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The Relationship between Administrator Interpersonal Skills and School Climate, Student Learning, and Teacher Retention

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The Relationship between Administrator Interpersonal Skills and School Climate, Student Learning, and Teacher Retention

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Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Marsha Justice under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University School of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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Abstract

The Relationship between Administrator Interpersonal Skills and School Climate, Student Learning, and Teacher Retention. Justice, Marsha, 2018: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University, Interpersonal Skills/Communication/Trustworthiness/Empathy/ Problem-Solving/School Leadership/Teacher Perception/School Climate/Teacher Retention/Student Learning.

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to determine if specific interpersonal skills (trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving) possessed by principals, as perceived by teachers, are important characteristics in creating and maintaining a positive school climate, increasing student learning, and retaining teachers in the elementary school setting. The participants in the study were teachers from 13 elementary schools in a North Carolina county. This study used both quantitative and qualitative data from a combined principal soft skill and climate survey, 2015-2016 North Carolina report card on teacher retention, 2015-2016 EOG math/reading scores, and results from teacher interviews to examine the relationship between administrator interpersonal skills on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention.

Based on the data from this research, principal interpersonal skills do impact school climate. The two interpersonal skills that showed significance as measured by their relationship to climate were trust and problem-solving. Although the interpersonal skills within this study did not statistically predict reading proficiency and math proficiency, teacher interviews clearly identified the importance of principal interpersonal skills with regard to student performance in elementary schools. Finally, principal interpersonal skills did not statistically predict teacher turnover in this research; however, trend data collected from teacher interviews indicated that teacher morale and retention were based on the skills of the school leader.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study was conducted to determine if there is a relationship between interpersonal skills of educational leaders and positive school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in 13 elementary schools in a North Carolina county. Data gained from this study could potentially create a positive social change in education including increased student learning, reduced teacher turnover, and positive school climate. This chapter introduces the research problem followed by the purpose of the study. Next, the research questions and hypotheses are stated and the conceptual framework is illustrated and developed. Significant terms within the study are also defined. Finally, there is a brief description of the study design and limitations are addressed.

Background

School climate is the mood or attitude of the people who work at the school (Gruenert, 2008). School climate is a complex mechanism that is impacted by the socioeconomic makeup; community; physical location; ethnicity; political factors; and the emotions of the faculty, parents, and students (Halpin & Croft, 1963). Educators have acknowledged the impact of school climate for over a century (Anderson, 1982; Creemers & Reezigt, 1999; Dewey, 1927; Miller & Fredericks, 1990; Perry, 1908). Perry (1908) wrote about the impact of climate on student learning. Dewey's (1927) writings continued with the importance of school environment and the focus on skill enhancement. Empirical research that reviewed the impact of school climate on school effectiveness began in the 1960s with Halpin and Croft (1963). In the last several decades, a large and growing body of research has focused on school climate and the impact it has on school effectiveness (Anderson, 1982; Creemers & Reezigt, 1999; Miller & Fredericks, 1990). School climate is very complex and is an important part of an

effective school and community (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987). School climate is associated with student achievement, attendance, teacher retention, and behavior (Ladd, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2003). Educational leaders play an important role in promoting and maintaining a positive climate (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) asserted that the school climate is guided by the leadership style of an administrator, which in turn impacts student performance and teacher working conditions.

Interpersonal skills are also crucial to effective leadership (Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001). Goleman (1998) found in his studies that the most effective leaders have a high degree of self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. Bulach, Boothe, and Pickett (2006) found that principals with a leadership style that incorporates trust, human relation skills, and dealing with conflict had a positive effect on climate and school success. The school leader is one of the most important individuals in the lives of teachers (Brock & Grady, 1997); therefore, the school leader is the key to teacher perceptions of feeling supported (Richards, 2005). Leaders of education need to increase their interpersonal sensitivity to prevent low staff morale and performance issues (Muse, Sperry, Voelker, Harrington, & Harris, 1993).

Research indicates there is a strong link between positive school climate and higher student achievement (Chen, 2007; Kelley, Thornton, & Daugherty, 2005). This research went on to explain that student achievement also directly influences school climate (Chen, 2007; Kelley et al., 2005). Deal and Peterson (1999) agreed that school climate affects everything including instruction, professional development, and the importance of learning for students. A positive climate tends to foster a connectedness to school which is a predictor of academic outcomes (McNeely, Nonnemaker & Blum,

2002; Whitlock, 2006).

While there is abundant literature that indicates school climate is independently associated with types of leadership, student learning, and teacher retention, there is very little research that shows all of these are interconnected. Currently, there is limited research on principal interpersonal skills in relation to school climate from the perception of teachers. Literature suggests there are numerous favorable characteristics that a principal should possess in order to establish a positive school climate (Cohen, Pickeral, & McCloskey, 2009; Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008); however, there is very little empirical evidence that the specific interpersonal skills of an educational leader mentioned in this study improve school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. The purpose of this study is to provide empirical evidence of specific interpersonal skills that educational leaders possess that could improve school climate, increase student learning, and reduce teacher turnover.

Statement of the Problem

The research problem. There is a compelling body of research that shows the importance of school climate, student learning, and teacher retention (Cohen, McCabe, Michelli, & Pickeral, 2009). However, there is very little research that shows how all of these are interconnected. There is limited research on principal interpersonal skills in relation to school climate from the perception of teachers (Malone, 2013). In addition, there is very little empirical evidence that the interpersonal skills of an educational leader improve school climate. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence of specific soft skills that educational leaders possess that could potentially improve school climate, increase student learning, and reduce teacher turnover. Based on research regarding principal interpersonal skills that

are directly linked to North Carolina Standards for School Administrators (NCSSA) and the impact on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention combined with current guidelines for administrator evaluation, a study involving each of these components is necessary.

As reported by news releases on the school district's website in the county where this study takes place, there have been administrative turnovers in 12 of the 13 elementary schools in the last 5 years. According to North Carolina Report Cards from 2012-2015, several of the elementary schools had a turnover rate that was higher than the state average. While this county had the 12th highest Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs) scores in Grades 3-8 reading and math in the state in 2013-2014, there is no consistency in high performance at the elementary level. In addition, data from North Carolina Report Cards from 2012-2015 show several of these elementary schools are performing below the state average in reading and/or math. According to this county's website, the position of Chief Professional Development Officer was developed in 2015 to increase leadership capacity among principals, support beginning teachers and administrators, and coordinate district-wide professional development. In addition, this county developed a mentor program in 2014-2015 for new principals and provided professional development such as "Win the Head, Win the Heart" (Frye, 2017) and "Crucial Conversations" (Patterson, 2002) to address many of these issues.

Relevance of problem. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) is a nonprofit organization that was established in 1966 and is nationally recognized. Along with the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, McREL created an evaluation framework for principal leaders that is reliable, validated, and research based (McREL International, 2016). The purpose of McREL's Principal

Evaluation System is to focus on 21st century skills and improve school leadership (McREL International, 2016). During the 2010-2011 school year, principals and assistant principals began to participate annually using the North Carolina School Executive: Principal and Assistant Principal Evaluation Process (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015a). Through the implementation of the North Carolina Administrator Evaluation process, principals are entrusted to support and promote effective leadership, quality teaching, and student learning (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015a). The current NCSSA clearly defines the need for leaders who can build powerful relationships with students, parents, and community stakeholders in order to sustain positive improvement through systematic change and enhance student learning (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015b). Multiple competencies related to this study are mentioned throughout NCSSA. Communication is a competency that is a focus for all administrators who "effectively listen to others; clearly and effectively present and understand information orally and in writing" (NCSSA, 2013, p. 10). In addition, the competency of personal ethics and values where administrators "consistently exhibit high standards in the areas of honesty, integrity, fairness, stewardship, trust, respect, and confidentiality" is stressed throughout the standards (NCSSA, 2013, p. 10). Emotional Intelligence is a competency that is mentioned throughout the standards with emphasis on "managing relationships through empathy, social awareness and relationship management" (NCSSA, 2013, p 10). Finally, the competency of conflict management challenges administrators to "anticipate or seek to resolve confrontations, disagreements, or complaints in a constructive manner" (NCSSA, 2013, p. 10). While there are multiple competencies, the ones mentioned clearly identify the importance of interpersonal skills as related to this study. The

standards mentioned identify communication, honesty, empathy, and problem-solving as interpersonal skills that school leaders are expected to develop and be evaluated on (NCEES for Principals/AP's, n.d.).

Recent research findings. The administrator of a school is the key individual responsible for creating and maintaining a positive school climate (Kelley et al., 2005). School climate is based on experiences at school that reflect interpersonal relationships, teaching and learning, norms, and structures of the organization (National School Climate Council, 2007). The National School Climate Council (2007) studied school climate and its effect on a quality education for students. The results from this study show a sustainable positive school climate enhances adolescent development and learning (National School Climate Council, 2007). A large and growing body of research on school climate shows that a positive school climate enhances student achievement (Ghaith, 2003; Reyes & Elias, 2011; van Horn, 2003). Hallinger and Heck (1998) agreed there is a relationship between principal interactions and school climate which significantly affects student achievement.

In recent years, the role of administrators in academic success of schools has received much attention. As principal roles have evolved from management of schools to a focus on leading people, the need to frame relationships and reflect on the impact of these relationships on academic success is imperative (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992); therefore, principals must now possess and develop skills which were not as important in previous school environments (Murphy & Hallinger, 1992). Fullan (2001) described this change in principal responsibility as a reculturing which involves changing values, skills, and relationships in the organization. The daily role of administrators provides evidence of the need to study interpersonal skills (Bredeson, 1987). Three quarters of a principal's

daily activities are interpersonal, while half of these interactions involve face-to-face interaction (Bredeson, 1987). Bredeson (1987) found that while 49.8% of principal interactions focused on policies and procedures, the remaining 49.3% of principal interactions focused on attitudes, morale, and satisfaction of educational services.

One of the main responsibilities of the principal of a school is to ensure a school climate that ensures student success (Leithwood, Seashore Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). School leaders have both a direct and indirect impact on teaching and student learning which contributes to school climate (Leithwood et al., 2004). School administrators face tremendous public examination due to accountability and high stakes testing (Johnson, 2007a). The demands of standards-based curriculum and high stakes testing are laborious not only for administrators but also for students and teachers (Botwinik, 2007; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). This challenge became even greater due to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), which called for each state to make schools accountable for student achievement measured by a system of testing (Johnson, 2007a). The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; NCLB, 2001) holds schools accountable for the academic performance of individual subgroups of students; therefore, an overall performance score could no longer be used. Schools now have to meet standards for all subgroups to make Annual Yearly Progress. President Obama signed into law the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015) in December 2015 replacing NCLB (Klein, 2016). ESSA gives states the opportunity to develop accountability goals along with a plan for low-performing schools. Due to this legislation, administrators are currently in an era of compulsory education where students are required to reach a level of achievement based on historical test data and the achievement of their peers with similar test histories (North Carolina Department of

Public Instruction, 2012). In 2013-2014, the North Carolina General Assembly directed the State Board of Education to pass a state law that gave schools a letter grade (A-F) based on both school growth (20%) and achievement (80%; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015b). Administrators are discouraged by this flawed process because it focuses primarily on end-of-year test data and not enough on student academic growth. The current Trump administration proposes a $9 billion cut to the Education Department's budget while investing $1.4 billion in school choice (Brown & Douglas-Gabriel, 2017). The future of education is uncertain at this time.

While there are many positive aspects of reform in education such as improved curriculum resources and clearer grade-level standards, the climate of stress due to reform efforts affects all stakeholders (Botwinik, 2007; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). School reform is costly and requires an enormous amount of energy (Levin & McEwan, 2001). Reform efforts often scrutinize student achievement without evaluating school climate and leadership (Waters et al., 2003). The demands created by this increased accountability are enormous for current principals (Botwinik, 2007; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). In addition to job stress, administrators are not being compensated appropriately for the job they are doing (Public Schools First NC, 2016). According to the North Carolina Public Education Budget of 2016 and Senate Bill 121, administrators in North Carolina earn less than or only slightly more per month than teachers with the same educational level and years of experience (Public Schools First NC, 2016). It is difficult to recruit principals from teacher positions based on the intensity of the job (Rosenberg, 2001). The current compensation structure does not incentivize strong teachers to pursue school leadership where they can have a positive impact on students and the entire school (Rosenberg, 2001). Due to standards-based instruction, state

curricula, high stakes testing, and lack of funds to support these mandates, the role of principal has become more and more complex (Rosenberg, 2001). Kennedy (2000) stated there are five reasons administrators leave their profession: salary, time, changing demands of the job, lack of community support, and lack of respect. These factors and the stress associated with a principalship are the leading causes of administrator turnover (Norton, 2002; Kennedy, 2000).

In addition to these issues, administrators are faced with a diversity of students who have needs greater than ever including poverty, limited English proficiency, and increased teen pregnancy (Kaplan, Turner, & Badger, 2007). English Language Learners (ELL) make up the fastest growing public school population (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007). Over the past 15 years, the ELL population in U.S. public schools has almost doubled (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007). ELL students have high dropout rates, perform academically well below their peers, and two thirds of ELL students come from low-income families (National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition, 2007). In addition, African-American students are experiencing lower performance on standardized tests than White students and have higher dropout rates (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Storer et al., 2012). To make Annual Yearly Progress, administrators and their schools must show that all subgroups including those mentioned above have met proficiency in reading and math.

In addition to the stressors outside of an administrator's control, principals have never-ending responsibilities within their control including

> (a) selection of teachers, (b) evaluation of instructional staff, (c) assignment of faculty to courses, (d) leading professional development, (e) developing the

> master schedule, (f) working to develop a cooperative relationship, (g) enforcement of contrast provisions, (h) making the school safe, (i) dealing with disruptive students, (j) dealing with attendance concerns, (k) working with parents relative to student behavior, (l) curriculum development or alignment, (m) accepting accountability for instructional program, (n) compliance with state mandates, (o) special education supervision, (p) publication of newsletters, (q) attendance at community events, (r) awards recognition programs, (s) budget development, (t) budget management, (u) fundraising, (v) selection of coaches, (w) evaluation of supplemental personnel, (x) supervision/attendance at extracurricular activities, and (y) facilities. (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004, p. 710)

The responsibilities of principals have increased, making the environment for leadership in schools very complex (Rayfield & Diamantes, 2004).

The educational environment is changing at an increasing rate; and today's school leaders work under difficult, complex conditions (Fullan, 2001). This has an effect on schools and their leaders (Fullan, 2001). The school must be responsive to differing opinions and multiple needs from the community (Johnson, 2007b). The government, businesses, and parents have demands that often conflict with one another (DuFour, 2004). The demands on education result in stressed teachers, staff, administrators, and students (Botwinik, 2007; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). Stress within the system creates a lack of trust, creates competition from market-based schools, and affects teacher retention (Botwinik, 2007; Burchielli & Bartram, 2006). Fullan (2001) told school leaders there is no magic solution to a successful school. He stated leaders need good skills to ensure the success of their schools and the changes they face (Fullan, 2001). These changes and their effect on schools call for new expectations for school leaders

(Fullan, 2001). Future and current administrators need continuing education and training to develop interpersonal skills that will alter their leadership strategies based on the strengths and weaknesses of their staff (Bulach, Lunenburg, & McCallon, 1995).

Gap in the research. While there is abundant literature that indicates school climate is independently associated with types of leadership, student learning, and teacher retention, there is very little research that shows all of these are interconnected. Currently, there is limited research on principal soft skills in relation to school climate from the perception of teachers. Previous research suggests there are numerous favorable characteristics that a principal should possess in order to establish a positive school climate; however, there is little empirical evidence that the specific interpersonal skills, communication, trustworthiness, empathy, and problem-solving focused on by the researcher improve school climate (Cohen, Pickeral et al., 2009; Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008).

Purpose of the Study

A mixed-methods paradigm was used for this study. The purpose of this study was to identify desirable interpersonal skills possessed by elementary principals and their impact on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. Through the identification of these interpersonal skills, educators can begin to explore the effect of principal interpersonal skills on the success of schools. By studying the perceptions of selected elementary teachers on principal interpersonal skills in North Carolina, data from this study explored information about principal interpersonal skills necessary for effective school leadership in all schools. This study could potentially aid district leaders in hiring new school administrators based on interpersonal skills that are linked to positive school climate and student academic success. Results of the study can be used for

administrative professional development and self-reflective purposes to positively affect the school climate by increasing teacher morale and student learning not only in the county studied but in all schools. This study will contribute to the limited literature and body of knowledge regarding principal interpersonal skills and how these skills affect school leadership and climate.

This study was conducted in all 13 elementary schools in the county chosen for the study. The independent variables in this study are the school administrator interpersonal skills including trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving as perceived by elementary school teachers. While there are other interpersonal skills that could be studied, the researcher chose an instrument that focused on these specific interpersonal skills. The dependent variables are school climate, student learning, and teacher retention.

Research Questions

1. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of communication?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of trustworthiness or honesty?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of empathy?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of problem-solving? (Malone, 2013)
2. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by

teachers, and student learning?

3. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and teacher retention?

Theoretical Context

This study is based on the theoretical context and guiding principle that the desirable interpersonal skills possessed by principals will result in a positive climate, teacher retention, and increased student learning. According to Goleman's (1998) Emotional Intelligence Theory, emotional competence is a learned capability that results in outstanding performance. These competencies include social awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 1998). Communication, conflict management, empathy, and trustworthiness are some of the interpersonal skills in relationship management, according to Goleman (1998). Research suggests that these emotional competencies are key in creating a climate that is nurturing and encourage workers to perform to the best of their ability (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001).

Another theoretical proposition that surrounds this study is the social systems theory. Getzels and Guba (1956) discussed the importance of the principal's role in their social systems theory. These authors identified the nomothetic (institutional) and the idiographic (personal) dimensions of an organization (Getzels & Guba, 1956). Getzels and Guba theorized that it is the principal's responsibility to serve as the means for productive interaction between the nomothetic and idiographic dimensions. Within this social systems theory, the challenge to the administrator, according to Hughes and Ubben (1994), is to address the organizational and individual needs in order to achieve as much congruence as possible.

According to Goleman (1998) and Getzels and Guba (1956), the leader's

interpersonal skills impact the organization as well as its members. Based on these theories, the researcher determined there was a relationship between the perceived interpersonal skills of administrators in an educational setting and the organizational climate, learning of students, and retention of teachers.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 1) utilized in this study includes interpersonal skills contributing to a positive school climate, increased student learning, and improved teacher retention (Cohen, McCabe et al., 2009). The independent variables are the interpersonal skills located in the center block. The interpersonal skills incorporated in this study were based on observability and identified as important based on educational literature explained more thoroughly in Chapter 2. The independent variables are the interpersonal skills: (a) trustworthiness; (b) communication; (c) empathy; and (d) problem-solving skills, which are hypothesized to create and maintain a positive school climate, increase student learning, and increase teacher retention (Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2001; Johnson et al., 2001). The Principal's Observable Soft Skill Scale (POSSS; Appendix A) will measure these interpersonal skills. The dependent variables are school climate, student learning, and teacher retention located in the circles surrounding interpersonal skills in the center block. The Revised School Level Environmental Questionnaire (SLEQ; Appendix B) identifies the domains of school climate. Finally, the conceptual framework shows the interconnectedness of each dependent variable. Research indicates that there is a relationship between school climate and student learning as well as teacher retention (Ladd, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Waters et al., 2003). There is also a growing body of research that shows teacher retention and student learning affects a school's climate (McBer, 2000; Quinn &

Andrews, 2004). In addition, multiple studies indicate that retaining effective teachers impacts student learning, and positive student learning contributes to teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Wahlstrom & Lewis, 2008).

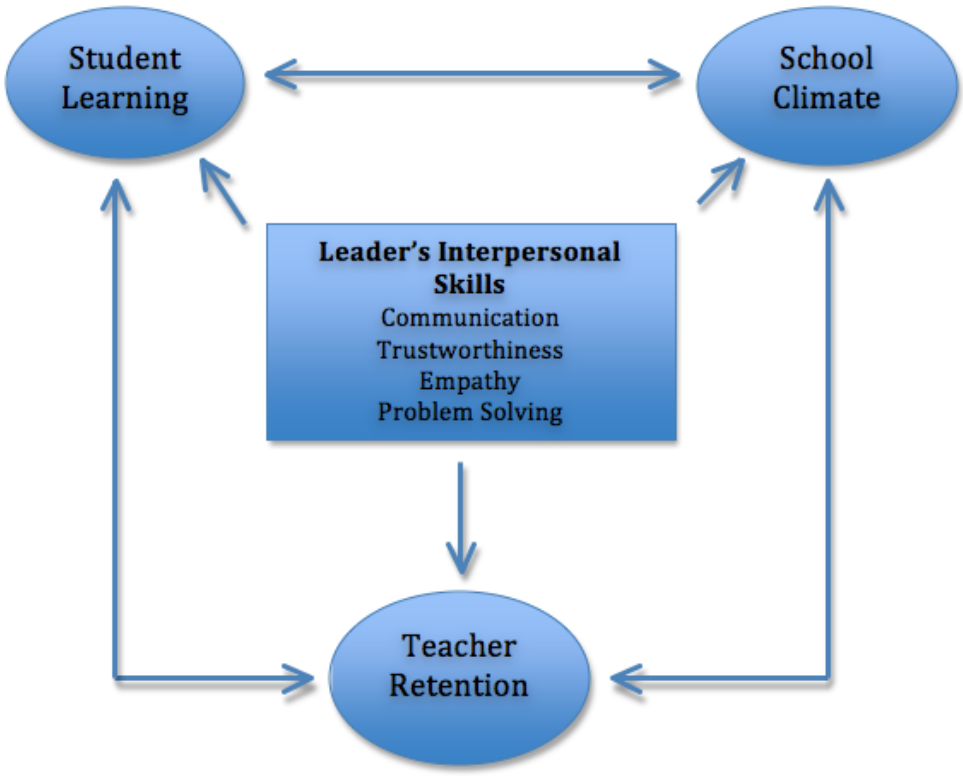

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Nature of the Study

This is a mixed-methods study with both quantitative and qualitative data that were collected from 13 elementary schools. Creswell (2014) stated that mixed-methods research combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. A convergent parallel mixed-method design was used for this study to enable the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data separately and concurrently (Creswell, 2014). A survey, teacher interviews, student end-of-grade (EOG) test data, and teacher

retention data were gathered concurrently to address the research questions. Quantitative data analyses were conducted using SPSS (Brace, Kemp, & Snelgar, 2000). To address the first research question, the researcher performed a linear regression comparing the overall SLEQ score and the combined and separate soft skills POSSS scores. The SLEQ (Appendix B) that came from Rentoul and Fraser's (1983) original instrument has 21 items to measure school climate and is answered on a five-point Likert scale. POSSS (Appendix A) is a survey instrument developed by Mark Malone of Texas to measure the perception of a leader's interpersonal skills. More information regarding the development of Malone's POSSS is described in Appendix C. Next, a means comparison between each interpersonal skill (trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving) and demographic information was conducted. To address the second research question, a linear regression comparing the mean EOG proficiency for math, the mean EOG proficiency for reading, and the overall EOG proficiency to the mean POSSS scores for all 13 elementary schools was conducted. Finally, a linear regression comparing the mean turnover percentage of teachers to the mean POSSS for all 13 elementary schools was conducted to address the third research question.

Teacher interviews were analyzed using a priori coding. A priori coding was used to organize themes and patterns in the teacher interviews. The dependent variables in this study are teacher perceptions of the school climate collected using SLEQ (Appendix B), student learning as measured by math/reading EOG scores (2015-2016), and teacher retention as measured by the North Carolina Report Card (2015-2016). The independent variables in this study are the school administrator interpersonal skills including trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving as perceived by elementary school teachers.

Definition of Terms

Interpersonal skills. A set of nonspecific skills based on human and organizational interaction such as communication, analytical problem-solving, teamwork, and soft skills (Chamorro-Premuzic, Arteche, Bremner, Greven, & Furnham, 2010). The terms interpersonal skills and soft skills were used interchangeably within this study. The interpersonal skills researched in this study were communication, trustworthiness, empathy, and problem-solving.

Communication. The intentional transfer of meaning by which individuals influence others (Barrett, 2010).

Trustworthiness. The reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone; resulting in the unwavering belief in that person by others (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000).

Empathy. The perception of being listened to and understood while, at the same time, having a deep emotional connection with the other person (Goleman, 2006).

Problem-solving. The capacity and willingness to view problems or challenges from a new perspective and to seek innovation in exploring potential options (Maxwell, 1999).

School climate. The psychosocial context in which teachers work and teach and students learn (Johnson, Stevens, & Zvoch, 2007); based on the beliefs of members of a school (James, 1982).

Student learning. Student learning as measured by outcomes on North Carolina EOG tests.

EOG tests. Multiple choice/gridded response tests given to students in Grades 3-8 in reading and math and Grades 5 and 8 in science at the end of each school year to

"measure performance on the goals, objectives, and grade-level competencies specified in the NC Standard Course of Study" (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015b, para. 2).

Teacher retention. The rate at which teachers remained in the same teaching assignment and the same school as the previous year (Billingsley, 1993).

SLEQ. Measurement of school climate (Johnson et al., 2007; Appendix B).

POSSS. Instrument designed to measure principal soft skills of honesty, empathy, problem-solving, and communication (Malone, 2013; Appendix A).

Assumptions

Two assumptions were made in designing and conducting this study. As this study relies on self-reported data, it is assumed the participants provided truthful information about their perceptions. There is a plethora of research on the validity of self-reported data. Researchers found that self-reported data are only accurate when participants clearly understand the questions and they remain anonymous (Brener, Billy, & Grady, 2003). It was also assumed that the participants accurately understand the issues that are the focus of the study. Since the participants were teachers, they have experiences that provide appropriate background knowledge regarding school climate, student learning, and teacher retention.

Limitations and Delimitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. First, the study focused on elementary schools in an area that may be influenced by perspectives that are not present in other locations. This may limit the ability to draw conclusions. In addition, the results of this study may not be generalizable to middle or high school as the data reflect information from elementary schools. Another limitation includes changes to the

administrative and teacher staff within these 13 elementary schools. Personnel changes could impact the climate and teacher perceptions within the school. Finally, data collected from this study were teacher responses based on their own perceptions of principal interpersonal skills and climate. Perceptions can be skewed based on stages of a teacher's career and interpretation of their own experiences (Richards, 2005).

One delimitation of this study includes the focus on elementary schools only. A previous study by Malone (2013) focused on the relationship between principals' desirable interpersonal skills and school climate at the high school level. The researcher decided to instead focus on elementary schools to determine if elementary teacher perceptions of their school principal interpersonal skills impact school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. Another delimitation is the researcher decided to interview six elementary teachers from a cross-section of 13 elementary schools based on a voluntary response from an invitation in an email format. The researcher chose not to conduct a teacher interview at each elementary school. According to Creswell (2014), the intent of these qualitative data was to gather in-depth information from a small sample to provide insight into the teacher perceptions of principals' desirable interpersonal skills and their impact on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention.

Significance of the Study

Analysis of the data gained from this study could create a positive social change in education including increased student learning, reduced teacher turnover, and positive school climate. In addition, results from this study could be used to improve college preparation courses as well as administrative professional development and encourage self-reflection for current principals. This study could provide insight and suggestions to

principals who want to strengthen teacher/administrator relationships. School districts might consider altering the hiring processes of administrators based on the implication that desirable interpersonal skills improve school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. Preparing school leaders who understand the critical role of school climate and its importance has implications for teacher education (Fulton & Lee, 2005).

Conclusion

This study was designed to show the impact of principal interpersonal skills on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in 13 elementary schools in a North Carolina county. Data gained from this study could be used to improve school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in this North Carolina county and others. Educational leaders must have a keen interest and clear understanding of school climate and interpersonal skills that influence school climate, so schools can build and sustain a positive teaching and learning environment (Brookover et al., 1978; Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to identify desirable interpersonal skills possessed by elementary principals and their impact on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. While there is abundant literature that indicates school climate is independently associated with types of leadership, student learning, and teacher retention (Cohen, Pickeral et al., 2009; Kowalski, 2010; Leithwood et al., 2008), there is very little research that shows how all of these are interconnected. Currently, there is limited research on principal soft skills in relation to school climate from the perception of teachers (Malone, 2013). In addition, there is very little empirical evidence that the interpersonal skills of an educational leader improve school climate.

This chapter discusses the importance of school climate and the factors within a school that impact it. Interpersonal skills are defined and applied to the field of education. In addition, an overview of the impact of climate and leadership on teacher retention and student learning is examined. Finally, organizational climate as it relates to leadership is reviewed, and teacher perceptions are addressed.

The Literature Search Strategy

The literature search was designed to identify existing research and provide an academic basis for the study. Initially, a broad area of study was developed and then was narrowed by browsing scholarly articles relative to the areas of interest. A mixture of approaches was used to search for resources applicable to this study. The researcher began with a systematic approach by finding all relevant materials related to school climate and principal interpersonal skills. Next, citations from useful books, journal articles, and dissertations were investigated. Finally, the topic and research questions

were narrowed providing a targeted area of literature to be reviewed.

The electronic databases predominantly used to research this study were ERIC, ProQuest, and EBSCO and were accessed through the Gardner-Webb University library. Keywords used in the search included school climate, principal interpersonal skills, administrator interpersonal skills, principal soft skills, administrator soft skills, principal leadership, administrator leadership, teacher perceptions, teacher retention, student learning, and student achievement. Similar and related terms were also used to ensure terminology did not block possible resources. All resources were referenced and then discarded later if not used in the study. While acknowledging the ideas of others, referenced resources provided grounding to arguments and scope and breadth for the research (De Montfort University, 1989).

Theoretical Context

This study is based on the theoretical context and guiding principle that the desirable interpersonal skills possessed by principals will result in a positive climate, teacher retention, and increased student learning. Goleman's (1998) Emotional Intelligence Theory and Getzels and Guba's (1956) Social Systems Theory were logically appropriate to the study based on the focus of administrator interpersonal skills and the impact on the organization. The notion that these interpersonal skills can be learned has led to numerous leadership education programs in universities across the United States (Brungardt, Greenleaf, Brungardt & Arensdorf, 2006; Funk, 2006). Goleman's (1998) Emotional Intelligence Theory describes emotional competence as a learned capability that results in outstanding performance. These competencies include social awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 1998). Communication, conflict management, empathy, and trustworthiness are some of the interpersonal skills in relationship

management, according to Goleman (1998). Research suggests that these emotional competencies are key to creating a climate that is nurturing and encourages workers to perform to the best of their ability (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). There are many studies that investigate the development of emotional intelligence in adults and children (Cadman & Brewer, 2001). Multiple educational strategies using emotional intelligence including empathy and problem-solving have been used to target healthcare professionals (Fairbairn, 2002). In addition to the healthcare field, the Collegiate Employment Research Institute (2007) indicated that interpersonal skills including communication, honesty, and problem-solving are at the top of the list for qualities that employers seek.

Another theoretical proposition that surrounds this study is the social systems theory (Getzels & Guba, 1956). The leaders in this field, Getzels and Guba (1956), discussed the importance of the principal's role in their social systems theory. These authors identified the nomothetic (institutional) and the idiographic (personal) dimensions of an organization. Getzels and Guba theorized that it is the principal's responsibility to serve as the means for productive interaction between the nomothetic and idiographic dimensions. Within this social systems theory, the challenge to the administrator, according to Hughes and Ubben (1994), is to address the organizational and individual needs in order to achieve as much congruence as possible. Gibbs (1990) provided an extensive literature review that provided a clear view of educational administration as a social process in the organization and the school as an open system. Gibbs also used the Social System Theory to identify roles in the organization as well as how these roles impacted organizational relationships.

According to Goleman (1998) and Getzels and Guba (1956), the leader's interpersonal skills impact the organization as well as its members. Based on these

theories, the researcher determined there is a relationship between the perceived interpersonal skills of administrators in an educational setting and the organizational climate, learning of students, and retention of teachers. While there are more recent studies by lesser known scholars, the theorists mentioned above were not only leaders in their field but also were the most applicable to this study. These veteran theorists continue to be sited by current researchers.

Interpersonal Skills

Perreault (2004) described interpersonal skills as the personal qualities, attributes, or level of commitment of a person that set them apart from others. In contrast, hard skills are the technical expertise and knowledge needed for a job that are easily observable and measurable (Laker & Powell, 2011). Interpersonal skills are difficult to quantify, and some say emotional intelligence is resistant to measurement (Becker, 2003). Interpersonal skills have been defined as soft skills based on teamwork, communication, and problem-solving ability (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010). A growing body of research supports the argument that interpersonal skills are crucial to effective leadership (Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001). In 1990, Salovey and Mayer introduced the concept of emotional intelligence, which has been helpful in identifying interpersonal skills of leadership. This research clearly shows that emotions are essential for effective decision-making, drive memory, learning, and motivation and are an essential part of cognition instead of a separate process (Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Building upon this, there is now strong support for the role emotional intelligence plays in leadership and the interpersonal skills of communication, problem-solving, trust building, and persuasion (Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001). In 1998, Goleman described emotional intelligence as one's ability to understand his/her feelings,

express emotions in an effective manner, and to listen and understand others. Goleman (1998) found in his studies that the most effective leaders have a high degree of self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills. In a study of 121 companies, Goleman et al. (2001) found soft skills were the main difference in effectiveness when managing people. Bulach et al. (2006) found that principals with a leadership style that incorporates trust, human relation skills, and dealing with conflict had a positive impact on climate and school success. Emotions are contagious, and the feelings and behaviors of an educational leader tend to drive the climate of the organization (Goleman, 1998).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness or honesty is a soft skill that has been identified by interpersonal and relationship theorists as essential in creating confidence and trust in all organizations (Butler, Cantrell, & Flick, 1999; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Mayer & Gavin, 2005). Trust/honesty is one of the most important leadership qualities as perceived by teachers at all career levels (Richards, 2005). The literature on effective school leaders makes several references to trust and its importance and the role it plays in building relationships (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Barth (1990), Covey (1992), and Sergiovanni (2009) advised leaders to develop and maintain trust within their organizations; however, they do not provide instruction on how to build trust. "When one searches for studies of trust in school environments and its relationship to leadership efforts by principals, the body of research is more lacking" (MacNeil & Spuck, 1999, p. 3).

Covey (2004) stated, "low trust is the first chronic problem that all organizations face" (p. 107). His research has emphasized that leaders should serve with character to earn the trust of stakeholders (Covey, 1992, 2004). The research by Kolp and Rea (2006) has a similar significance as character and competence are strongly recommended for

leading with integrity and building trust in the system. Bennis and Goldsmith (1994) implied that trust is the main quality that inspires people to follow the leader and the secret to creating an organization ready for change. Researchers agree that in order for leaders to move an organization toward educational reform, trusting relationships must be formed (MacNeil, Spuck, & Ceyanes, 1998). Kouzes and Posner (2002) summarized the contributions of an administrator by stating, "when leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take risks, make changes, keep organizations and movement alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 19). "Without trust, you cannot lead" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 244).

Communication

Communication can be defined as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another (Keyton, 2010). The key to success for an educational leader is the ability to work with other school stakeholders including faculty, support staff, community members, parents, and central office to create a shared vision for what the school is attempting to accomplish (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). As school administrators build a shared vision and goals, the school will become more effective (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). Building a relationship between school administrators and other school stakeholders requires effective communication (Kouzes & Posner, 2002).

Communication is one of the most important skills one can attain (Covey, 1989). Successful principals communicate frequently through listening, speaking, writing, and body language (Wentz, 1998).

The number one priority of a principal's job description is to communicate in

> appropriate, productive, meaningful, helpful, and healing ways with teachers, students, parents, colleagues, as well as a vast array of others, whether individually, in small groups, or en masse. (McEwan, 2003, p. 2).

Research shows that principals spend 70-80% of their time in interpersonal communication with multiple stakeholders (Green, 2010; Lunenburg & Irby, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2009; Ubben, Hughes, & Norris, 2010). Effective principals know how to communicate, and they understand the importance of ongoing formal and informal communication (Wentz, 1998). Communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness (Brun, 2010; Summers, 2010); therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that organizational effectiveness can be hindered due to a lack of effective communication (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010). Research shows good communication skills are very important to one's success as a school administrator (Brun, 2010; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; McEwan, 2003; Summers, 2010). A study by Yate (2009) indicated that recruiters rate communication skills as the most important characteristic of an ideal job candidate. Huddle (1988) expressed that principals must be "skillfully adept at communicating inside the school" (p.19). Stone, Patton, and Heen (2000) proposed that effective communication occurs when leaders engage members of the organization with the intent of mutual learning without trying to change the individual.

Marzano, Waters, and McNulty (2005) suggested that although principals may think teachers will talk with them about problems that arise, this is not always true. Teachers want a principal who has an open-door policy and offers effective lines of communication with staff (Marzano et al., 2005). Richards (2005) reported that teachers in all stages of their career found a leader with an open-door policy who was available and willing to listen ranked in the top five for leadership behaviors. An effective leader

understands that his/her perception of situations is often different from others; and if that is not considered, the leader could appear insensitive or presumptuous (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). It is important for school leaders to step away from their offices and engage in clear communication with their teachers (Bolman & Deal, 1993; Wentz, 1998). Effective communication by school administrators is essential to the nature of a productive school organization; however, school leaders need to be aware that communications do break down (Abrell, 2004; Auer, 2011; Larson, 2011; Shettleworth, 2010; Weiss, 2011). Several communication theorists (Abrell, 2004; Auer, 2011; Larson, 2011; Shettleworth, 2010; Weiss, 2011) have focused on the major areas where failures in communication most frequently occur. Communication breakdowns most frequently occur in schools where there is a lack of honesty, sincerity, empathetic listening, realistic self-perception, positive climate, and appropriate feedback (Abrell, 2004; Auer, 2011; Larson, 2011; Shettleworth, 2010; Weiss, 2011).

Empathy

Empathy is a critical skill for effective leadership (Ketelle & Mesa, 2006). In order to build trust with others, a leader must appreciate and be aware of others' feelings (Ketelle & Mesa, 2006). Good leaders are warm and caring people (McEwan, 2003). Empathy is the ability to share and understand another's emotions (McEwan, 2003). Empathy means to recognize another person's feelings and participate in their emotional experience without becoming part of it (Keen, 2007). Empathy is often referred to as putting yourself in another person's shoes or experiencing another's emotions (Donahue, 1997). Many psychologists have suggested that empathy is an innate personality trait (Hoffman, 1977); however, many educational researchers consider empathy a learned skill that enhances relationships (Goleman, 2003). In addition, Burns

(1978), Gardner (1986), and Kotter (1985) argued that empathy is a leadership quality that is needed to manage relationships. Covey (1992) agreed that educational leaders, through establishing positive relationships, can build emotional bank accounts. In order for positive relationships to be formed with understanding and communication, empathy must be present (Pedersen, 2007). Empathetic leaders are emotionally intelligent (Goleman, 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). They are able to remove themselves from their own feelings and analyze the feelings of others in a subjective manner without letting those feelings control the outcome of the current situation (Goleman, 2003; Mayer & Salovey, 1997). Empathy can also be defined cognitively, in relation to perspective taking or identifying with another person's emotions (Goleman, 2006). For example, Hogan (1969) described empathy as "the intellectual or imaginative apprehension of another's condition or state of mind without actually experiencing that person's feelings" (p. 308). Mehrabian and Epstein (1972) defined empathy as "the heightened responsiveness to another's emotional experience" (p. 526). Just because a leader is empathetic does not mean he/she will act morally; therefore, the moral component is equally as important as being empathetic (Ketelle & Mesa, 2006).

While researchers have acknowledged the positive role empathy plays in building relationships, they also agree that training programs enhance and develop this skill (Crabb, Moracco, & Bender, 1983; Egan, 1994; Goldstein, 1981; Hepworth & Larsen, 1993). Ketelle and Mesa (2006) suggested that role enactment is critical for educational leaders to cultivate the ability to consider other perspectives as a reflective professional.

Empathy is a key ingredient for effective leadership and building relationships (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1986; Ketelle & Mesa, 2006; Kotter, 1985; Pedersen, 2007). Goleman (1995) suggested that empathy is the main factor in guiding leaders in

making ethical decisions. Empathy also allows principals to understand the perspective of his/her teachers providing flexibility and morality that otherwise the leader without empathy skills would lack (Goleman, 1995).

Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is an emotional intelligence that effective administrators use on a daily basis (Goleman, 1995). It is important that principals understand and accurately perceive the problems that arise in the organization (Goleman, 1995). Sankar, Kawulich, Clayton, and Raju (2010) described various areas of problem-solving including prioritizing, strategy development, critical thinking, and evaluative processes. Problem-solving interpersonal skills require the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information that has been observed, experienced, reflected upon, and communicated (Sankar et al., 2010). While knowledge is important, Snyder and Snyder (2008) contended that it is not enough to ensure effective leadership. They believed an individual must have problem-solving interpersonal skills to make good leadership decisions (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Arenofsky (2001) claimed that good problem solvers are more likely to be competent, open-minded, flexible, and have a responsible attitude toward decision-making. Izgar (2008) conducted a study of 268 principals that showed leaders with problem-solving skills led schools more effectively than those who did not have these skills.

Maxwell (1999) described the five qualities of leaders. Maxwell stated that leaders will anticipate problems, accept the truth, have a vision of the future, handle problems one at a time, and will not give up. He stressed that the key to problem-solving is the willingness to view challenges from a new perspective and explore options (Maxwell, 1999).

School administrators would be more effective if more effort were made to improve their quality of thinking and problem-solving (Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Leithwood & Stager, 1989). Leithwood and Steinbach (1992) suggested from their research that administrative problem-solving can be improved through systematic instruction. This problem-based instruction includes modeling by expert problem solvers, practice opportunities, peer/group problem-solving, reflection, and direct instruction (Hallinger & McCary, 1990; Leithwood & Stager, 1989).

School Climate vs. School Culture

School climate is a complex mechanism that is impacted by the socioeconomic makeup; community; physical location; ethnicity; political factors; and emotions of the faculty, parents, and students (Halpin & Croft, 1963). It is ever-changing as it is impacted by perceptions of each member of the school community (Dietrich & Bailey, 1996; Gunbayi, 2007; Sutherland, 1994). Not only is school climate impacted by these factors, it is also a more significant factor on student achievement than the variables of socioeconomic status and race (Brookover et al., 1978). The reform efforts in the last 25 years have failed to improve student success because they have failed to address school climate (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). School culture and school climate are often used interchangeably within conversations and context (Gruenert, 2008). Although there are many common characteristics, both are defined differently and separated on the basis of this research.

Gruenert (2008) indicated that school culture is the unwritten rules of a school. School stakeholders conform to the culture to prevent conflict with others and to maintain a good relationship with peers (Gruenert, 2008). These unwritten rules are maintained over a long period of time and are passed from generation to generation (Gruenert,

2008). The culture of a school is embedded in everything from rituals, celebrations, and school members, which makes it difficult to change or alter in a brief time (Gruenert, 2008). The culture of a school is pervasive and influences everything from curriculum, to décor, to daily conversations (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Culture is the stream of "norms, values, beliefs, traditions, and rituals built up over time" (Peterson & Deal, 1998, p. 29). Culture is the driving force that influences the decisions and actions of students, faculty, and parents; and it can be a positive or negative influence on a school's functionality (Peterson & Deal, 1998). Peterson and Deal (1998) described the positive culture in a school to be a caring and safe environment where people respect each other, agree on what is important, and commit to help children learn. In a positive school culture, the staff has a sense of purpose and works harder to improve teaching and learning (Peterson & Deal, 1998). This culture supports the celebration of student and teacher accomplishments (Peterson & Deal, 1998).

In contrast, the school climate is the mood or attitude of the people who work at the school (Gruenert, 2008). School climate has been defined in various ways throughout research.

> A school's climate is its atmosphere for learning. It includes the feelings people have about the school and whether it is a place where learning can occur. A positive climate makes a school a place where both staff and students want to spend a substantial portion of their time; it is a good place to be. (Howard et al., 1987, p. 35)

School climate is very complex and is an important part of an effective school and community (Howard et al., 1987). School climate is associated with student achievement, attendance, teacher retention, and behavior (Ladd, 2009; Sergiovanni &

Starratt, 1998; Waters et al., 2003). Educational leaders play an important role in promoting and maintaining a positive climate (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Sergiovanni and Starratt (1998) asserted that the school climate is guided by the leadership style of an administrator, which in turn impacts student performance and teacher working conditions.

Ladd (2009) used survey data from North Carolina schools to determine that teacher perceptions of school leadership, measured through responses to school climate surveys, are most predictive of teacher intentions to remain in the current position or education. Ladd's findings are similar to other research in that they support the impact of school leadership on climate. Waters et al. (2003), in a meta-analysis of 70 empirical studies, found a strong relationship between school leadership and student achievement. The effects of school leadership reviewed in this research included establishing school routines, providing teachers with resources, advocating for stakeholders, and building a sense of community (Waters et al., 2003). An extensive review of literature was conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) and Hallinger (2005) which deduced that school leadership impacts schools and student learning through the influence he/she made on staff and structures. In addition, a study of 42 schools in the United Kingdom found that leaders with strong interpersonal skills had successful schools, as measured by academic achievement (McBer, 2000). High academic achievement in schools was seen as an indication of a positive school climate and positive teacher attitudes as influenced by leadership (McBer, 2000).

Principal interpersonal skills and leadership styles are noted by several authors as significant factors in setting the tone of the school climate; therefore, leaders can alleviate stress among teachers, students, and other stakeholders (Black, 2008; Hurren, 2006;

Ramalho, Garza, & Merchant, 2010). The qualitative study by Creswell and Fisher (1998) showed significant correlations between campus climate and principal interpersonal skills. Educational leaders who do not recognize the impact of interpersonal skills run the risk of affecting their school's climate in a negative way (Hughes & Ubben, 1994). Wendell, Hoke, and Joekel (1996) stated that positive interpersonal skills result in good rapport and harmony within an organization resulting in an increased motivation to work. Research continues to support the importance of interpersonal skills and the impact on school climate (Glenn, 2008; James & James, 2004; Sutton, 2002).

Teacher Retention

Principals have the greatest impact on schools through their influence of staff motivation, commitment, and creating and maintaining positive working conditions (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). Approximately 33% of first year public school teachers in the United States leave teaching before finishing their first year in the classroom (Hill, Peltier, & Thornton, 2005). Almost 50% of teachers leave education after 5 years (Roth & Tobin, 2005). There are several contributing factors to teacher retention, including teacher characteristics (Boe, Bobbitt, Cook, Barkanic & Maislin, 1998); however, data from the National Center for Educational Statistics show that climate-related factors in a school, including inadequate support from school leaders, contribute to higher rates of teacher turnover rates (Ingersoll, 2001). Teacher turnover rates tend to be higher in urban and lower-performing schools (Hanushek, Kain, & Rivkin, 1999). A negative school climate is a contributor to teacher burnout (Dedrick & Raschke, 1990). The cost of replacing teachers who leave the profession or move to another school is $5 billion yearly (Cavanagh, 2005). Quinn and Andrews (2004) attested that teacher attrition could be

contributed to the amount of support received from school leaders. "Elementary and middle school principals have a powerful impact on the schools in their charge. The current teacher shortage combined with the demands of standards-based education place a strain on the teacher-principal relationship" (Quinn & Andrews, 2004, p. 164).

The school leader is one of the most important individuals in the lives of teachers (Brock & Grady, 1997); therefore, the school leader is the key to teacher perceptions of feeling supported (Richards, 2005). Leaders of education need to increase their interpersonal sensitivity to prevent low staff morale and performance issues (Muse et al., 1993).

Student Learning and Climate

DuFour (2004) stated, "the core mission of formal education is not to simply ensure that students are taught but to ensure they learn" (p. 6). School leaders are second only to the classroom teacher as an influence on student learning (Leithwood et al., 2008). Data from a study by Andrews and Soder (as cited in McEwan, 2003) demonstrated that schools with strong instructional leadership produce greater gains in achievement in both math and reading as opposed to schools with average or weak leaders.

The continuous placement and recruitment of teachers make an impact on student learning (Darling-Hammond, 2001). Not only is there a strong correlation between positive school climate and teacher productivity and job satisfaction but also increased student achievement (Wahlstrom & Lewis, 2008). Other studies show that there is little evidence that teacher turnover directly impacts student achievement (Guin, 2004). Literature shows that some turnover may help an organization by providing a better person-job match and bringing in new ideas (Abelson & Baysinger, 1984).

Based on a study from Texas middle and high schools, Johnson, Johnson, and Zimmerman (1996) reported that school climate is the key to an effective school. Other researchers indicated there is strong link between positive school climate and higher student achievement (Chen, 2007; Kelley et al., 2005). This research went on to explain that student achievement also directly influences school climate (Chen, 2007; Kelley et al., 2005). Deal and Peterson (1999) agreed that school climate affects everything including instruction, professional development, and the importance of learning for students.

Cohen, Pickeral et al. (2009) reported that a positive climate reduced violence in schools. Positive school climate has also been linked to a reduction in bullying (Roberge, 2011). Research by Cohen (2001) suggested a positive climate is a major key to risk prevention and promotion of health, which contributes to safe, caring, and healthy school climates. Positive school climates provide students with a connectedness that is a powerful predictor of violence prevention and a preventative measure in risky sexual, violent, and drug-use behaviors (Kirby, 2001). According to Lezotte (2000), "the extent to which the correlates are in place in a school has dramatic, positive effect on student achievement" (p. 2). In this case, the correlate would be a safe and orderly climate.

This body of research emphasizes why administrators must focus on improving things within their circle of influence such as the school's climate. In order to create and maintain a positive school climate, administrators need to determine which interpersonal skills are desirable and directly impact school climate, student learning, and teacher retention (Glenn, 2008; Hughes & Ubben, 1994; James & James, 2004; Sutton, 2002).

Teacher Perceptions of Principal Behaviors

While the role the principal plays in determining the climate of the school is

important, teacher perceptions of those actions should be considered (Rhodes, Camic, Miburn, & Lowe, 2009; Shouppe & Pate, 2010). The climate of a school can be positive or negative depending on the perceptions of teachers and principals (Cohen, McCabe et al., 2009; Kelley et al., 2005). This research also emphasized the need for principals to have awareness of teacher perceptions if they want to create or maintain a positive environment (Cohen, McCabe et al., 2009; Kelley et al., 2005). Ärlestig (2007) found that often the perceptions of teachers and principals regarding climate were conflicting. In addition, teachers are unwilling to share this information with a leader, which prevents a needed change (Ärlestig, 2007). Holdaway and Johnson (1993) found that principals often rate their school climate more positively than teachers, indicating a difference in perceptions. Kelley et al. (2005) indicated that principals should be aware of teacher perceptions to make informed decisions and to maintain a positive climate. Rhodes et al. (2009) added that when teachers felt their needs were being met, they perceived a positive climate. Teacher perceptions of school climate often influence retention or attrition (Wynn, Carboni, & Patall, 2007). Wynn et al. (2007) found that teachers are willing to stay in school districts where their perceptions of working conditions are improving. In addition, teachers are more likely to remain in school districts where their satisfaction in leadership increases (Wynn et al., 2007). In a time when teacher shortage and retention continue to be issues (Ingersoll, 2001; Marlo & Inman, 1997), teacher perceptions should be considered; and principals should be willing to adopt desired interpersonal skills to improve school climate.

Summary

The focus of this literature review was to provide an overview of the research on the relationship between educational leaders' interpersonal skills and school climate,

student learning, and teacher retention. Research indicates that principal interpersonal skills play an important role in the educational climate, student learning, and teacher retention (Glenn, 2008; Hughes & Ubben, 1994; James & James, 2004; Sutton, 2002). The interpersonal skills that are noted to be important are trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving (Butler et al., 1999; Covey, 1989; Dirks & Ferrin, 2002; Gardner, 1986; Izgar, 2008; Ketelle & Mesa, 2006; Kouzes & Posner, 2002; Maxwell, 1999; Mayer & Gavin, 2005; McEwan, 2003; Snyder & Snyder, 2008). The next chapter discusses the methodology that is used in this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to predict if specific interpersonal skills possessed by principals, as perceived by teachers, are important characteristics in creating and maintaining a positive school climate. Also, this study attempted to determine if there is a correlation between interpersonal skills and student learning and teacher retention. Research tells us that principals have the authority to influence school climate but lack feedback to improve (Kelley et al., 2005); therefore, this study provides administrators with an understanding of how their interpersonal skills or lack of these skills relates to the framework of school climate. In addition, the results from this study offer suggestions to educational leaders who want to improve teacher/administrator relationships.

This study draws from the work of Malone (2013). Mark Malone granted permission on June 24, 2016 by phone and email (Appendix D) to use the measurement tool developed for the quantitative portion of this research. This study used similar methods but with different subjects and quantitative as well as qualitative data. While Malone's study involved high schools, the focus of this study was elementary schools. Malone's study only looked at the relationship between the principal and climate, whereas this study investigated the impact on student learning and teacher retention. This study does empirically support the results of the original study; however, there were some differences as well. The data collected from this study will contribute to the body of research on the relationship between the interpersonal skills of a principal and climate, student learning, and teacher retention. Additional findings add support to the previous study while possibly correcting limitations. Replication studies play an integral

role in the process of testing and providing generalizability of crucial findings (Schmidt, 2009).

In this chapter, the researcher presents the research questions and hypothesis for this study. Next, the research design for this study and the methods for data collection are discussed including the criteria used for selecting participants. This mixed-method study includes a survey instrument and teacher interviews. Finally, the data analysis methods used and limitations of the study are described.

Setting

This study took place in a county located in Western North Carolina. This county has 108,448 residents; and of these residents, 13,618 are students enrolled in the public school system. The student population consists of 71.33% Caucasian, 18.76% Hispanic, 3.69% African-American, 3.72% multi-racial, 1.25% Asian, 0.26% Hawaiian Pacific, and 0.24% American Indian. The average family income in this county is $47,371. Many of the families in this area are living at or below the poverty level reflected by 54.9% of the county's students qualifying for free/reduced lunch status.

According to the Annual Profile of Statistical Information of 2014, the participating district is made up of 23 schools: 13 elementary schools (K through Grade 5), four middle schools (Grades 6-8), four high schools (Grades 9-12), one early college high school, and one education center (Grades 9-12). This study was conducted at all 13 elementary schools in the county.

In the county where this study took place, there have been administrative turnovers in 12 of the 13 elementary schools in the last 5 years. In addition, based on the North Carolina School Report Card, teacher turnover in the elementary schools is less than desirable. This county ranks sixth in the state academically; however, there is no

consistency in high performance at the elementary level. Several of these elementary schools are performing below the state average in reading and/or math. This county has recently created the position Chief Professional Development Officer to increase leadership capacity among principals. In addition, they have developed a mentor program for new principals and provided professional development such as "Win the Head, Win the Heart" (Frye, 2017) and "Crucial Conversations" (Patterson, 2002) to address many of these issues.

Research Design and Rationale

This study was driven by the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of communication?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of trustworthiness or honesty?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of empathy?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of problem-solving? (Malone, 2013)
2. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and student learning?
3. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and teacher retention?

This was a mixed-methods study with both quantitative and qualitative data that

were collected from 13 elementary schools. Creswell (2014) stated that mixed-methods research combines the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research. A mixed-method design involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative and quantitative data that guide the assessment and assist in answering research questions (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Creswell clearly identified two main approaches in mixed-method research: sequential and concurrent. Creswell indicated that triangulation is an important reason to use both qualitative and quantitative research. Triangulation among multiple sources of data enhances the validity of a study (Creswell 2014). A convergent parallel mixed method design was used for this study to enable the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data separately and concurrently (Creswell, 2014). In addition, these sources of data were merged and analyzed to predict relationships.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was observer and interviewer. Although the researcher works in the chosen school district as a middle school administrator, there were no personal or professional relationships with the potential participants in 12 of the 13 elementary schools. The researcher's children attend one of the elementary schools; however, there were no personal biases regarding any of the schools involved in the study. All elementary schools were offered the same opportunities to participate in the study. There were no ethical issues in this study, and incentives were not offered to the participants.

Methodology

Participants. The participants for this study were drawn from 13 elementary schools in a North Carolina community. The elementary schools in this study were

selected based on proximity to the researcher and resources available. Multiple elementary schools were included to increase the probability of gathering data regarding principals who display varied levels of interpersonal skills and a wider possible range of perceptions of school climate. The elementary schools provided access to teachers for research purposes. The elementary schools range in size from 400 to 600 students and are located in the same school district, which adequately meets Brace et al.'s (2000) acceptable ratio of 10 participants per predictor variable.

The sample included certified teachers at the elementary schools within the study. Instructional support, administrators, and other support staff were omitted from the sample. The researcher did not use data from any other staff members because ultimately teachers interpret school climate and share this climate with students via daily instruction (Dietrich & Bailey, 1996). Administrators were excluded from the research due to their different perceptions of leader interactions and the impact on culture (van Horn, 2003).

Multiple elementary schools were used to increase the probability of gathering data regarding principals who have different types and varied levels of interpersonal skills. Also, multiple elementary schools were used to provide a range of perceptions regarding school climate. The pool of available participants in the 13 elementary schools within the targeted schools was estimated to be 300 teachers.

Instrumentation. As shown in Table 1, the following data were used to answer each of the research questions.

1. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact school climate? (communication, trustworthiness, empathy, problem-solving)
    a. SLEQ/POSSS – climate/soft skill survey (Malone, 2013; Appendix E)

Trustworthiness

Q#1 Teachers in this school often question the motives of the principal

Q#7 My principal keeps his/her word

Q#13 Teachers at this school trust my principal

Q#15 My principal typically acts with the teacher's best interest in mind

Communication

Q#5 My principal makes me feel comfortable to talk with him/her

Q#8 My principal clearly articulates his/her vision for the school

Q#9 It is not safe to say what I am really thinking to my principal

Q#16 My principal makes me feel that things I tell him/her are important

Empathy

Q#4 I believe my principal cares about me personally

Q#6 My principal understands the pressures we face as teachers

Q#11 If I have a personal problem, I trust my principal to help me with it

Q#14 My principal acts like he/she cares about me just so things will go smoothly

Problem-solving

Q#2 Generally my principal ignores problems until he/she has no choice

Q#3 If I approach my principal with a problem, I am confident he/she will help me resolve it

Q#10 The solutions to problems presented by my principal are mostly successful

Q#12 My principal avoids conflicts that should be handled

b. Teacher Interviews

2. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact student learning?
    a. EOG results (2016)
        1. 3-5 Reading
        2. 3-5 Math
    b. Teacher interviews
    c. POSSS results
3. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact teacher retention?
    a. North Carolina Report Card (2015-2016) – teacher turnover
    b. Teacher interviews
    c. POSSS results

Table 1

Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Question	Type of data to collect	Method of data collection	Information Source	Analysis Procedures	Interpretation procedures and criteria
What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?	Quantitative	Soft skill/ climate survey	Elementary teachers	Linear Regression	Compare the Overall SLEQ score with POSSS score (For each soft skill and for all soft skills combined). The higher the overall mean on the POSSS (4 to 20 possible) the more likely a principal has the desired interpersonal skill as perceived by teachers.
	Quantitative	Soft skill/ climate survey	Elementary Teachers	Linear Regression and Means Comparison	Each independent variable (trustworthiness, communication, empathy, problem-solving) combined and separately as it relates to demographic information (gender, ethnicity, years in education, years at current school). The higher the overall mean on the POSSS (4 to 20 possible) the more likely a principal has the desired interpersonal skill as perceived by teachers. a priori coding
	Qualitative	Teacher Interviews	Elementary teachers	Thematic Content Analysis	

(continued)

Research Question	Type of data to collect	Method of data collection	Information Source	Analysis Procedures	Interpretation procedures and criteria
What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and student learning?	Quantitative	2016 EOG Scores for Math/ Reading grades 3, 4, and 5 at 13 elementary schools	NC Report Card 2016	Linear Regression	Compare mean EOG proficiency percentage for Math, for Reading, and overall proficiency and mean POSSS scores for all 13 schools.
	Qualitative	Teacher Interviews	Elementary teachers	Thematic Content Analysis	a priori coding
What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and teacher retention?	Quantitative	NC Report Card results from 2015-2016 at 13 elementary schools	NC Report Card 2015-2016	Linear Regression	Compare mean turnover percentage (showing retention of teachers) and mean POSSS score for all 13 schools.
	Qualitative	Teacher Interviews	Elementary teachers	Thematic Content Analysis	a priori coding

This study required a combination of two survey instruments. The SLEQ (Appendix B) that came from Rentoul and Fraser's (1983) original instrument has been used in multiple research studies to determine school climate (Fisher & Fraser, 1990; Johnson et al., 2007). SLEQ (Appendix B) has 21 items to measure school climate which include (a) four items based on student relations, (b) six items based on collaboration, (c) four items based on school resources, (d) four items based on instructional innovation, and (e) three items based on decision-making. SLEQ (Appendix B) is answered on a five-point Likert scale: 1, strongly disagree; 2, disagree; 3, neither agree nor disagree; 4, agree; or 5, strongly agree. For consistency of data analysis, the coding for questions 19, 25, 26, 30, 32, 34, 36, and 37 are different due to the negative nature of the question. These questions were reverse scored to ensure that "those that are originally

negatively-keyed and those that are positively-keyed are consistent with each other, in terms of what an agree or disagree imply" (Negatively-Keyed Items and Reverse-Scoring, n.d., para. 3). Johnson et al. (2007) conducted a study to test the validity of SLEQ. The adjusted goodness-of-fit was .93 and the comparative fit index was .94 which are both in the range of criterion. The root mean square error of approximation was .052 which is lower than the recommended level of .06 (Hu & Bentler, 1998). Johnson et al. (2007) also determined the internal reliability to be =.90 using Cronbach's alpha. These data show SLEQ is within range of the above average of internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951).

Malone (2013) developed a survey instrument called POSSS (Appendix A) to measure the perception of a leader's interpersonal skills. Mark Malone granted permission on June 24, 2016 by phone and email (Appendix D) to use the measurement tool developed for the quantitative portion of this research. This instrument contains 16 items that were adapted from many other instruments that have been used to measure one or more of the interpersonal skills investigated in this study. For consistency of data analysis, the coding for questions 1, 2, 9, 12, and 14 are different due to the negative nature of the question. These questions were reverse scored to ensure that "those that are originally negatively-keyed and those that are positively-keyed are consistent with each other, in terms of what an agree or disagree imply" (Negatively-Keyed Items and Reverse-Scoring, n.d.).

POSSS (Appendix A) was created to measure (a) trustworthiness, (b) empathy, (c) problem-solving, and (d) communication. A pilot study of POSSS was conducted at a high school in Texas to determine reliability. Cronbach's Alpha showed trustworthiness (alpha) =.84, empathy (alpha) = .89, problem-solving (alpha) = .87 and communication

(alpha) = .90 which prove internal consistency based on Cronbach (1951). Based on the response rate and analysis of surveys, this survey instrument is considered valid and reliable.

The survey instrument used in this study is a combination of both SLEQ and POSSS and also includes a demographic section (Appendix E). This survey has four demographic items and 37 survey questions. The demographic items were used for descriptive analysis and to provide significance to the study.

Variables

The dependent variables in this study are teacher perceptions of the school climate collected using SLEQ, student learning as measured by math/reading EOG scores (2015-2016), and teacher retention as measured by the North Carolina Report Card (2015-2016). The composite score from the school climate constructs in SLEQ was used to determine teacher perceptions. The independent variables in this study are the school administrator interpersonal skills including trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving as perceived by elementary school teachers. These perceptions were collected using a survey instrument (POSSS) to identify teacher perceptions of leader interpersonal skills. The climate (SLEQ) and soft skill (POSSS) surveys were given simultaneously (Appendix E).

Data Collection Process

The researcher began her research by quantitatively measuring the perceptions of teachers at 13 elementary schools using SLEQ (Rentoul & Fraser, 1983) and POSSS (Malone, 2013; Appendix E). Surveys are used to collect data about the knowledge, characteristics, and opinions of certain groups (Gall, Borg, & Gall, 1996). Collecting data using a survey instrument was appropriate because it identifies the perception of a

large population efficiently and provides standardized measurement and consistency among respondents (Fowler, 2009). An email prior to the survey was sent to teachers at all 13 elementary schools introducing them to the researcher and the purpose of the survey. A consent to participate in the study was sent with the email (Appendix F). The electronic survey was sent the next day and included the assurance that responses to the survey were confidential and remained secure by the researcher. The Director of Elementary Education in this district facilitated the distribution of the initial email and survey. The survey window was 2 weeks with two email reminders on day three and eight.

Included in the initial survey email was an invitation for participation in an individual interview. There was a separate link to participate in an interview survey including name, school, email, and phone number. A choice of preferred day and time was included in this survey. Interviews are defined as "carefully planned discussions designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest in a permissive, nonthreatening environment" (Krueger & Casey, 2009, p. 18). The individual teacher interviews were conducted with six certified elementary teachers. There were 10 predetermined open-ended probing questions that were asked during the interview. All interviews were recorded, with consent, through use of a recording application. The recorded information was transcribed verbatim, and the data from the interviews were coded for confidentiality, themes, and patterns. Krueger and Casey (2009) believed that interviews provide an opportunity for people to tell you what they really think and feel.

Data Organization and Analysis

All quantitative data analyses were done using SPSS (Brace et al., 2000). A reliability analysis was completed previously to show a correlation of items for the

POSSS and SLEQ. Cronbach alpha was determined which is usually acceptable at .7 or higher (Trobia, 2008). To address the first research question, a linear regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (trustworthiness/ honesty, problem-solving, empathy, and communication) were the predictors of school climate while controlling for possible confounding variables (gender, ethnicity, years total teaching experience, and total years at the school). Linear regression was used to compare the overall SLEQ score and the combined and separate soft skills POSSS scores. Next, a means comparison between each interpersonal skill (trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving) and demographic information was conducted. The results of the combined surveys are displayed in a table and presented in a narrative format. To address the second research question, a linear regression was conducted comparing the mean EOG proficiency for math, the mean EOG proficiency for reading, and the overall EOG proficiency to the mean POSSS scores for all 13 elementary schools. Finally, a linear regression comparing the mean turnover percentage of teachers to the mean POSSS for all 13 elementary schools was conducted to address the third research question.

The teacher interview data were analyzed using a priori coding. A priori coding was used to organize themes and patterns in the teacher interviews to align data with the research questions in order to draw relationships and report findings. A priori codes were derived from the research questions, the conceptual framework, the SLEQ/POSSS survey, and the researcher's prior knowledge (Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d.). The results of coding are presented in narrative format. The researcher expanded the predetermined codes to include emerging codes as well. The following codes and subcodes were used:

1) Climate
    a) Students – motivated to learn, well behaved, cooperative, helpful
    b) Teachers – collaboration, communication, innovative, coordinated instruction, teamwork
    c) Facilities – instructional equipment
2) Interpersonal/Soft Skills
    a) Trustworthy/Honesty
        i) Confidence, faith
    b) Communication
        i) Email, letter, meetings, collaboration
    c) Problem-solving
        i) Critical thinker, creative,
    d) Empathy
        i) Understanding, caring, kind, listener
3) Student Learning
    a) Student Scores
    b) Student Achievement
    c) Student Progress/growth
4) Teacher Retention
    a) Turnover, Move, Stay, Quit, Change

The interviews were recorded with an electronic device, and the researcher took handwritten notes during the interview as well. The researcher used the Interview Guide (Appendix G) to guide the discussions. The researcher developed the interview guide to address each research question and to provide an opportunity for participants to elaborate

on topics within the survey.

Threats to Validity

The researcher concluded there were no threats to internal validity. The researcher did not use a pre/posttest design for the study nor did she attempt to establish a causal relationship between the independent and dependent variables. Since the researcher focused on one group for the study, the internal validity threats of selection and experimental mortality did not apply. The researcher was the only interviewer for the teacher interviews, so the instrumentation threat to internal validity was addressed.

In an effort to address the threats to external validity, the researcher sent the survey to all elementary teachers in the chosen district. Since all elementary teachers had the opportunity to participate in the survey, the sample who chose to participate was representative of the entire population. In addition, all elementary teachers were invited to participate in an individual interview, so the sample who chose to participate should be representative of the entire population.

Issues of Trustworthiness

To meet the guidelines of Gardner-Webb University regarding the protection of human participants, a request for review was submitted to the Institution Review Board for approval to interview approximately six participants for this study. The interviews were conducted in a convenient and neutral location for all participants. The interviews took place approximately two weeks following the close of The Principal's Observable Soft Skills Scale and School Level Environmental survey (Appendix E). Upon IRB approval from Gardner-Webb University, the researcher submitted a research proposal to the Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction of the chosen school district for approval. After the researcher obtained approval, the recruitment for interview

participants and data collection began.

Summary

This chapter presented the methodology by the researcher for this mixed-method study. The quantitative and qualitative data collected were used to determine the impact of principal interpersonal skills as perceived by teachers on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. The research questions were addressed using the data collected.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

This chapter presents the major findings in the study. The purpose of this mixed-method study was to identify desirable interpersonal skills possessed by elementary principals and their impact on school climate, student learning, and teacher retention. Through the identification of these interpersonal skills, educators can begin to explore the effect of principal interpersonal skills on the success of schools. By studying the perceptions of selected elementary teachers on principal interpersonal skills in North Carolina, data from this study explored information about principal interpersonal skills necessary for effective school leadership in all schools. The following research questions were addressed using the collected data.

1. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of communication?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of trustworthiness or honesty?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of empathy?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of problem-solving? (Malone, 2013)
2. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and student learning?
3. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by

teachers, and teacher retention?

In this chapter, the setting and demographics of the participants within the study are presented. The researcher describes the data collection along with the analysis of the data. The presentation of results from this mixed-method study includes both qualitative and quantitative components. Finally, evidence of trustworthiness based on the results is addressed.

Setting

This study took place in a county located in western North Carolina. This county has 108,448 residents; and of these residents, 13,618 are students enrolled in the public school system. The student population consists of 71.33% Caucasian, 18.76% Hispanic, 3.69% African-American, 3.72% multi-racial, 1.25% Asian, 0.26% Hawaiian Pacific, and 0.24% American Indian. The average family income in this county is $47,371. Many of the families in this area are living at or below the poverty level reflected by 54.9% of the county's students qualifying for free/reduced lunch status. According to the Annual Profile of Statistical Information of 2014, the participating district is made up of 23 schools: 13 elementary schools (K through Grade 5), four middle schools (Grades 6-8), four high schools (Grades 9-12), one early college high school, and one education center (Grades 9-12). This study was conducted at all 13 elementary schools in the county.

In the county where this study took place, there have been administrative turnovers in 12 of the 13 elementary schools in the last 5 years. In addition, based on the North Carolina School Report Card, teacher turnover in the elementary schools is higher than the district middle school turnover percentage and higher than the overall state turnover percentage. This county ranks sixth in the state academically; however, there is no consistency in high performance at the elementary level. Several of these elementary

schools are performing below the state average in reading and/or math. This county has recently created the position Chief Professional Development Officer to increase leadership capacity among principals. In addition, they have developed a mentor program for new principals and provided professional development such as "Win the Head, Win the Heart" (Frye, 2017) and "Crucial Conversations" (Patterson, 2002) to address many of these issues.

Demographics

Thirteen elementary schools were represented in this study. Table 2 describes the demographics of participants within the study. There were 68 of 300 possible respondents to the survey who included 63 females and 5 males. This is a 22.7% response rate with a confidence interval of 95% +/- 10% (Survey Statistical Confidence, n.d.). Although this response rate is lower than anticipated, according to Fluidsurvey (2014), the average survey response rate for email surveys is 24.8%. Genroe stated that their average response rate for surveys is between 10-30% (Ramshaw, n.d.); therefore, the researcher deemed this response rate to be acceptable.

Of the 68 respondents, 66 of the respondents were Caucasian, while the other two were Latino and other. The majority of respondents had 11 or more years of experience teaching; however, 49 of the respondents had only worked 10 or fewer years at their current school.

Table 2

Participant Demographics

Demographic	Frequency	Percent
Gender	68	
Male	4	5.8
Female	64	94.1
Years Teaching	68	
>1	1	1.5
1-5	8	11.8
6-10	9	13.2
11-15	23	33.8
16+	27	39.7
Years at School	68	
>1	2	2.9
1-5	24	35.3
6-10	23	33.8
11-15	9	13.2
16+	10	14.7
Identified Ethnicity	68	
Asian/South Pacif	0	0
Black	0	0
Hispanic	1	1.5
Native American	0	0
White	66	97.0

Other	1	1.5

Data Collection

Teacher perceptions of principal soft skills and school climate were documented using SLEQ (Rentoul & Fraser, 1983) and POSSS (Malone, 2013) survey (Appendix E). This combined survey has four demographic items and 37 survey questions. SLEQ has 21 items to measure school climate which include (a) four items based on student relations, (b) six items based on collaboration, (c) four items based on school resources, (d) four items based on instructional innovation, and (e) three items based on decision-making. SLEQ was answered on a five-point Likert scale: 1, strongly disagree; 2, disagree; 3, neither agree nor disagree; 4, agree; or 5, strongly agree. For consistency of data analysis, the coding for questions 19, 25, 26, 30, 32, 34, 36, and 37 are different due to the negative nature of the questions. These questions were reverse scored to ensure that "those that are originally negatively-keyed and those that are positively-keyed are consistent with each other, in terms of what an agree or disagree imply" (Negatively-Keyed Items and Reverse-Scoring, n.d., para.3). POSSS contains 16 items that were adapted from many other instruments that have been used to measure trustworthiness, empathy, problem-solving, and communication. For consistency of data analysis, the coding for questions 1, 2, 9, 12, and 14 are different due to the negative nature of the question. These questions were reverse scored to ensure that "those that are originally negatively-keyed and those that are positively-keyed are consistent with each other, in terms of what an agree or disagree imply" (Negatively-Keyed Items and Reverse-Scoring, n.d., para. 3). This electronic survey was available to certified teachers at 13 elementary schools for 3 weeks.

Included in the initial survey email was an invitation for participation in an

individual interview. There was a separate link to participate in an interview survey including name, school, email, and phone number. A choice of preferred location, day, and time was included in this survey. Six certified elementary teachers volunteered to participate in the teacher interviews and all were selected. Teachers interviewed had been at their current school from a range of 2-8 years with a range of 3-23 years of experience in education. Interviews were conducted simultaneously with the survey, and each interview took approximately 45 minutes. Ten predetermined open-ended probing questions were asked during the interview (see Appendix G). All interviews were recorded, with consent, through the use of a recording application. The recorded information was transcribed verbatim, and the data from the interviews were coded for confidentiality, themes, and patterns. The transcriptions were stored on a device that was password protected and used only by the researcher. After coding for themes, the researcher deleted all transcriptions.

Originally, the researcher proposed to use an ordinal logistic regression; however, according to Yuxi Qiu, Ph.D. candidate at University of Florida National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment INC, the outcome variables were not categorical and linear regression was the most appropriate statistical test (Qiu, personal communication, 2017). While there were no unusual circumstances encountered during the data collection, the researcher did extend the survey window to 3 weeks instead of 2, providing an opportunity for more participants. There were no other variations from the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Data Analysis

As shown in Table 1, the following data were used to answer each of the research questions.

1. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact school climate? (communication, trustworthiness, empathy, problem-solving)
    a. SLEQ/POSSS – climate/soft skill survey (Malone, 2013; Appendix E)

        Trustworthiness

        Q#1 Teachers in this school often question the motives of the principal

        Q#7 My principal keeps his/her word

        Q#13 Teachers at this school trust my principal

        Q#15 My principal typically acts with the teacher's best interest in mind

        Communication

        Q#5 My principal makes me feel comfortable to talk with him/her

        Q#8 My principal clearly articulates his/her vision for the school

        Q#9 It is not safe to say what I am really thinking to my principal

        Q#16 My principal makes me feel that things I tell him/her are important

        Empathy

        Q#4 I believe my principal cares about me personally

        Q#6 My principal understands the pressures we face as teachers

        Q#11 If I have a personal problem, I trust my principal to help me with it

        Q#14 My principal acts like he/she cares about me just so things will go smoothly

        Problem-solving

        Q#2 Generally my principal ignores problems until he/she has no choice

        Q#3 If I approach my principal with a problem, I am confident he/she will help me resolve it

        Q#10 The solutions to problems presented by my principal are mostly

successful

Q#12 My principal avoids conflicts that should be handled

b. Teacher Interviews

2. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact student learning?
   a. EOG results (2016)
      1. 3-5 Reading
      2. 3-5 Math
   b. Teacher Interviews
   c. POSSS results
3. Do principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, impact teacher retention?
   a. North Carolina Report Card (2015-2016) – teacher turnover
   b. Teacher Interviews
   c. POSSS results

The teacher interview data were analyzed using a priori coding. A priori coding was used to organize themes and patterns in the teacher interviews to align data with the research questions in order to draw relationships and report findings. A priori codes were derived from the research questions, the conceptual framework, SLEQ/POSSS survey, and the researcher's prior knowledge (Center for Evaluation and Research, n.d.). The results of coding are presented in narrative format. The researcher expanded the predetermined codes to include emerging codes as well. The following codes and subcodes were used:

1) Climate

a) Students – motivated to learn, well behaved, cooperative, helpful
b) Teachers – collaboration, communication, innovative, coordinated instruction, teamwork
c) Facilities – instructional equipment

2) Interpersonal/Soft Skills
   a) Trustworthy/Honesty
      i) Confidence, faith
   b) Communication
      i) Email, letter, meetings, collaboration
   c) Problem-solving
      i) Critical thinker, creative,
   d) Empathy
      i) Understanding, caring, kind, listener
3) Student Learning
   a) Student Scores
   b) Student Achievement
   c) Student Progress/growth
4) Teacher Retention
   a) Turnover, Move, Stay, Quit, Change

The interviews were recorded with an electronic device, and the researcher took handwritten notes during the interview as well. The researcher used the Interview Guide (Appendix G) to guide the discussions. The researcher developed the interview guide to address each research question and to provide an opportunity for participants to elaborate on topics within the survey. There were no discrepant cases or disconfirming data

evident within this study.

Data and Findings for Research Question 1

Soft skills and school climate linear regression. This section details the findings related to the primary research question: What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?

To answer this question, a linear regression was conducted. Originally, the researcher proposed to use an ordinal logistic regression; however, according to Qiu (personal communication, 2017), the outcome variables were not categorical, and linear regression was the most appropriate statistical test. Results are presented in Figures 2 and 3. A linear regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (trustworthiness/honesty, problem-solving, empathy, and communication) were the predictors of school climate while controlling for possible confounding variables (gender, ethnicity, years total teaching experience, and total years at the school).

The results of the regression indicate that the variables trustworthy/honesty, problem-solving, empathy, and communication significantly predicted school climate. Although the entire set of independent variables were found to be significant, not every variable was found to be significant. The model accounted for 89% of the variance in school climate. Because the model accounted for greater than 25% of the variability, it represented a large effect size for linear regression analysis (Howell, 2010).

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.886[a] [Q1]	.784	.661	3.74694

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	357.309	4	89.327	6.363	.017
	Residual	98.277	7	14.040		
	Total	455.585	11			

Figure 2. Summary and ANOVA for Soft Skills of Elementary Principals and Climate.

The soft skills of elementary principals accounted for 89% of the variation in climate with adjusted R^2= 66.1%, a substantial size effect according to Cohen (1988). The soft skills of elementary principals statistically predicted climate, F(4,7) = 6.363, p = .017.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	92.752	10.609		8.743	.000
	Trust	3.193	1.091	1.496	2.927	.022
	Comm	2.265	1.490	.858	1.520	.172
	Empathy	-2.420	1.164	-.705	-2.079	.076
	Problem-Solving	-3.552	.981	-1.430	-3.620	.009

Figure 3. Soft Skill Independent Variables.

Although the entire set of independent variables were found to be significant, not every variable was found to be individually significant as indicated in Figure 3. As its *p* value (.0222) is less than .05, trust is a statistically significant predictor of climate. The unstandardized coefficient of 3.193 indicates that a one-unit change of trust is associated with 3.193 unit change in climate, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.172) is more than .05, communication is not a statistically significant predictor of climate. The unstandardized coefficient of 2.265 indicates that a one-unit change of communication is associated with 2.265 unit change in climate, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.076) is slightly more than .05, empathy is a marginally significant predictor of climate. The unstandardized coefficient of -2.420 indicates that a one-unit change of empathy is associated with -2.420 unit change in climate, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.009) is less than .05, problem-solving is a statistically significant predictor of climate. The

unstandardized coefficient of -3.552 indicates that a one-unit change of empathy is associated with -3.552 unit change in climate, while holding the other three predictors constant.

Trustworthiness/Honesty

The following section discusses the findings for the question regarding how trustworthy teachers perceive principals in this study to be. Figure 4 summarizes the results of the analysis. In order to determine the perception of principal trustworthiness, teachers responded to four items on the POSSS. The mean (15.2) and the standard deviation (3.02) of the trustworthiness/honesty construct were examined. The higher the overall mean, the more likely teachers perceived a principal to be trustworthy with the lowest possible value 4 and the highest possible value 20. Men were more likely to perceive the principal as trustworthy (m=17.3) than women (m=15.1).

Examining data concerning the construct trustworthiness/honesty and total number years teaching yielded a greater variation in the mean than gender. Teachers with 11 years or more experience perceived the school principal as more trustworthy than any other group (*m*=15.4). Teachers with 6 years or less experience (*m*=14.6) perceived principal trustworthiness lower.

The data regarding the construct trustworthiness/honesty and total years at the current school were opposite from total years teaching. In this case, the group with less years at the current school perceived the principal to be more trustworthy (m=15.4) in relation to the teachers with 11 or more years (m=14.4). Data describing the construct trustworthiness/honesty in relation to ethnicity reflected the least variance of all the sample characteristics due to the respondents being almost 98% White.

Soft skill Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Trustworthiness/Honesty	68		
Gender			
Male	4	17.3	1.71
Female	64	15.1	3.54
Total Years Teaching Exp.			
> 1 year	1	15	
1 – 5 years	8	14.3	4.57
6 – 10 years	9	14.6	3.57
11 – 15 years	23	15.4	3.93
16 + years	27	15.4	2.95
Years at Current School			
> 1 year	2	17	2.83
1 – 5 years	24	15.4	3.36
6 – 10 years	23	15.3	4.2
11 – 15 years	9	14.7	3.74
16 + years	10	14.4	1.90
Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0		
Black	0		
Hispanic	1	17	
Native American	0		
White	66	15.1	3.54
Other	1	16	

Figure 4. Trustworthiness Means Comparison.

Communication

The following section discusses the findings for the question related to teacher perceptions of how well the principal communicates. Figure 5 displays the data for the mean comparisons for the communication construct. In order to determine perceptions of principal communication skills, teachers responded to four items on the POSSS. The mean (15.9) and the standard deviation (2.44) of the communication construct were examined. The higher the overall mean, the more likely teachers perceived a principal to communicate well, with the lowest possible value 4 and the highest possible value 20.

When comparing genders to the construct of communication, men were more

likely to perceive the principal as utilizing effective communication (*m*=17.8) than women (*m*=16.1). The highest perception of principal communication came from teachers with 6-10 years of experience (*m*=16.5). In contrast, teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience perceived principal communication the lowest (*m*=15.3). Interestingly, teachers with 1-5 years of teaching experience at the current school produced the highest perceptions of communication skills (*m*=16.6), while teachers with 11-15 years at the current school rated communication skills lower (m=15.3).

Soft skill Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Communication	68		
Gender			
Male	4	17.75	2.63
Female	64	16.1	3.31
Total Years Teaching Exp.			
> 1 year	1	16	
1 – 5 years	8	15.3	2.75
6 – 10 years	9	16.5	3.24
11 – 15 years	23	16	4.06
16 + years	27	16.4	2.85
Years at Current School			
> 1 year	2	18	2.83
1 – 5 years	24	16.6	2.80
6 – 10 years	23	15.9	4.12
11 – 15 years	9	15.3	3.64
16 + years	10	16.2	1.99
Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0		
Black	0		
Hispanic	1	20	
Native American	0		
White	66	16.1	3.29
Other	1	18	

Figure 5. Communication Means Comparison.

Empathy

This section focuses on the findings for the question of how well the principal

displays empathy as perceived by teachers. Figure 6 displays the mean comparison data for empathy. In order to determine the perception of principal empathy, teachers responded to four items on the POSSS. The mean (16.3) and the standard deviation (1.88) of the empathy construct were examined. The higher the overall mean, the more likely teachers perceived a principal to display empathy with a possible range from 4 to 20.

The construct of empathy in relation to gender reflected that women perceived principal empathy (*m*=16.5) as lower than men (*m*=17.3). The relationship between the construct of empathy and total years of teaching experience was highest in means at 1 year (m=19) and 6-10 years (m=17.5). The relationship between the construct of empathy and total years at the same school showed teachers with 1-5 years of experience perceived the principal to display greater empathy (*m*=17.5) than teachers with 6-15 years of experience teaching which perceived the lowest levels of empathy (*m*=15.9).

Soft skill Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Empathy	68		
Gender			
Male	4	17.3	1.89
Female	64	16.5	3.02
Total Years Teaching Exp.			
> 1 year	1	19	
1 – 5 years	8	16.6	3.31
6 – 10 years	9	17.5	3.27
11 – 15 years	23	16.2	3.37
16 + years	27	16.3	2.45
Years at Current School			
> 1 year	2	17.5	2.12
1 – 5 years	24	17.1	2.92
6 – 10 years	23	15.9	3.30
11 – 15 years	9	15.9	3.37
16 + years	10	17	1.89
Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0		
Black	0		
Hispanic	1	20	
Native American	0		
White	66	16.5	2.97
Other	1	18	

Figure 6. Empathy Means Comparison.

Problem-Solving

This section examines the findings for the question of how well developed principal problem-solving skills are, based on teacher perceptions. The mean comparison data for principal problem-solving skills are displayed in Figure 7. In order to determine the perception of principal problem-solving skills, teachers responded to four items on the POSSS. The mean (15.8) and the standard deviation (2.59) of the problem-solving construct were examined. The higher the overall mean, the more likely teachers perceived a principal to possess good problem-solving skills, with the lowest possible value 4 and the highest possible value 20. Men were more

likely to perceive the principal as a good problem solver (*m*=17.8) than women (*m*=15.5). The relationship between the construct of problem-solving and total years of teaching experience reflected the largest variance in means between teachers with 1-5 years of experience (*m*=16.4) and teachers with 11-15 years of teaching experience (m=15.5).

The relationship between the construct of problem-solving and total years at the same school showed even greater variances between groups. Teachers with 1-5 years of experience perceived principal problem-skills higher than any other group (*m*=16.7). In contrast, teachers with over 16 years at the same school rated principal problem-solving skills the lowest (*m*=14.4).

Soft skill Construct	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Problem-Solving	68		
Gender			
Male	4	17.8	1.71
Female	64	15.5	3.41
Total Years Teaching Exp.			
> 1 year	1	14	
1 – 5 years	8	16.4	1.72
6 – 10 years	9	15.6	3.66
11 – 15 years	23	15.5	3.73
16 + years	27	15.9	2.94
Years at Current School			
> 1 year	2	17	4.24
1 – 5 years	24	16.7	2.22
6 – 10 years	23	15.2	4.26
11 – 15 years	9	14.7	3.32
16 + years	10	14.4	3.03
Ethnicity			
Asian/Pacific Islander	0		
Black	0		
Hispanic	1	16	
Native American	0		
White	66	15.6	3.41
Other	1	14	

Figure 7. Problem-Solving Means Comparison.

Teacher interviews were conducted to bring an in-depth look at teacher perceptions of principal soft skills and school climate. Teachers were very passionate about soft skills needed in a principal and how they impacted them and their school. The teachers interviewed felt communication was important and made several references to the fact that communication results in a positive climate. One pattern that emerged was the connection between communication and trust.

Teacher A: "I think without good communication skills there's a lot of misunderstanding. This causes a negative climate with much speculation about what is going on."

Teacher C: "Effective communication skills increase collaboration and increases the comfort level of the school. Lack of communication causes distrust and confusion."

Teacher E: "Open communication reduces trust issues, rumors, and hard feelings. Open and honest communication makes a more positive climate."

In relation to trust, teachers were confident that the amount of this soft skill in principals greatly impacted the school climate.

Teacher A: "Trusting a leader will allow more willingness to comply and follow with enthusiasm. The lack of trust negatively affects a school climate."

Teacher B: "It goes back to being heard, and understood, keeping your confidence, and being in your corner. Trust affects teachers buy in and the willingness to do what's asked of them even if they don't agree."

Teacher D: "I trust a principal that does what they say they're going to do. If you can't trust the leader, I think that the school climate would suffer due to low morale."

Empathy is a soft skill that each elementary teacher interviewed appreciated in a leader. The word "feel" was used repeatedly throughout the interviews which shows this

soft skill brings about a humanistic approach to leadership. In addition, empathy was linked to trust several times throughout the interviews.

Teacher B: "Empathetic principals are ones that have been teachers and walked in your shoes. They know the obstacles you are facing."

Teacher C:

> I think an empathetic principal realizes that you are human and you make mistakes. You don't feel criticized if something goes wrong, you learn from it and move on. My principal made a mistake and admitted it in front of the entire faculty. That helped her establish trust with us.

Teacher F: "An empathetic principal is willing to listen and understand, build rapport and trust, and makes the staff feel valued."

All respondents mentioned that problem-solving was an important soft skill. While a solution is necessary in problem-solving, respondents continued to mention it is just as important that principals are collaborating with others to create this solution.

Teacher D: "A principal who problem-solves listens to needs and recognizes situations, and then finds a way to collaborate to find solutions by including staff, parents, community, and children. This increases the effectiveness of the climate at school."

Teacher E: "A problem solver doesn't make rash decisions. They talk to other staff members and get input from others to work towards a solution together."

Teacher F: "They show interest in trying to fix the problem and reach out to other people to ask for help."

Although the interviewer asked questions about one soft skill independently at a

time, on multiple occasions, the teachers interviewed combined the soft skills as they responded to questions.

Data and Findings for Research Question 2

Reading proficiency. The result of the impact of soft skills on reading proficiency in elementary school is found in Figure 8 and Figure 9.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.719[a]	.517	.241	.09434

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.067	4	.017	1.874	.220[b]
	Residual	.062	7	.009		
	Total	.129	11			

Figure 8. The Summary and ANOVA for Soft Skills and Reading Proficiency.

The soft skills of elementary principals accounted for 51.7% of the variation in reading proficiency with adjusted R^2= 24.1%; this is a moderate size effect according to Cohen (1988). The soft skills of elementary principals did not statistically predict reading proficiency, $F(4,7) = 1.874$, $p = .220$.

Coefficients

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.725	.267		2.712	.030
	Trust	.020	.027	.543	.710	.500
	Comm	-.071	.038	-1.610	-1.905	.098
	Empathy	.061	.029	1.061	2.090	.075
	PS	-.012	.025	-.277	-.469	.653

Figure 9. Soft Skill Independent Variables and Reading Proficiency.

As its *p* value (.50) is more than .05, trust is not a statistically significant predictor of reading proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of .020 indicates that a one-unit change of trust is associated with .020 unit change in reading proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.098) is more than .05, communication is not a statistically significant predictor of reading proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of -.071 indicates that a one-unit change of communication is associated with -.071 unit change in reading proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.075) is more than .05, empathy is not a statistically significant predictor of reading proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of .061 indicates that a one-unit change of empathy is associated with .061 unit change in reading proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.653) is more than .05, problem-solving is not a statistically significant predictor of reading proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of -.012 indicates that a one-unit change of problem-solving is associated with -.012 unit change in reading proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant.

Math proficiency. The results of soft skills relationship to math proficiency in elementary schools are listed in Figure 10 and Figure 11.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.653[a]	.427	.099	.08660

ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.039	4	.010	1.303	.355
	Residual	.052	7	.007		
	Total	.092	11			

Figure 10. Overall Soft Skills and Math Proficiency.

The soft skills of elementary principals accounted for 42.7% of the variation in math proficiency with adjusted R^2= 9.9%. This is a moderate size effect according to Cohen (1988). The soft skills of elementary principals did not statistically predict math proficiency, $F(4,7) = 1.303$, $p = .355$.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.752	.245		3.067	.018
	Trust	.014	.025	.454	.544	.603
	Comm	-.031	.034	-.817	-.887	.404
	Empathy	.045	.027	.921	1.665	.140
	PS	-.027	.023	-.780	-1.211	.265

Figure 11. Individual Soft Skills and Math Proficiency.

As its *p* value (.603) is more than .05, trust is not a statistically significant predictor of math proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of .014 indicates that a one-unit change of trust is associated with .014 unit change in math proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.404) is more than .05, communication is not a statistically significant predictor of math proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of -.031 indicates that a one-unit change of communication is associated with -.031 unit change in math proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.140) is more than .05, empathy is not a statistically significant predictor of math proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of .045 indicates that a one-unit change of empathy is associated with .045 unit change in math proficiency, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.265) is more than .05, problem-solving is not a statistically significant predictor of math proficiency. The unstandardized coefficient of -.027 indicates that a one-unit change of problem-solving is associated with -.027 unit change in math proficiency, while holding

the other three predictors constant.

During teacher interviews, responses indicated that soft skills did play a role in student performance.

Teacher B:

> I think supporting teachers in knowing that they have a goal for student learning trickles down. And I think it's all modeling the leadership, you know when someone takes the time to understand you, teachers can step back, proceed with the learning, but also remember to deal with students on an individual level to create partnerships, because that's how learning happens. You are not going to learn from someone you don't trust and feel comfortable with.

Teacher D: "If there is low morale due to issues with not trusting the principal, it's going to directly affect the students."

Teacher E:

> Effective communication about expectations at the school level and the classroom level will trickle down to expectations for students. If there is a common language and understanding, a level of confidence will be built with both students and staff. If students see teachers positively interact and react to the principal, they feel like they are in a secure environment and can perform better and are willing to take risks.

Data and Findings for Research Question 3

Teacher retention. The results of soft skills relationship to teacher retention in elementary schools are listed in Figure 12 and Figure 13.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.690[a]	.476	.177	.06442

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	.026	4	.007	1.591	.277
	Residual	.029	7	.004		
	Total	.055	11			

Figure 12. Overall Soft Skills and Teacher Retention.

The soft skills of elementary principals accounted for 47.6% of the variation in teacher turnover with adjusted R^2= 17.7%; this is a moderate size effect according to Cohen (1988). The soft skills of elementary principals did not statistically predict teacher turnover, $F(4,7) = 1.591$, $p = .277$.

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	.561	.182		3.074	.018
	Trust	.016	.019	.665	.835	.432
	Comm	-.005	.026	-.167	-.190	.855
	Empathy	-.034	.020	-.909	-1.720	.129
	PS	-.002	.017	-.081	-.132	.899

Figure 13. Individual Soft Skills and Teacher Retention.

As its *p* value (.432) is more than .05, trust is not a statistically significant predictor of teacher turnover. The unstandardized coefficient of .016 indicates that a one-unit change of trust is associated with .016 unit change in teacher turnover, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.855) is more than .05, communication is not a statistically significant predictor of teacher turnover. The unstandardized coefficient of -.005 indicates that a one-unit change of communication is associated with -.005-unit change in teacher turnover, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.129) is more than .05, empathy is not a statistically significant predictor of teacher turnover. The unstandardized coefficient of -.034 indicates that a one-unit change of empathy is associated with -.034-unit change in teacher turnover, while holding the other three predictors constant. As its *p* value (.899) is more than .05, problem-solving is not a statistically significant predictor of teacher turnover. The unstandardized coefficient of -.002 indicates that a one-unit change of problem-solving is

associated with -.002 unit change in teacher turnover, while holding the other three predictors constant.

During teacher interviews, all respondents agreed that soft skills play an important role in teacher retention as evidenced below.

Teacher A:

> I think teachers are very dedicated to the profession and are emotionally involved with the students as the stakeholders, and they have high expectations of themselves as well as leadership above them, when there are things that need to be fixed or addressed. So if they feel like they have someone who is willing to listen and take the steps to address issues or allow the teachers to address issues, they are more apt to stay in that situation.

Teacher C: "You want to work for a principal who understands what you are going through and who isn't afraid to tackle a problem."

Teacher E:

> Teachers do not leave schools, they leave principals. It is hard to work with somebody that you don't respect, trust, or doesn't value you. If you have an empathetic principal, you are more willing to give and be there and stay there. I think it creates loyalty. It makes you more comfortable when someone is there to support you and lift you up.

Teachers indicated during interviews that they are more willing to stay at a school where a principal is trustworthy, communicates well, and values their staff.

Results

Several major findings emerged from the analysis of data. The purpose of this study was to identify desirable interpersonal skills possessed by elementary principals

and their impact on school climate, student learning, teacher retention. Based on the findings from SLEQ/POSSS survey, teacher interviews, reading and math proficiency scores, and teacher turnover data, principal soft skills do impact school climate. While the survey data did not show a strong statistical relationship between soft skills and academic proficiency and teacher turnover, results from teacher interviews did imply that each soft skill represented in this study was perceived as important to teachers.

The first major finding within this study was soft skills do impact climate; however, each soft skill individually is not empirically significant. The two soft skills that showed significance as measured by their relationship to climate were trust (*p* value .022) and problem-solving (*p* value .009). The next major finding was soft skills within this study do not statistically predict reading proficiency ($F(4,7) = 1.874$, $p = .220$); and they do not statistically predict math proficiency ($F(4,7) = 1.303$, $p = .355$) in elementary schools. The third major finding in this study was soft skills of elementary principals did not statistically predict teacher turnover ($F(4,7) = 1.591$, $p = .277$).

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility, the researcher used triangulation among multiple sources of data for this study (Creswell 2014). Creswell (2014) indicated that triangulation is an important reason to use both qualitative and quantitative research. The researcher used 13 elementary schools' data from SLEQ/POSSS survey results, reading and math proficiency scores, teacher turnover data, and teacher interviews to achieve triangulation for each of the research questions. In addition, the researcher achieved credibility by sending the survey for the study to all elementary teachers in the chosen district. In addition, all elementary teachers were invited to participate in an individual interview. Participation in this study was voluntary and all responses were kept

confidential.

The researcher focused on one group for the study; therefore, the internal validity threats of selection and experimental mortality do not apply. The researcher was the only interviewer for the teacher interviews, so the instrumentation threat to internal validity was addressed.

In an effort to address transferability, the researcher disclosed all information regarding setting, participants, and data collection methods. This study is transferable to a similar setting given the data collection methods used; however, it cannot be generalizable to other locations or grade levels. To ensure the confirmability of this study, the findings are the product of the focus of the study and not the bias or personal motivations of the researcher.

Summary

Data collected through the soft skill/climate survey, teacher interviews, 2015-2016 reading and math proficiency scores, and 2016 teacher turnover data in 13 elementary schools were used to answer the research questions. The results from this study indicate that interpersonal skills overall impact school climate; and of the four interpersonal skills measured, trustworthiness and problem-solving were statistically significant. Data analysis and interview excerpts were presented and summarized in this chapter. Finally, a summary of the major findings based on the data were presented. Chapter 5 provides interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future educational change.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This study was used to determine the relationship between principal interpersonal skills and school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in 13 elementary schools in a western North Carolina county. A growing body of research supports the argument that interpersonal skills are crucial to effective leadership (Goldberg, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001). According to Goleman (1998), the most effective leaders have a high degree of self-awareness, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

An extensive review of literature conducted by Leithwood et al. (2004) and Hallinger (2005) deduced that a school leader impacted schools and student learning through the influence he/she made on staff and structures. In addition, a study of 42 schools in the United Kingdom found that leaders with strong interpersonal skills had successful schools as measured by academic achievement (McBer, 2000).

The school leader is one of the most important individuals in the lives of teachers (Brock & Grady, 1997); therefore, the school leader is the key to teacher perceptions of feeling supported (Richards, 2005). Leaders of education need to increase their interpersonal sensitivity to prevent low staff morale and performance issues (Muse et al., 1993).

The purpose of this mixed-method study was to determine if specific interpersonal skills possessed by principals, as perceived by teachers, could predict creation and maintenance of a positive school climate. Also, this study attempted to determine if there is a correlation between interpersonal skills and positive school climate, student learning, and teacher retention.

This study was driven by the following research questions.

1. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and school climate?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of communication?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of trustworthiness or honesty?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of empathy?
    - To what extent do teachers perceive principals possess the interpersonal skill of problem-solving? (Malone, 2013)
2. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and student learning?
3. What is the relationship between principal interpersonal skills, as perceived by teachers, and teacher retention?

A convergent parallel mixed method design was used for this study to enable the researcher to collect both qualitative and quantitative data separately and concurrently (Creswell, 2014). A survey, individual teacher interviews, student EOG data, and teacher retention data were gathered concurrently to address the research questions. To address the first research question, a linear regression was conducted to determine which independent variables (trustworthiness/honesty, problem-solving, empathy, and communication) were the predictors of school climate while controlling for possible confounding variables (gender, ethnicity, years total teaching experience, and total years at the school). Linear regression was used to compare the overall climate score and the combined and separate soft skill scores. Next, a means comparison between each

interpersonal skill (trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving) and demographic information was conducted. To address the second research question, a linear regression was conducted comparing the mean EOG proficiency for math, the mean EOG proficiency for reading, and the overall EOG proficiency to the mean soft skill scores for all 13 elementary schools. Finally, a linear regression comparing the mean turnover percentage of teachers to the mean POSSS for all 13 elementary schools was conducted to address the third research question. Teacher perceptions of principal soft skills and school climate were documented using SLEQ (Rentoul & Fraser, 1983) and POSSS (Malone, 2013) survey (Appendix E). Six certified elementary teachers volunteered to participate in the teacher interviews, and they answered 10 predetermined open-ended questions during the interview (See Appendix G). A priori coding was used to organize themes and patterns in the teacher interviews to align data with the research questions. EOG results from 2016 for Grades 3-5 were collected from each school for both reading and math. In addition, teacher turnover data were collected from the 2015-2016 North Carolina Report Card. This study determined that principal interpersonal skills do impact school climate; however, the data collected regarding student learning and teacher turnover was not found to be statistically significant.

Interpretation of the Findings

The results of the statistical analyses revealed that overall interpersonal skills do impact climate; however, individually only two of the four soft skills presented in this study significantly predicted school climate. According to the results of this study, trustworthiness significantly predicted school climate. These findings reinforce the work of Kouzes and Posner (2002) who summarized the contributions of an administrator by stating, “when leadership is a relationship founded on trust and confidence, people take

risks, make changes, keep organizations and movement alive. Through that relationship, leaders turn their constituents into leaders themselves" (p. 19). "Without trust, you cannot lead" (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 244). During the interview process, teachers mentioned that trust was a vital part of school climate and that lack of trust could directly impact morale and communication. Problem-solving also significantly predicted school climate in this study. Problem-solving interpersonal skills require the ability to apply, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate information that has been observed, experienced, reflected upon, and communicated (Sankar et al., 2010). While knowledge is important, Snyder and Snyder (2008) contended that it is not enough to ensure effective leadership. They believed an individual must have problem-solving interpersonal skills to make good leadership decisions (Snyder & Snyder, 2008). Arenofsky (2001) claimed that good problem solvers are more likely to be competent, open-minded, flexible, and have a responsible attitude toward decision-making. Teacher interviews indicated that while problem-solving was an important interpersonal skill, principals should collaborate with staff, parents, community, and children to find solutions. Although communication was not found statistically significant in this study based on survey data, teacher interviews evidenced a strong belief in communication and its impact on climate. Research shows that principals spend 70-80% of their time in interpersonal communication with multiple stakeholders (Green, 2010; Lunenburg & Irby, 2006; Matthews & Crow, 2010; Sergiovanni, 2009; Ubben et al., 2010). Effective principals know how to communicate, and they understand the importance of ongoing formal and informal communication (Wentz, 1998). Communication skills affect both personal and organizational effectiveness (Brun, 2010; Summers, 2010); therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that organizational effectiveness can be hindered due to a lack of effective

communication (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010). Although empathy was only found to be slightly significant based on the survey data, teacher interviews indicated that empathy is an interpersonal skill that contributes to staff rapport through listening, trust, and a sense of value. Empathy is a key ingredient for effective leadership and building relationships (Burns, 1978; Gardner, 1986; Ketelle & Mesa, 2006; Kotter, 1985; Pedersen, 2007). Goleman (1995) suggested that empathy is the main factor in guiding leaders in making ethical decisions. Empathy also allows principals to understand the perspective of his/her teachers providing flexibility and morality that otherwise the leader without empathy skills would lack (Goleman, 1995). During teacher interviews, both communication and empathy were mentioned as important to the effectiveness of school climate and related to honesty and problem-solving.

Although the researcher asked questions about one interpersonal skill independently at a time, the teachers interviewed, on multiple occasions, combined these skills as they responded to questions as if these skills could not exist alone. For example, one teacher said, "An empathetic principal is willing to listen and understand, build rapport and trust, and makes the staff feel valued." Another teacher mentioned, "Open communication reduces trust issues, rumors, and hard feelings. Open and honest communication makes a more positive climate." Perhaps interpersonal skills do not act independently, but instead work together to enhance each other.

Although interpersonal skills as perceived by teachers in this study were not found to statistically predict reading and math proficiency, research indicates that high academic achievement in schools was seen as an indication of a positive school climate and positive teacher attitudes as influenced by leadership (McBer, 2000). Positive school climate and positive teacher morale are linked to the soft skills that leaders possess.

Teacher interviews indicated that interpersonal skills that were modeled by principals including clear, honest communication and feeling comfortable and secure in their surroundings increased teacher and student performance while allowing them to take risks.

The interpersonal skills of elementary principals as perceived by teachers did not statistically predict teacher turnover in this study; however, Brock and Grady (1997) stated that a school leader is one of the most important individuals in the lives of teachers. Therefore, the school leader is the key to teacher perceptions of feeling supported (Richards, 2005). Leaders of education need to increase their interpersonal sensitivity to prevent low staff morale and performance issues (Muse et al., 1993). Teachers in this study indicated during interviews that they are more willing to stay at a school where a principal is trustworthy, communicates well, and values their staff. They also mentioned that teachers do not leave schools; they leave principals. Although research from this study did not support interpersonal skills impact teacher turnover, teacher interviews did indicate principal interpersonal skills do impact teacher willingness to stay at a school.

Research indicates there is a relationship between school climate and student learning as well as teacher retention (Ladd, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Waters et al., 2003). There is also a growing body of research that shows teacher retention and student learning affect a school's climate (McBer, 2000; Quinn & Andrews, 2004). In addition, multiple studies indicate that retaining effective teachers impacts student learning, and positive student learning contributes to teacher attrition (Darling-Hammond, 2001; Wahlstrom & Lewis, 2008). Educational leaders must have a keen interest and clear understanding of school climate and interpersonal skills that influence

school climate so schools can build and sustain a positive teaching and learning environment (Brookover et al., 1978; Goldberg & Proctor, 2000; Johnson et al., 2001; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998). Data from this study indicate that overall interpersonal skills do impact positive school climate. The quantitative data in this study did not show a statistical significance based on principal interpersonal skills and their impact on student learning and teacher turnover; however, the qualitative data did show that the interpersonal skills of leaders impact climate, which ultimately impacts student learning and teacher retention (Ladd, 2009; Sergiovanni & Starratt, 1998; Waters et al., 2003). Each teacher interviewed indicated through their responses that the leader of a school sets the climate, which directly or indirectly impacts the learning and morale within a school.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations associated with this study. First, the study focused on elementary schools in an area that may be influenced by perspectives that are not present in other locations. In addition, the results of this study are not generalizable to middle or high schools as the data reflects information from elementary schools. Another limitation of this study includes confinement to 13 elementary schools in western North Carolina and only 68 participants, which is a 22.3% response rate. It is possible that only teachers who were motivated to express their opinion through an online survey made an effort to respond, therefore making it possible that moderate opinions that could have been represented in a face-to-face or paper/pencil survey were not represented in a manner representing the entire population. A larger study incorporating a larger population and more diverse geographical area could validate the findings and better define which soft skills are predictive of school climate, student learning, and teacher retention (Creswell, 2014).

Another limitation includes changes to the administrative and teacher staff within these 13 elementary schools. Personnel changes impact the climate and teacher perceptions within a school (Cohen, McCabe et al., 2009; Ingersoll, 2001; Kelley et al., 2005). Data collected from this study were teacher responses based on their own perceptions of principal interpersonal skills and climate. Perceptions can be skewed based on stages of a teacher's career and interpretation of their own experiences (Richards, 2005). In addition, the perceptions of students and community members were not considered and could provide more insight related to the impact of principal soft skills on school climate, as student and teacher perceptions are not often aligned (Mok & Flynn, 2002).

Finally, it is possible that teachers were reluctant to respond to the survey within this study or provided inaccurate responses based on possible loss of job security, as teachers were providing information regarding their administrator. In addition, data were collected from teachers during the last few weeks of school, which could have impacted the number of respondents as well as the quality of response. Although the researcher does not hold a supervisory role over participants in this study, her position of assistant principal in the county could have influenced responses from the participants in this study.

If time and resources had not been limited, the researcher would have included an interviewee from each school represented to connect the survey data and interview data between each school.

Recommendations

This study used prior research to examine which interpersonal skills impact school climate, student achievement, and teacher retention based on the perceptions of

teachers. A study using both survey and interview data seeking the perception of students and/or parents instead of just teachers in future research could also expand the knowledge about interpersonal skills and school climate. In the future, a broader examination of principal interpersonal skills such as work ethic, creativity, teamwork, adaptability, and professionalism could be explored to determine their relation to school climate. In addition, a study of the impact of interpersonal skills on specific factors of school climate including student attendance, behavior, and bullying could provide valuable insight to administrators related to improvement of school climate.

Implications

The data gained from this study could create a positive social change in education including increased student learning, reduced teacher turnover, and positive school climate. The survey results from this study indicated that principal interpersonal skills, specifically trustworthiness and problem-solving, do positively impact school climate. The trend data from teacher interviews indicated that the interpersonal skills studied were important as they relate to climate, academics, and teacher turnover. Although survey data from this study did not clearly indicate that interpersonal skills impact student learning and teacher turnover, research indicates principals have the greatest impact on schools through their influence of staff motivation, commitment, and creating and maintaining positive working conditions (Hallinger & Heck, 1998). In addition, a study by Andrews and Soder (as cited in McEwan, 2003) demonstrated that schools with strong instructional leadership produce greater gains in achievement in both math and reading as opposed to schools with average or weak leaders. The teacher interviews in this study indicated that principal interpersonal skills did impact student learning and teacher retention through the climate that the leader has established within the school.

In addition to positive social change in education, results from this study could improve administrative professional development and encourage self-reflection for current principals. The issue for principals is soft skills are rarely taught in principal preparation training programs because of other academic priorities (Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2010). Universities and colleges offering principal training could use the findings from this study to focus the training program curriculum to include trustworthiness, communication, empathy, and problem-solving skill development to better prepare aspiring principals. Professional development that could specifically target problem-solving and trustworthiness should be considered, as these were the two soft skills in this study that quantitatively showed an impact on school climate. Examples of professional development that specifically develop these soft skills include "Crucial Conversations" (Patterson, 2002), "Win the Head, Win the Heart" (Frye, 2017), and "The Seven Habits" (Covey, 1989) which could be valuable resources for aspiring and veteran principals. In addition, a strong mentoring program from veteran principals with positive soft skills can ultimately assist new principals with their own soft skill development (Bryant, King, & Wilson, 2016).

This study provides insight and suggestions to principals who want to strengthen teacher/administrator relationships. School districts might consider altering the hiring processes of administrators based on the implication that desirable interpersonal skills improve school climate. Preparing school leaders who understand the critical role of school climate and its importance has implications for teacher education (Fulton & Lee, 2005).

Conclusion

This study was based on the theoretical context and guiding principle that desirable interpersonal skills possessed by principals will result in a positive climate, teacher retention, and increased student learning. There is limited literature focused on interpersonal skills and school leadership; therefore, this research seeks to inform educational leaders about the impact of principal soft skills on school climate, student learning, and teacher turnover.

The results from this study revealed that principal interpersonal skills impact school climate. The two soft skills that were found most significant as measured by their relationship to climate were trustworthiness and problem-solving. While principal interpersonal skills were not found to statistically predict student learning and teacher retention, teacher interviews imply that these skills are important as perceived by teachers.

From the results of this study, it is recommended that further research focus on additional interpersonal skills that a principal could develop to improve school climate, teacher retention, and student learning. Ultimately, it is the principal's responsibility to create and maintain a positive school climate. Through the recognition and development of interpersonal skills such as those presented in this study, educational leaders can maximize student and teacher success. Another future study that should be considered is the relationship between teacher soft skills and student learning.

It is the recommendation of the researcher to develop principal interpersonal skills in all levels of education. Principal interpersonal skills do impact school climate in the elementary schools in this western North Carolina county.

This study provided insight regarding principal soft skills and positive school climate. The findings from this study have helped the researcher reflect on and improve

the interaction she has with her staff. Despite the daily demands of school leadership, the researcher must make time to clearly communicate and actively listen to all stakeholders including students, staff, parents, and community members. Clear and frequent communication will build strong relationships built on trust. Gaining feedback through face-to-face interaction and using survey instruments like POSSS and SLEQ will assist the researcher in understanding the needs/problems that exist. The researcher will facilitate problem-solving with staff members to improve the perception of her communication and problem-solving while increasing buy in and providing more creative solutions. Throughout the researcher's career, many have told her that she is empathetic and a good listener; however, she cannot afford to be complacent. After completing this study, the researcher has determined to be present when people are addressing her and to seek first to understand before speaking. Too often, the researcher tries to "fix it' instead of just listening and making it clear that she cares for them and is concerned about what they are sharing. Although the findings from this study were not exactly what the researcher expected, it did confirm to the researcher that teacher perceptions are very important, and the researcher should reflect upon and develop her soft skills.

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Appendix A

Principal's Soft Skill Survey

Principal's Soft Skills Survey

The purpose of this survey is to identify the observable Interpersonal skills displayed by a school's principal. The survey is divided into two sections. The first section contains demographic information. The second section contains questions about your current principal.

Section One: Demographics

For each question, place an "X" in the box that best corresponds with the answer that describes you.

What is your gender?	Male	Female
How many years have you been teaching?	0 – 1 years 11 – 15 years 2 – 5 years 16+ years 6 – 10 years	
How many years have you worked at your current school?	0 years 11- 15 1 – 5 years 16+years 6– 10 years	

Section Two: Perception of Principal's Interpersonal Skills

For the following statements, think about your school's current principal, and determine how well each statement reflects your principal's behaviors and interactions. Place an "X" in the box that best fits your agreement with the statement. Only mark one choice for each statement. At the end of the survey there is additional space provided to comment on the survey.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Teachers in this school often question the motives of the principal T1					
Generally my principal ignores problems until he/she has no choice PS1					
If I approach my principal with a problem, I am confident he/she will help me resolve it PS2					
I believe my principal cares about me personally E1					
My principal makes me feel comfortable to talk with him/her C1					
My principal understands the pressures we face as teachers E2					
My principal keeps his/her word T2					
My principal clearly articulates his/her vision for the school C2					
It is not safe to say what I am really thinking to my principal C3					
The solutions to problems presented by my principal are mostly successful PS3					
If I have a personal problem, I trust my principal to help me with it E4					

My principal avoids conflicts that should be handled PS4
Teachers at this school trust my principal T3
My principal acts like he/she cares about me just so things will go smoothly E4
My principal typically acts with the teachers' best interest in mind T4
My principal makes me feel that things I tell him/her are important C4
COMMENTS:

(Malone, 2013, 111-112)

Appendix B

Revised SLEQ Items

Revised SLEQ Items

For each item circle the answer that best represents your perception about your school	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
1. Teachers design instructional programs together.	SD	D	N	A	SA
2. Most students are well mannered or respectful of the school staff.	SD	D	N	A	SA
3. Instructional equipment is not consistently accessible.	SD	D	N	A	SA
4. Teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.	SD	D	N	A	SA
5. New and different ideas are always being tried out.	SD	D	N	A	SA
6. There is good communication among teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
7. Most students are helpful and cooperative with teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
8. The school library has sufficient resources and materials.	SD	D	N	A	SA
9. Decisions about the school are made by the principal.	SD	D	N	A	SA
10. New courses or curriculum materials are seldom implemented.	SD	D	N	A	SA
11. I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
12. Students in this school are well behaved.	SD	D	N	A	SA
13. Video equipment, tapes, and films are readily available.	SD	D	N	A	SA
14. I have very little to say in the running of the school.	SD	D	N	A	SA
15. We are willing to try new teaching approaches in my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA
16. I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other	SD	D	N	A	SA

teachers					
17. Most students are motivated to learn.	SD	D	N	A	SA
18. The supply of equipment and resources is not adequate.	SD	D	N	A	SA

19. Teachers in this school are innovative.	SD	D	N	A	SA
20. Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.	SD	D	N	A	SA
21. Good teamwork is not emphasized enough at my school.	SD	D	N	A	SA

(Malone, 2013, 113-114)

Appendix C

Tables for Method of Analysis and Variables & Items adapted for Principal Observable Soft Skill Scale (POSSS)

Tables for Method of Analysis and Variables

Do the utilization of Interpersonal skills by the school principal, at the elementary school level, as perceived by teachers, assist in building and/or maintaining a positive school climate?	
Dependent Variable	**Independent Variable**
ɔined revised SLEQ score 21 items	*Combined POSSS score* 16 items

1. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perception of a principal's honesty or trustworthiness and teachers' perception of the school climate? 2. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perception of a principal's communication skills with staff, and teachers' perception of the school climate? 3. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perception of a principal's empathy, and teachers' perception of the school climate? 4. Is there a significant relationship between teachers' perception of a principal's problem solving skills, and teachers' perception of the school climate?	
Dependent Variable	**Independent Variables**
Combined revised SLEQ score 21 items	*Honesty or trustworthiness 4 items*
	Communication 4 items
	Empathy 4 items
	Problem solving 4 items

(Malone, 2013, 115)

Items adapted for Principal Observable Soft Skill Scale (POSSS)

Concept	**Original Scale**	**Original Item**	**Adapted Item for POSSS**
Communication	Gougeon (1991) *Social Control Communication Scale.*	My Principal communicates with me by making me feel comfortable when he\she talks with me	My principal makes me feel comfortable to talk with him/her.
	North Carolina Department of Education (2008). *North Carolina School Executive: Principal Evaluation Process.* NCES. (2007). Teacher Questionnaire: Schools and Staffing Survey 2007-08 School Year.	The principal articulates a vision, and implementation strategies, for improvements and changes which result in improved achievement for all students. The principal knows what kind of school he or she wants and has communicated it to the staff.	My principal clearly articulates his/her vision for the school.
	Valentine (1981). *Audit of Administrator Communication Items – Factor IV: Encourager.*	When talking to your administrator, you have the feeling that your administrator is sincerely interested in what you are saying.	My principal makes me feel that things I tell him/her are important.

	Gougeon (1991) *Social Control Communication Scale.*	My Principal communicates with me by making me feel isolated from my colleagues My Principal communicates with me by making me feel unfairly treated	It is not safe to say what I am really thinking to my principal.

Empathy	Valentine (1981). *Audit of Administrator Communication Items – Factor I: Affective Involver.*	Your administrator demonstrates a sincere interest in your personal life through discussion and inquiry about your family, activities, interests, and/or accomplishments.	I believe my principal cares about me personally.
	Valentine (1981). *Audit of Administrator Communication Items – Factor IV: Encourager.*	When you discuss a problem with your administrator, your administrator demonstrates an understanding and appreciation of how you feel about the problem.	My principal understands the pressures we face as teachers.
	Valentine (1981). *Audit of Administrator Communication Items – Factor I: Affective Involver*	You discuss personal problems with, and seek advice from, your administrator.	If I have a personal problem, I trust my principal to help me with it.
	Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2003). *Faculty Trust Scale*	The principal of this school does not show concern for teachers.	My principal acts like he/she cares about me

			just so things will go smoothly.
Problem Solving	Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa (2007). *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire*	I (do not) believe that my principal follows words through with action.	Generally my principal ignores problems until he/she has no choice but to address this issue.
	Bentley & Rempel (1972). *The Purdue Teacher Opinionaire*	My principal acts interested in me and my problems My principal is concerned with the problems of the faculty and handles these problems sympathetically	If I approach my principal with a problem, I am confident he/she will help me resolve it.
	Reed, Vidaver-Cohen & Colwell (2011). Executive Servant Leadership Scale.	My Organization's Top Executive Effectively thinks through complex problems Solves organizational problems with new and creative ideas.	The solutions to problems presented by my principal in the past have been mostly successful.

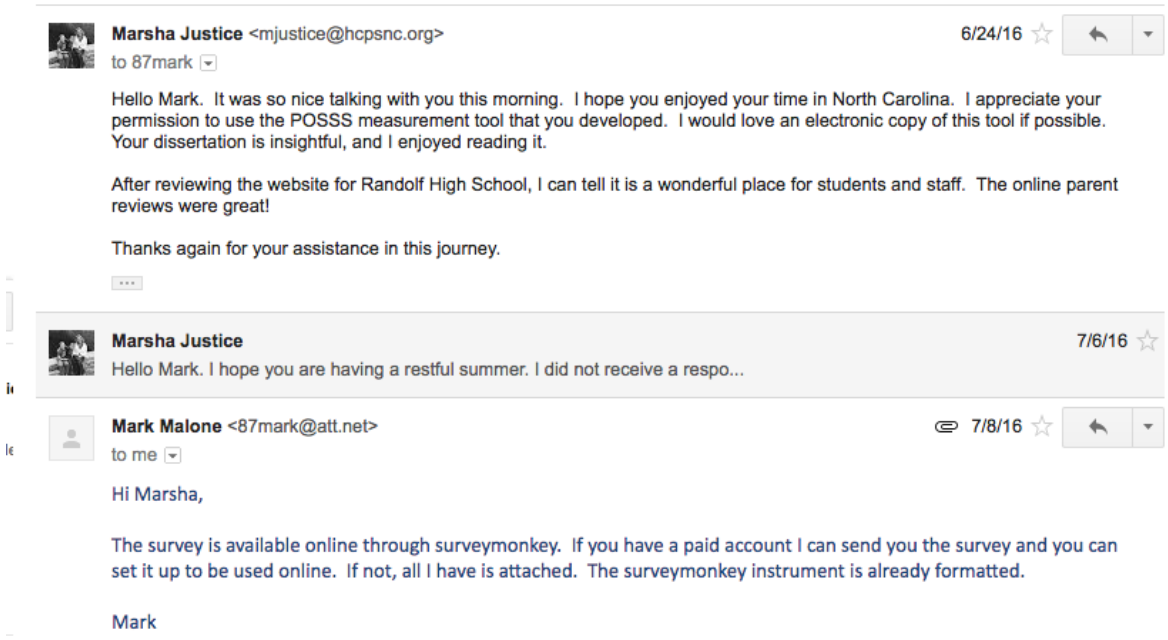
	Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa (2007). *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire*	My principal (does not) make difficult decisions based on high standards of ethical conduct	My principal avoids conflicts.
Honesty/ Trustworthiness	Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2003). *Faculty Trust Scale*	The teachers in this school are suspicious of most of the principal's actions.	Teachers in this school often question the motives of the principal.

	Avolio, Gardner, & Walumbwa (2007). *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire*	I act knowing that my principal will keep his/her word.	My principal keeps her word.
	Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2003). *Faculty Trust Scale*	The principal in this school typically acts in the best interests of the teachers.	My principal typically acts with the teachers' best interest in mind.
	Tschannen-Moran & Hoy (2003). *Faculty Trust Scale*	Teachers in this school trust the principal.	Teachers at this school trust my principal.

(Malone, 2013, 116-118)

Appendix D

Permission Granted By Mark Malone



Marsha Justice <mjustice@hcpsnc.org> 6/24/16

to 87mark

Hello Mark. It was so nice talking with you this morning. I hope you enjoyed your time in North Carolina. I appreciate your permission to use the POSSS measurement tool that you developed. I would love an electronic copy of this tool if possible. Your dissertation is insightful, and I enjoyed reading it.

After reviewing the website for Randolf High School, I can tell it is a wonderful place for students and staff. The online parent reviews were great!

Thanks again for your assistance in this journey.

Marsha Justice 7/6/16

Hello Mark. I hope you are having a restful summer. I did not receive a respo...

Mark Malone <87mark@att.net> 7/8/16

to me

Hi Marsha,

The survey is available online through surveymonkey. If you have a paid account I can send you the survey and you can set it up to be used online. If not, all I have is attached. The surveymonkey instrument is already formatted.

Mark

Appendix E

Principal's Observable Interpersonal Skills Scale and School Level Environmental Questionnaire

Principal's Observable Soft Skills Scale and School Level Environmental Questionnaire

The purpose of this survey instrument is to identify the observable soft skills displayed by a school's principal and the perceived school climate. The first section contains demographic information.

The second section contains questions about your current principal and the final section contains questions about your school's climate.

Section One: Demographics

For each question, place an "X" in the box that corresponds with the choice that best describes you.

What is your gender?	Male	Female
How many years have you been teaching?	< 1 year 2 – 5 years 6 – 10 years	11 – 15 years 16+ years
How many years have you worked at your current school?	< 1 year 1 – 5 years 6 – 10 years	11 – 15 16+ years
Which best describes your ethnic background	American Indian Asian Black	Hispanic White Other

Section Two: Perception of Principal's Interpersonal Skills

For the following statements, think about your school's current principal, and determine how well each statement reflects your principal's behaviors and interactions. Circle the answer that best fits your agreement with the statement. Strongly Agree = SA, Agree = A, Neutral = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD. Only circle one choice for each statement.

1. Teachers in this school often question the motives of the principal.	SA	A	N	D	SD
2. Generally my principal ignores problems until he/she has no choice.	SA	A	N	D	SD
3. If I approach my principal with a problem, I am confident he/she will help me resolve it.	SA	A	N	D	SD
4. I believe my principal cares about me personally.	SA	A	N	D	SD
5. My principal makes me feel comfortable to talk with him/her.	SA	A	N	D	SD
6. My principal understands the pressures we face as teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
7. My principal keeps his/her word.	SA	A	N	D	SD

8. My principal clearly articulates his/her vision for the school.	SA	A	N	D	SD
9. It is not safe to say what I am really thinking to my principal.	SA	A	N	D	SD
10. The solutions to problems presented by my principal are mostly successful.	SA	A	N	D	SD
11. If I have a personal problem, I trust my principal to help me with it.	SA	A	N	D	SD
12. My principal avoids conflicts that should be handled.	SA	A	N	D	SD
13. Teachers at this school trust my principal.	SA	A	N	D	SD
14. My principal acts like he/she cares about me just so things will go smoothly.	SA	A	N	D	SD
15. My principal typically acts with the teachers' best interest in mind.	SA	A	N	D	SD
16. My principal makes me feel that things I tell him/her are important.	SA	A	N	D	SD

Section Three: School Level Environmental Questionnaire

For the following statements, think about your current school, and determine how well each statement reflects your school's climate. Circle the answer that best fits your agreement with the statement. Strongly Agree = SA, Agree = A, Neutral = N, Disagree = D, Strongly Disagree = SD. Only circle one choice for each statement.

17. Teachers design instructional programs together.	SA	A	N	D	SD
18. Most students are well mannered or respectful of the school staff.	SA	A	N	D	SD
19. Instructional equipment is not consistently accessible.	SA	A	N	D	SD
20. Teachers are frequently asked to participate in decisions.	SA	A	N	D	SD
21. New and different ideas are always being tried out.	SA	A	N	D	SD
22. There is good communication among teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
23. Most students are helpful and cooperative with teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
24. The school library has sufficient resources and materials.	SA	A	N	D	SD
25. Decisions about the school are made by the	SA	A	N	D	SD

principal.					
26. New courses or curriculum materials are seldom implemented.	SA	A	N	D	SD
27. I have regular opportunities to work with other teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
28. Students in this school are well behaved.	SA	A	N	D	SD
29. Video equipment, tapes, and films are readily available.	SA	A	N	D	SD
30. I have very little to say in the running of the school.	SA	A	N	D	SD
31. We are willing to try new teaching approaches in my school.	SA	A	N	D	SD
32. I seldom discuss the needs of individual students with other teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
33. Most students are motivated to learn.	SA	A	N	D	SD
34. The supply of equipment and resources is not adequate.	SA	A	N	D	SD
35. Teachers in this school are innovative.	SA	A	N	D	SD
36. Classroom instruction is rarely coordinated across teachers.	SA	A	N	D	SD
37. Good teamwork is not emphasized enough at my school.	SA	A	N	D	SD

(Malone, 2013, 119-121)

Appendix F

The SLEQ/POSSS Survey Introductory Letter and Informed Consent Letter

May 10, 2017

Dear Elementary School Teacher:

I am pleased to convey the following information on behalf of a fellow educator in our district. Mrs. Marsha Justice is a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Wendy Frye in the Educational Leadership program of Gardner-Webb University. She is conducting a research study to explore the relationship between principals' interpersonal skills and school climate, teacher retention, and student learning.

She is requesting your participation, which will involve completing an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is anonymous and voluntary.

The full informed consent letter is attached below. If you would like to participate in the study, please click on the link below.

(Insert link to "The SLEQ/POSS Survey" Google Form)

In addition, Mrs. Justice is requesting your participation in an individual interview that will last approximately 30 mins. Your participation in this interview is voluntary and all information shared will be kept confidential. If you are interested in participating in an interview, please click on the link below.

(Insert link to the "Teacher Interview Volunteer Form" Google Form)

Thank you in advance for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

XXXXXXXXXXXXX
Director of Elementary Education

"The SLEQ/POSS Survey"
May 10, 2017

Dear Elementary School Teacher:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Wendy Frye in the Educational Leadership program of Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study to explore the relationship between principals' interpersonal skills and school climate, teacher retention, and student learning.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve completing an online survey that will take approximately 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If at any time you discontinue the survey, your results will be discarded. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. The survey is anonymous. Any identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential by the researcher.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us understand desirable principal interpersonal skills that could improve school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in the elementary schools in this county and all schools. The results of this study will be shared with the school district for strategic planning purposes.

The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at XXXXXXXX or e-mail me at XXXXXXXXX.

This research has been approved Gardner-Webb University's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Jeff Rogers, the Institutional Administrator, Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board at 704-406-4724 or at jrogers3@gardner-webb.edu. Additional contact information is available at www.gardner-webb.edu/academic-programs-and-resources/institutional-review-board/about/index.

Completion of the survey will be considered your consent to participate. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Marsha Justice XXXXXXXXXX
Dr. Wendy Frye wfrye1@gardner-webb.edu

Appendix G

Teacher Interview Guide and Consent

Teacher Interview Guide
May 15, 2017

Dear Elementary School Teacher:

I am a doctoral student under the direction of Dr. Wendy Frye in the Educational Leadership program of Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study to explore the relationship between principals' interpersonal skills and school climate, teacher retention, and student learning.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve participating in an individual interview that will last approximately 30 mins. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. If at any time you discontinue the interview, your results will be discarded. The results of the research study may be published, but your name will not be used. Any identifiable characteristics will be kept confidential by the researcher. The interview recording will be transcribed immediately upon completion of the interview and will be destroyed after transcription is completed.

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us understand desirable principal interpersonal skills that could improve school climate, student learning, and teacher retention in the elementary schools in this county and all schools. The results of this study will be shared with the school district for strategic planning purposes.

The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at XXXXXXXX or e-mail me at XXXXXXXXX.

This research has been approved Gardner-Webb University's Institutional Review Board. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact Dr. Jeff Rogers, the Institutional Administrator, Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board at 704-406-4724 or at jrogers3@gardner-webb.edu. Additional contact information is available at www.gardner-webb.edu/academic-programs-and-resources/institutional-review-board/about/index.

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the interview and keep the information from the session confidential. I understand that this interview will be recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio recording will be transcribed and destroyed.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the interview.

_____ Date: _____

Participant Printed Name

_____ Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Sincerely,

Marsha Justice XXXXXXXXXX

Dr. Wendy Frye wfrye1@gardner-webb.edu

Teacher Interview Guide

I. Introductions, purpose of interview, anonymity

Each teacher will be informed of the purpose of the interview, the topic to be covered, and assured confidentiality about all information shared.

Everything that you share with me will be confidential. I will not share any information with staff members or other principals. I will share the information with my committee as necessary for completion of my studies. Your name and the name of others that you mention in the interview will not be used. Any other identifying information will not be used.

I would like to record the interview so that I can remember everything you say. Is that acceptable to you? The interview will then be transcribed word by word.

During the interview, if you feel uncomfortable answering any of the questions, please let me know. I plan for the interview to last approximately 30 minutes.

If you give me permission to use this information, please sign this consent form.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

II. Questions

1. How would you describe good communication skills in a principal? Can you give an example? (verbal, written, collaboration)

a. How might good communication skills affect school climate?

b. How might good communication skills affect student learning at a school?

c. How might good communication skills affect teacher retention/attrition at a school?

2. How would you describe a high level of trust in a principal? Can you give an example?

a. How might a high level of trust affect school climate?

b. How might a high level of trust affect student learning at a school?

c. How might a high level of trust impact teacher retention/attrition at a school?

3. How would you describe an empathetic principal? Can you give an example?

a. How might an empathetic principal impact school climate?

b. How might an empathetic principal affect student learning at a school?

c. How might an empathetic principal affect teacher retention/attrition at a school?

4. How would you describe a principal that is a problem solver? Can you give an example?

a. How might a principal that is a problem solver affect school climate?

b. How might a principal that is a problem solver affect student learning at a school?

c. How might a principal that is a problem solver affect teacher retention/attrition at a school?

5. Do you plan on staying in the profession of education? Do you plan on staying at your school? (why or why not)

6. Are the students at your school learning? (as evidenced by?)

7. How would you describe the climate at your school?

8. What would you like to see your principal do differently to change or improve the climate at your school?

9. If you were to arrive at the perfect positive school climate, what would it look like? What would be the steps to getting there? What is the role a principal could take in this process?

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts and feelings with me. Please remember to keep the information shared during this session confidential. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, you will not be identified in any way with the information you have given me. Again, thank you for your time.

Teacher Interview Volunteer Form

Demographic Information

1. Name
2. Contact Number
3. Contact Email
4. Convenient Day/Time for Interview
5. Current School
6. Years at Current School
7. Previous school(s) names and years of experience at each
8. Describe your teaching experience
9. Male/ Female