THE EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS WHO REPORT JOB SATISFACTION: AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

In a Metlife, Inc. study conducted in 2012, 41 percent of school principals reported job dissatisfaction. Of those, one-third admitted to looking for another job. The complexities and challenges faced by school principals in the K-12 sector has led to an increased number of dissatisfied principals and a decrease in retention. Several studies have looked at the challenges of the principal role and what can lead to a lack of satisfaction with the job, but few have focused on what brings job satisfaction to principals despite the challenges. The purpose of this study was to explore what contributes to job satisfaction in school principals and what motivates them to stay. Six school principals in the state of Texas participated in the study. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was utilized to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences the participants had as principals. Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provided the theoretical lens to explore the motivations of principals that lead to job satisfaction and retention. Each principal believed they were fulfilling a purpose or making a difference. It was important for each to work directly with children to make the greatest impact and keep their challenges in perspective. The participants established solid foundations for growth and success, which included setting goals, making plans, having high expectations, and effective communication. Importance was placed on empowering staff to establish shared leadership. Each participant had a strong awareness of self and valued transparency and balanced living. The findings are relevant for new and seasoned principals who desire job satisfaction despite the demands of the job. The findings are also relevant for school districts who wish to retain quality principals, as well as principal preparation programs that prepare new principals to be successful in their roles.

Keywords: school principal satisfaction, job satisfaction, role of the school principal, job retention, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators
Dedication

This doctoral research is dedicated to my Aunt, Sabrina Roy, who is no longer with us, but will always remain in spirit. Sabrina was the best school principal I knew. Her love for her students, families, and staff was incredible. She enjoyed her work and lit up every time she walked into the school building. I will never forget her infectious smile when she was around her students.
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I was raised in Chicago by my mother Beverly, who has always taught me the value of education. Not only did she speak the importance of education, but she demonstrated it when she returned to school during my high school years to pursue a nursing degree. I witnessed her challenges as she continued to work full-time, raise a family as a single parent, and complete her RN program. She did so with grace and I am grateful for the experience I shared with her. I thank my mother for planting the seed within me to pursue something bigger for myself.

My grandmother Emma was very instrumental in my life and I spent a lot of time with her throughout my developmental years. My grandmother always made me feel like I was special and had the power to do whatever I chose. She continues to support me today and I am thankful for her love and her belief in me. My grandmother is the sunlight that helped my seed to grow.

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Chapter One: The Research Problem

“Job satisfaction among principals has declined to its lowest point in over a decade” (MetLife, Inc., 2012, p. 33). A recent (2012) study, conducted by MetLife, Inc., revealed that as few as 59 percent of the 500 principals surveyed reported high levels of job satisfaction. Of the principals who reported a lack of job satisfaction, one-third claimed they were likely to leave their position and seek employment in another field. Stress, complexity of the work, and control over decision making were the factors that contributed negatively to job satisfaction in the MetLife study. Almost half (48 percent) of principals reported having “great stress” at least several times per week, and less than half (43 percent) reported having control over decisions such as hiring and firing of teachers and finances. Seventy-five percent of the principals acknowledged that the job had become too complex (MetLife, Inc., 2012).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of practice that triggered this research is the decline of principal satisfaction and its ramifications on the retention of qualified principals. Principal retention has become a serious concern for districts trying hard to keep quality principals in their schools. The Educational Research Service (ERS) announced that close to 40 percent of public school principals would retire or resign before 2010 (ERS, 1998). This milestone has come and gone, but the impending loss of principals continues to threaten many districts across the nation. Coupled with declining job satisfaction, the possible shortage of qualified principals threatens a crisis in these districts.

Murphy and Beck (1994) have proposed that the principalship has changed over time. The job of a principal has become more demanding, with higher expectations and longer work hours. Principals are now required to meet more stringent testing requirements for student
achievement and perform larger amounts of state mandated paperwork (Murphy & Beck, 1994). With the high demands of principalship and increased daily stress, principals feel less satisfied with the work they do. Unfortunately, this has led many principals to think about pursuing other positions or careers, leaving many districts asking how they can retain qualified principals.

Fuller and Young (2009) found that close to 70 percent of new high school principals leave their position within 5 years. Their study revealed that more than 20 percent of high school principals in low-achieving, high-poverty schools left after one year in the role. Researchers from this Texas study speculated that accountability pressures, as well as the complexity and intensity of a principal’s job, causes too much stress and pressure for new principals (Fuller & Young, 2009). Principals are asked to take on many roles and meet the demands placed on them by district, state, and now federal agencies. The stressors and demands are increasing and principals feel the intense pressures of the job.

A few quantitative studies have assessed job satisfaction of school principals using surveys and existing job-satisfaction scales. However, little attention has been given to the collection of qualitative data regarding job satisfaction of principals in today’s schools. This study focuses on Texas public school principals who report high job satisfaction. This dissertation assesses how principals find satisfaction in schools and what motivates them to stay in their positions.

**Significance of Research Problem**

The purpose of this research was to investigate what brings job satisfaction to school principals and what motivates them to stay. Previous research identified the school principal as the key to a successful school (Davis, Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, & Meyerson, 2005). Davis, et al. (2005) stated that quality leadership is just as essential as quality teachers to maintain a
high-performing school. In school reform efforts, principals are the most visible players, and are held accountable for the success of students and the success of the school as a whole (Petrosko, 2000). Principals are visionaries for the school who set the tone when they take a leader’s position. Low principal retention leads to instability within schools, especially when the vision or leadership style change often (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). This instability significantly impacts schools due to a lack of strong foundations and consistent leadership.

Baker, Young, and Fuller (2007) found that high levels of principal retention are tied to high levels of teacher retention. The researchers also stated that high teacher retention is crucial to the financial and academic success of schools. Fuller and Young (2009) stated that principal turnover is very costly for districts. Money is spent on the recruitment, hiring, and training of new principals. Further financial investment in the professional development of existing principals are lost when a principal leaves less than three years into the job.

This research gives a voice to principals who have learned to manage the daily stressors of the principalship. Learning what factors increase job satisfaction can benefit new principals as they enter the field and face the demands of the work. This knowledge is also helpful to districts who want to invest in supports for increased retention of their principals. The study adds to the existing knowledge of job satisfaction in the field of education, which assists all educational leaders, including teachers.

Research Questions

This research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to job satisfaction as perceived by school principals?
2. How do principals make sense of their desire to stay in their positions?
The questions examine internal and external factors that increased job satisfaction for the principals in this study. Question one focused on the individual motivational factors that led to job satisfaction in principals. Question two examined factors that increased the likelihood for principals to stay in their positions. The answers to these questions are beneficial to the future satisfaction of newly-hired and seasoned school principals.

**Organization of Document**

This document is organized as a conventional dissertation. Now that the problem of practice has been described, the theoretical framework section describes Self-Determination Theory, which was used to help understand the phenomena of job satisfaction of school principals. The literature review (Chapter 2) follows, providing an overview of the literature on job satisfaction and how it relates to the role of the principal. The research design (Chapter 3), provides a description of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) centering on individual school principals that reported job satisfaction with their current positions. The data collection and analysis procedures are discussed, followed by a description of the ethical procedures used to protect the participants in this study. Chapter 4 presents the findings, and Chapter 5 concludes the study with a discussion of the implications of the findings for the field of education and future research.

**Theoretical Framework**

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was used to clearly examine the identified problem of declining principal satisfaction and its ramifications on the retention of qualified principals. In order to address the purpose of this study, which was to examine school principal satisfaction and their motivation to stay in their jobs, SDT provided a lens to explore the basic motivations and needs of principals that lead to job satisfaction and job retention.
According to Gagne’ and Deci (2005), self-determination in employees is vital within organizations. Employees that are self-determined feel more committed to their organizations (Gagne’ & Deci, 2005) and report a higher likelihood to remain in their positions (Richer, Blanchard, & Vallerand, 2002). SDT is a theory of motivation, but differs from other theories of motivation in that it focuses on the different types of motivation, as opposed to focusing on the amount of motivation individuals have for a behavior or activity (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Deci and Ryan (2008) believed the type of motivation an individual possesses is a predictor of outcomes such as psychological health and well-being, job performance, and effective problem-solving.

Using SDT as the lens for this study allowed the researcher to look closely at the roles motivation and self-determination play in job-satisfaction, performance, retention rates, and overall well-being of school principals. This theory takes into account the universal psychological needs that are inherit in all individuals, such as autonomy, relatedness, and competency. It also allows for an individualized focus on a person’s motivations and orientations. When these universal psychological needs are satisfied, it leads to well-being and effective performance (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Using SDT as a lens allowed for the exploration of principals’ different motivations and orientations, particularly those who reported job satisfaction and the intention to remain in their current positions. The theory also assisted in understanding what motivations and orientations led to the satisfaction of universal psychological needs.

**Universal psychological needs.**

Deci and Ryan (2008) found that a set of universal psychological needs are necessary for effective performance and well-being. These psychological needs, found to be common in all cultures across all stages of life, are the need for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Autonomy refers to the need to feel that one’s behaviors are self-determined and
that the resulting outcomes are based on personal choices. Competence refers to individuals need to feel effective and capable of performing tasks necessary in their environment. Relatedness is the need to feel connected to and supported by individuals in daily interactions (Ryan & Deci, 2002). According to SDT, all three psychological needs inherit in human beings must be met in order to achieve well-being. If only one or two of the three psychological needs are met, then well-being declines (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Research has shown that when individuals engage in activities that satisfy all three psychological needs, they demonstrate better performance and are more likely to persist in their environments (LaGuardia, Ryan, Couchman, & Deci, 2000).

Previous research using SDT in the workplace linked the satisfaction of universal needs and autonomous motivation to employee performance and well-being (Bono & Judge 2003; Otis & Pelletier, 2005). Motivations contribute to the satisfaction of universal needs. SDT recognizes two forms of motivation as the core components of motivation: autonomous motivation and controlled motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

**Autonomous versus controlled motivation.**

Autonomous motivation includes both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. Intrinsic motivation is internally based and results from a drive individuals have within themselves. Intrinsic motivators do not rely on external stimuli, but instead focus on internal feelings, such as joy, and a sense of accomplishment. Extrinsic motivation is received from external sources and moves one’s focus to outside of self. The forms of extrinsic motivation that are included under autonomous motivation are those that individuals personally identify with and internalize into their own sense of self (Deci & Ryan, 2008). According to Deci and Ryan
(2008), individuals who are autonomously motivated act on their own will and are self-driven to perform and engage in activities.

Controlled motivation includes both external regulation and ‘introjected’ regulation. External regulation causes one’s behavior to be contingent on external rewards and punishment. ‘Introjected’, is a psychoanalytic term used by Deci and Ryan (2008) to describe regulation that causes one to internalize expectations in order to gain approval, avoid shame, and increase self-esteem. The ego is often involved in ‘introjected’ regulation and places individuals in a position to be controlled. When individuals are controlled, they deal with the pressures of thinking and behaving in a particular way that allows them to increase pleasure or avoid pain (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Many school principals are both rewarded and punished for the performance of their schools. Some may attempt to gain approval from stakeholders within the school and others may look to avoid the shame that comes with a low performing school.

Both autonomous and controlled motivation encourage movement and direction of behaviors, however, they lead to different outcomes. Autonomous motivation leads to increased psychological health, effective performance, and long-term persistence (Deci & Ryan, 2008). These ideas are illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Autonomous versus controlled motivation.
Employees that are autonomously motivated engage in activities that align with their underlying self and behaviors that are self-determined (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Lam and Garland (2008) found that employee’s self-determination is correlated with positive job outcomes. In their 2005 study of police officers, Otis and Pelletier wrote that officers with increased self-determined work motivation reported the intention to remain in their jobs until retirement. These officers were less likely to report daily stressors or hassles that occurred on the job. Richer (2002) found that increased work satisfaction and decreased emotional exhaustion were linked to self-determined work motivation, which also showed a relationship to turnover intentions.

SDT allows researchers to examine individual differences as they relate to how needs are met and how motivation impacts the satisfaction of universal needs. Motivations play a significant role in the satisfaction of psychological needs. For the purposes of this study, individual differences were key to gain a better understanding of what promoted job satisfaction and retention. SDT includes two conceptions of individual differences: causality orientations and life goals (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

**Causality orientations versus aspiration of life goals.**

‘Causality orientations’ is a set of orientations that describe the level of self-determination individuals have in certain situations and how individuals adjust to their environments when faced with the initiation or regulation of behaviors (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Causality orientations include autonomous, controlled, and impersonal orientations. When all three universal needs are met, it is said that one’s autonomous orientation is strongly developed. When competence and relatedness needs are met, but not autonomy needs, then a strong controlled orientation is developed. Impersonal orientation is developed when all three universal needs are not satisfied.
SDT proposes that all people have some level of each orientation and psychological and behavioral outcomes can be predicted based on these orientations. Strong autonomous orientations are positively linked to well-being and positive performance outcomes. Controlled orientations are linked to decreased psychological health, rigid behaviors, and regulations through ‘introjects’ and rewards or punishment. Finally, impersonal orientations are linked to ill-being, lack of performance, and poor functioning (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The positive connections are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Outcomes of causality orientations.

Self-determination may be specific to a domain and change over time. However, causality orientation is a stable characteristic over time and within different domains (Lam & Garland, 2008). Some research has shown that general causality orientation is directly associated with job outcome. SDT has focused on long-term goals, both intrinsic and extrinsic aspirations, which direct behaviors and activities (Kasser & Ryan, 2006). According to Deci and Ryan (2008), aspirations are developed as a result of whether or not the three universal needs of
competence, autonomy, and relatedness are satisfied or not satisfied. Intrinsic aspirations such as community, close relationships, and personal development are positively associated with the satisfaction of universal needs, which lead to greater well-being, health, and effective performance (Vansteenkiste, Simons, Lens, Sheldon, & Deci, 2004). Extrinsic aspirations are described as ‘need substitutes’ that serve as replacements when universal needs are not satisfied. Examples of extrinsic aspirations are financial success, fame, and appearance. When extrinsic aspirations take the place of universal psychological needs, they provide little satisfaction and often lead to poor performance and a lack of well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

**Current research in SDT.**

Current research in SDT has looked at the extent to which mindfulness and awareness of self and others affects motivations (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Mindfulness is positively related to autonomous motivation, which leads to well-being and positive performance outcomes. Another aspect of motivation that has been recently studied under SDT is vitality and energy. Other theories of motivation have posited that autonomous behaviors that require self-regulation and persistence often deplete energy sources (Moller, Deci, & Ryan, 2006). However, SDT suggests that autonomous behaviors are rejuvenating and enhance energy through the satisfaction of universal needs. SDT posits that controlled motivation drains energy sources in one’s effort to avoid punishment or receive rewards (Deci & Ryan, 2008).

**Application of theory.**

Murphy and Beck (1994) have reported that the principalship has changed over time. It has become more demanding, with higher expectations, and regulated duties. Principals are required to meet more rigorous testing requirements for student achievement, and complete more state mandated paperwork (Murphy & Beck, 1994). The motivations of principals may be fueled
by the expectations and pressures of a highly demanding job. SDT provided a lens to examine the origin of satisfaction in satisfied principals by focusing on their autonomous motivations, controlled motivations, universal needs satisfaction, orientations, and goals. SDT proposes that the satisfaction of universal psychological needs is related to well-being, effective performance, and job satisfaction. This study attempted to uncover the specific motivations and individual differences of the school principals that reported job satisfaction.

SDT provides an opportunity to examine the self-determination of school principals. However, there are two limitations to SDT that should be considered. First, SDT does not measure satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Specifically, SDT does not include a measure for school principal satisfaction. Yet, a principal’s level of satisfaction may be an important factor in retention. Second, SDT does not account for intervening variables that may affect job satisfaction and retention. There may be other variables beyond motivations and orientations that have a direct effect on job outcomes. Despite the limitations of SDT, this framework provided a foundation to understand the basic motivations, orientation, and needs of school principals that report high job satisfaction. SDT provided a means to address what motivated principals to stay in their positions. The following chapter continues the exploration of the motivations of principals and job satisfaction through a review of previous literature in the field.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review**

The study of job satisfaction is not new in the world of industrial-organizational psychology (Judge, Bono, Thoreson & Patton, 2001). According to Judge and Church (2000), in the field of industrial-organizational psychology, job satisfaction is the most heavily researched topic. Although there exists many quantitative and qualitative studies on job satisfaction, more recent developments warrant review and a connection to more current literature (Judge, Bono,
Most of the job satisfaction research centers on studies conducted in business firms (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). However, Green and Reese (2006) found that problems surrounding job satisfaction in the business world were also observed in other disciplines. Recently, research investigating job satisfaction has been conducted in settings outside of business firms, such as hospitals, government agencies, military, and educational settings (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011).

Much of the recent research on job satisfaction in the field of education has focused on teachers or faculty in university settings (Green & Reese, 2006). Few studies have focused on job satisfaction levels of school administrators. In particular, there has been little focus given to the job satisfaction of school principals in public elementary and secondary settings (Sodoma & Else, 2009). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) mentioned a shift in focus when examining job satisfaction and its determinants under different disciplines. For example, the school administrators have specific aspects of their jobs that differ from those of other disciplines (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). Therefore, the factors that determine a school principal’s satisfaction may be different from those of teachers in the same school or those in higher education. This chapter first defines job satisfaction. It then presents the history and theories of job satisfaction, the different perspectives as to how job satisfaction is measured, motivation as it relates to job satisfaction, and the peculiar characteristics of the job of school principals.

**Job Satisfaction Defined**

In 1935, job satisfaction was defined by Happock as when individuals state they are satisfied with their job based on a blending of psychological, physiological, and environmental conditions. (Green & Reese, 2006). According to Luthans (1994), job satisfaction is the developed mindset one has of the job and the job conditions. This involves the personal
evaluation of the conditions or the results of a job, which is an internal response experienced by the individual. Conditions include the job itself and the attitude of management or administration. One’s pay rate or job security are examples of results of the job (Saygi, Tolon, Tekogul, 2011).

Individuals hold perceptions about their jobs and their job conditions. As a result, they develop internal reactions that contribute to job satisfaction (Saygi, et al, 2011). According to Schneider and Snyder (1975), job satisfaction is the internal response experienced based on the formation of norms, expectations, and values of individuals. An individual has a high level of job satisfaction when their desires are paralleled with the features of their job (Davis, 1981). Weiss (2002) considered job satisfaction to be positive and negative judgments individuals make about their jobs, which demonstrates an internal evaluation of the environment. One of the most popular and highly cited definitions of job satisfaction originates from Locke (1976), who stated that it was “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s values” (p. 316). Locke (1976) wrote that job satisfaction can be found in the relationship between the job and the individual.

Similar definitions of job satisfaction have been offered by researchers in more recent years. Schermerhorn, Hunt, and Osborn (1994) stated that individuals have a psychological contract that hold expectations of the job and job satisfaction is the sensual reaction individuals have toward the physical and social conditions of their job that correspond with these expectations. Akcamete, Kaner, and Sucuoglu (2001) defined work satisfaction as that which is experienced when individuals’ values correspond with the work they perform. At its simplest form, job satisfaction demonstrates how pleased individuals are with their jobs (Saygi et al., 2011). This is the definition that most informs this study.
The History of Job Satisfaction

The desire to understand job satisfaction was sparked in the early 1900s when the concerns of fatigue in industrial workers began to surface. A researcher named Taylor (1970) believed that job satisfaction would increase if fatigue was reduced and salary was increased. The issue of fatigue reduction was addressed for many years following Taylor’s initial observations. Large-scale examinations of fatigue and performance were conducted, looking closely at work hours, rest times, lighting, ventilation and noise in the workplace (Locke, 1976).

In the 1920’s, factors such as rest periods and motivating productivity sparked the Hawthorne study, which brought to light the relationship between job satisfaction and job performance (Locke, 1976). According to Brannigan and Zwerman (2001), “the Hawthorne Studies were the single most important investigation of the human dimensions of industrial relations in the early 20th century” (p. 55). After observing very little change in the participants, the researchers of the Hawthorne study shifted their focus to look at workers’ attitudes. The focus on attitudes included workers perceptions of management, the economic circumstances, and their mood (Locke, 1976). According to Locke (1976) the role of money as a determinant of job satisfaction was minimized in the Hawthorne study and instead the outcomes were focused on the importance of informal work groups and supervisory practices. The results of the Hawthorne study influenced research on job satisfaction for decades following and had a significant impact on leadership theories during World War II and the Human Relations movement (Locke, 1976).

In 1959, the emphasis within job satisfaction studies shifted to a focus on the redesign of work itself, based on a monograph written by Herzberg, Mausner, and Synderman (1959). According to Locke (1976) the historical trends of job satisfaction can be summed up by three
major schools of thought: the physical-economic school, the social (human relations) school, and the work itself (growth) school. The physical-economic school concentrated on the physical environment of the job site, working conditions and the amount of pay. The social school concentrated on employee work groups, employee-management relations, and quality supervision. The work itself school placed an emphasis on skill building, efficacy, and work that challenged the mental capabilities of employees (Locke, 1976). Although each of these schools of thoughts emphasized different aspects of work and the role of the individual, the historical foundations of job satisfaction prevalent in the theories of job satisfaction are still used.

**Theories of Job Satisfaction**

Theoretical frameworks guide research and help to determine what will be measured in scholarly studies. Theories of job satisfaction provide frameworks to help describe what satisfies or motivates individuals in the workplace (Zhilla, 2013). A number of theories have been used in many studies on job satisfaction in order to provide a direction and define measurable variables. They include Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory, the Motivation-Hygiene Theory, and the Job Characteristic Model.

**Maslow’s Need Hierarchy Theory.**

In 1954, Maslow stated that individuals have five basic categories of needs: physiological needs, such as food, water, and air; safety needs, such as freedom from harm and economic security; belongingness, to belong and experience feeling loved; esteem needs, including the need for achievement and approval; and the need for self-actualization, the ability to live out one’s potential (Maslow, 1954). These needs are arranged in a hierarchy, in which the lower order needs (physiological, safety, and belongingness) must be fulfilled before individuals can progress to seeking out higher order needs (esteem and self-actualization) (Derlin & Schneider,
The idea behind Maslow’s theory is that an individual’s motivation is ignited by the desire to meet the need that is most pressing at the time (Derlin & Schneider, 1994). In the context of this study, the most favorable outcome would be when one’s job environment matches the need one is attempting to fulfill. Maslow’s theory was not originally intended to explain job satisfaction; however, its influence can be seen today in incentive programs offered by management in a variety of disciplines (Locke, 1976). A visual representation of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is displayed below in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs
**Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory.**

The motivation-hygiene theory, also called two-faceted theory, originated from a study of 200 engineers and consultants who were asked to describe times of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the job (Herzberg, Mausner, & Snyderman, 1959). Their answers were grouped into categories based on similarities and frequency (Locke, 1976). One set were determined to be ‘satisfiers’ that motivate employees and the other set were determined to be ‘dissatisfiers.’ The motivators included achievement, recognition, work itself, and responsibility. The ‘dissatisfiers,’ which were labeled “hygiene” factors, included interpersonal relationships with subordinates and peers, supervision, policy, and personal life. The presence of some of these factors can increase satisfaction. However, the absence of these same factors do not necessarily increase dissatisfaction (Derlin & Schneider, 1994). According to Locke (1976), Herzberg’s theory suggested that job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction have different determinants. May and Decker (1988) noted criticism for Herzberg’s theory because it lacked a definitive statement of theory, and Derline and Schneider (1994) believed it to be too open to interpretations. An example of the application of Herzberg’s theory is presented in Figure 4.

![Figure 4. Herzberg’s Motivation-Hygiene Theory.](image-url)
Job Characteristic Model.

Hackman and Oldham’s (1976) Job Characteristic Model (JCM) stated that some aspects of a job can create positive and negative outcomes of an individual’s performance. Five characteristics related to job attributes were developed in JCM that are intended to increase motivation and contentment in employees. The five characteristics include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. Skill variety is the skill set and abilities needed to accomplish the tasks of a job. Task identity is the extent of the task and a clear definition of what is required for completion of the task. Task significance refers to factors of the job that impact the growth of the employee. Autonomy is when factors of the job increase the ability for employees to accomplish personal tasks and perform task that benefits their own selves. Finally, feedback provides an opportunity for employees to know how they are performing on the job (Sultan, 2012).

The first three contents proposed by JCM (task variety, task identity, and task significance) are intended to evoke a psychological state of meaningfulness for the work that is performed. Autonomy evokes the feeling of responsibility and control. Feedback provides the experience of having knowledge of the results of the work one produces. All of these contents lead to a positive psychological state in employees that can lead to positive job outcomes (Kass, Vodanovich, Khosravi, 2011). Figure 3 outlines the components of JCM and their relationships.
Identifying tasks that provide opportunities for upgrading, reliability, efficiency, promotion, and expansion is the best way to encourage employees (Parker, Wall, & Corderly, 2001). According to Bruce and Blackburn (1992), studies have proven that the way in which tasks are constructed, influences the contentment and performance of employees. Tasks should be aligned with employees’ interests to motivate them to achieve the goals of the organization (Campion & Thayer, 1985). The five dimensions of the job characteristic model and its positive relationship to employee satisfaction and motivation has been supported by other studies. (Brass, 1981).

**Measuring job satisfaction.**

Job satisfaction is a multi-dimensional concept that can be complex and difficult to measure (Mullins, 1996). According to Poggi (2010), identifying factors that increase or decrease satisfaction is essential to understanding well-being in individuals. Poggi (2010) stated there were four reasons that understanding the determining factors of job satisfaction was
important. First, studying the determinants of job satisfaction can provide contributions to the development of new theories (Poggi, 2010). Second, understanding job satisfaction can provide insights into work quality and how to improve productivity (Kok, 2003). Third, understanding job satisfaction provides opportunities for individuals to use their skills and demonstrate their capabilities, which can lead to living a better life (Sen, 1999). Studying job satisfaction can give insights into what creates a good life, an overall societal benefit. Fourth, learning about job satisfaction can inform policies that can boost an organization’s employment and productivity (Poggi, 2010).

Due to the global nature of job satisfaction, the concept has many facets, and the most commonly used categorization of job satisfaction includes five major facets (Judge & Klinger, 2008). Smith, Kendall, and Hulin (1969) described the five facets of job satisfaction as pay rate, promotions, coworkers, supervision, and the work performed. Locke (1976) later added recognition, work conditions, and company management. Most discussions of job satisfaction separate the concept into intrinsic or extrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors include pay and promotion. Intrinsic factors include coworkers and the work performed.

Zhilla (2013) described the external needs for work motivation that increase job satisfaction, including pay, supervision, coworker relations, and working conditions. Pay refers to financial compensation and the perception of whether or not the compensation is equitable. The amount of compensation received helps individuals meet their basic needs and assists in the attainment of the higher needs of individuals, such as esteem and self-actualization (Luthans, 1998). According to Pfeiffer and Dunlap (1982), supervision is extremely important in the field of education. Research has found that the supervisor-subordinate relationship is a strong motivator for work satisfaction (Luthans, 1998). Morrison (2004) stated that having strong co-
worker relations often leads to job satisfaction. Job satisfaction is related to the ability of employees to have positive interactions with their coworkers (Mowday & Sutton, 1993). Working conditions are often linked to job satisfaction, supported by Luthans (1998) who wrote that a clean, friendly and inviting environment makes individuals happy to come to work.

Staw and Ross (1985) argued that too much emphasis has been placed on external environmental aspects of the job when attempting to find the determinants of job satisfaction. They believed that examining stable, individual differences is as important as external factors. Kim (2002) described instances where the quality of life is enhanced by job satisfaction, which includes improving intrinsic motivators to help employees feel good about their work.

Saiti and Fassoulis (2012) looked at the level of satisfaction that school leaders derive from the work they perform. They found that job satisfaction is at its highest when school leaders received recognition and support from their superiors. A positive relationship between managers and subordinates demonstrated cooperation and devotion. Overall, the study found that recognition, encouragement, and raising the morale of both superiors and peers were higher determinants of job satisfaction than economic rewards.

Derlin and Schneider (1994) examined job satisfaction determinants of teacher and principals in urban and suburban schools. They found that the job satisfaction of principals was influenced by extrinsic factors, such as pay, security, and advancement. However, teachers demonstrated a greater influence of intrinsic factors, such as student achievement, recognition, and support. Derlin and Schneider’s (1994) study also found a difference between principals in urban schools and principals in suburban schools. Salary considerations were a greater influence in principals’ job satisfaction in urban schools than suburban schools. Suburban principals reported higher job satisfaction derived from favorable impressions of their work environment.
Derlin and Schneider’s (1994) findings indicate that principals in urban schools develop more job satisfaction from extrinsic motivators than their teachers or suburban peers.

According to Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) believed job satisfaction research has largely focused on extrinsic motivators because the factors appear to be easier to measure. Yet, in careers in social service fields like education, where economic gain is not as strong of an interest, researchers have looked closely at intrinsic motivators and satisfaction (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). Intrinsic motivators are self-motivated aspects of job satisfaction, whereas extrinsic motivators are external rewards, such as pay rate and promotion. Sometimes, there is not a clear distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivators, and the line between the two is often blurred. It is a challenge to unravel the factors of job satisfaction that are often linked together (Bozeman & Gaughan, 2011). Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) provided an example of individuals who are motivated by pay. On the surface, it could be assumed that individuals are extrinsically motivated by the desire to get paid more. However, the pair found that the amount of pay earned is less important than the perception of fairness about pay and how it reflects performance, an intrinsic motivator.

**Motivation.**

Borzaga and Tortia (2006) noted that the degree of job satisfaction is influenced by employee motivation. For example, employees can be motivated by better work relations, creating a proactive attitude that leads to job satisfaction. Shapiro (1975) defined motivation as “a force that energizes an employee’s willingness to perform; it is a summary of his perceptions about his job” (p. 647). Most empirical tests of employee motivations have focused on monetary motivation. Few studies have focused on the extent nonmonetary motivations influence job satisfaction (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). Schuster (1974) believed that rewards must satisfy the
needs of employees in order to motivate their behaviors. He found that employees worked with more effort when their pay was based on their performance. Ford (1973) did not believe that wages or benefits served as motivators, but instead they were used to only retain employees.

Sultan (2012) examined the relationship between employees’ work motivation, satisfaction, and job characteristics. Job characteristics were based on the five dimensions of the Job Characteristic Model, which include skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. He found that high ratings in the five job characteristics positively correlated with job satisfaction and work motivation (Sultan, 2012). He wrote:

Employees with greater varieties of skills prefer teamwork. It shows that the employees are completely involved in the whole process of work from start to the end. This property indicates that the employees exercising full freedom in their jobs experience having more autonomy, report a higher desire to work and feel more satisfied at their work place.

(Sultan, 2012, p. 22)

Organizations can implement incentive programs that match the motivations and organizational objectives of their employees. By doing this, organizations can influence the satisfaction of their employees (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006). According to Borzaga and Tortia (2006) one of the benefits of satisfied workers is increased worker loyalty, which reduces turnover within the organization. Figure 6 (Borzaga & Tortia, 2006) lists different work motivators for employees, which include intrinsic, extrinsic, economic, and relational aspects. A mix of incentives that can be used by an organization to increase motivation is also included: economic, extrinsic, relational, and process-related aspects.

This section has provided many definitions of job satisfaction found in the literature. However, Locke’s (1976) definition of job satisfaction continues to be the most frequently used,
defining job satisfaction as “the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s values” (p. 316). Although the examination of job satisfaction surfaced as a result of fatigued industrial workers in the early 1900s, the study of job satisfaction continues to be of importance in most organizations across various disciplines. Employees’ job satisfaction effects the bottom line of any company. When employees are not satisfied at work, their productivity declines and job turnover increases. Due to the multi-dimensional nature of job satisfaction, it is challenging to measure job satisfaction in employees. This chapter began by introducing the intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation and provides a strong foundation for a discussion of the duties of a school principal, the complexities of the job, and what intrinsic and extrinsic motivations affect the school principal.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workers</th>
<th>Organizations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivators toward work in general</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mix of Incentives</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Intrinsic Aspects:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An opportunity for self-fulfillment</td>
<td><strong>Economic Aspects:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A contribution to society</td>
<td>• Wage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Extrinsic Aspects:</strong></td>
<td>• Career advancements achieved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A necessity</td>
<td>• Future career advancements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A hobby</td>
<td><strong>Extrinsic Aspects:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• A way to gain recognition</td>
<td>• Working hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Economic Aspects</strong></td>
<td>• Job security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To earn a living</td>
<td>• Work environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To earn as much as possible</td>
<td><strong>Relational Aspects:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• To support a family</td>
<td>• Relations with supervisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational Aspects:</strong></td>
<td>• Relations with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• An opportunity to form new relationships</td>
<td>• Relations with volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process Related Aspects:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Process Related Aspects:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Professional development</td>
<td>• Professional development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Decision-making autonomy</td>
<td>• Decision-making autonomy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Variety and creativity of the job</td>
<td>• Variety and creativity of the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recognition of one’s contributions</td>
<td>• Recognition of one’s contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other-Regarding Aspects:</strong></td>
<td><strong>Other-Regarding Aspects:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• The social usefulness of the job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A recent (2012) study, conducted by MetLife, Inc., revealed that as few as 59 percent of the 500 principals surveyed reported being satisfied with their jobs. They were asked, “All in all, how satisfied would you say you are with your job as a principal in the public schools? Very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied” (Metlife, 2012, p. 33). The study found that the principals who reported feeling dissatisfied had higher levels of stress on the job and less control over decision making. The principalship has changed over time, becoming more demanding, with higher expectations, and longer work hours. Principals are now required to meet more stringent testing requirements for student achievement and complete larger amounts of state mandated paperwork (Murphy & Beck, 1994).

Friesen, Holdaway, and Rice (1983) examined the sources of job dissatisfaction in school administrators. They found the top five reasons for job dissatisfaction were administrative policies, amount of workload, lack of funding for schools, societal attitudes, and the lack of physical facilities. According to Green and Reese (2006), other sources of job dissatisfaction include lack of clearly defined job duties, policies, and responsibilities.

Principals face dual pressures: having to meet the government regulations and being held accountable for the performance of their students (Sodoma & Else, 2009). Additional pressures principals face are teacher shortages, overcrowded classrooms, and safety issues (Institute for Educational Research, 2000). Derlin and Schneider (1994) described a principal’s responsibility

Figure 6. Work Motivators

The Job of the Principal

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for students’ achievement of educational objectives, which relies on their ability to motivate their teaching staff to improve performance. Once school principals were identified as part of students’ failure to achieve educational standards, researchers began looking closely at what motivated educational leaders in their jobs. Their recommendations included increased compensation, awards based on merit, and restructuring the work environment (Derlin & Schneider, 1994). According to Derlin and Schneider (1994), the goal of these extrinsic monetary rewards was to serve as motivational strategies to increase the job satisfaction of principals.

School administrators are responsible for creating and maintaining a healthy work environment that fosters good performance by the school members and the pursuit of accomplishing a common goal (Saiti & Fassoulis, 2012). According to Saiti and Fassoulis (2012),

The performance of a school depends, to an extent, on the levels of job satisfaction derived from practicing the managerial tasks, then the school head cannot complete this managerial task without knowing the motivation for his subordinates and the sort of satisfaction he/she derives from his work. (p. 371)

Schools must satisfy the desires and needs of school principals in order for them to be successful (Saiti & Fassoulis, 2012) because the actions of the school principal directly affect the operation of the school as a unit. Therefore, it is imperative to keep school principals satisfied with their work.

In order to motivate principals within their work, understanding how job satisfaction is achieved is needed. A clear understanding of what brings job satisfaction to school principals can inform how school communities, boards of education, and superintendents operate (Sodoma
According to Saygi et al. (2011), Tanriverdi believed that individuals desire to expose their natural talents at work. Any time these natural talents and abilities are thwarted, individuals may experience psychological problems and dissatisfaction. High workloads, lack of ability to make decisions, and duty-conflicts can build stress in individuals, and lead to dissatisfaction (Saygi et al., 2011). In order to retain school principals, they must have the ability to develop and utilize their natural talents and skills (Sodoma & Else, 2009).

**Stress.**

Principals must juggle the needs of higher authorities, boards of education, and several other constituencies. Terrill (1994) stated that principals face the same problems of most middle managers, with costs similar to most public agencies. The pressures of new directives, educational crisis, and demands, increases many principals’ stress levels resulting in lower job satisfaction (Terrill, 1994). Washington (2013) surveyed 35 principals, and found that 77 percent perceived their job as more stressful than other professional jobs. Principals were asked to rank situations that provoked stress, and the demands placed on principals by central administration was ranked number one. Supervising teachers came in a close second as a stress-provoking situation. Almost three-quarters of those surveyed stated that their principal preparation trainings and graduate programs did not prepare them to deal with the stressors of a principalship.

The amount of stress on the job is often related to the perceived control one has over a difficult situation. If individuals feel like others control the solutions and outcomes of their circumstances, then stress levels can increase. Stress and anxiety can be replaced by structure, plans and implementation (Terrill, 1994).
Terrill (1994) spoke with secondary principals to learn what coping strategies they used to deal with stress on the job. Terrill’s findings reported the following coping strategies: being transparent with staff to inform them of issues; delegating smaller tasks; allowing teachers more leadership of their classrooms, practicing time-management; self-care to tend to mental and physical health; setting limits on the amount of time spent on work and at school; taking risks; open to the perspectives of others; avoiding trying to change others; having a network of friends outside of work; and acknowledging Type A traits and implementing strategies to balance them out. Washington (2013) noted other coping mechanisms. In Washington’s (2013) survey, 57 percent of the respondents dealt with stressful situations by temporarily placing the problem aside. Attempting an immediate solution was how 29 percent of the principals reported they dealt with stressful situations. The remaining 14 percent of principals sought advice from friends or colleagues (Washington, 2013).

Most professionals learn to cope with stress. However, those who are unsuccessful in coping with their chronic stress can experience burnout (Jennett, Harris, & Mesibov, 2003). Jennett, et al. (2003) stated that one form of burnout is emotional exhaustion, manifested as low energy and chronic fatigue, often the outcome of chronic occupational stress. Previous studies have found that emotional exhaustion, and other measures of burnout, predict motivation and job satisfaction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2011) studied teachers to examine whether there was a relationship between occupational stressor variables and job satisfaction, emotional exhaustion, feeling of belonging, and motivation to leave the profession. They found that time pressure and discipline problems predicted emotional exhaustion, and emotional exhaustion and a teacher’s feeling of belonging predicted job satisfaction. Both
emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction predicted a teacher’s motivation to leave the profession.

**Retention.**

Studies have shown a positive relationship between job satisfaction and the intention to leave a job (Chan & Morrison, 2000). To assess attrition and mobility among school principals, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) surveyed K-12 schools in the United States in 2008 – 2009. The principals surveyed were part of a national survey the previous year. The results showed that 80 percent of the principals stayed in the same position the following year. Six percent of the principals surveyed moved to a different school the following year. Twelve percent of the principals left the principalship completely (US Department of Education, 2010). The results and percentages of the survey are displayed below in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Type</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Stayers</th>
<th>Movers</th>
<th>Leavers</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Schools</td>
<td>117,140</td>
<td>93,150</td>
<td>7,060</td>
<td>13,640</td>
<td>3,290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(79.5%)</td>
<td>(6.0%)</td>
<td>(11.6%)</td>
<td>(2.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Public (Traditional &amp; Charter)</td>
<td>89,920</td>
<td>71,440</td>
<td>6,210</td>
<td>10,690</td>
<td>1,570</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(79.5%)</td>
<td>(6.9%)</td>
<td>(11.9%)</td>
<td>(1.8%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIE</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(71.8%)</td>
<td>(8.9%)</td>
<td>(12.0%)</td>
<td>(7.2%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private</td>
<td>27,050</td>
<td>21,580</td>
<td>830</td>
<td>2,930</td>
<td>1,710</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(79.8%)</td>
<td>(3.1%)</td>
<td>(10.8%)</td>
<td>(6.3%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Stayers are 2007-08 principals who were principals in the same schools in 2008-09. Movers are 2007-08 principals who were principals in different schools in 2008-09. Leavers are 2007-08 principals who were no longer principals in 2008-09. Other includes principals who had left their 2007-08 school, but for whom it was not possible to determine a mover or leaver status in 2008-09. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for
Allen and Meyer (1990) developed a model of commitment that included three aspects of work commitment, including a normative aspect (feeling obligated to remain with an organization), a continuance aspect (commitment based on costs), and an affective aspect (emotional attachment and identification with an organization). The pair found that the affective aspect is the strongest predictor of job satisfaction and retention of employees. The level of commitment at the affective aspect had a positive relationship with well-being, attendance, and motivation. Therefore, the more an employee can identify with an organization and the more emotionally attached they feel to that organization, the more likely they are to be satisfied with their job and motivated to stay in their position (Allen & Meyer, 1990).

Valentine, Godkin, Fleischman, and Kidwell (2011) examined the influence of perceived corporate ethical values and employee creativity on employee satisfaction and their intention to leave a position. When organizations establish an ethical foundation, employees are more likely to have positive interactions with coworkers. Organizational cultures that are ethical, dependable, and open-minded, encourage high productivity and loyalty from employees (Valentine, et al., 2010). Oliver, Statler, and Roose (2009) found that ethics in the workplace is related to creativity in employees. Reflexively, when organizations foster creativity in employees, their sense of organizational identity is strengthened, which is often tied to ethical practices within the organization (Oliver, et al., 2009). Valentine et al. (2011) found that there was a positive relationship between the perception of ethical values and employee creativity. Both perceived corporate ethical values and employee creativity were positively correlated with increased job satisfaction. However, the relationship between the two measures showed little relationship to an employee’s intention to leave the position.
School principals have many daily challenges they must face. As a result, many experience high levels of stress. Similar to the early 1900s, when researchers first began looking at job satisfaction due to the fatigue of industrial workers, it is time to focus on the stressors of school principals and what needs to be done to increase their job satisfaction. This chapter presented the concept that the demands of the principalship can cause stress and decrease retention. The unique qualities of the principalship may require more intrinsic motivators for job satisfaction, such as a principal’s belief that they are connected to the school, their perceptions of control, and fostering creativity, which allows them to use their natural abilities and skills. The many consequences that result from a dissatisfied principal, such as the lack of productivity and turnover rates, makes it imperative to discover how principals find job satisfaction.

Conclusions

This chapter examined job satisfaction of school principals by defining job satisfaction, presenting the history and theories of job satisfaction, as well as different perspectives on how job satisfaction is measured. The chapter also reviewed motivation as it relates to job satisfaction, and the peculiar aspects of the job of school principals. This content was explored through the different theories and researcher’s approaches in order to provide a context for the central research question: What factors contribute to job satisfaction as perceived by principals? The review provided examples of both extrinsic and intrinsic factors that have been linked to job satisfaction in the field of education and other professional occupations. Along with the factors that influence job satisfaction, motivation, as it relates to job satisfaction, provides a context for the secondary research question: What motivates principals to stay in their positions? In order to explore what motivates principals to stay in their position, it was important to know to what extent motivators influence both job satisfaction and employee retention.
A school is a social institution that has specific goals that must be met by the leadership. The role of the principal is a balance between school leadership and bureaucratic responsibilities. Principals create the environment and influence the culture of their schools, affecting the performance of the teachers and the students. The dynamics of school principals result from their abilities, attitudes at work, and feelings toward their jobs. These attitudes and feelings toward work depend on the level of job satisfaction principals have (Saiti & Fassoulis, 2012). Principals are visionaries for their schools and set the tone as leaders. Low principal retention leads to instability within schools, especially when the vision changes with each new successor. This instability significantly impacts schools that need a strong foundation and strong consistent leadership. School and society need principals who can find satisfaction in the work they perform despite the demands and stressors of the job.

The research design and results that follow gives voice to those principals who have learned to manage the daily stressors of the principalship. Learning what factors increase job satisfaction and what motivates principals to stay may help new principals as they enter the field and existing principals as they face the demands of the work. This knowledge will also help district administrators who are looking to invest in supports for increased retention of their principals.

**Chapter Three: Research Design**

**Research Question**

The problem of practice that triggered this study is the decline of principal satisfaction and its ramifications on the retention of qualified principals. To address this issue, the purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis study was to apply self-determination theory to
investigate what brings satisfaction to school principals and what motivates them to stay. The research questions at the core of this study were:

1. What factors contribute to job satisfaction as perceived by school principals?
2. How do principals make sense of their desire to stay in their positions?

**Methodology**

Based on these research questions, which focused on how school principals experience job satisfaction, this study called for the use of a qualitative approach. Qualitative methodology opens the door to new areas of research and allows researchers to explore existing research from different perspectives, creating a new understanding and an expanded view. (Shreiber & Stern, 2001). Traditionally, quantitative methods have been used to look at principals’ job satisfaction, centering on measurements, correlations, and cause and effect. However, like some other phenomena, principals’ job satisfaction encourages researchers to go beyond the traditional methods and take a deeper look (Broussard, 2006). Qualitative research methods allow researchers to understand the individual experience at a deeper and richer level through the production of descriptive data. (Streubert, 1999; Boyd, 2001).

The nature of this study encourages a lens focused on the subjective views and meanings held by school principals. A researcher’s paradigm directs the choice of tools, instruments and methods used for a study by uncovering their underlying philosophical assumptions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000b). The constructivist paradigm is the philosophical framework that supports the direction of this research design and a subjective viewpoint of participants (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). The constructivist paradigm aligns with qualitative methods, which allows this researcher to understand the experience of the school principals through their own words and experiences.
This paradigm supports the understanding of “lived experiences” from the perspectives of the participants (Ponterotto, 2005).

The constructivist paradigm recognizes the existence of multiple realities as opposed to a single true reality (Ponterotto, 2005). Through this viewpoint, reality is subjective, originating from the mind of the individual, and is often influenced by an individual’s experiences and perceptions. This study embraced the multiple realities of each participant as they spoke of their experiences as school principals. Ponterotto (2005) stated that reality is influenced by the interaction between the participant and the researcher. The researcher was sensitive to the interaction with each participant in order to encourage a deep and honest exchange. The methodology that best supports the constructivist paradigm in its hermeneutic and idiographic nature is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

**Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis**

In order to gain an understanding of why principals are satisfied in their jobs, this study examined the personal meaning principals attribute to their work and how it relates to their lives. The study explored the beliefs principals hold, the meaning their work holds for them, and what principals believe contributes to their job satisfaction. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach provided an opportunity to uncover themes and meanings that principals hold when discussing what contributes to their job satisfaction (Reid, Flowers, and Larkin, 2005).

An IPA allows for an exploration of how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The method looks deep into the individual perceptions of an experience and allows the participant to provide their own interpretation of the experience. The researcher plays an active role in the interpretative process by trying to make sense of the
participant who is trying to make sense of his world (Smith & Osborn, 2008). According to Smith and Osborn (2008), IPA involves a double hermeneutic, combining empathetic hermeneutics with questioning hermeneutics. Therefore, the researcher must be able to understand the participant by stepping into their world (empathetic hermeneutics) but also continue to ask critical questions (questioning hermeneutics). By combining the two forms, the researcher may be able to see something more in the collected experiences that the participant has not yet considered (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Smith and Osborn (2008) believed that researchers who use IPA must also be able to interpret the mental and emotional state of their participants when they speak. There is a connection between individuals’ emotional states and what they say and think. The connection can be complicated, and it is important for researchers to understand that individuals may have difficulty expressing what they are thinking and feeling about a situation. Participants may also be unwilling to share how they feel about some thing or situation. The IPA researcher must be aware of these challenges and be sensitive to emotional states (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

The qualitative design of this study allowed the researcher to make sense of the meaning that principals bring to their experience in their natural settings. Including the voices of the participants allowed for a deeper understanding of what brought them job satisfaction and why they remained in their positions. A narrative approach was used to gather the experiences of principals through their own words. Narrative research stems from many different social and humanities disciplines (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004). Constructing a narrative allowed for the principal’s interpretation of the events they encounter in the principal role and an understanding of how they deal with these events.

Participants
In order to develop a detailed analysis, IPA studies use purposeful sampling, seeking out individuals whose experiences apply to the research questions. The sampling size is usually small and homogenous. The target participants for this study were public school principals, employed in the same position for a minimum of one year, who reported high job satisfaction. The original research design planned for four participants, representing public school programs in the state of Texas. However, six participants were interviewed to account for the possibility of participants not continuing the study. Three males and three females were interviewed, with the following racial breakdown: two Caucasian males, two Black females, one Caucasian female, and one Black male. The ages of the participants varied. Table 2 summarizes the information regarding the participant, the type of school they serve and the number of years they served as principal at their current school.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Type of School</th>
<th># of Years Served</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal A</td>
<td>High School (9th – 12th)</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal B</td>
<td>Middle School (6th – 8th)</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal C</td>
<td>Elementary (K - 5th)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal D</td>
<td>Elementary (K - 5th)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal E</td>
<td>Middle School (6th – 8th)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal F</td>
<td>Intermediate (5th &amp; 6th)</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Participants agreed to meet three times with the interviewer, with the option of the first and third meeting in person, via phone, or other form of social media. Interview protocols required the second meeting to take place face to face with the interviewer for a recorded interview spanning from 60 to 90 minutes.

**Recruitment**

The original recruitment plan was to use the Texas Education Agency (TEA) AskTed database to develop a list of school principals in Austin, Killeen, Dallas, and San Antonio independent school districts. Email addresses of administrators are provided on the AskTed database, and these were to be used to send an initial survey to measure job satisfaction as a screening tool for inclusion. The four districts yielded 571 principals with active email addresses. Additional recruitment was planned through social media, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Google Plus. These alternate methods were utilized when the researcher encountered challenges with the AskTed system. Although several principals completed the survey, all of the districts listed above required district level approval for any principal to participate in a research study. The research had to benefit the district and could take up to one year for approval. Therefore, all six participants from this study were recruited through social media and social connections and served in six different school districts surrounding the city of Austin. Using an unsigned consent form and a secure web-based survey site (SurveyMonkey.com), the researcher provided each participant with the survey questions to determine if they met the criteria for job satisfaction. Six principals were chosen based on their survey answers. After selection, the researcher provided additional details for the study and presented an overview of the commitment involved. Once the participant was comfortable with moving forward with the study, the informed consent was provided in person.
Data Collection

IPA data is most commonly collected through semi-structured interviews, where the researcher is able to engage with the participant and modify questions from their interview protocol based on responses. The researcher can ask critical questions based on the information that is shared (Smith & Osborn, 2008). In-depth, semi-structured interviews were used in this study to explore how principals make sense of their world. Three meetings were scheduled with each participant in order to build rapport and trust between the researcher and the participant. An interview schedule was developed to reflect the range of issues the research covered. Appropriate questions, the sequence of questions, the use of funneling, and possible prompts were considered before the interviews occurred, in accordance with best practices (Smith & Osborn, 2008). The researcher also included an observation of the principal’s workspace that provided physical clues to what motivated each principal, such as pictures of family, vacation spots, or hobbies.

Data Analysis

After the interviews were conducted, the material was transcribed verbatim including both the participants and researcher’s words. Nonverbal behaviors were noted in the transcription, along with any pauses, laughter, or other significant sounds that could assist in the interpretation of the data. The analysis focused on the content and complexities of the meaning that the participants held. This researcher engaged with the text and interpreted the transcripts in order to capture the psychological world of each participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Each interview was first analyzed individually, reading a transcript carefully several times. All interesting and significant information was annotated within the margin. The transcripts were read a number of times to become familiar with the content and gain insights
into what was being said. According to Smith and Osborn (2008), the researcher may choose to comment on associations, connections, similarities, and differences. The researcher may also use this time to summarize and make preliminary interpretations.

Once the first participant’s transcript was read, the researcher started from the beginning of the transcript and changed initial comments into more concise phrases and words. Themes noted after the initial readings were jotted down. During this process, the researcher used psychological terms that captured the meanings and sense making of the participants. The initial notes throughout the transcript were transformed into emerging themes. This process was repeated for each transcript. Once all initial themes were listed, connections to the themes were made and the themes were clustered. “Codeweaving” was also used to provide a map of connections and patterns seen throughout the data. According to Creswell (2012), “codeweaving” is a technique that integrates codes into the memo narrative, which provides a visual to determine how the pieces to the puzzle fit together. This researcher then checked the original content within the transcripts to confirm that the clustered themes continued to reflect the words of the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

A table of themes was developed that created a superordinate theme for each cluster. The original source within the transcript, along with the page number was connected with each theme within the clusters. This process was completed for each participant. Once each transcript of the participants was analyzed using the above process, converging and diverging themes between participants were examined. A final table was constructed using the themes that emerge from the richness of the data between all participants in the study (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Validity and Credibility
Smith, Flower, and Larkin (2009) discussed Yardley’s four broad principles for assessing quality of research and their use in strengthening the validity and credibility of IPA studies. Yardley’s four principles are sensitivity of context, transparency, coherence and impact and importance. Due to the idiographic nature of IPA, sensitivity to context is demonstrated through the initial engagement the researcher must have with key stakeholders that provide access to the individuals that share a “lived experience.” The researcher must develop a rapport within the community where sampling will occur. Sensitivity of context is also demonstrated through the researcher’s awareness and presence during the interview process. The researcher needs to show empathy, create a comfortable and safe environment, and recognize any challenges in the interaction between the participant and the researcher (Smith, Flower, Larkin, 2009). According to Smith et al. (2009), sensitivity of context continues through the analysis of data when the researcher attempts to make sense of how the participant makes sense of his world. These demonstrations of sensitivity of context are not always visible and should be communicated in writing through the details of the data collection and analysis. Examples of the participants’ words should be included in the researcher’s writings to show the connection between the raw data and the analysis (Smith et al., 2009).

Transparency is a clear description of steps taken during the research process, which should be reflected in the write-up of the study. In IPA, the researcher should describe the selection process of participants, the construction of the interview schedule, how the interviews are conducted, and the steps taken in the analysis of data (Smith et. al., 2009). This provides transparency for the readers and increase the validity of the IPA study.

Coherence is judged from the perspective of the reader. Coherence addresses whether or not the researcher created a coherent argument, connected themes appropriately, and clearly dealt
with contradictions in the research. The write-up needs to be clear and coherent for the reader. IPA requires careful writing and awareness of the coherence of one’s writing. Smith et al. (2009) stated that many IPA studies require multiple revisions in order to establish coherence. It is also important for the researcher to reread their finished product from the perspective of a reader. Coherence also demonstrates whether or not the researcher’s theoretical assumptions are aligned with the principles of an IPA study. The write-up should reflect the interpretative nature of an IPA study and the reader should get a sense of the researcher attempting to make sense of the participant’s world. Finally, impact and importance strengthens validity by encouraging the researcher to aspire to write research that is interesting, important, or useful (Smith et al., 2009).

**Researcher Bias**

Merriam (1998) stated that it is important to clarify the researcher’s bias upfront, informing readers of any biases or assumptions held by the researcher. As a consultant within schools, the researcher has worked in over ten different schools within the Chicago and Texas school systems. Previously, she taught kindergarten for two years in a private school. After teaching, the researcher became a consultant within schools as a program specialist, working for the Comer Program, which helped train principals to lead their schools using a systems approach. This position allowed the researcher to look at the whole school and the role of the stakeholders within a school. Through this program, the importance of leadership and observations of the demands placed on principals within a school were evident. The researcher currently supervises 30 consultants under the Military Family Life Counseling Program within military schools in three Texas public school districts. She continues to work closely with school principals in Texas and watches them navigate through the demands placed on them by the school district as well as the Department of Defense. Personal experiences have developed many perceptions
regarding school principals and the difficulties they have meeting the demands placed on them. Some handle the challenges very well, but others falter under the pressures. Throughout her years in the field, the researcher has seen many principals come and go.

Being a clinical psychotherapist can be both an advantage and a disadvantage for an IPA study. As a psychotherapist, the researcher was trained in understanding the connection of one’s emotional and mental states to the words they speak. This, naturally, leads to looking beyond the surface of the words to find the meaning of what is being said. Therapeutic skills made it easier to develop a rapport with participants and create a safe and nurturing environment. However, researcher and psychotherapist are two different roles, and care was taken to understand each role before engaging in the conversations with participants. Care was also taken not to dig too deep, keeping the research questions in mind during the interview process.

Researchers can make faulty interpretations and present experiences in the wrong way (Briscoe, 2005). According to Briscoe (2005), researchers carry their own history and experiences when attempting to understand new situations. A researcher’s own experiences, such as exposure to principals within schools, and a background as a psychotherapist, influences beliefs. These experiences were kept in mind in order to prevent biases from appearing in the research. Briscoe (2005) stressed the importance of knowing the positions of the researchers and the researched. Although aware of potential biases, a belief that it was necessary to explore what keeps principals satisfied in their jobs, despite the many challenges they face drove the research.

**Member Checking**

The process of member checking was used once coding was completed in order to actively engage participants in assisting with accuracy of information and interpretations. Lincoln and Guba (1985) explained that member checking is the most important technique for
establishing credibility. The data analysis was mailed to each participant with a request to schedule the final 30 minute meeting of the study. The participants were given the opportunity to express any concerns or questions they had regarding the data as part of the member checking process.

**Reliability**

Providing details in the study also enhanced reliability. A good quality tape recorder provided the opportunity for detailed and accurate transcriptions, including any pauses or other pertinent information. Creswell (2012) reported that computer programs are another way to establish reliability by assisting with the recording and analyzing of the data.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

It was important that the participants were well informed and made the decision to participate based on their desire to add to the body of literature in the field of education. The best interest of each participant was considered throughout the process and the researcher made every effort to secure safety and well-being.

Each of the participants entered the study voluntarily, with the opportunity to withdraw at any time during the study. All participants had the ability to choose whether or not to answer a question asked of them. Autonomy was respected at all times, honoring the participants’ opinions, choices and actions (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013). Informed consent was communicated verbally and provided to all participants in written form. Efforts were made to make sure all participants comprehended the informed consent, including the expectations and purpose of the study before consenting to the study.

The purpose of this study was to understand how school principals find job satisfaction and what motivates principals to stay in their jobs. However, in order to increase the validity of
this study, it was important that the participants were not initially informed that this study was looking at job satisfaction and retention. This knowledge may have skewed their initial survey results. Participants were informed before they agreed to participate that features of this study would not be revealed until the conclusion of the study (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2013).

There were minimal risks to the participants in this study. The participants were not harmed and all efforts were made to support their well-being. However, due to the exploration of motivators, stressors, and psychological well-being on the job, feelings were evoked that were sensitive in nature. Procedures were put into place to protect the confidentiality of all participants, such as the destruction of interview recordings. All transcriptions were secured in a locked safe in the home office of the researcher. Only the researcher has access to the information. After three years all documentation will be destroyed. As stated earlier, all participants had an opportunity to refuse to answer questions that made them uncomfortable and they had the ability to withdraw from the study at any time.

The participants in this study have added to the body of knowledge that currently exists to help administrators, district officials, and principal preparation programs see what issues need to be addressed to increase principal job satisfaction. The benefit to the participants was a stronger understanding of their own self-motivation, self-identity, and contributions to their schools as a psychologically healthy leader. Another benefit was the opportunity to have their voices heard and provide contributions to any changes that are needed to increase job satisfaction amongst principals across the nation.

Conclusion
This study arose from the growing concern of decreasing job satisfaction in school principals. A study conducted by Metlife (2012) revealed that 41 percent of principals surveyed reported having a lack of job satisfaction. Of these principals, one-third are likely to leave their position. Job retention amongst school principals has become a growing concern in the state of Texas as well as other states across the nation. It is imperative that we understand the factors that motivate principals to stay in their positions.

The Metlife (2012) study found that stress, complexity of the work, and control over decision making are contributors to low job satisfaction. Due to the requirements of the principalship, stress, lack of control, and complexity of work are often part of the job. However, it is important not to forget that 59 percent of the principals surveyed reported having job satisfaction. The purpose of this study is to hear the voices and learn the experiences of those who have found job satisfaction despite the challenges of the job. The satisfied principals will provide insight to others in their field to help increase satisfaction and retention of school principals.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provided a lens for this researcher to examine job satisfaction in principals. SDT served as an opportunity to look closely at the motivations and orientations of the principals that report high job satisfaction. Due to the complexity of the principalship, it was important to examine closely what factors contribute to the job satisfaction of principals. The motivations in SDT involve both intrinsic and extrinsic factors as discussed in the literature review and provided an opportunity to look at the individual orientations of each principal based on the psychological needs that were met through the motivations they receive at work. SDT is a great combination of the theories discussed and was a good fit for this study.
Many studies, both quantitative and qualitative, have been conducted on job satisfaction, but few studies have addressed job satisfaction in school principals working in the K thru 12 sector. This study is an opportunity to go beyond the factors that create job satisfaction and look closely at the experience of the job that leads to job satisfaction. An effective method for understanding the experiences of principals through their perspective is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which was the method of choice for this study. IPA allowed this researcher to connect with each participant to understand how they each interpret their experiences. IPA also helped provide insight into how principals make sense of their work and the experiences that lead to their job satisfaction.

The outcome of this study not only added to the body of literature on job satisfaction, but also provided insight to what creates a good working life for school principals in K-12 education. The goal was to determine what is needed to keep principals motivated and to retain them in their positions. The outcome of this research informs other school principals, district superintendents, and principal preparation programs of the experiences that lead to a principal that reports high job satisfaction.

**Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis**

The purpose of this interpretive phenomenological analysis study was to apply self-determination theory to investigate what brings satisfaction to school principals and what motivates them to stay. Six participants, reporting high job satisfaction, shared their experiences as school principals in Texas public schools. The analysis of the interview data generated three superordinate themes and seven subthemes. The superordinate themes and their subthemes were:
1. Fulfilling a Purpose and Making a Difference (1.1 Working Directly with Children to have the Greatest Impact, 1.2 Keeping Challenges in Perspective)

2. Establishing a Solid Foundation Toward Growth (2.1 Establishing Clear Set Goals, Plans and Expectations, 2.2 Effective Communication, 2.3 Empowering Staff to Establish Shared Leadership)

3. Developing a Strong Awareness of Self (3.1 Transparency, 3.2 Balanced Living).

This study uncovered why these participants chose and remain in their positions, how they established supportive systems, and who they must become in order to achieve job satisfaction. There was a clear understanding of what inspired these participants to endure the daily demands of their job and persevere to achieve higher levels of personal and professional growth. What follows are the personal accounts of six participants making sense of what motivates them each day to find satisfaction in the work they do.

**Fulfilling a Purpose and Making a Difference**

The theme ‘fulfilling a purpose and making a difference’ captures the participant’s beliefs that they are doing what they were meant to do. School principals choose to become administrators for a myriad of reasons. However, the participants in this study each felt they were exactly where they were supposed to be in order to fulfill their purpose in life or to make a difference in the lives of children. Discussing why they became school principals, Principal A stated, “This was my goal in life.” Principal B believed it was her responsibility to make a difference in the lives of her students. Principals C and F both felt they were fulfilling their purpose in life. Principal D, who always wanted to work in education, stated that this work is “the most meaningful thing” he has done. Finally, Principal E believed it was “God’s will” that placed him in his current position and it is “God’s will” that will determine when it is time for
him to leave. Each participant’s sense-making of their reasons for becoming school principals appears to be something bigger than themselves and a desire to lead, with children as the focal point of their intentions.

From this superordinate theme, other themes emerged. As part of fulfilling one’s purpose, working directly with children in order to have some impact on their lives was a priority. Being in the position to have a greater impact on the lives of children was what attracted the participants into the administrative role. As each principal fulfills their purpose, they have a need to be challenged on a consistent basis. The challenges keep them energized and reinforces their belief that they are fulfilling their life’s purpose. However, many of these challenges could serve as a source of frustration for participants if not put into perspective. Thus, the two subthemes are ‘working directly with children’ and ‘keeping challenges in perspective’.

**Working directly with children.**

When the participants stepped into administrative roles, instead of sitting in their offices waiting for the issues to come to them, they looked at their positions as an opportunity to get to know the students in a different way. A school principal has the advantage of being outside of the classroom and seeing the needs of their students through a different lens. According to Principal C, she can look at the bigger picture and observe the whole child, which includes both school life and home life. Each participant described themselves as child-centered when discussing their role and each had the goal of doing what was best for children. The desire to place the needs of the children first seems to be what drives these principals to do what they do each day. Each participant loved working with children previously as teachers and felt a need to make a greater impact in the lives of their students. Principal B related:
I think when you are in the classroom, you have your close knit (group) of just kids and you really get to know them, you get to know their parents, you get to know their learning styles, but when you are in administration with kids, you get to see all variations of a child. You get to know all of their needs. The kids that really need that pat on the back, that sense of encouragement—you’re like their counselor. You mentor the kids and you can have a bigger impact on your kids than you can just working in the classroom.

For Principal B, the promotion to administrator provided the means to “give more to a bigger mass of students.” Principal E discussed making many difficult decisions, but ultimately he hoped that his kids understood he loves them and cares about them and know they have someone who believes in them. Both Principals C and D mentioned that being around the kids gives them the energy to deal with the other administrative duties that are a part of their job. Both Principals D and E discussed the importance of spending more time in classrooms and less time in their offices. Principal E explained why being with the kids is a priority:

You can’t make your living inside this room. You have to be with those kids to do what you can to make sure they get what they need and if you don’t talk to them, you can’t know that. If you never hear them, you do not know when they are upset and you do not know when they are happy. I can hear them and I can tell you when they are upset. I can tell you when they are happy and I can tell you when they are worried about what’s going on. I’m around them enough to feel that on a daily basis.

Principal E also conveyed the importance of being around students and not sitting in the office. Principal D had similar thoughts:

I am very interactive with the kids, the part we have about the job is that you are around kids and I enjoy kids. So when things are going well, I am out getting my high-fives and
my hugs and then I come back in and deal with the stuff I do not want to deal with. I think that I am very interactive with the staff and the kids and I try to be in every class, if not once a day, then twice just to pop in and let the kids see me.

Each participant expressed love for their students and their desire to make the lives of their students better. The principals enjoyed the interactions with the students and understood the importance of knowing their students on a personal level. In their position as school principals, they fulfil their purpose and make a difference through their interactions with the children.

It was necessary for these principals to be socially adept and comfortable working with children. The participants described how they spent a substantial amount of time alongside their students within the classrooms, during lunch periods, and in the hallways. The participants believed that too much time in their offices took away from their work with students. They were energized by the students and they were validated in seeing the results of their work when students succeed. Participants described how their interactions with students helped balance the challenges of administrative duties and district expectations. Additionally, to continue to fulfill their purpose and make a difference, participants had to put their daily challenges into perspective.

**Keeping challenges in perspective.**

The job of a school principal is challenging. The participants in this study acknowledged the challenges that distract from doing what they love to do. For most of these principals, the school district’s expectations were the greatest challenges that impacted their daily lives. However, each principal was able to put the district’s expectations in perspective in order to focus on what was best for their schools and students. Principal E shared how he put state assessments into perspective:
How we look at our assessments are problematic because some assessments are not meant to be successful, they are meant to be benchmarks to see where we are at any given point in the race. Just because I am not in first place in the race does not mean that I am not going to win the race. It just means that at this point, this is where I am.

All of the participants understood that it was necessary to satisfy the demands of the school district. However, they chose not to make district demands the focus on their campuses. Each participant exercised their autonomy by establishing systems that worked within their individual schools, yielding positive results for the district. Principal F shared her desire to see higher scores, but because her school is an intermediate school, her perspective was different:

I would love to have high 90 scores, but if you are really setting the foundation you’ve got to get them on a path of improvement and you’ve got to make sure that foundation and scaffolding is so strong that they can continue on as they move up because sometimes that’s not where I’m effective. My ego would love to have those high scores, but being at the center and making sure it’s strong to continue improvement really enables the higher levels to be successful and that’s very important to me.

Principals C and D discussed how their role serves as the buffer between the district and the school. Principal C stated that she cannot feed her staff all of the information that gets “vomited” on her by the district. She believed teachers have enough on their plates and she must “sift through the information that [she] receive[s] and disseminate it carefully.” Principal D felt that when too much is piled on teacher’s plates, then it takes away their focus from teaching. He believed it is the administrator’s job to “come in and keep their plates as uncluttered as we can.”

As leaders on their campuses, making a mistake or the fear of making a mistake may deter some principals from doing what they know is best for children. Another way the
participants kept things in perspective was by understanding the importance of working in accordance with their knowledge of their own campuses and using all mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow. Learning from mistakes, without compromising why they became administrators, made the participants more confident in their decisions on their individual campuses. Principal A stated, “I am not afraid of a challenge…as an administrator I can do what I can do to improve that system.”

They also acknowledged that the focus needs to be on positive events that occur each day and not the negative. Several participants noted that they celebrate the good whenever they can and stressed the importance of keeping the big picture in mind when making decisions. Principal E stated, “We start to look for celebrations, no matter how small. We start to look for opportunities to say, ‘Job well done,’ instead of, ‘What you are doing is not good enough.’”

Principal D explained how he keeps perspective:

You know, in life I am able to do a lot of things that I want to do because I have this job. I am very thankful for that. You know, when things are not going good, you are very thankful that you have a job and it is a good one to have and I always try to keep that in perspective.

Principal D conveyed a sense of gratitude for the position he held. His perspective allowed him to look at what he received from his title and what it allowed him to do. Later in the interview, he discussed how previous positions and job experiences helped him appreciate what he currently has.

Keeping challenges in perspective is not an easy task and is developed over time as school principals learn and grow in their role. From viewing the position with gratitude to celebrating the small victories, the participants learned to look at challenges through different
lenses. Due to the complexities of the job, the principals believed it was imperative to find ways to satisfy the requirements of the district without sacrificing the integrity of their schools. It appears that each principal has achieved this through the perspectives they hold. Combined with the right perspective, working directly with the population they serve allowed the participants to enjoy the work they do. Each participant had a genuine love of interacting with their students. They were energized by these interactions and reminded why they chose to become principals.

As the participants were able to look at challenges differently and continue to work directly with children, they should continue to feel like they are fulfilling their purpose daily and making a difference in the lives of children. The superordinate theme of ‘fulfilling a purpose and making a difference’ brought forth why participants became principals and continue to stay in the role. The next superordinate theme of ‘establishing a solid foundation toward growth’ touches on what our participants have implemented within their schools.

**Establishing a Solid Foundation Toward Growth**

In order to work toward improvement and growth, schools must have a solid foundation in place. This foundation serves as the base by which all systems are built. Principal D mentioned that a strong foundation helped set the direction for the school. When a foundation is implemented and the direction is set, all school stakeholders are working on the same page. Schools with a solid foundation are also more likely to function as a strong, unified unit. When challenges occurred, the participants relied on the foundations established to stay focused and keep moving forward. Establishing a foundation takes time, and requires principal retention to implement and maintain organizational momentum. Asked what advice he would give new principals, Principal A stated, “Set a course and stay the course.” Once a foundation, or course,
is established it is important not to sway or change direction. “Staying the course” was also described by Principal E during a discussion about setting the foundation within his school:

No need to look for strategies or the newest things coming out. No, we are not changing the base. Accentuate what we can do better, but the base stays the same because that is what we are made from. That’s our base. That’s what we are going to live and die with.

Several of the participants spoke of their school’s foundation as the core from which everything else is built. The participants relied on the systems within their schools stemming from the solid foundations in place. Data collected suggests a solid foundation consists of clear set goals and expectations, effective communication and collaboration, and opportunities for empowering staff to establish shared leadership. Therefore, the subthemes of this superordinate theme are ‘clear set goals and expectations,’ ‘effective communication and collaboration,’ and ‘empowering staff to establish shared leadership.’

**Establishing clear set goals, plans and expectations.**

The large number of individuals in a school setting requires that everyone is moving in the same direction. To accomplish this task, clear set goals need to be established. According to Principal D,

A principal has to set the direction that a campus is going to go to. When you get combined interests in that, you know, you kind of get your group together at the first of the year and you say okay what goals do we have, what goals will we work on and you guide that process, but after you’ve done that, then you step back in the supportive role for the teachers.

The principals in this study discussed the importance of setting goals in order to know where they were and where they wanted to go. Principal C offered setting clear goals as advice she
would give to a principal just getting started. Principal E commented that goals “are checkpoints making sure we are hitting all of our marks.” When developing the foundation for the school, goals allowed Principal E to build a roadmap with checkpoints to determine if what had been done to date met the mark, or whether it was time to re-evaluate the efforts. Goals allowed principals in the study opportunities for measurement and evaluation, which was part of the process of establishing a foundation. According to Principal D,

There are times when you have to micro-manage when we are not meeting our goals and we are not going in the direction we all said. That’s where we have to step in, but other than that let them teach.

The evaluation of goals allowed these principals to know when they needed to provide guidance and education.

Once goals are established, plans can be made to determine the systems needed to work toward the goals. Principal A shared that once his staff is on the same page, “…you can come up with a mission statement, come up with a plan, come up with an idea, and things can be successful.” Principal A believed his success resulted from systems he put in place. He shared that his processes were not as systematic when he first began as an administrator:

My demeanor has changed a great deal from when I stepped on this campus to where I am now. Time creates opportunities of collaboration and communication. I call it an opportunity. It was an opportunity I was given. I had to be authoritative and dictative and now I am more collaborative and instead of being reactive, I’m proactive.

Principal A described a change that occurred over time, developing systems in order to become more proactive. Along the same lines, Principal E discussed how planning helped when his test scores revealed that they had not met their goals:
You have to look at what our gaps are, look at our teacher information--what their gaps are, what we need to help them learn in order to be more efficient in what they’re doing and we’ll try again next year. It’s not about being upset, it’s about always having a plan. You talk about being a new principal, you’ve got to have plans; you can’t run on emotion.

Principal E believed that without a plan, administrators do not make mindful decisions and they become reactive when faced with a challenge. He mentioned being careful not to run on emotions, which can occur in a reactive state. Both Principal A and Principal F reiterated the importance of keeping emotions in check. “I get tired; I get mad; I get angry; I get frustrated just like anyone else. It’s not like I don’t have the feelings,” were the words used by Principal A, who discussed how he worked through emotions by using an administrative filter. Principal F agreed in her statement,

“If I don’t keep in control of my emotion, then I have more garbage to clean up afterward and I don’t get what I want from the parents and most of the time it’s not in the best interest of the kids.

The principals in this study attributed a solid foundation, with clear goals and plans, to how they deal with their daily demands. In addition, many of the participants highlighted their high expectations for both staff and students as a necessity in strengthening the foundation. The participants effectively communicated their expectations of both staff and students. Principal F spoke of her hiring process when attempting to find a good fit for her school. She stated, “I hire professionals that may learn with me, and I set the expectation and facilitate how I see that going and then I turn that over to them.” Later in the conversation, Principal F shared that when she retires, she wants people to remember that they’re loved. She stated, “…because I love you, I’m
going to hold the line with you, and I’m going to hold you to the expectation and your choices and that’s hard to do, but I’m going to do it because I love you.” Principal F made sense of her level of expectations as a form of love for both her students and her staff. Similarly, Principal C expressed the love she has for her students and the level of expectation that she has for her staff to hold the student’s best interest in mind. When asked what it meant to be a school principal, Principal C responded, “Making decisions based upon big picture and integrity, ensuring the safety of my students first and foremost.”

During the interview, Principal C showed concern about an issue that she had discussed with a few staff members. She had recently communicated her expectations about an issue, but noticed that they had not followed through that day. It was clear that she believed the staff members did not have the best interest of children in mind. Her frustration and concern for her students was evident. Having expectations of the staff is significant, but Principal D shared his expectations for his students:

Now there is that group of kids that will tell you that I am very firm, but I have my expectations and when they are not acting the way they should and don’t care about their education, then I am right there on top of them. I really do not tolerate it. At the same time, those kids will tell you that I will be the first to congratulate them when they do something good.

The participants in this study believed in the importance of setting goals, making a plan, and holding everyone accountable to expectations. With a strong foundation, everyone within a school is aware of their base, the direction they are going, and what is expected of them along the way. By establishing clear goals, plans, and expectations, the participants have navigated their
way in their leadership roles. On their path of leadership, the principals in this study acquired many skills, including effective communication.

**Effective communication.**

Effective communication was shown to be key in sharing information, building trust, and encouraging a creative work environment. Making sure that information was clearly conveyed and properly received was vital to each of the participants. The participants believed it was not enough to share information, but, instead that it was necessary to make sure the information was understood by the receivers. Effective communication aided these principals in building trust with their staff, who appreciated being aware of the processes at the administrative level. Effective communication also provided opportunities for staff to exchange ideas and thoughts, which led to more creative work practices.

Principal C suggested that having a clear vision and goals is important, but being able to effectively communicate the vision and goals is essential. Each morning, Principal C addressed her staff and students in the cafeteria with daily announcements. She believed that clear communication is key in making sure everyone is on the same page. Principal A referenced the war movie “We Were Soldiers,” citing when Mel Gibson told his soldiers, in the middle of an attack, “Hold, everyone calm down. Understand the problem and communicate it effectively.” Principal A described how he stepped back to take a broader look at a situation to discover new information. Once he understood the situation, he communicated it effectively. One tool he used is a daily communicator, which he sends out to his teachers. When describing making difficult decisions, Principal D shared the need for communication during occasions when he has to make a decision without involving his staff:
Sometimes it’s not a matter of involvement, it’s that something has to be done, but my teachers need to know why we made that decision. Lack of information, at least from my past history, when you had to do something and you don’t know why or what you have to do with it; but, when you understand why a decision was made, you can go with it even if it’s not what your heart really believes. I share information.

Principal D recalled how he felt as a teacher when there was a lack of information about why decisions were made. He believed that communicating why decisions were made provides his teachers with the information they need to understand the situation. Principal E discussed how he filters communication to his teachers:

I believe in our teachers and we have people really working hard to make it happen. And sure people complain about them sometimes, but that’s a personal complaint and that’s their opinion. I am not about to subject my teachers to the opinion of someone not certified to appraise their value. They just have an opinion, so I listen to their opinion, but I’m not going to share that with my teachers, but I will share the nuggets that they can improve with, not the complaining.

It was clear that Principal E was very protective of his teacher’s feelings. He stated, “If you really care about your staff, you keep a lot of unnecessary nonsense from them.”

Whether information was disclosed or filtered, each participant seemed to be aware of the needs of their staff members. At the administrative level, the staff need to know more information in order to trust the decisions that were made. However, at the personal level, the sensitivity of some information was considered in order to avoid discouragement. The principals connected to their staff members in order to meet their needs and work through their challenges. The participants recognized the contributions made possible by the strengths and skills possessed
by their staff members. This recognition led the participants to empower their staff members toward shared leadership.

**Empowering staff to establish shared leadership.**

Shared leadership was valued by each participant in this study. Empowering the teachers to establish shared leaderships required these principals to trust in the skills of other staff members and let go of the need to control. Not one participant appeared to have a need nor a desire to be in control. Principal A stated, “With time, I’ve pulled together a Building Leadership Team. I give them a task and they take it from me. I do not have to lead; they lead themselves.” Principal F discussed the empowerment of her staff:

What type of leader do you want to be? Do you want to be the authoritative, top-down (leader)—if that’s you’re comfort zone or if you want to empower your staff and allow them to make decisions collaboratively, which is probably a lot more in depth and far reaching because there are different points of view, but they know when they have those privileges, there is great responsibility.

Principal F believed that shared leadership leads to a richer experience when there is a collaboration of multiple thoughts and ideas. She said, “When they make a decision, they know that it is their decision and when they can justify to me that it is a good decision, I support them 100 percent.” Most participants stressed that staff members needed to take ownership in the processes to encourage investment in what they do. Principal E spoke of what he implemented to empower teachers:

The greatest thing that I did when I first came to this school—I opened it up to anyone who wanted to make a difference and wanted to have a voice about how we do things on this campus and people started making suggestions. Those that were in the know said
“Why are you asking them? They’re not a leader.” Well, yes they are; they wanted to be, so they needed to have their ideas heard also. When people started seeing their ideas come to pass, they got even more excited about giving me more ideas. Before long the leadership pendulum started to swing toward the common person, instead of the supposed aristocrats that were in position already.

Principal E has used this model since his arrival and it has strengthened the foundation of his school, where the entire staff is strongly invested in the growth and success of the campus. During a tour of Principal E’s campus it was evident that everyone on the campus was celebrated, including the custodians and lunchroom staff. They all had a voice and an opportunity for leadership. Principal E also believed that the foundation was solid enough to survive without them, as he stated when describing shared leadership:

You walk in front and you let (your staff) walk with you and before long there will be some that want to be equal to you, not because they want to be better than you, but because they want to make sure you are taken care of as well. That’s the role of what leadership is and true leaders will put people in positions that when they are gone, it doesn’t die. The vision of this school is going to live on.

Another tactic to develop shared leadership was pulling teachers together to train one another and learn from each other, something both Principal B and Principal E practice on their campuses. Principal B expressed that she likes “to do things that engage the teachers to be teacher leaders.” After attending conferences, she often ask the teachers to put together a workshop to teach what they learned at the conference. Similarly, Principal E shared how his teachers train each other:
We have teacher-led professional development on campus, meaning that if teachers have some really great strategies they want to share, they can share it. We create a workshop environment on campus where each teacher has a session where they are going to be presenting what works for them and other teachers have an opportunity to do a round table to go from class to class, learning about different strategies that they may not have been aware of or they may not have used.

Principal E observed that his teachers “love the academic freedom they have.” Other participants recognized that staff members fill the gaps with expertise that the participant may not possess. Principal D said:

Realize that you are not going to know everything. If you are in elementary school and your fourth grade teachers don’t know more about teaching fourth grade then you do, then you are actually in trouble. That is their specialty area, so you know, help them get the direction and give them the guidance they need to get there, but in the end, let them run when they need to go and be able to step in when you have to.

Similarly, as a former wrestling coach, Principal A shared how his teacher’s strengths added to the foundation of the school:

I’m not great in curriculum-instruction. I’m not awesome. I know that’s my downfall. I know that we continually learn. I know what it takes to be successful in the classroom and I get them what they need. I feel like I surround myself with good people and so, it’s communication; it’s collaboration. It’s allowing, giving people the ability to know that what they think and what they feel is important. Not only to themselves, but to everyone.

Teachers and other staff members play an integral role in the lives of these participants. Each participant understood the importance of building up their staff and allowing them to share what
they know. Shared knowledge and shared leadership strengthen the foundation, creating a campus where everyone is working together, in the same direction, toward growth. Each participant showed genuine care for their staff, with the ultimate goal of everyone working toward the best interest of the children. When principal E discussed why he supported teachers as leaders and provided them what they needed to be successful, he stated, “Because they have kids that are depending on them and if I don’t give them what they need, I’m not hurting them, I’m hurting the kids they are supposed to be serving.”

Establishing a solid foundation toward growth helped the participants put systems in place that included clear goals, plans, and expectations, effective communication, and the empowerment of staff toward shared leadership. Each subtheme discussed not only added to the development and stability of the foundation, but also appeared to relieve stress and add to the well-being of the principals in this study. Not one participant appeared to carry the weight and the responsibility of full leadership, feeling that they were going at it alone. Each principal conveyed a sense of support by the systems they had in place. It is evident that the participants relied on the foundations they had built to deal with the complexities of the job, but also to provide them with a sense of security that things were working the way they should.

Establishing a solid foundation requires surrendering the need for control and trusting the processes that have been put into place. This requires ‘having a strong awareness of self’, which is the final superordinate theme derived from the data. This superordinate theme brings attention to who the participants are within and outside of their school buildings.

**Having a Strong Awareness of Self**

To capture how the participants viewed themselves as individuals, part of the interview ask them to discuss their lives within and outside of the school. It was also important to see how
the principal role influenced other parts of their lives or how their lives influenced the role. The data revealed that each participant held a strong sense of self. They were knowledgeable of who they were and the strengths they possessed. The awareness of their strengths had an impact on how they led their schools. For example, shared leadership was not an intimidating concept for these principals who have a strong awareness of their own gifts and strengths. Knowing their strengths also led to insights regarding their limitations. As a result, the participants in this study were cognizant of the gaps that needed to be filled due to their own limitations. Having a strong awareness of self was indicated by the participants’ need to be transparent and their engagement in activities outside of their principal roles. The subthemes that emerged from this superordinate theme were ‘transparency’ and ‘balanced living.’

**Transparency.**

Transparency means free from pretense or deceit and easily detected or seen through (Collins English Dictionary, 2014). The participants demonstrated transparency by showing they are the same person in and outside of the school, being open and free from pretense, and truthful in their communications. All but one participant reported that they were the same person outside of the school as they were inside. Principal D believed that it was important to “be who you are and don’t be a different person just because you are now principal.” The advice Principal D would give new principals was:

Be open to any suggestions you can get from anybody else and don’t have a chip on your shoulder when it comes to interacting with your staff, thinking I am the principal you are the teacher. I think that’s one of the biggest things and, you know, it’s an insecurity thing sometimes. You (feel you) have to establish yourself as a principal, it just does not work.
Principal D had a very calming presence and appeared to be approachable and open about his experience as a principal. When he spoke of his experiences with children and the importance of interacting with children, he became more animated and it was clear why he does the work he has chosen. Principal A related similar qualities when he described who he was outside of the principal role:

I am the same person in this chair, I expect to be transparent and communicative just like I would here. If I see one of my kids at the Walmart, I want them to speak to me. If they don’t, I will go speak to them and their parents. I want to be the same guy. I do not want any differences. I do not want any surprises. Transparency and consistency is what kids need.

Principal A was very passionate about who he was and what he brings to his school. He stated, “If you are not striving to be the best, how can you motivate kids to be the best?” He had a very energetic presence and his passion for kids and making a difference in their lives was evident throughout the interview.

Principal B is an accomplished violinist outside of her principal role, and she often brings her love of music to her students by performing for them and inviting them to see her perform at the symphony. When asked how the principal role fits into her life, Principal B responded, “I think it’s just who I am. I think by working with kids, working with teachers, you’ve got to have patience and flexibility. It certainly helps me outside the school.” Principal B is of African-American descent and felt a personal responsibility to be a role model for young African-American children. She believed that if they witnessed her in her leadership role and in her role as a violinist, they will know they can also accomplish anything. Principal B was very
passionate about sharing her creative side with her students to combine her two worlds.

Principal E had this advice for new principals:

People wanting to be principal: be open to learning, be transparent. If you don’t know, say that. Don’t feel like you have to answer every question. Go find the answer and then come back and tell them what they are asking you. Don’t think that you are the one in charge.

Principal E remarked on the need for some principals to be in charge and act like they know it all, but only lead people in the wrong direction when they pretend to have an answer. He said that this does not help anyone. Principal E was very passionate about his students, staff, and the systems he had in place. He also felt strongly about his work resulting in God’s will for him. He is a pastor and a family man outside of the school, but uses the same values at home, in the church, and at the school. He shared that he is the same person in all aspects of his life.

Principal F was also very passionate about all the stakeholders in her school, including the community. She felt she had a strong history in the community and conveyed a sense of responsibility about her role in the community. When asked to describe herself outside of the school, she responded:

Who I am is how I am here. Probably, at home, I defer to my husband more than I as the authority, but that’s our role there. We have been married a long time and have a good partnership. I’m very much the same. I have to know the boundaries of a public school entity and there are certain things that I do not talk about, but I’m pretty much the same. How I am in the community with people around me is pretty much how I am here.

Principal C was the only principal who expressed a difference between who she was at school and who she was at home. Principal C revealed that she is an introvert, saying, “I like to go
home, read a book and just get quiet. I like to be alone and regroup, so I get my energy by going inside.” Principal C discussed how, as a principal, she must perform as an extrovert in order to interact and be visible. However, she needed to find quiet when she goes home to prepare for the next day. As a principal, she knows where her energy comes from and she is very aware of what she needs. Principal C is new to her role, but she is a very driven young woman. She felt strongly about her students and worked in their best interest.

Transparency has been the avenue for participants to be open to who they are and what type of leader they wanted to be. It also provided the principals with opportunities to connect who they are and how that fits into their role as principal and the school they lead. Principal F discussed her feelings about finding a good fit:

You need to know your community and serve your community, not have your community fit into your ideas. That’s why fit is so important. You have to know why you are being a principal. If it’s for title, or status, or standing, it’s not the right reason to be a principal.

Principal F believed those going into administration for status are looking for the school and community to fit their needs. However, those who are open with true intentions look at what the school and community needs are and where they fit in to make a difference.

It was essential for each participant to be transparent in their roles by maintaining their true selves inside and outside of the school. The participants did not believe they had to change themselves in order to fit a leadership persona. They were true to themselves and did not compromise who they were as individuals. Being transparent also created a level of vulnerability, in which the participants needed to be secure in their understanding of who they were and how they wanted to be perceived. Transparency communicated a strong sense of self
and an awareness of how to live their lives. The participants knew what they needed to be successful in their jobs and in their lives, which resulted in balanced living.

**Balanced living.**

The requirements of the principalship can be very demanding in terms of time and commitments. However, most of these participants found a balance between their personal life and work. For example, Principal C found quiet when she returns home, finding balance with a good book after a long day of interactions. Principal D was a family man, with three children between the ages of 9 and 16. He spent a lot of time driving them back and forth to activities, but noted that in his life he makes decisions based on what is best for his family, and “family comes first.”

Principal A confessed that the job has its challenges. “I am going to be honest, it has taken a toll on my marriage, it has taken a toll on my kids, it has taken a toll on everyone, but I think they understand this is my passion.” Principal A attempted to spend as much personal time as he could with his wife and son. He also spent time in the weight room and on his motorcycle.

Principal B enjoyed performing her music and talked about this passion:

> I have a good balance between what I love and my passion, which is music. To have that world be so energized and then to come and do the grunt of what I do day to day. So they mix together. I have played for my students. I performed several times with the choir.

> So, they know I do something in addition to seeing me here at the school.

Music is where Principal B received her energy. She found a balance that works in her life.

Principal E reported that he has learned to find balance over time:

> This is my office. I am not in here much, so I’m doing my job through the day. It only takes me 30 minutes to go through my emails. Emails are done. I am doing classroom
walkthroughs. I have almost 500 done this year in this building. There, done. So, when school is over, unless I have a meeting after school, I could stay until about 4:30 if I want to, 5 o’clock if needed, but after that point it is time to go home be with my kids and see my wife. Because I am a husband; I am a father and I plan to watch my kids grow up. So, it’s a work in progress. Now my first year, I was here until 8 o’clock sometimes trying to get it all together, but it was because I was not doing things efficiently. I was trying to figure out—to make sure I was doing it the right way. It’s a growth process, so each year it gets better.

Principal E demonstrated that finding balance can take time, but for those who choose to learn from their challenges, things can get better. He also mentioned that “each year you have to work smarter, not harder.” Principal F concurred, while discussing the bigger picture of her role and her life she said:

Time-wise, I have become better at when I leave here that I take off principal and I go home and I’m me. Now a person doesn’t change, but unless it’s about a critical issue, I don’t worry about school very much when I get home. Now I can’t say 100 percent because when there’s a big thing coming up, I’d be thinking about it, but I think that separation of home and school is much better than it was because I know I enjoy both, but being older I realize that there is life after school.

Balanced living afforded the participants the ability to be the best at what they do. The principals were able to find releases and energy in their lives outside of the school. Balanced living and transparency strengthened each participant’s awareness of self.

**Conclusion**
The purpose of this study was to uncover what brought job satisfaction to school principals and what motivated them to stay in these roles. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What factors contribute to job satisfaction as perceived by schools principals?
2. How do principals make sense of their desire to stay in their positions?

The participants in this study each reported job satisfaction. Four of the participants had worked in the same position for five years or more and two participants were newer to the role, but had a desire to stay in their position for some time.

The interviews with the participants revealed many convergent themes that may have influenced their level of job satisfaction. First, each participant either believed they were fulfilling their purpose in their role and/or they had a strong desire to make a difference in the lives of children. The desire to serve others in their role as principals was more overwhelming than any desire to control. Believing the role is their purpose, God’s will, or the most meaningful thing they have ever done impacted how they see their role. It appeared that they walked into their positions humbled, with the intention to find out where they could help to make things better. The participants did not separate themselves as the leader of the school, but instead they joined forces with the staff to make the necessary changes. This provided a sense of being a part of something, leading a team that is working together for the best interest of children.

Due to the love they had for children, it was imperative that each principal had direct contact with their students on a daily basis. It appeared that this role would not be satisfying if there was not the opportunity to interact with the students daily. Knowing the students assured the principals that their efforts were being realized. They could see what was going on in the lives of their students and they enjoyed the relationships they built.
The principals in this study faced challenges each day. Yet, the data showed that they have learned to put these challenges into perspective. They did this by focusing on the positive experiences, celebrating the good moments, understanding how to meet the demands of the district without compromising the integrity of their schools, and using past experience to understand the benefits of the position they held. It was not clear if their beliefs regarding fulfilling their purpose and making a difference influenced their ability to put challenges into perspective. It was clear, however, that each participant was able to put their challenges into perspective to focus on what they were there to do.

Not one participant felt defeated or weighed down by the demands of the district. Instead they looked at things differently. That is not to say that many of the participants did not feel stressed or frustrated about the challenges they faced. However, they each had healthy ways to deal with them. The participants knew that the challenges existed, but they did not let that get in the way of fulfilling their purpose or making a difference in the lives of students.

Each participant understood the importance of having a solid foundation, which included setting clear goals, having a plan, and having expectations. It was important that a solid base was established in order for all operations to run smoothly. If challenges did occur, each participant felt they could fall back on their foundation to find out what needed to be tweaked or changed. The foundation appeared to provide stability, which impacted leadership, staff, students, and parents. It was important to the participants that goals and expectations were clear and plans were developed. When this was in place, there were less surprises, everyone felt secure in their roles and responsibilities, and the participants felt supported in their roles as leaders. There also appeared to be a sense of peace knowing that everything would not fall apart if the participants stepped away.
A solid foundation was also supported by effective communication and shared leadership through the empowerment of staff. Effective communication left little room for interpretation. It also prevented rumors and fabrication that may exist among staff members and students within schools. When the participants used effective communication, they alleviated many of the tensions that can occur in schools. Most of the participants believed that staff needed to be empowered to have investment in the school. When the participants were able to get staff buy-in, they did not have to struggle to get things done. The principals in this study also did not feel alone in their decision-making when involving the staff members in the decisions made for their schools. A solid foundation supported participants in their leadership roles and provided them with a sense of security.

Each participant possessed a strong awareness of self. They knew who they were and what strengths they brought to their schools. A strong awareness of self was important, contributing to knowing who they were and how they fit into their roles. They did not need to prove anything and they were accepting of others’ strengths and abilities without feeling intimidated.

As part of this sense of self, the participants were transparent in their roles and they practiced balanced living. Most of the participants believed that it was important to be the same person within the school as they were outside of the school. They understood the leadership role did not change them as individuals. They also understood the responsibility and professionalism they needed to maintain due to the roles. Each were true to themselves and what they believed. They did not appear to feel a need to compromise who they are for the requirements of the role. Each principal also found healthy ways to live a balanced life. Most of the participants did not let the demands of the role take over their lives outside of the school building. They enjoyed
their families, their hobbies, or just peace and quiet. Each superordinate theme and subtheme revealed the participants’ sense of well-being, allowing them the feeling of job satisfaction for their roles as school principals. The following chapter addresses how the superordinate themes fit into the larger body of current literature and implications of findings.

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications for Practice

This study sought to explore what brings job satisfaction to school principals and why they stay in their positions. An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to delve into the lives of school principals to gain a deeper understanding and make sense of this phenomena. This research study fills a gap in the literature where there was a lack of qualitative research centering on K-12 school principals’ job satisfaction by answering the following research questions:

1. What factors contribute to job satisfaction as perceived by schools principals?
2. How do principals make sense of their desire to stay in their positions?

The analysis of data rendered three superordinate themes, which included:

1. Fulfilling a Purpose and Making a Difference,
2. Establishing a Solid Foundation Toward Growth, and
3. Developing a Strong Awareness of Self.

This chapter examines these superordinate themes as they relate to existing literature, the intellectual goals of the research, and the implications for future research.

Fulfilling a Purpose and Making a Difference

Much of the extant research on job satisfaction examined motivators, which include both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, in a work setting. Noting that school principals contribute to student’s achievement on educational standards, Derlin and Schneider (1994) discussed how
researchers began looking at what motivates educational leaders. They recommended increasing compensation, promoting merit awards, and restructuring the work environment. These extrinsic motivational strategies were expected to increase job satisfaction (Derlin & Schneider, 1994). The results of this previous research did not prove to be effective with the participants in this study. The principals in this study were not motivated by extrinsic rewards, but instead found their motivation in how they served others. The participants either believed their positions allowed them to fulfill their purpose in life or make a difference in the lives of children. The participants in this study chose their careers in order to make a bigger impact in the lives of students. They each held previous positions as teachers and were driven by the desire to have a larger impact on more students. Their reason for becoming and remaining principals is beyond the desire to control, make money, or receive external recognition. The participants made sense of their roles as individuals on a mission for the greater good. Each principal placed their focus on doing best for the children they serve. The role of principal appeared to be one of service and responsibility.

Bozeman and Gaughan (2011) stated that most research on job satisfaction has focused on extrinsic motivating factors due to the simplicity of measurement. However, they believed that in service careers, researchers measuring satisfaction have to look more deeply at intrinsic motivators. Intrinsic motivators include self-motivated aspects of job satisfaction, demonstrated by the principals in this study. Because the participants viewed their roles as servicing others, their work could be considered a career of service, which supports Bozeman and Gaughan’s (2011) theory.

Straw and Ross (1985) believed that examining individual differences is as essential as the examination of external environmental aspects. The findings in this study showed that each
individual principal was mostly motivated by intrinsic factors. Their need to fulfill a purpose and make a difference was an internal need and an intrinsic motivator.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) posits that individuals with autonomous motivation can have both intrinsic and extrinsic forms of motivation. According to Deci and Ryan (2008), individuals who are autonomously motivated are self-driven to perform and engage in activities and act on their own will. This proved to be true. The participants’ desire to fulfill their purpose or make a difference in the lives of children is considered an intrinsic motivator, a drive within themselves that led to internal feelings of joy and a sense of accomplishment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The participants in this study had feelings of joy and a sense of accomplishment when discussing the students they serve.

Some may argue that rewards that present as the result of fulfilling one’s purpose or making a difference are extrinsic in nature. Witnessing the results of one’s work may be an extrinsic motivator derived from fulfilling a purpose or making a difference, such as seeing a challenging student walk down the stage at graduation or receiving gratitude from a parent. However, according to Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this type of extrinsic reward could be internalized, serving as an intrinsic motivator. Deci and Ryan (2008) described these forms of extrinsic motivation through the lens of SDT as those that the participants personally identified with and internalized into their own sense of self.

Deci and Ryan (2008) discussed three universal psychological needs that must be met in order to achieve well-being and psychological health in SDT. When all three are met, the participants demonstrate better performance and are more likely to persist in their school environments. These universal psychological needs are autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The superordinate theme of ‘fulfilling a purpose and making a difference’ fulfills the need for
relatedness. The participants discussed the importance of working directly with children so they could have a bigger impact. Relatedness is the need to feel connected to and supported by individuals in daily interactions (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

The participants were driven by and received their energy from spending time with the students through daily interactions. They had a need to see the students and see how they were doing and feeling. Some participants believed that they could not serve the students appropriately if they did not know them personally. Other participants enjoyed being around children so much that it made the rest of their duties less tedious. The principals made walking the halls and spending time within classrooms a regular practice instead of sitting in their offices. They built relationships and got to know the children within the school building. They also were able to step away from administrative duties to interact with stakeholders and witness how the systems they had in place affected students. This provided the principals with a feeling of connection, but also first-hand knowledge of the daily happenings within their schools.

In order to keep their focus on fulfilling their purpose and making a difference, the participants had to learn how to put challenges into perspective. Often, the job of the principal is described as extremely demanding. Murphy and Beck (1994) discussed the complexities of the principalship. According to the pair, the position has changed over time. It has become more demanding, with longer work hours, and higher expectations. Principals are also required to meet more rigid student achievement testing requirements and complete mandated paperwork.

The participants in this study were held to the same standards and requirements and did not deny the stressors that come with the job. However, many of them were able to understand what was required of them while putting things into perspective to make their lives easier. Many of the participants served as buffers between the districts’ demands and their staff. Several
learned how to produce outcomes the districts sought while providing their teachers academic freedom. Others learned to take the bad with the good, celebrating the good as much as possible.

The findings showed that the universal psychological need for autonomy was fulfilled. This is the feeling that one’s behaviors are self-determined and resulting outcomes are based on personal choices (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The participants exercised autonomy by making choices that best fit their school. They did not lead their schools with a focus on district mandates. They understood the mandates and attempted to meet the requirements without subjecting the entire school to the accompanying pressures. By doing so, the principals in this study maintained the integrity of their schools. They did not attempt to achieve the highest scores or satisfy benchmark numbers. Instead, these principals celebrated growth and improvement, not high scores. They celebrated the teachers based on improvement, assisting them where needed. Each participant remained self-determined to focus on the best interest of children. It was their personal choice to put their challenges into perspective and keep moving forward.

There was a clear balance between the challenges the participants faced and their belief that they were fulfilling their purpose and making a difference. Having the ability to fulfill a purpose and knowing that their work has meaning was greater than the challenges that came with the role of the principal. The participants’ intrinsic motivators outweighed the demands and complexities of the principalship. These principals were internally motivated, and in alignment with SDT, fulfilling their universal needs of relatedness and autonomy.

The participants were not easily strayed by stressors. They did not thrive on chaos and gave the appearance that challenges could be overcome or handled. The findings in this study supported Terrill (1994), who stated the amount of job stress is often related to the perceived control one has over a difficult situation. When individuals feel empowered and believe
solutions can be implemented, then stress levels are reduced. Terrill (1994) also believed that stress and anxiety are replaced by structure, plans, and implementation. As the findings indicated, the next superordinate theme of ‘establishing a solid foundation toward growth’ also supports Terrill’s beliefs regarding the positive effects of structure, plans, and implementation.

**Establishing a Solid Foundation Toward Growth**

The establishment of a solid foundation was imperative for most participants in the study. A solid foundation served as the base by which all other systems were built. It provided the principals with a sense of direction, security, and support. With a solid foundation, the principals were able to set the direction for their schools. Many felt secure knowing that operations were working as they should. The principals did not deviate from the base when faced with a challenge. Finally, the principals felt supported by other stakeholders due to shared leadership and investment in the schools. They did not feel like they needed to take control and dictate what would happen, instead they humbled themselves as leaders in order to let others shine.

The superordinate theme of ‘establishing a solid foundation toward growth’ fulfills SDT’s universal psychological needs of competence. Competence is the need to feel effective and capable of performing tasks necessary in an environment (Deci & Ryan, 2008). Competence was demonstrated in the participants’ need to set goals and make plans. They set the goals for their schools to make sure everyone was aligned and moving in the same direction. The plans set the parameters for what needed to be done. Each participant was secure in their level of competence, and felt confident in their ability to perform the tasks needed.

Competence was also indicated through the participants’ commitment to shared leadership. Surrendering the need for control is not an easy task, but it was exercised by most participants in the study. They proved they were confident enough in their level of competence
and did not need to dominate all situations. They were also aware of their own skill sets and area of gaps within their schools. They allowed staff to step up and fill the gaps in order to strengthen the foundation and the systems in place.

Sultan (2012) proposed that employees with a larger array of skills prefer teamwork. Teamwork involves all employees in processes from beginning to end. The data from this study supports Sultan’s theory in that the principals in this study, who come with a greater skill set, preferred teamwork. They empowered staff members to lead and share the skills they possessed. Most of the participants worked with their staff from the beginning to the end, involving them in the processes. However, it must be mentioned that the principals remained the leaders of the school. The quality leadership these principals provided is in accordance with the previous research of Petrosko (2000), who found that quality leadership was just as crucial as quality teachers in establishing and maintaining high performing schools. Petrosko (2000) also stated that principals are held accountable for both the success of students and the success of schools due to their positions. The participants in this study made the final decisions after receiving feedback, and they set the parameters by which the staff members could have academic freedom. They also took responsibility when mistakes were made or results were not desirable.

Having a solid foundation was essential to the longevity of the positions held by the principals. A couple of principals discussed the consequences of not meeting state mandates, which often included being dismissed from their position. A solid foundation served as a survival tool, making sure all of the systems in place for success were working. Without a strong foundation the systems are unstable and unable to sustain change in the form of new mandates.

The participants could rely on their solid foundation for continued academic improvement and continued growth in teaching practices. One participant established continued
academic improvement by using the systems he had in place to identify where the students were academically and where they needed to be. Goals should be set and plans made to move academic achievement in the right direction. Expectations are also important at this stage because both students and teachers need to know what is expected of them. Each participant had high expectations of their students and staff. The expectations were clear and communicated effectively. Both ‘effective communication’ and ‘expectations’ were subthemes of ‘establishing a solid foundation toward growth’.

According to Schneider and Snyder (1975), how individuals form their system of norms, expectations, and values results in the internal response of job satisfaction. This definition of job satisfaction was supported by the principals in this study who set the norms, expectations, and values for their schools. Teaching practices were enhanced by a solid foundation due to the clear goals, plans and expectations. Teachers were aware of the direction their school needed to follow, how to get there, and what was expected of them.

Effective communication of the goals, plans, and expectations was utilized by each participant in the study. However, they did not only establish these foundations, they reached out to staff for support by encouraging shared leadership. Shared leadership was another way of enhancing teaching practices. One form used by two of the participants was the opportunity for teachers to teach each other. This form of leadership allowed the teachers to share their knowledge with coworkers. The participants also established strong supportive relationships with their staff members by providing them with opportunities of shared leadership. According to Morrison (2004), positive interactions with coworkers is related to job satisfaction. Allen and Meyer (1990) found that the more emotionally attached an employee feels, the more likely they are to stay in their position. The principals in this study created an environment of support, in
which their staff members enjoyed what they were doing. As a result, the interactions between
the participants and their staff members were positive and most likely influenced satisfaction and
retention levels.

Saiti and Fassoulis (2012) proposed that school principals are compelled to create and
maintain healthy work environments for their staff. Healthy work environments encourage
growth and the desire to work toward a shared goal. It was apparent that the principals in this
study created and maintained healthy environments for their staff and students. The foundations
they established fostered an environment of support, trust, and respect between everyone in the
school building. The stakeholders in each school appeared to be working toward a common goal
with a shared vision, which lessened many stressors for the principals in this study. These
principals did not have to micromanage their staff or mediate conflicts between staff. They had
the time to focus their energies on successful practices and growth.

‘Establishing a solid foundation toward growth’ provided the participants with a solid
base to develop strong systems. The base allowed them to feel stable in their own abilities,
meeting the need for competence and allowing them to focus on the issues unique to their
schools. Through their understanding of their competencies, they moved forward to build
systems rooted from the foundation that was aligned in the direction of growth, which ensured
that all stakeholders were moving in the same direction. In each school, the principals fostered
an environment of teamwork through shared leadership and supportive relationships, while
remaining quality leaders.

The foundation and systems were strengthened by effective communication, clear goals
and plans, and high expectations. The high expectations were not just for others, but also aimed
at self-improvement and personal development. Each principal demonstrated a strong awareness
of self through their understanding of what they needed to do for themselves to improve as principals and as individuals. The principals benefited from having a high awareness of self, knowing who they were and what they could offer to their schools.

**Having a Strong Awareness of Self**

Saygi, Tolon, and Tekogul (2011) referenced Tanriverdi, who believed in the importance of exposing an individual’s natural talents at work in order to avoid stress and job dissatisfaction. Sodoma and Else (2009) agreed that the expression of natural talents is important. The researchers reported that the retention of school principals required that principals have the ability to develop and utilize their natural talents and skills. The findings of this study supported both Saygi et al. (2011) and Sodoma and Else (2009) by revealing that most participants in this study recognized and utilized their natural talents and skills. The talents varied between each participant. One participant had the talent of connecting students and the community through music. Another participant was a talented minister, who used his gift of inspiring others to motivate his staff members. One participant was a talented coach in his previous teaching career and integrated his coaching strategies into the systems he implemented. Other participants also pulled from their previous careers, in which their natural talents were developed, including a participant who attended business school and used the strategies she learned to build systems in her school. Having an avenue to share their talents and skills provided the participants an opportunity to express and display a part of themselves. This led to the feeling that they were contributing not only to the schools, but to all stakeholders involved with the schools.

Each principal had a strong awareness of self, which afforded them with an understanding of the strengths and gifts they had to offer. Knowledge of their own strengths and talents made these participants aware of their limitations as well. Knowing their limitations
allowed them to be open to the gifts and strengths of others. The participants did not attempt to know everything and do everything as leaders. Their knowledge of their limitations made it possible for them to step back and take note of the gaps they needed to fill within their schools. Principal A was aware of this when he discussed his weaknesses in curriculum instruction. He knew that he needed to have others around him that were strong in curriculum instruction and he made that happen with his leadership team.

Principals must first be aware of their individual strengths, talents, and limitations. Once they have this awareness, they can assess the needs of their schools and determine where they can use their strengths and talents. Principals must then determine what needs they are unable to fill and make note of these gaps. After assessing the gaps, principals know what skills they must look for in others in order to fill these gaps. This requires a principal to be observant and conscious of the individuals within their school. This consciousness and mindfulness cannot take place sitting inside of an office. Principals must walk around the schools, spend time in classrooms, and create opportunities to get to know their staff. Being present and available, building relationships, and being transparent is what helped the principals in this study fill the gaps within their schools.

Brown and Ryan (2003) discussed newer research on SDT, which has looked at how motivation is effected by mindfulness and awareness of self and others. As with the findings in this study, the newer research on SDT has found that mindfulness is positively related to autonomous motivation. According to Ryan and Deci (2000), autonomous motivation leads to individuals engaging in activities that align with their underlying self. The participant’s need for transparency supported an alignment between their work and their underlying self. All of the participants in the study strove to be the same person in their principal roles as they were outside
of their roles. There was not a separation of roles between the self and the principalship. Who the principals were outside of their position was reflected in the work they do. Who they were in their roles as principals was reflected in their everyday life. The job and the person were interconnected. The personalities of each participant stayed the same inside and outside of the school building.

The participants validated the importance of being oneself in the role. Principals do not have to change who they are when they step into the role. The participants found it was more important to show vulnerabilities than to walk into the role pretending to know all things. The participants valued honesty and openness while sharing who they are and what they were there to do, without pretense or underlying motives. Transparency was essential to their well-being and job satisfaction. Along with transparency, the principals understood the importance of balanced living.

Terrill’s (1994) study of secondary school principals revealed the following coping strategies the principals used to deal with job stressors: being transparent with staff to inform them of issues; delegating smaller tasks; allowing teachers more leadership of their classrooms; practicing time-management; self-care to tend to mental and physical health; setting limits on the amount of time spent on work and at school; taking risks; being open to the perspectives of others; avoiding trying to change others; having a network of friends outside of work; and acknowledging Type A traits while implementing strategies to balance them out. The findings in this study mirror many of Terrill’s (1994) study. However, when examining balanced living, the factors that were highlighted by the participants were self-care and setting limits on time spent at work. Both of these factors contribute to balanced living.
Each principal was aware of what they needed to do for self-care. Some chose time with family, while others enjoyed time alone. All had hobbies and interest outside of work that allowed for personal development and growth. It was important for the participants to engage in activities that allowed them to relax and release any stressors they had from the day. These activities not only helped the participants escape from the demands of work, but also helped them to connect with themselves to become more conscious and self-aware of their needs. It was important for principals to take care of themselves and engage in activities they enjoyed. This allowed them to re-energize and clear their minds to meet the challenges of the position.

Along with self-care, most participants were able to set limits on the time they spent at work. Many of the principals were able to put systems in place that allowed them to better organize their work day. It was a challenge when the participants first became principals, but when they were able to establish a foundation, it became easier to leave work at a decent hour. The participants understood the importance of home life and family. Many of the principals used their time with family or time alone to rejuvenate and replenish their energy to deal with the complexities of the job. Staff members often follow and mimic the behaviors of their principals, therefore it was important for principals to set the example for balanced living. How the principal viewed time and work affects all stakeholders within a school. The participants in this study served as models for their staff, putting limits on the time they spent at work and encouraged a healthy work environment for all stakeholders.

Having a strong awareness of self was important in the expression of the participant’s natural talents, which allowed them to feel they were contributing their strengths to their schools and their students. Each participant’s self-awareness made it possible for them to know their strengths as well as their limitations, allowing them to understand what gaps they left open.
However, the participants were mindful enough to look for the strengths and talents of others to fill the gaps they could not. The relationship between mindfulness and motivation found in this study adds to the newer SDT research on mindfulness and motivation. The participants’ need for transparency supported the alignment of their underlying self and the activities in which they engaged in and outside of the school. Many of the activities that the participants engaged in outside of school provided opportunities for them to escape from the demands of the job and connect to themselves to meet their self-care needs. The principals also found ways to rejuvenate and connect by setting limits on the time they spent at work and living balanced lives.

The superordinate themes and subthemes that were derived from this data provided a window to the lives of school principals who are satisfied with their work. The stories shared by the participants allowed for an understanding of how each individual made sense of their position and how they came to feel satisfied. The findings also met the intellectual goals for this study.

**Intellectual Goals and Implications for Research**

This thesis was triggered by the 2012 study conducted by Metlife, Inc., which revealed job dissatisfaction reported by 41 percent of the school principals surveyed. Of the 41 percent reporting job dissatisfaction, many admitted to looking for another job. The researcher set out to examine the perspectives of school principals who reported job satisfaction. The intellectual goal for this project was to gain deeper insights into the factors that contribute to job satisfaction in school principals and what motivates them to stay in their positions. The extant literature provided a vast amount of research on job satisfaction. However, there was little research on job satisfaction in the field of education. That which does exist covered mostly higher education or attempts to understand job dissatisfaction. Through an Interpretative Phenomenological
Analysis, this research project aimed to fill the gaps in job satisfaction by exploring the perspectives of K-12 school principals who reported having job satisfaction.

Another goal of this study was to examine the self-determination of the participants to explore the motivations that lead to job satisfaction. Through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT), this study sought out the motivations that influenced the participants’ satisfaction with the work they did and the desire to continue in their role. SDT posits that there are three existing universal needs that must be met in order to experience psychological well-being, which include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. SDT proposes that the satisfaction of all three universal psychological needs is connected to well-being, effective performance, and job satisfaction. Each participant in this study met all three needs as discussed earlier in this chapter.

By fulfilling a purpose and making a difference, the participants met the need of relatedness. The desire to personally connect with students and be active participants in the classrooms afforded them the ability to meet their need for relatedness. These participants also met the need for relatedness through the supportive relationships they developed with staff members as they engaged their staff while establishing strong foundations toward growth.

Autonomy was exercised when the participants developed their own ways to deal with district mandates, requirements, and pressures to raise performance. The principals in this study demonstrated their autonomy by doing what they knew worked and providing evidence of growth through their practices. Relationships were not sacrificed to focus on test scores. The participants provided their teachers the freedom to use their skills and do the work they love without the interference of the district demands. These participants also demonstrated autonomy by living balanced lives. Many of the principals had systems in place that allowed them to leave
work and focus on their lives at home and their families. Although their work was important to them, many of the participants did not place work above their own well-being.

The systems these principals put in place allowed them to meet the need of competence by demonstrating their capabilities. The participants set goals, made plans, and communicated expectations for the staff and students. They were clear in their communication and proved to their stakeholders that they had the ability to move the schools in a positive direction. The principals were also able to expose their natural talents and skills, which also helped fulfill the need of competence by allowing them to share their knowledge with others.

Meeting all three needs led to autonomous motivation, an autonomous orientation, and intrinsic aspirations. The principals in this study demonstrated autonomous motivation by connecting their motivation to what drives them internally. They were focused on meeting needs and not having their needs met through external stimuli. The external rewards they received from meeting the needs of others were connected to their sense of self and who they believed they were meant to be. The autonomous orientation described the high level of self-determination these participants possessed. The principals were able to adjust to their environments on their own terms when challenged by governing entities.

Finally, SDT allowed the researcher to look at the individual differences of each participant by exploring their aspirations. When universal needs are not met, SDT proposes that individuals become extrinsically motivated, which are aspirations that serve as need replacements, such as financial success, fame, or appearance. Not one of the participants’ behaviors were directed by extrinsic aspirations. Each participant held intrinsic aspirations, such as community, close relationships, and personal development. All participants aspired to develop close relationships with staff and students and to continue working on personal
development. Having a sense of community within the school was communicated by all participants, but extending one’s impact to the community outside of the school was expressed by the two participants who had been in their positions the longest. This suggests that with time, the vision for one’s school becomes larger and more impactful for the entire community.

The findings highlight the intrinsic motivations and intrinsic aspirations for satisfied principals. Knowing the decline in principal satisfaction and its ramifications on the retention of qualified principals, this study sheds light on what could bring satisfaction to school principals. Intrinsic motivators and aspirations originate from within each individual; therefore, there is limited influence a district has over influencing principals’ satisfaction. However, there are several things district leaders can do to provide opportunities for principals to meet their psychological needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which will most likely lead to well-being and job satisfaction.

This study suggests that school districts should step back and allow principals to learn and grow in their roles. Districts must provide principals with autonomy and control to make decisions for their schools, including the hiring process for staff members. It is important that principals feel like they can make a difference without a district micromanaging the processes that happen within schools. Districts also need to change the way they measure success and focus more on improvement and growth. This would require districts to provide more time to starting principals, who need to build relationships, establish foundations, and create systems for growth. This process takes time and often will not occur under the pressures and threats for immediate results that often come from the district level. Districts leaders must also realize that many principals do not step into the role possessing all of the tools they need for the job. When working with existing principals, districts need to provide required training workshops on
relationship building, delegating responsibilities, shared leadership, setting a foundation, building systems, and self-care for leaders. These trainings will provide all principals with the tools that will lead to satisfaction and higher retention.

Many districts use extrinsic motivators to increase performance, such as principal and school recognition, distinguished labeling, and sometimes monetary rewards. However, because satisfied principals are more intrinsically motivated, it is important to encourage activities that support internal motivations, such as encouraging principals to spend time outside of their offices and more time in the classrooms and in the school community. District leaders need to take more opportunities to visit individual schools and allow principals to put their schools on display. It would be important for districts to highlight one principal at a time, with selections not based on achievement, but based on the results that occur from the expression of the natural talents of principals and their staff. District leaders need to focus on building connections with the principals and their schools. This can happen by providing principals with the necessary training and then trusting in them to do what is best for their schools. Districts need to step away from managing the daily processes and allow principals to grow and learn about themselves and their schools. From the sidelines, districts should encourage personal development, growth and balanced living.

The results of this study also suggest that district leaders need to look closely at their hiring practices. More attention needs to be paid to understanding why candidates want to become principals. Do candidates feel like they can make a difference or are they fulfilling a purpose? Hiring committees also need to look closely at the teaching careers of candidates. Did the candidates teach the minimum two years to fulfill the requirements to become principals or did they really enjoy teaching and spending time with children. Candidates need to like children
and they need to want to spend time with children. With the knowledge that principals who believe they are fulfilling a purpose and making a difference in the lives of children will motivate them to stay in their positions, hiring officials need to develop questions that will help them uncover the intentions of the principal applicants.

Districts should look closely at why applicants are seeking an administrative role instead of what they think they can do in the role. The focus needs to shift to how applicants have developed relationships as teachers and how they feel about the students they have served. Applicants should have a child-centered mindset with the desire to do what is best for children and not what is best for the district.

This study suggests that current principals who are unsatisfied in their role need to ask themselves why they chose the role. If the reason is compelling enough to continue, then they should make sure they are not sitting at their desk, but instead building relationships with students and staff by spending time in the classrooms and being visible. They should begin spending time in a self-reflective process examining their strengths and talents, as well as their limitations. Getting to know staff members’ strengths and talents is also important in order to fill the gaps beyond an individual’s limitations. After building relationships, unsatisfied principals should work on establishing a strong foundation, setting clear goals, making plans, and communicating expectations. Finally, they should begin to work on living a balanced life by finding activities or hobbies they enjoy outside of work. Managing time at work in order to have more time for themselves or family is also critical. Most of all, principals should increase the amount of time they spend engaging in activities each day that make them and the people around them feel good.
There is a gap in the existing research examining the relationship between the amount of time spent in one’s position and the types of motivation that lead to satisfaction. Although the motivations were similar for the participants in this study, it appeared that the less seasoned principals were knowledgeable about how they wanted to manage their role; however, they struggled with the implementation. The less seasoned principals spoke more eagerly about how systems were developing, whereas the seasoned principals seemed grounded in their understanding of how things needed to happen.

Balanced living also appeared to be a work in progress for the newer principals. They understood the importance of having a life outside of the school, but they continued to spend more hours than they wished taking care of administrative duties. The seasoned principals had systems that allowed them to delegate work and helped them organize their days to be more productive during the school day. Future research should look closely at time spent in the role and how that impacts job satisfaction. The aspirations of individuals could also be investigated to see what directs and drives individual principals during different periods in their careers.

Longitudinal studies of job satisfaction among principals is another gap in the literature. A longitudinal study would be beneficial to examine the growth of school principals as they move through each year. Following new principals who report high levels of job satisfaction and exploring how universal needs are met over a period of years, and whether motivations change over time or remain consistent would fill this gap.

The research presented in this thesis benefits new, seasoned, and aspiring principals. The demands placed on the principalship are daunting to individuals currently sitting in the role or thinking about one day sitting in the role. This study showcased why six principals became principals and continue in their role, what they have implemented to decrease stressors and
contribute to job satisfaction, and how they choose to live their lives in and outside of school. The stories of these six participants have proven that universal needs are met within the role and challenges can be overcome. Principals do not have to be governed and regulated by district, state, or federal powers. Every principal should develop an autonomous orientation that empowers them to have the self-determination to run the schools in ways they know are effective.

This research study may also encourage current and future principals to reflect on why they chose the role. If a principal has chosen the role for extrinsic rewards such as money and recognition, they may experience disappointment. The role has many challenges and demands, which may overpower any fulfillment of extrinsic aspirations. Overall, this study should instill a sense of hope in those principals who are feeling dissatisfied in their role by demonstrating what brings satisfaction.

This study has documented six principals who reported job satisfaction. However, there are many more around the country who are willing to share their stories and best practices. School districts would benefit from determining who their current satisfied principals are and utilizing them as mentors for new principals. Instead of encouraging the mentors focusing on teaching administrative duties, districts should encourage mentoring of new principals that centers on building relationships, how to implement systems, and how to live balanced lives. This type of mentorship program would promote growth for both the mentees and mentors, who would feel like they are helping others fulfill their purpose and making a bigger impact in the lives of children.

Finally, this research study provides direction to principal preparation programs helping them better prepare future principals for their roles. Principal preparation programs have the
ability to provide learning experiences that will assist future principals in better dealing with the demands and stressors that come with the role. Classes should be developed focusing on building relationships with staff, students, and family members. Although a class focused on relationship building may be trivial to some, social skill development is important for many teachers who have not ventured out beyond the four walls of their classrooms. One observation that this researcher had regarding the principals in this study was that as teachers many participants were exposed to many students. Two principals were former coaches, one was a music teacher, and two were high school subject teachers. Therefore, they taught multiple classes of students from different grade levels, providing them with the opportunity to connect with many different types of students throughout each day. This is not true for all aspiring principals, who may be accustomed to teaching one grade level of students assigned to them for the entire school day. Principal preparation programs should develop social skills and provide future principals with the tools to connect with others.

A second class that will benefit future principals is one focusing on the development of systems that work. As the findings indicated, a solid foundation was the base for establishing systems that work. Systems provided direction, security, and support for the principals in this study. Future principals should be exposed to research-based systems that have worked in schools. Students in these programs need to understand the importance of setting clear goals, making plans, and establishing expectations. They also need to be taught the benefits of shared leadership and the importance of effective communication.

The final class that needs to be added to all principal preparation programs is one that addresses personal development and balanced living. Many new principals expend all of their energy trying to become successful in their role. New principals spend too much time trying to
meet demands and forget about themselves. Unfortunately, individuals who get caught up in the stressors of the principal role often experience burnout and they start looking for another job. If principal preparation programs focused on personal development and balanced living, they could mitigate many of the challenges that new principals experience.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research study was to uncover what brings satisfaction to school principals and what motivates them to stay in their positions. The findings revealed three superordinate themes and seven subthemes that explained why the participants do what they do, what they implement to be effective in their role, and who they are in and outside of their role as principal. The superordinate themes and their subthemes were: 1. Fulfilling a Purpose and Making a Difference (with subthemes 1.1 Working Directly with Children to Have the Greatest Impact, 1.2 Keeping Challenges in Perspective); 2. Establishing a Solid Foundation Toward Growth (with subthemes 2.1 Establishing Clear Set Goals, Plans and Expectations, 2.2 Effective Communication, 2.3 Empowering Staff to Establish Shared Leadership); and 3. Developing a Strong Awareness of Self (with subthemes 3.1 Transparency, 3.2 Balanced Living).

The findings in this study supported much of the existing literature on job satisfaction, especially considering the relationship between intrinsic motivations and job satisfaction. In the business of education, the literature has shown the distressing demands of the principalship, deterring principals from feelings of job satisfaction and discouraging them from continuing in their positions. This study set out to find principals that achieved job satisfaction despite the demands of the role. What was discovered were six individuals who are not only satisfied with their jobs, but love the work that they do. The findings showed that these principals were internally driven and intrinsically motivated. The behaviors and actions of these principals were
self-determined, providing them the freedom to do what they needed to do in the best interest of children. Each principal was fulfilling their purpose or believed they were making a difference. The intentions of these principals were child-focused as were the foundations established by each principal which were aimed in the direction toward growth.

The personal stories of these principals were viewed through the lens of Self-Determination Theory (SDT). The principals demonstrated leadership through autonomous motivation. There was also evidence that these participants had an autonomous orientation and they were directed by intrinsic aspirations. Aligned with newer research of SDT, the study looked at how mindfulness and awareness of self and others was related to the participant’s motivation to continue the work that they do.

An overall contribution was made to the existing body of literature by providing more findings on job satisfaction in the field of education, adding to the literature where qualitative research was lacking on job satisfaction experienced by K-12 school principals. At a time where almost half of school principals report job dissatisfaction and retention levels are decreasing, it is vital that more research be conducted on what brings job satisfaction to school principals. This study assists in providing a framework to new, existing, and future principals on how to manage their role and be satisfied in the service the role provides. This study also assists districts when hiring new principals, providing training opportunities, and providing mentorship opportunities to benefit both the new and seasoned leaders. Last, the findings aid in the development of new classes for principal preparation programs that will support aspiring principals in their future roles.

The stories that were shared by these principals not only will benefit the field of education, but also encourage other individuals in different fields to think about what drives
them and brings them energy, what they should implement to establish growth, and how they are living their lives to promote self-awareness, balance, and personal development.
References


Appendix A: IRB Approval

Northeastern

Date: January 8, 2014  IRB #: CPS13-12-11
Principal Investigator(s): Kimberly Nolan
                       Sharon Edmond
Department:  Doctor of Education
            College of Professional Studies
Address:  20 Belvidere
          Northeastern University
Title of Project:  Finding Motivation in Work: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of School Principals
Participating Sites:  N/A
Informed Consent:  Two (2) unsigned consents—one for survey/one for online interviews

As per CFR 45 46.117(c)(2) signed consent is being waived as the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves no procedures for which written consent is normally required.

DHHS Review Category:  Expedited #6, #7
Monitoring Interval:  12 months

Approval Expiration Date: JANUARY 7, 2015

Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. Informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB immediately of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee prior to being instituted.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board
Appendix B: Social Media Recruitment

Texas School Principals Needed for Research Study on Motivation

I am looking for school principals who have worked as a principal in the same Texas public school for a minimum of three years.

I would like to invite you to participate in a web-based online survey. The survey is part of a larger research study whose purpose is to understand the motivation of school principals. This survey should take about five minutes to complete. You may be asked to participate in a second part of this study based on your survey answers, which will ask that you participate in three interview sessions with a researcher. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

Please click on the attachment for more information.

https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/ZVBNKTR

Northeastern University, College of Professional Studies, Doctor of Education Program
Name of Investigator(s): Kim Nolan (Principal Investigator); Sharon Edmond (Student Researcher)
Title of Project: Finding Motivation in Work: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of School Principals
Appendix C: Consent Form

UNSIGNED CONSENT DOCUMENT

**45 CFR 46 117(c)**: In certain instances, an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain a signed consent form for some or all subjects. In cases in which the documentation requirement is waived, the IRB may require the investigator to provide subjects with a written statement regarding the research.

**Only the IRB can waive or modify the consent process. Researchers are not authorized to make this decision.** When a signed informed consent is not required, this consent form may be given to participants to keep. Please modify the following information as necessary.

**Northeastern University, Department of Education, College of Professional Studies**

**Name of Investigator(s):** Kim Nolan [Principal Investigator], Sharon Edmond [Student Researcher]

**Title of Project:** Finding Motivation in Work: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of School Principals

**Request to Participate in Research**
We would like to invite you to take part in a research project. The purpose of this research is to understand the motivation of school principals, but some features of this study will not be revealed until the conclusion of the study.

You must be at least 18 years old to be in this research project. [Unless specifically approved otherwise by HSRP]

The study will take place at a location of your choice or via an internet video conferencing platform and will take three sessions for the following minutes:
1\(^{st}\) Session: 20 minutes
2\(^{nd}\) Session: 60 -90 minutes
3\(^{rd}\) Session: 30 minutes
If you decide to take part in this study, we will ask you to discuss your opinions about the work that you do.

There are no foreseeable risks or discomforts to you for taking part in this study.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study. However, your answers may help us to learn more about what motivates school principals.

Your part in this study will be handled in a confidential manner. Only the researchers will know that you participated in this study. Any reports or publications based on this research will use only group data and will not identify you or any individual as being of this project.

The decision to participate in this research project is up to you. You do not have to participate and you can refuse to answer any question. Even if you begin the study, you may withdraw at any time.

You will receive a $10 gift certificate to Starbucks at the end of the interviews.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to call Sharon Edmond at 512-662-1395, the person mainly responsible for the research. You can also contact Kim Nolan at 617-390-3622, the Principal Investigator.

If you have any questions about your rights in this research, you may contact Nan C. Regina, Director, Human Subject Research Protection, 960 Renaissance Park, Northeastern University, Boston, MA 02115. Tel: 617.373.4588, Email: n.regina@neu.edu. You may call anonymously if you wish.

You may keep this form for yourself.

Thank you.

Sharon Edmond
512-662-1395, Edmond.s@husky.neu.edu
Appendix D: Interview Protocol

Title of Study: Finding Motivation in Work: An Interpretative Phenomenological
Analysis of School Principals

Time of interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Introduction/Description of Project

(a) Purpose of the Study

(b) The sources of data being collected

(c) Explanation of what will be done with the data to protect the confidentiality of the participant

(d) Provide an approximation of how long the interview will take

(e) Provide an opportunity for questions

(Turn on recorder)

Interview Questions

1. What does it mean to you to be a school principal?

2. How do you feel about the work that you do?

3. How do you see your role as a principal?

4. How would you describe yourself as a school principal? What type of principal are you?

5. How would you describe yourself outside of the principal role?

6. How does your role as a principal fit into your life when you look at the big picture?
7. As a principal, how or where do you feel most effective?

8. Research has shown that principal retention is a problem here in Texas. How do you feel about that?

9. Why have you stayed in this position?

10. What would make you stay longer?

11. What are your future aspirations?

12. What advice would you give principals just getting started?
Appendix E: Pre-Screening Questionnaire

1. Are you a current full-time principal for:
   o Elementary
   o Middle School
   o High School
2. Have you worked as a principal at your current school for a minimum of three years:
   o Yes
   o No
3. Has your school had Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under your leadership?
   o Yes
   o No
4. How meaningful is your work?
   o Extremely meaningful
   o Very meaningful
   o Moderately meaningful
   o Slightly meaningful
   o Not at all meaningful
5. How challenging is your job?
   o Extremely challenging
   o Very challenging
   o Moderately challenging
   o Slightly challenging
   o Not at all challenging
6. In a typical week, how often do you feel stressed at work?
   o Extremely often
   o Very often
   o Moderately often
   o Slightly often
   o Not at all often
7. Are you satisfied with your job?
   o Extremely satisfied
   o Moderately satisfied
   o Slightly satisfied
   o Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
   o Slightly dissatisfied
   o Moderately dissatisfied
   o Extremely Dissatisfied
8. How likely are you to look for another job?
   o Extremely likely
   o Very likely
   o Moderately likely
   o Slightly likely
   o Not at all likely