participants needed and what grade(s) (if none, please write N/A).

N/A

Please write the number of TEACHER participants needed and what grade(s) (if none, please write N/A).

N/A

Please write the number of ADMINISTRATORS needed (if none, please write N/A).

3-4

Please write the number of SUPPORT STAFF needed (if none, please write N/A).

N/A

Please write the number of PARENTS needed (if none, please write N/A).

N/A

How many participants will be needed OVERALL for this research project?

3-4

How much time will be required for individuals participating in the study? Provide a breakdown of required time (in days/weeks/months AND by minutes/hours) by each type of participant (i.e., student, teacher, etc.).

This study entails a 5-10 minute survey and a 45-60 minute interview for each participant.

How will participants be selected?

I would work with the Executive Directors of Elementary Schools to identify principals that meet the sample criteria.

What will participants be asked to do? Be as specific as possible as to the conditions under which the data will be collected. Will this activity disrupt or occupy classroom instructional time for either students or teachers?

Principal participants would respond to an email, complete a 5-10 minute web survey, and schedule 45-60 minutes for me to interview them at a location of their choosing. I am happy to visit their school before, during, or after school hours per their schedule.

Identify separately the potential benefits and risks for participants that might result from participating in this research project.

Participants will have an opportunity to reflect upon their experiences with job-related stress, how they are responding to that stress, and if it is impacting their desire to remain in their role. As a result, they may gain greater insight about their occupational stress and could decide to enhance their well-being.

When interviewing participants about occupational stress, there is a risk of vulnerability for participants to talk about their mental health, including stress. Additionally, while there are risks associated with privacy and confidentiality being lost with individual data collection, measures have been put into place to protect participant privacy, anonymity, and confidentiality. As shared, participants will be given a pseudo name and their real name will not be used. Interviews will be encrypted as they are recorded and transcribed by a third-party, Zoom or Rev. Audio recordings will be erased once transcription is received. All electronic data will be password protected on the researchers' computer. No other persons shall have access to the data or the researchers' computer. The online survey data will be stored on a password protected cloud server. The only person who will have access to this information is the researcher.

Research Methodology: Research Design

Is this research project, quantitative, qualitative, or mixed method?

Qualitative

What are your independent variables?

N/A

What are your dependent variables?

N/A

Research Methodology: Data Collection and Analysis

Please upload any available surveys, questionnaires, interview protocols, data collection instruments, etc.

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1wT5E19VkU-P4gcq7yf2wrkF6YcqWvzq3>,

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1k8de8T77FCVW30ob1zXFysWftJd2zJz1>,

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1xBFbtOHQic3_by1mjS9RodjZI3uAi1RI

Describe the data analysis procedures/methods to be employed. Identify the inferential statistics/methods that will be used to test the hypotheses, if applicable, or describe the qualitative approach used to generate themes.

This qualitative phenomenological study will utilize the Moustakas' (1994) method for analyzing data. Throughout data analysis, the researcher will use interview transcripts to create codes, classify/create patterns, and develop visual representations to generate themes. Within this analysis, the rich textual, structure, and composite descriptions of participants' experiences will be created to display the context as lived. From a participant's lens, each will be invited to participate through feedback called member checking, a recommended validity check within qualitative research. Initially, participants will be provided transcripts to check for accuracy. Then, as visual representations and themes from the interviews are developed, they will be shared with the respective participant for additional member checking. This is optional for participants.

Reporting, Publication, and Dissemination of Results

How will you brief the participants about the purpose and results of your research?

Participants will be contacted by email initially regarding the purpose of study. If they choose to participate, they will be informed of the details of the study including their rights as participants. They will be given the opportunity to review transcripts and analyzation as part of member checking. Upon defense of dissertation and NAU publication, I would be happy to share the final results.

How do you plan to disseminate the results to the district, scientific community, and general public?

The dissertation will be published by Northern Arizona University and will be available online as part of the K-12 educational literature. I am also presenting findings at the 2023 Arizona Professors of Educational Leadership (APEL) Conference.

[REDACTED]



December 12, 2022

Dear Heidi Lindsay,

After reviewing your research request, I have granted authorization for you to conduct research in [REDACTED]. I feel this district is in a good position to support its participation in your study and am excited to collaborate further with you in this research.

Please do not hesitate to contact our Teaching & Learning Department if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A black rectangular redaction box covering the signature of the Assistant Superintendent.

A black rectangular redaction box covering the name of the Assistant Superintendent.

Assistant Superintendent of Teaching & Learning

APPENDIX C: SURVEY AND INTERVIEW INFORMED CONSENT APPROVALS



Office of Research Compliance

Online Survey Consent

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled *"Evolving job demands: How elementary school principals take care of themselves to support their resiliency and retention"*.

This study is being done by Heidi Lindsay from Northern Arizona University.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being.

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to complete an online survey/questionnaire. This survey/questionnaire will ask about demographic information, administrative experience, general level of job-related stress experienced, job-related stress coping strategies, and desire to remain in the principal role and it will take you approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

You may not directly benefit from this research; however, we hope that your participation in the study may contribute to the research to support principal well-being and retention. We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach of confidentiality is always possible. To the best of our ability your answers in this study will remain confidential. We will minimize any risks by using protecting your anonymity through use of a pseudo name and ensuring all electronic data is secured in a password protected hard drive.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time. You are free to skip any question that you choose. If you choose not to participate it will not affect your relationship with Northern Arizona University or result in any other penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have questions about this project or if you have a research-related problem, you may contact the researcher(s), Heidi Lindsay at (602) 391-7353. If you have any questions concerning your rights as a research subject, you may contact Northern Arizona University IRB Office at irb@nau.edu or (928) 523-9551.

By submitting this survey, I affirm that I am at least 18 years of age and agree that the information may be used in the research project described above.

Consent to Participate in Research

Study Title: Evolving job demands: How elementary school principals take care of themselves to support their resiliency and retention

Principal Investigator: Heidi Lindsay

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you do not have to participate. This document contains important information about this study and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to participate.

The purpose of this qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is to examine the lived experiences of elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. If you elect to participate in this research study, you will participate in one in-depth interview. An In-depth interview utilizes open-ended questions to foster flexibility and genuine responding. All conversations will be recorded to ensure accuracy; however, identities will be strictly protected. You will have the opportunity to review transcripts of the interview to check for accuracy. Later, as visual representations and themes from the interview are developed, they will be shared with you for invitational feedback.

There are no expected risks to you as a result of participating in this study. You will not benefit directly from participating in this study. The in-depth interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes.

The results of the research may be published, but names and all other personally identifying facts will not be disclosed to any outside entity. Entering into a research study may offer the ability to gain deeper insight in the topic presented. In addition, participants may gain deeper awareness of their own well-being. Findings and results from this study may enhance the body of literature surrounding school principal well-being and retention.

Your name will not be used in any report. Identifiable research data will be encrypted and password protected. Your responses will be assigned a code number. The list connecting your name to this code will be kept in an encrypted and password protected file. Only the research team will have access to the file. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list will be destroyed.

With your permission, I would like to audiotape this interview so that I can make an accurate transcript. Once I have made the transcript, I will erase the recordings. Your name will not be in the transcript or my notes.

The information that you give in the study will be anonymous. Your name will not be collected or linked to your answers.

Information collected about you will not be used or shared for future research studies.

The information that you provide in the study will be handled confidentially. However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released or shared as required by law. Northern Arizona University Institutional Review Board may review the research records for monitoring purposes.

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Heidi Lindsay at (602) 391-7353.

For questions about your rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact the Human Research Protection Program at 928-523-9551 or online at <http://nau.edu/Research/Compliance/Human-Research/Welcome/>.

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS AND INTERVIEW PROTOCOL, SCRIPT,
AND QUESTIONS

1. List a pseudo number. This is the number that will be used throughout the study. Your real name will not be used when referencing your experiences nor will any identifying criteria such as your ethnicity, age, gender, or school district.
2. How do you describe yourself (male, female, non-binary, prefer to self-describe/not to say)?
3. Choose one or more races you consider yourself to be (i.e., White or Caucasian, Black or African American, Hispanic, American Indian/Native American or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Other, prefer not to say).
4. Select your age range (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50-59, 60+).
5. Years of experience as a school principal (Under 3, 3-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+).
6. Total years of experience as a school administrator (i.e., principal, assistant principal, dean) (Under 3, 3-5, 6-10, 11-15, 16+).
7. The percentage of students at your school who receive Free and Reduced Lunch.
8. Level of job-related stress you experience (pre-pandemic and currently) (low, medium, high).
9. List strategies you've used to cope with job-related stress.
10. How many more years do you plan to serve as a school principal?

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol and Questions

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As I've shared previously, I am Heidi Lindsay, a doctoral candidate with Northern Arizona University. I am going to ask you some questions to try and better understand the lived experiences of elementary school principals as they navigate workplace stress and personal well-being. Your answers are completely confidential, and any documentation of this interview will not have any identifying information on it. You will find the questions to be open-ended so you can answer them in a way that highlights your experiences and allows you freedom to respond as accurately as possible. There are no right or wrong answers and I appreciate your complete honesty. At any point in our conversation, you are welcome to refer back to a previous question and expand on your ideas. I know your time is valuable, and I appreciate you sharing part of your day with me. If you need to take a break at any time, we can certainly do so. Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

1. Tell me a little bit about yourself (i.e., family, hobbies).
2. Tell me a little bit about your school.
3. Describe your experience with job-related stress as a school principal. If needed, provide examples of potential stressors (i.e., student discipline, accountability from local, state, federal requirements, teacher evaluation, parents).
4. How is your experience with job-related stress similar and different since before the start of the pandemic? (i.e., intensity and frequency)
5. How do you know when you are feeling high levels of stress?
6. How does job-related stress impact you at work?
7. Does job-related stress impact you outside of work?

8. Tell me about your experiences in attempting to mitigate job-related stress.
9. What are your thoughts about the future in your role as principal?

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Heidi Ann Lindsay was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was the first of two children of Robert E. and Linda M. Schloesser. She attended parochial school in Oak Creek, Wisconsin and Saginaw, Michigan. After graduating from Western Michigan University in April 2003 with a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education, she moved to Arizona and began her career in public education. She taught primary grades at an urban charter school in Phoenix, Arizona before moving into leadership roles. Mrs. Lindsay earned her Master's degree from Northern Arizona University in Educational Leadership in 2008. She has held positions as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal at the site level. Since 2011, she has served as a charter and district administrator supporting and supervising school principals. She holds Arizona certification as a teacher, principal, administrator, and superintendent. Mrs. Lindsay lives in Scottsdale, Arizona with her husband Zach and their daughter, Lily Marie. She will graduate with her Doctorate in Education Leadership in May, 2023 from Northern Arizona University.